

Hotel Mestari

HELSINKI

Studio Arcibella injects new life into a former building association headquarters in the Finnish capital, creating a lifestyle hotel characterised by a masculine leitmotif.

Words: Guy Dittrich • Photography: © Aaro Artto (unless otherwise stated)

Helsinki’s latest hospitality haunt, Hotel Mestari, takes its name from the Finnish word for ‘master’. Rather fittingly, the hotel is owned by the Association of Master Builders, whose offices still occupy a small part of this sturdy, six-storey corner block in an artisanal quarter of central Helsinki. The interior design by Kristiina Michelsson of Studio Arcibella follows an industrial aesthetic, with the masculine leitmotif a constant; raw materials and exposed elements combine with delicate artworks, soft furnishings and clever acoustic and spatial solutions.

Originally built in the 1930s, the building was later renovated in the ‘60s. For its most recent transformation, the association invited some 30-plus developers to pitch for the project, including Primehotels, which currently operates seven properties across Finland. “We saw great potential in its functionality and efficiency,” explains Board Member and Partner Tomi Peitsalo, who has significant experience of bringing major global brands to the Nordics.

Having won the project in 2018, Primehotels in turn asked a number of studios to consider the interiors. Studio Arcibella was selected, thanks to Michelsson’s ability to grasp and interpret the proposition. “I respected that Kristiina listened and closely followed the brief,” says Peitsalo as he nods towards Michelsson. The pair share a good level of trust following several collaborations for Glo Hotels, now part of Nordic Hotels & Resorts’ lifestyle portfolio.

“It was Kristiina who came up with our masculine lifestyle slogan,” quips Peitsalo, quick to note that this has nothing to do with gender. Rather he references inclusive ideas around aesthetics, quality, values and culture. And financial viability too. This red thread is more to do with materiality and the celebration of construction itself.

And the construction offers huge flexibility. The 237 guestrooms are stratified into some eight categories, though there are at least 30 different configurations. Operationally, the hotel offers guests the chance to enhance their stay with a selection of experiential packages such as Cool Down, a stress-relieving range of teas and spa products, or Movie Night with snacks and woollen socks.

Within a relatively tight floorplan, Michelsson has also realised a variety of harmonious public spaces catering for all – from party and private events spaces to quiet booths and co-working areas. Standalone, street-level tenanted units provide further options with coffee shops, beauticians, hairdressers and a private gym, to which hotel guests have access. An assortment that can be tailored by the owners.

Masculine lifestyle might perhaps be slightly contradictory for the Master Builders but it is strong, clear and to the point. All attributes of Michelsson. And strong she needed to be, as there were doubters around some proposals. Take the hotel’s courtyard, for example. Was it worth removing the plaster render on the walls to reveal the brickwork? Yes, as





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they now add real character. With a new glazed roof came acoustic concerns. So, reconstructed parts of the inner walls were sprayed with a sound-absorbing finish. Then came colour choices. Michelsson wins again with a warming terracotta. Finally, and most significantly, the insertion of a platform above part of the seating at Latin Bistro & Bar Maestro 51. Success here too, with the delivery of a significant new revenue-generating space that simultaneously provides a more atmospheric volume underneath and choice for guests. Michelsson enthuses about her collaborative relationship with Peitsalo: "It was wonderful to work with Tomi because it was actually other people saying no."

The interiors major on exposed materials – brick, as well as corridor ceilings suspended with a host of M&E, and scaffolded platforms used in a series of double-height guestrooms to create lounge cinemas. Expanded sheet metal is aplenty too, its diamond pattern decorating in-room hanging spaces and mini-bar units. The interiors of the lifts are also lined with it

to replicate the external lifts typically seen on construction sites.

Michelsson swipes through images on her phone to highlight the extent of the excavation and the material inspiration. "We encouraged workers to leave the patina of their craft on the materials," she explains. For example, the four substantial steel tubes that support the glazed roof of the courtyard are pleasingly imperfect, to the extent that they look like they could have been originals. The shuttered concrete structural elements from the 1960s works, Michelsson's "structural mysteries", have been left exposed wherever possible. Their sturdy reliability softened by the wood plank relief. On the high ceilings of the top floor rooms, the beauty of these tapered beams has been boldly highlighted in a stark black.

Guestrooms are otherwise largely similar, even if their configurations vary. Soaring single pane windows are triple-glazed – essential for the climate – and bring in natural light. Artworks made from pressed steel and copper meanwhile



© Niki Soukko

hang above each bed, reflecting the colourways of the rooms that combine oak flooring, the greys and beiges of walls and curtaining – with blackout qualities, again necessary for the long summer days – and fixed furnishings in black-stained wood and steel.

All these latter elements, including a chaise longue that cleverly transforms into a useable bed, are designed by Michelsson – a furniture design specialist. Studio Arcibella also turned its hand to the lighting, both internally and on the façade. In collaboration with Helsinki-based Saas Instruments, Michelsson designed two stylish lamps: one, the i-Beam, referencing a steel girder, and the other a glass ball chandelier.

The latter is seen in the flexible events spaces, where partition walls allow for up to 13 room configurations. The audio-visual set-up also means all events guests can watch the same presentation at once. Seating 140 people, the most spacious room features a full-height image of the famous black-and-white Lunch atop a Skyscraper photograph, originally taken

in 1932 to show ironworkers sitting on a steel beam suspended high above Manhattan. Used throughout the hotel, the image reinforces the hotel's masculine leitmotif, paying homage to the art of craftsmanship. On the opposite wall hangs an elemental rusted re-bar grid.

Here and in the corridors, the raw ethos of the interiors is enhanced by Ege's Industrial Landscape range by Tom Dixon. Produced with the look of a natural patina, the collection mirrors the rough aesthetic of a city through seven designs, including Coal – which reflects the substance that powered the Industrial Revolution – and Iron, imitating the gradual disintegration of the oxidised metal surface that generates a random hued patination.

Initially built as offices, Hotel Mestari has seen a variety of tenants over the years, with stints as a cinema, dinner-and-dance venue, and most recently a nightclub. Its latest iteration, a clever and well-executed lifestyle hotel envisioned by Primehotels and Studio Arcibella, could just be the best yet.



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: Rakennusmestarien Säätiö

Operator: Primehotels

Architecture: APRT Architects

Interior Design: Studio Arcibella

Main Contractor: Lehto Group

www.hotelmestari.fi