

# Vienna's

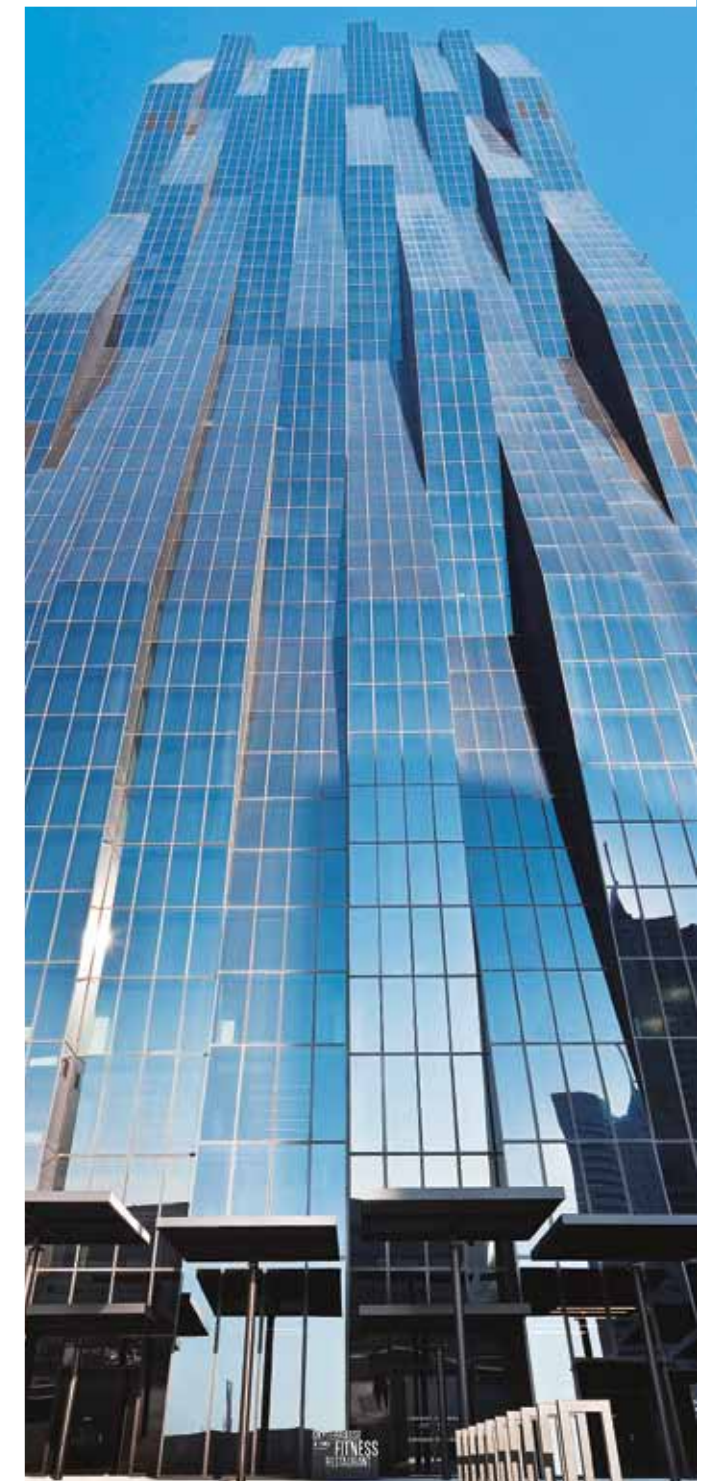
N E W E R A

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AUSTRIA'S CAPITAL IS MARCHING PROUDLY INTO A NEW ERA OF PROSPERITY, WHERE GLEAMING NEW HOTELS AND CAREFULLY RESTORED HISTORICAL HOUSES ARE OFFERING DISCRETE LUXURY EXPERIENCES FOR DISCERNING VISITORS

