

# SLEEPER

HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE & DESIGN





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## Badeschloss

### BAD GASTEIN

The culture of bathing takes centre stage at a spa town hotel in the Austrian mountains.

Words: Guy Dittrich • Photography: © Ana Barros (unless otherwise stated)

Followers of the black line will appreciate a particular design detail at Badeschloss in Bad Gastein, the spa town south of Salzburg that is undergoing something of a revival. The black line in question is the tiling that marks out the lanes of swimming pools worldwide, and at the aptly-named Badeschloss – directly translated as ‘Bathing Castle’ – it features in various forms, alongside a pool narrative that flows through the hotel.

Originally built in 1751, Badeschloss sits on central Straubingerplatz, opposite the historic Alte Post and Hotel Straubinger. All three buildings had fallen into disrepair following their closure in 1991, sitting empty for decades before being acquired by the state of Salzburg. It wasn’t until 2018 that Munich-based Hirmer Immobilien emerged as a willing real estate partner, seeking to bring the property back to life as part of a wider plan to revitalise the whole resort. Alte Post and Hotel Straubinger have united to form the new Grand Hotel Straubinger (also featured in this issue), while Badeschloss

occupies the original building and a multi-faceted 13-storey newbuild tower behind. Both hotels are operated by Travel Charme Hotels & Resorts, a subsidiary of Hirmer Immobilien.

At Badeschloss, BWM Designers & Architects was tasked with restoring the protected monument and designing the newbuild component, as well as crafting the interiors. The existing four-storey building has a horizontal aspect directly adjacent to Bad Gastein’s magnificent waterfall, while the tower has striking verticality; together, they encapsulate the town’s blend of Neo-Classical and Belle Époque architectural styles, with the Brutalist forms of the nearby conference centre complete with its geodesic domes. Despite this varied architectural landscape, there were concerns that the new tower would be at odds with its neighbours, so BWM opted for a concrete façade, made using a local stone that harmonises with the surroundings and will further ‘disappear’ over time. “The façade was designed as a double-skin, coloured-concrete construction,”





At Badeschloss – directly translated as ‘Bathing Castle’ – a pool narrative flows through the public spaces

explains Markus Kaplan, Partner at BWM. “The multifaceted panels have a lively appearance and produce shadows that make the tower look slimmer.” Added to this are the offset sections that result in a floorplate with multiple corners, affording the luxury of double-aspect views in many of the 103 guestrooms.

Interiors of concrete and ceramic are made cosy by curvaceous furnishings, underfloor heating in the tiled en suite and ethereal curtains by Kvadrat that glide around the perimeter of the room. The 20 guestrooms in the original building are all unique and individually named and, in the words of Erich Bernard of BWM, each “celebrates the bathtub”; choose from a seated tub, a bath with a view or a room with its own sauna. Options galore to give repeat guests new experiences.

The F&B offers the same element of choice, with restaurants and bars supported by several lounges and a 64-seat terrace overlooking the square. “We wanted the hotel to reflect an open, outgoing and fluid personality,” says Bernard, gesturing to the expansive front-of-house spaces – a ‘social design’ that attracts a particular type of staff and, by association, a particular type of guest.

The Kaminbar features a fireplace and original Ardent stone floors, as well as a counter topped with hemispherical, fringed lamps to BWM’s design. The restaurant has a solid herringbone timber floor, completely restored to the liking of the Federal Monuments Office, and like the bar, the ceiling has stucco detailing, here resplendent with gleaming reconditioned chandeliers from master glassmakers Lobmeyr. Sandwiched between the two is dark furniture with edges accented in neon orange and lime. The calmer pale blue walls are a new feature.

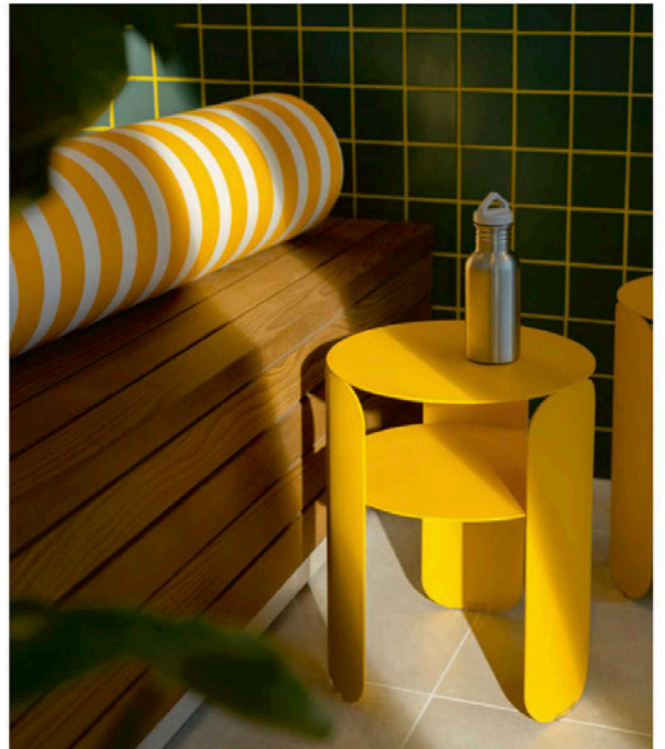
The Séparée and other lounges feature modern, geometric lighting from Chelsom, Flos and Gubi, matched by plump furniture upholstered in soft, luxurious fabrics in bold colours. Burnt orange velvet ottomans, mustard sofas on deep blue, deep pile carpets – cosy corners after a day in the mountains.

