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The Julius

PRAGUE

House of Julius Meinl brings its retail expertise to the hotel sector, opening a serviced residences designed by Matteo Thun.

Words: Ben Thomas • Photography: © Gionata Xerra

My ancestors originated from the Czech Republic,” says Julius Meinl VI, sixth generation member of the House of Julius Meinl, as he sips a fresh cup of coffee at the group’s debut hotel in Prague. “We have roots here, so it was a natural choice for our first venture into hospitality.”

Breathing new life into a Neo-Renaissance building on Senovážné Square in the city’s New Town, the 168-key property looks to bring “accessible luxury to an underserved market” according to Meinl, who is the driving force behind Julius Meinl Living. With the family name known as a manufacturer and retailer of coffee and gourmet foods, the new-generation Julius Meinl has ventured into hospitality, leading the development of an accommodation offer. “A hotel wasn’t the only option we considered after acquiring the site several years ago, but following lengthy conversations, we landed on hospitality, specifically serviced residences,” he explains. “Our goal is to offer a temporary home for those travelling to Prague.”

Given the anticipation surrounding the new endeavour, not to mention the historical significance of the structure, Meinl needed someone he could trust to execute the brand’s vision. Enter Matteo Thun & Partners, with whom House of Julius Meinl has partnered on retail outlets for over 15 years. “Matteo knows what we’re about, so the brief was brief,” he confirms. “The fundamental objective was to preserve and enhance the building’s heritage while at the same time weaving a contemporary narrative into the fabric of the city. Rather than removing a sense of community, we wanted to create a space that respected the shared history, whilst catering for future generations.”

In practice, this meant working with Prague City Hall Heritage Department to retain original elements, from the façade colours to the paved flooring outside the hotel’s entrance – though Meinl did convince the council to inscribe its name into the footpath. “It was important to meet aesthetic standards but also transform the site into a luxurious space,” he reflects.



For the guestrooms, Thun took inspiration from the works of Czech artist Alphonse Mucha to curate a pared back aesthetic with organic materials and a warming palette of caramel and terracotta

Granted creative freedom thanks to his relationship with the family, Thun set about devising an interior scheme that worked within the parameters of the building yet injected fresh energy, much of which was influenced by the Czech Republic's artistic heritage. "We wanted to design a timeless scheme in tune with a contextually aware, nomadic way of living," Thun reveals, noting the importance of meeting various needs through a modern-day formula.

On the ground floor, the guest journey begins in a sleek lobby, where a series of stainless steel archways are offset by bold turquoise walls and burnt orange furniture. From here, a mirrored walkway leads to the Emporium bistro and bar at the centre of the complex. Lit by statement lighting from Czech brands such as Preciosa, the venue takes on a more autumnal colour palette, combining shades of green and orange with natural materials like timber and stone. "The idea was to channel a local feel through urban materials, reflective surfaces and Modernist colours," says Thun, citing the works of Czech artists Alphonse Mucha and František Kupka as key sources of inspiration. "In the communal areas, we drew on

Kupka's abstract pieces to channel a more energetic atmosphere through vibrant tones and the ambient glow of bohemian glasswork."

For the guestrooms meanwhile, of which there are 40 varying shapes and sizes due to the existing floorplate, Thun took cues from Mucha's works to curate a pared back aesthetic with organic materials and a warming palette of caramel and terracotta. Homely touches come in the form of artisan rugs, cosy armchairs and soft textiles, echoing a distinctly residential style. And in the bathrooms, marble-effect ceramic tiles from Italy – which also serve as flooring in the in-room kitchens and public areas – were used to clad the walls and vanity units, bringing a luxurious feel alongside freestanding bathtubs and fittings by Zucchetti. Throughout the hotel, Thun's custom-made pieces ensure every space "arouses curiosity" – from the reception desk and black-tiled bar to the benches, upholstered headboards and bedside tables in the guestrooms.

With apartment living in mind, the design team also decided to separate the bedroom from the open-plan kitchen and lounge. The residential feel comes





across in the use of technology too, with services available via an app to save guests the hassle of traipsing down to reception when in need of assistance. “The key was to offer flexibility and convenience, as well as the ability for people to help themselves,” Meisl explains, stressing that while the property does offer a service element, digital initiatives are geared towards evolving travel habits. “Nowadays, most people own a smartphone. We use it to order food, reserve restaurants and book taxis. Why should things change when we travel?”

The same ethos will be applied to future developments, with the family already on the hunt for prime European locations to grow its hospitality division; Warsaw, Budapest, Vienna have all been touted as possible destinations along with Rome, Paris and London. “The ultimate goal is for 15 assets in city centre locations, with a focus on historic buildings,” Meisl confirms, though is realistic in the challenges of finding such properties. Much like Prague, the new ventures will take

inspiration from the architectural, artistic and cultural history of their location, designed in a way that aligns with the fabric of the city. “We’re flexible and we’ve shown that with this particular building,” says Meisl. “What we will not compromise on is our accessible luxury concept and the location, as we believe those two things are key for the customer experience and the long-term value of the asset. As an integrated owner, developer and operator, we must take a long-term view.”

Before Julius Meisl Living expands its offering across Central Europe, the brand is set to bring its retail expertise to The Julius Prague, opening an adjoining outlet where guests and locals can purchase gourmet food products from House of Julius Meisl partners. Something of a full circle moment, the move feeds into the group’s philosophy of giving back to the places it calls home, as Meisl concludes: “We build businesses with the view of multiple generations down the line, making sure that everything we do adds to the surroundings.”



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: PPH Nove Mesto

Operator: Julius Meisl Living

Architecture and Interior Design:

Matteo Thun & Partners

Visual Identity: Studio LP,

Something More Near

www.thejulius.eu