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**Words:** Stephan Burianek







At first I was sceptical. About a year ago, the opening team at Park Hyatt Vienna showed me some sketches of what they confidently predicted would become Hyatt's new flagship property in Europe. Being a lifelong citizen of the Austrian capital, this seemed somehow odd. Although the citizens of Vienna would never doubt that they live in one of the world's most beautiful cities, they still remember very well the sleepy and somewhat

off-the-beaten-path feel that surrounded their beloved hometown for decades. Long after prestigious brands such as Mandarin Oriental or Four Seasons had started to fly their flags in the capitals of former Communist countries like the Czech Republic or Hungary, most luxury travellers heading to Vienna were still confronted with antiquated guest rooms and rather boring food and beverage options. Innovation happened elsewhere, but in only a few years, this has changed tremendously. Venues like the Albertina

Passage nightclub in a former underground passage next to the Vienna State Opera (home to the best cocktails in town), or Le Moët champagne bar at the Le Méridien Wein, could very well be situated in global cities like New York or London. Kempinski and The Ritz-Carlton now run palaces on Vienna's prestigious Ring Street, while Sofitel manages a hotel in a sleek high-rise at the Donaukanal (Danube Canal).

The traditional grand hotels reacted and underwent considerable renovations. The Hotel Sacher hired

renowned interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon to provide the 140-year-old property with a design that serves contemporary needs without negating its past. In a step-by-step process over several years (and without closing the hotel), the Sacher renovated every room, making a point of keeping up with the hotel's classical-imperial atmosphere — historic paintings still provide each of the rooms with an individual touch. Rochon was also employed at the Hotel Bristol, which belongs to the same family as the Sacher (although it is run by





Photo: Gregor T. Iste

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**Retail therapy**  
*(left)* High-end shopping at the Goldenes Quarter

**New world, old world**  
*(previous page, left to right)* The Pearl Bar at Park Hyatt Vienna; the elegant Vienna State Opera

Starwood), and the legendary Imperial Hotel recently threw a gala party in order to celebrate the completion of a costly renovation of its public areas.

This rapid development hit its peak with Austria’s first Park Hyatt, which opened officially in June in a building that is considered a noble representative of the city’s rich historicism architecture. The opening was preceded by a two-year renovation process that transformed a former bank into a modern luxury hotel; money was no object. After a fire destroyed the historic executive floor, which included a beautiful ballroom, craftsmen from all over Europe were hired for a delicate reconstruction, which was supervised by a team of academic conservators and the Federal Monuments Office. Hyatt promised an interior design that would link to the building’s bygone past, using the most precious materials that could be found. Furthermore, rumours of a golden swimming pool were rife in Vienna.

My doubts were quickly blown away when I finally had the opportunity to stay in the hotel for a night. The new Park Hyatt Vienna is an extremely elegant house, spreading the charm of a traditional grand hotel while at the same time serving all the needs of modern luxury travellers. It is luxurious without showing-off. The friendly guestrooms are dipped in cream and dark brown colours that endow a comfortable and quite masculine ambience. All the guestrooms have walk-in closets (except the Studio category), white marbled bathrooms and exhilarating design features that include artistically shaped mother-of-pearl inlays on the floor and blown-up brooches on the wall. Two beautiful red onyx plates sprawled from the bathtub up to the ceiling in my Deluxe Room.

The Bank is the self-evident name of the hotel’s main restaurant, which is located in a hall that once served as the bank’s counter service area. Here, the goal of the Austrian chef Stefan Resch, whose career includes stints at Zurich’s Baur au Lac and Park Hyatt Tokyo, is to surprise as well as impress.

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“THE GOLDENES QUARTIER IS TESTAMENT TO THE FACT THAT VIENNA HAS FINALLY GAINED A CERTAIN RELEVANCY IN THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS WORLD”

Photo: Gregor Titze





**Hey, big spender** (above, left to right) Style is evident throughout the Goldenes Quartier, from the penthouse apartments of the city's affluent residents to the shopping avenues

**Changing skies** (previous page) The Goldenes Quartier is the place to enjoy high-end experiences in a historic ambience

The menu could be described as European with a strong Austrian touch, with the surprises found in the details, like in the Vietnamese coriander or the Dalmatian sage that are grown in a herb garden on the roof of the building. I ordered the Rossini, a perfectly smoky beef in a Madeira sauce that was topped with a roasted duck liver and truffles. This was a good choice, as was the intensely flavoured poppyseed cake that I had for dessert. And the golden pool? Well, it is not really golden. However, it is located in the bank's former vault, with the safe's original door still in place.

