

## FLORENTINE FINERY

Rocco Forte's Hotel Savoy, a microcosm of Italian charm at the heart of one of its greatest cities.

by **tom norton**

Upon its inauguration in 1893, with 120 beds, central heating and boasting the then revolutionary wonder of electricity, the Hotel Savoy was hailed as one of the most modern and luxurious establishments around. Not just within the borders of Florence, or even by extension, Italy – but of the entire period.

Over 120 years later, that air of reverence remains. Bolstered by a lavish refurbishment in 2000 and nestled between Giotto's Bell Tower and the celestial cobbles of Florence's iconic Cathedral Duomo the Hotel Savoy is one of the most recognisable luxury establishments in the city centre.

On first impressions, the polished, unassuming lobby belies the sheer size of the Savoy. A contemporary restyling sees modern sofas and artwork alongside a pair of backlit wooden cabinets showcasing the shoes, fashions and jewellery of high end designers or locally-sourced ateliers. And, when coupled with the uniformly friendly service, serves to give the entrance to the majestic residence a charming, almost boutique feel. Turn right upon entry and down the corridor you'll find the Savoy's in-house restaurant Irene – an unfussy, characteristically Mediterranean dining spot that spills out onto the hotel's lined terrace – with only a well-groomed hedgerow at table level separating you from the street (and enviable glances at your Carbonara from passers-by)

Of the 88 rooms and 14 suites, we'd advise making it a

priority to snare one with a city view, with the Savoy's strongest suit coming in the form of its balcony suites. A marriage of classic and contemporary that appeals is compounded immeasurably by virtue of the balconies that all open out to the bustling charms of the Piazza della Repubblica. With suites designed by Italian Olga Polizzi – sister of the Sir Rocco Forte (the owner of the hotel's parent company), the Savoy's lodgings are reminiscent of a sophisticated private house, smart furnishings in neutral colours with the welcome addition of classic novels peppering the bookshelves – giving the whole ensemble a cosy, comfortable feel as opposed to bombastic vacancy sometimes found in the world's top hotels.

If going to the gym is a staple part of your travelling routine (and we tip our hat to your enviable levels of discipline if so) it's worth noting that the Savoy's fitness centre champions both a solid set of equipment and a splendid view of the city, Duomo et al. If that kind of thing in your eyeline doesn't compel you to pound some of those pizza-induced carbs off on the static bikes, then quite frankly – nothing will.

Executing the marriage of modern conveniences and classic grandeur is no easy charge, and it is precisely this successful alchemy that gives the Savoy such enduring appeal. Prevailing as a bastion of antiquity and modern advancement, in what's widely regarded as one of the world's most beautiful corners.