Elaborating the black line of the swimming pool analogy is easy enough. A slim row of dark floor tiles slides between a pair of ripple-effect circular carpets, ending with the swimmer’s turning-T in front of reception. Behind are shelves stacked with rolls of yellow-and-white striped towels. The





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yellow tubular frames of the shelves are used for ladder configurations leading down to a black 'pool' at the entrance and up to a ceiling mirror rippling like 'water' in the lifts. Ladders double as hanging storage in guestrooms, where the omnipresent gentleness of the Kvadrat curtaining is reminiscent of the lining in swim shorts. More black lines bisect corridor carpets conceived by Gabriele Bruner. Lying distorted beneath a wavy water surface, not unlike a Hockney pool image, these are cleverly disrupted here and there by the 'reflection' of a swimmer at the edge of the pool painted on the wall by artist Soo Burnell.

Ironically the hotel's pièce de résistance, the 111m<sup>2</sup> stainless steel infinity pool on its rooftop, has no such lines. It does have uninterrupted valley views, a lengthy wave of submerged loungers and an underwater, neon green lightshow. The entrance is via an automated sliding door half immersed by water that sits within an angular dome, its form borrowed from the roof of the nearby conference centre. Three

floors are devoted to the spa area. Such prime real estate is usually destined for high revenue-generating suites, but the decision was to make this a public space. There are treatment rooms aplenty. So too saunas, steam rooms and shower experiences that could while away an afternoon. The pale concrete envelope is enlivened with pops of colour through the furnishings – the orange-framed Pedrali sunloungers being a highlight – and surfaces of contrasting tiling and grout in green and yellow, graphite and red. The name, Alpine Swim Club, etched large in the stairwell, overlooks another lounge area and the small Well-Fit nourishment bar.

The bones and bold strokes of the architecture at Badeschloss provide the backdrop to a free and fun design that has allowed BWM to create spaces that appeal to guests, locals and staff alike and bring new energy to the town. The paradox of an Alpine Swim Club and references to the bathing analogy bring a playful change of pace to the inherently conservative imagination of mountain hospitality.



#### EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: Hirmer Immobilien

Operator: Travel Charme

Architecture and Interior Design:

BWM Designers & Architects,

Atelier Peter Weisz

Branding: Moodley

[www.travelcharme.com](http://www.travelcharme.com)



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## Grand Hotel Straubinger

BAD GASTEIN

BWM Designers & Architects peel back the layers of the past to reveal stories of a grande dame hotel on a revitalised town square.

Words: Guy Dittrich  
Photography: © Arne Nagel (unless otherwise stated)

Dangling rather forlornly from the stucco rosette high up on the ceiling of the Belle Époque ballroom is a heavy metal chain. Beneath it, smashed atop a marble table, is a broken chandelier. Cut-glass pendulogues and sparkling crystals lie askew, yet the lights are still on. Something is amiss.

This is in fact an art installation. The centrepiece of the beautifully restored Straubinger Saal restaurant, itself at the heart of the recently opened Grand Hotel Straubinger in the Austrian spa town of Bad Gastein. The specially commissioned piece from glass atelier Lobmeyr is based on the original that was stolen during the years the building lay dormant.

The resurrection of this hotel came about when a package of adjacent buildings was purchased by the Austrian Federal State of Salzburg in 2017. Having not seen the interiors, the new owners were shocked to find that a roof had collapsed through three floors, and the restaurant's tables still set with tablecloths and crockery. The listed buildings were totally

defunct. Across the square and part of the package is Badeschloss (also featured in this issue), which itself had suffered fire damage.