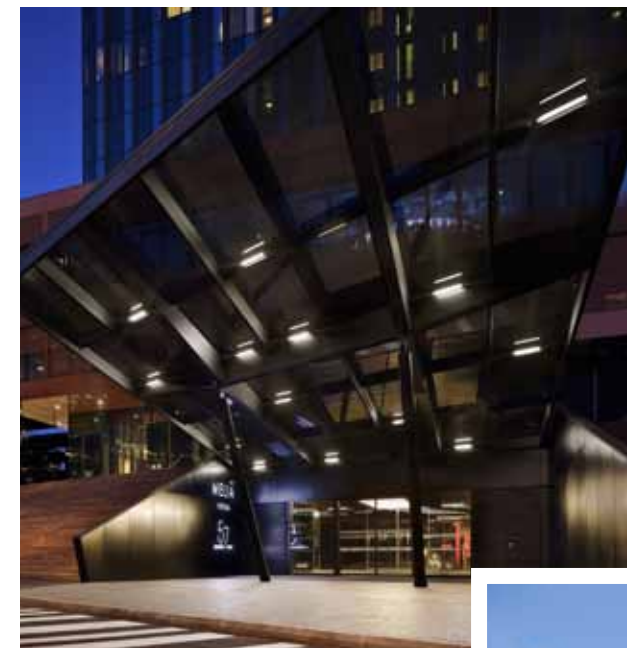
**City of contrasts**

The Park Hyatt is part of a street of houses coined the *Goldenes Quartier* (the Golden Quarter). Like the hotel, the neighbourhood is owned by Austrian real estate wunderkind René Benko's SIGNA Holding, and serves

as an extension of the Kohlgraben, a traditional high-end shopping street. The area is now home to some of the world's most prestigious fashion labels, like Louis Vuitton, Etro and Brioni. Besides glamorous shops, it also offers luxury living spaces and offices. The *Goldenes Quartier* is testament to the fact that Vienna has finally gained a certain relevancy in the international business world. While the *Goldenes Quartier* is located in the very heart of the city, upscale lodging has started to spread across Vienna. This year the Meliá Vienna opened its doors on the other side of the Danube, in the Eastern part of the city, which still is deprecatingly called 'Transdanubia' by the Viennese.

The nearby United Nations building and a conference centre have been a meeting point for tourists and business travellers alike for many years, but the surrounding area was definitely not a place to hang out. This has changed,

Photos: Gregor Thize



**Moving with the times**  
Meliá Vienna (above) and Park Hyatt Vienna (right) meet the demands of a modern hotel experience while respectfully preserving the city's past



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too, with the construction of new residential and office buildings that form the so-called DonauCity.

The development's new signature building, DC Tower 1, was designed by the French architect Dominique Perrault, and is now ranked as Austria's tallest skyscraper. Although its height of 220 metres might make Dubai residents yawn, its dark monolith appearance with a square, blocky shape that is broken up on one side to look like a waterfall, commands respect. The guestrooms of the Meliá are located on floors four to 15, and offer splendid views over the city and a chic interior design that is characterised by black-and-white contrasts, polished stones and a vast stake of glass.

On the top of the building, Meliá runs the well-conceived 57 Restaurant and a bar, the 57 Lounge, which has become a popular after-work spot for the Viennese. This is where I meet the hotel's guest relations manager Florian Augustin, an eloquent local chap who earned his

initial merits at the Raffles in Singapore, and who was also involved in the opening of The Ritz-Carlton, Vienna a few years ago.

"To be honest, at first we were not exactly sure what kind of guests would respond to our concept," he says as we enjoy views of the city. Meliá was mainly expecting international business travellers, but it turned out that a surprising number of young couples and families were attracted by the location. "From next year we plan to offer our guests bikes and Segways, for a better use of the recreational parks that stretch along the nearby Danube bank," Augustin adds.

On the window next to us, the reflection of the minimalistic and dimly-lit interior intermingles with the city lights outside. As a part of this colourful collage I can see the roller-coasters of the Prater, a year-round funfair, which appear like little models. Obviously, in Vienna the sky is no longer the limit. ■