

Photography by: Jeremy Debattista



ROSSELLI - AX PRIVILEGE, VALLETTA

“We wanted to evoke emotion through design. The grandeur and unapologetic boldness of the palazzo’s Baroque architecture was our point of departure,” says Michael Pace, co-founder of Forward – the architectural practice that converted a palazzo in Valletta into a unique 5-star hotel.



Nikki Muscat and Michael Pace

Since founding Forward in 2011, Michael Pace and Christopher Micallef have gained a reputation for designing architecture that impacts people’s lives. The architecture studio has achieved excellence through a wide portfolio of cultural, residential, commercial, hospitality and office design projects. Renovating the palazzo in Valletta into the Rosselli – AX Privilege Hotel is the latest iteration of their commitment to the creation of contemporary projects that are sensitive to purpose, place and context.

“Our brief was to transform this Baroque building into 25 spacious and unique suites,” explains Perit Pace. “From the get-go, we wanted to enhance the building’s interior and exterior spaces by evoking a sensation of preservation and modernisation. When we first set eyes on the building, it had been vacant for over a decade. It had previously housed offices, and some major architectural changes had been implemented. The whole team at Forward was adamant about exposing and celebrating the building’s original architecture. Our essential mission was always to rehabilitate the palazzo to its former glory.

“We removed accretions and alterations that had been implemented over the years. For example, we restored the courtyard to its





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original three-arch symmetry, and removed a full-span mezzanine that had been built within the piano nobile to re-expose its original double height. We wanted the project to become an example of a union between preservation and contemporary intervention. So, we embraced the language of the original build and it served as a canvas for our tailored design. In this way, old and new would co-exist unchallenged and in harmony.”

Forward’s fundamental work ethic centres on achieving quality through refined design. In the context of rehabilitating the historic palazzo for commercial use, this was a thrilling challenge. “To integrate the hotel’s operations within the palazzo and guarantee a seamless interface between the front- and back-of-house, we meticulously mapped out every detail – all while respecting heritage, safety and sanitary concerns,” continues Nikki Muscat. “This was also the case in ensuring accessibility. Centuries ago, entrances were designed with steps near the doorway, so we dropped the ground floor windows of the façade to create accessible doors for modern use.



“The Rosselli is the first five-star hotel in the heart of Valletta. From the introspective space of the courtyard to the soothing tactility and youth-inspired romanticism of the suites, it moves away from the conventional style of hotels towards the new trend of ‘lifestyle hotels’, which has the visitor’s experience very much at its core. Through our mix-and-match approach to finishes, objects and fittings, we’ve created a unique architectural experience that ignores trends and is instead suspended in time.

“Without a doubt, my favourite spaces are the entrance and courtyard. The entrance always lent itself to a dramatic, five-star feel, and the bevelled mirrors give a particularly interesting play of light. In opting for white and clearly distinguishing the original arches, the courtyard has been transformed into a place of congregation and rest – away from the hustle and bustle of the city.”

Perit Pace praises Kamra tal-Periti for giving local architecture and design firms an opportunity to expose projects that might otherwise go unnoticed by the local industry and general public. “We’re thankful for Kamra tal-Periti’s dedication to endorsing quality design in our built environment. And we’re thrilled to have received the Special Commendation for Interior Spaces. It is the result of the entire team’s dedication towards this project. All clients and sites are different and come with unique challenges, but we hope to use the experience gained on the Rosselli project on other hospitality projects in the future.

We are grateful to AX Group for trusting us with the design of such an important and complex project, and for seeing it through without compromise.”