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A PRAGUE HOTEL IN THE CITY'S OLD TOWN CELEBRATES THE NEW

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IN AUGUST 2002, the highest floodwaters in a century inundated Prague. As riverside streets turned into canals, the freshly minted Hotel Josef was forced to close down before it had even officially opened. "We had a very nice swimming pool right here," jokes the front office manager, indicating a now immaculate courtyard. In fact, immaculate might be altogether the best way to describe Prague's most stylish new hotel.

Opened in fully restored post-flooding splendour in October 2002, Czech architect Eva Jiricna's hotel is bright, light and serenely beautiful. From the facade to the fabrics and fittings, the ambience is one of quality, simplicity and cutting-edge design. Hotel Josef's essence is that of a modern space in which clutter is minimal, yet neither private nor public areas are intimidatingly bare and austere.

The hotel is surrounded by the historic buildings of the Old Town and Jewish Quarter. Although Jiricna's design extensively incorporates glass,

chrome and steel, the building is not incongruous amongst its urban neighbours – it feels like an integral part of city life, with none of the usual isolation of the conventional tourist hotel.

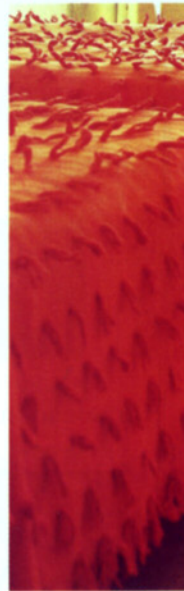
The architect designed each detail herself, from the attractive street frontage which glows, jewel-like, at night and the hotel's spacious lobby-cum-bar, breakfast restaurant and gym, down to the tiniest aspect of the bedrooms and bathrooms – even, allegedly, the types of pen used at reception. It's this attention to minutiae that makes for a cohesive whole. The colour scheme is consistent throughout the hotel: extensive use of white and cream is highlighted with sage and beige, as well as splashes of orange and the odd dash of the most lurid pink.

Jiricna is well known for her love of glass, and here it is used with consummate style, whether it's in a bathroom, a guestroom cupboard or the glass spiral staircase which forms the lobby centrepiece.





Glass features strongly, from spiral staircases to translucent bathrooms, brightened with splashes of vivid colour and custom-made perspex furniture



## HOTEL JOSEF'S AMBIENCE IS ONE OF QUALITY, SIMPLICITY AND CUTTING-EDGE DESIGN

Much of the furniture in the hotel's 110 rooms was also the architect's own inspiration: her custom-made lacquer bed units and clear perspex desks and tables are a signature feature.

Each airconditioned room is fitted with a concealed CD and DVD player, satellite TV and free internet connection, and there are other thoughtful little touches, such as the jogging map provided in each room, or the enormous silver umbrellas provided so guests can stroll the streets of the Bohemian capital on rainy autumn days.

Rooms on the upper floors have balconies and wonderful views across the city's rooftops and spires – or if guests wish to shut out the world entirely, they can lower the exterior blinds at the press of a button and retreat into their bedroom's soundproofed peace.

Hotel Josef does not have a restaurant, but a modest room service menu concentrating on fresh ingredients is available all day, and an elaborate breakfast is served in a sunny room gracefully furnished with Thonet tables and chairs. There is no lack of good food on offer, at a huge range of Prague restaurants nearby, so guests might take a pre-dinner drink in the stylish surroundings of Hotel Josef's bar before venturing out into the night-time city, safe in the knowledge that they have one of Prague's most comfortable hotel beds to return to. 🌐

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