

MILAN'S MINIMALIST MARVEL

For a brush with a
new, evolved genre
of luxury, Armani
Hotel Milan
turns to high-end
minimalism

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Armani Hotel Milano is a restored heritage building topped with a modern glass box in the heart of the city's prime shopping venues.



At the Armani Hotel in Milan, it's clear from the get-go that the interiors are the realisation of one man's vision—Giorgio Armani. That the man in question also helms one of the most well-regarded fashion brands in the world is what compels tourists, celebrities and anyone looking to splurge a fashionable lump sum to stay at the 95-room property in Italy's fashion and financial capital. Over the years, Armani, the company, has expanded, and the Milan building is ground zero for a range of goods that widen the brand's universe for well-heeled, high-spending die-hards.

Indians may be familiar with the Armani Hotel in Dubai, which occupies 10 floors of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. Armani's Milan outpost, on the other hand, is housed in a historic building designed by Enrico A. Griffini in 1937, distinguished by its stark facade which was later added upon to meld the no-frills original structure into a well-blended, modern extension. It was in 2011 that the building in Via Manzoni was converted into a hotel. Today it features a ground floor filled with exquisite options from the Armani store (across its varied brands). The ground floor is also a showcase for Armani's ever-growing brand extensions, whether it be Armani/Dolci, the chocolate store, or Armani/Fiori, which has expanded to Kuwait City and Hong Kong.

The sparse, bordering on monastic deference to materiality is the unifying theme that runs through the property. Though it portends luxury,

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the dark colours can sometimes seek to overwhelm the space. There's also the choice made to elevate aesthetics over practicality—take two examples: room doors lack handles, but instead click inwards when opened with a key card, and, the elevator's call button is supposed to be touch sensitive, but doesn't respond well all the time. Small niggles aside, the hotel is an immersion into the Armani aesthetic, with everything, including the soap, enriched with a story. It would seem that some travellers have been packing away keepsakes from their stay and as a result, each room has a card warning that guests will be charged if the Armani branded glass tumblers, bathrobes or towels are found missing at the end of one's stay. Of course, all are available for purchase, and typical to the Armani name, command stratospheric prices.

Across the hotel's eight room categories, each features an iPad that controls pretty much everything—from the curtains and blinds to television channels and concierge services. This centralisation makes it easy to acclimatise, all without having to get in touch with anyone. Also, worth keeping in mind in the new normal is the antechamber that each room has, so that deliveries

The hotel's eighth-floor spa features a gym, steam, sauna and relaxation pool. Its windows also offer some great views of the city.

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and room service can be ordered without coming into direct contact with the staff. What the hotel lacks though, are enough plug points to charge today's ever-proliferating arsenal of devices.

Those looking for an Instagram-worthy setting should book the Armani Signature Suite, which sprawls over two floors and includes a gorgeous living room, statement staircase, and one architectural head-turner of an internal balcony. The marble bathroom attached to the bedroom is a sight to behold as well. Every room, no matter the category, will delight guests with the size of the bathrooms, which put most Mumbai apartments to shame. Monolithic and accented with mirrored chrome, they boast a lot of functional accents, like a towel rack, hooks for the bathrobes and a sculptural toiletry holder to add to their appeal. Also appealing are the nugget-gold tones, an earthier compliment to the colours that typify the bedroom.

The hotel houses a restaurant and a bar, both of which draw on the mystique of the designer to build a coherent universe. Bamboo Bar serves up an array of Signature Armani Cocktails, that puts a twist of classic tipples. There's the Pantelleria, which substitutes vodka for mezcal; and the Milano 1981, made with bitter campari, Belsazar red vermouth, Zucca and Cyar (both Italian apertifs), instead of standard ingredients like gin, Campari and vermouth. In the evenings, the bar comes to life, with lights reflecting off the windows and slatted louvres for a setting that's fun without being flashy, and hedonistic while still being approachable. Located on the seventh floor, alongside the Armani/Ristorante and the hotel lobby, the bar appears to be popular as much for its buzzy vibe as for its memorable cocktails.

The restaurant, under chef Francesco Mascheroni takes Italian dishes and gives it a worldly spin. The menu includes ingredients like wakame seaweed, tahina and aged soy sauce—which come together well in dishes that are grounded in Italian ingredients, be it cheese, pasta or local meat. It is worth mentioning that meat here includes game and some region-specific seafood (Pro tip: Go for the Mazara red shrimp). With a cosmopolitan milieu of guests, the food was bound to have global appeal, so breakfast includes dim sum and congee alongside cheese, charcuterie, fruits and some of the best croissants I've had in Italy.

Add to this potent mix a spa and plunge pool on the top floor, and carefully laid out *Wallpaper** magazines across the property, and your stay becomes a five-star experience that doubles as a luxurious spell of brand immersion and experiential retail (similar-looking Armani/Casa furniture can be ordered for purchase, though the pieces in the

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The rooms, fashioned to walk the line between luxury and minimalism, stick to an earthy palette decided by the fashion designer himself.

hotel are custom made). Its location, near the hipster neighbourhood of Brera, and close to the Duomo, Teatro alla Scala, Fondazione Lucio Fontana, and some of Milan's most luminous shopping venues, only adds to the notion of functional decadence.

A stay at the property left me curious about its sister hotel in Dubai. After all, minimalism isn't in vogue there, but this storied brand name most definitely is. While the Arabian Emirate might be closer and easier for a quick getaway for many Indians, Milan offers the chance to experience Armani in its home city—where design and history collide. ■

Luxury in the Time of Corona

Armani Hotel Milan reopened on July 1, 2020, following the lifting of Italy's lockdown. It has since partnered with the certification company Bureau Veritas Group for its health and environment certification. Check-in and check-out are now done over e-mail, and meals for up to six people can be pre-booked in the Presidential Suite. Hotel staff have timed entry and exits from the building, social distancing is practiced in the common areas, and cleaning and sanitisation are carried out regularly. (www.armanihotelmilano.com; doubles from ₹50,000)