The potential of this doubtful trio nevertheless caught the eye of Hirmer Immobilien, who were quickly convinced to invest and create two new hotels, which they now operate under their Travel Charme brand. Grand Hotel Straubinger sees the combination of the former Straubinger Hotel and adjacent Alte Post into a five-star, 46-room hotel, with Vienna-based BWM Designers & Architects appointed to take the lead on the refurbishment.

"We took on both the architecture and interiors, as it is very difficult to split the tasks on such a complex renovation," says BWM co-founder Erich Bernard. The stories behind the design, he explains, were gradually revealed as the layers of the building were exposed. And many layers there were too, given that original construction happened between 1791 and 1888. The structure was carefully stripped back to its raw state, parts of which have been left





exposed to contrast with newer elements. The result is a scenography of dramatic interiors, with BWM taking a chiaroscuro approach of contrasting light and dark tones to bring a certain moodiness. Its effect is best seen in guestrooms, where walls and curtains appear to have been dipped in dark paint, with the original patina visible above the paint line.

The interiors see a clever combination of old and new. As far as possible, the historic fabric was preserved and restored – including original terrazzo flooring, exposed plaster and stucco on walls. Gothic-style vaulted ceilings, decorative murals, timber wall panelling, bannisters and deep-section doorways also nod to the building's long history. "Everything that could be kept was re-used," emphasises Bernard of the value of heritage, adding that it "could not have gone better with the protection authorities". Gold leaf discovered on the top of pillars in the Saal was exposed but not replaced to avoid being "false". Where necessary, current standards had to be adhered to; ironmongery





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Heavy drapes are used to create an intimate lounge bar, while the reception features a display case of guestroom keys



on the guestroom doors is original, but the doors themselves needed to be replaced to meet acoustic and fire-rating standards, for instance.

Other traditional elements are in evidence, such as the key rack at reception – a case within which guestroom keys are displayed on velvet cushions ready for new arrivals. Its relatively low height adds an openness, certainly compared to the ‘barrier’ of a typical check-in desk. Across the staircase lobby, the café evokes the ambiance of a Viennese coffeehouse, where a variety of torte and strudel line up on the cake cart. The space sees further crystal in wall lamps with delicately pleated semi-opaque pink shades accompanying extensive plantings to creating a palm garden feel.

In the lounge bar, a U-shaped stone counter is dotted with burnished bronze, while dome-shaped downlights designed by BWM bring a cocktail bar vibe. Intimacy is enhanced by plush, heavy drapes and transparent curtains hanging above the bar. The venue looks on to a small lounge complete with an upright piano, furnished in a charmingly haphazard way, with small tables covered in floral tablecloths – a pattern that is also picked up in a large rug.

There are plenty of new elements, including bespoke designs for carpets. In corridors, these have cloud-like patterns taken from the





different tones that revealed themselves during the restoration process. The rope-like lighting used by the construction company has been mimicked by new LED strips hanging from high ceilings. More quirkiness is used to 'disguise' a speaker high on the wall of the private dining room adjacent to the Saal. It is covered by a white linen cloth, which is then topped by a small porcelain bird figurine. Far from random, it references the flora and fauna of a mural discovered beneath layers of paint and paper.

BWM had fun with pattern, too. Herringbone is found in different formats and scales in wood and tile flooring, and even used for a tabletop in the Weinkeller. This wine cellar, overlooking the vast display kitchen, is under the Saal and, more unusually for a cellar, also has a view over the valley thanks to the steepness of the plot. The form of several arched windows with similar views has been incorporated in the hotel's own logo, repeated also in the decorative wallcoverings of lifts and tiles in bathrooms.

Any discerning hotel in Bad Gastein must have its own spa to take advantage of the mineral waters that put the town on The Grand Tour of European

aristocracy. At Straubinger this includes an indoor-outdoor pool with stunning valley views. It is overlooked by a new construction, a glazed elevation covered in a lamella of thermal modified wood, which is baked in controlled conditions, the elimination of its moisture making it hardier and better suited for the Alpine climate. Here, floors are given over to saunas, relaxation lounges and treatment rooms. "The glazing gives unobstructed views while the lamellas ensure privacy," points out Markus Kaplan of BWM. Adjacent are four spa suites each with a private sauna and more uniquely, windows right over the waterfall. The views are like no other.

The hotel works around Straubingerplatz took several years to complete, during which time, the small square was closed to traffic – a huge inconvenience to locals. Now, they have more than just their square back. They have a high-quality restoration of their grande dame, complete with respect for the past and a panache for the future. The 'fallen' chandelier may be a poignant reminder of recent history, but Grand Hotel Straubinger and Hotel Badeschloss give Bad Gastein a new beating heart.



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 Operator: Travel Charme  
 Architecture and Interior Design:  
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 Atelier Peter Weisz  
 Branding: Moodley  
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