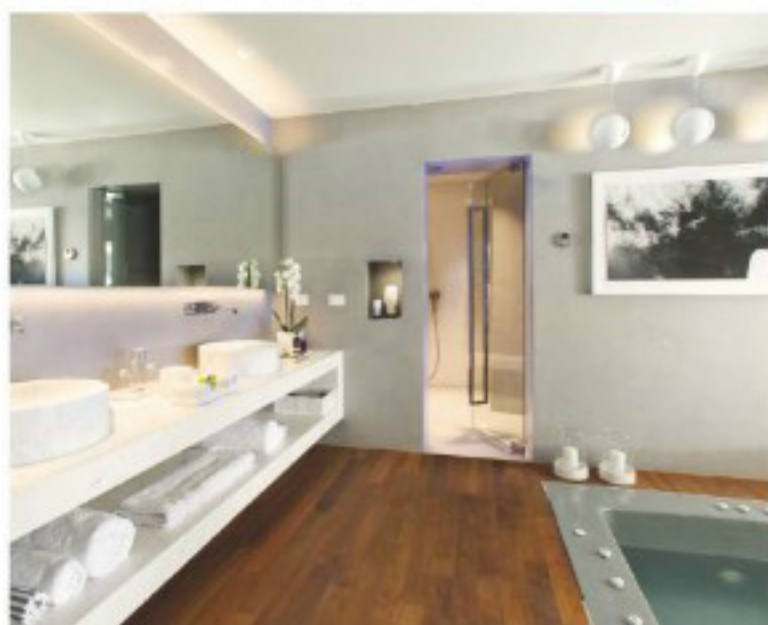
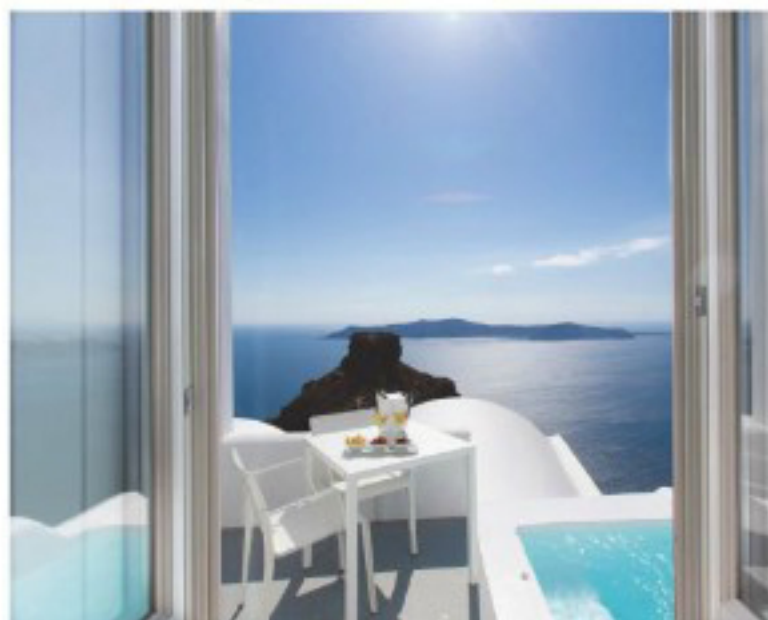


# GRACE, SANTORINI

Where else in the world can you stay on a cliffs edge while looking down at a volcanic caldera? With iconic vistas of the Aegean Sea and a contemporary style throughout the interiors, Hamish Kilburn argues why Grace Santorini is one of Europe's – if not the world's – best designed boutique hotels.

The word 'unique' is used far too frequently when describing new-found pockets of the globe. But there is no alternative to use when describing the arresting first impressions made at Grace Santorini – 'speechless' maybe, but that's not very helpful when writing an article on the project. Although hypocritical to the statement just put forward, using 'unique' is fitting in this context. Maybe it's the volcanic fragments lodged together in the oversized windows that makes this place 'distinctive'. Or perhaps it's the unrivalled views looking out towards a silk sheet of unhindered blue water. More likely, it's because of its position with the hotel sitting 300 metres above the Aegean Sea, overlooking a volcanic caldera while capturing the silhouettes of islands in front of deep sunsets. It's how Grace Santorini fits around the location that first makes it a truly exceptional and world-class luxury boutique hotel.





No more than 21 guestrooms sit atop of the dramatic fall, which leaves minds wondering how it was designed and what difficult encounters were faced, and overcome, during its construction. "It was a challenging project that was done through very traditional means," says Memos Filippidis, Director of Mplusm Architects, who first completed the project back in 2010 alongside Divercity. One of the greatest challenges for the team at the time was to design the hotel around the overwhelming views while at the same time ensuring that guests' privacy was protected within the rooms. When doing so, the levels that once hindered the design became its saving grace. "Everyone staying here wants to have unobstructed views over the beautiful panoramic landscape, but all guests want to feel a sense of privacy in their rooms," explains Filippidis. "We achieved this by introducing step sections between each room. To keep guests' privacy, the public footpaths were created on separate levels to the guestrooms."

Providing a contemporary interpretation of vernacular architecture, the infinity pool adds landscape drama, again taking inspiration from what's around the development. For Filippidis, this revived some fond childhood memories. "Designing this space took me back to when I was just eight years old," he says. "It was then when I first noticed the geometric designs around Santorini. I love the fluent twist on traditional design and wanted to encompass this in the hotel's pool, which had to be a statement given the views."

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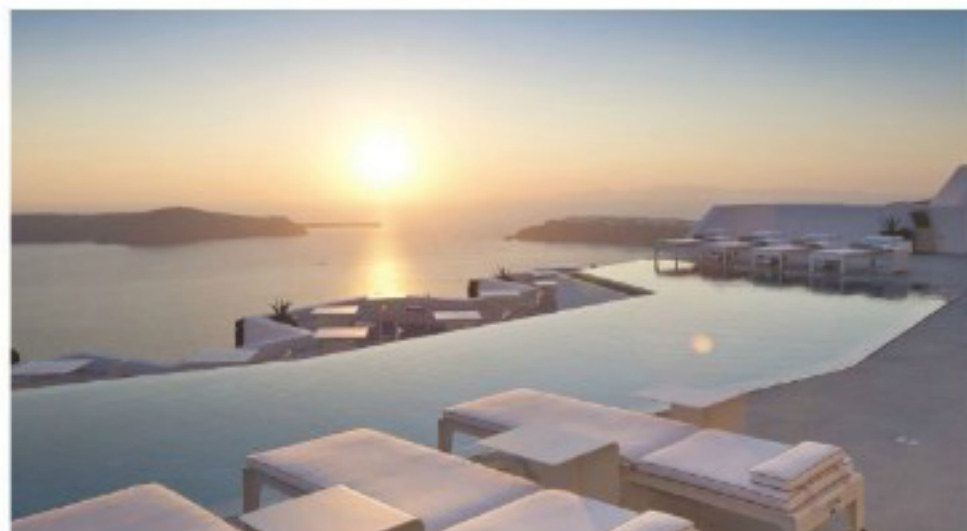
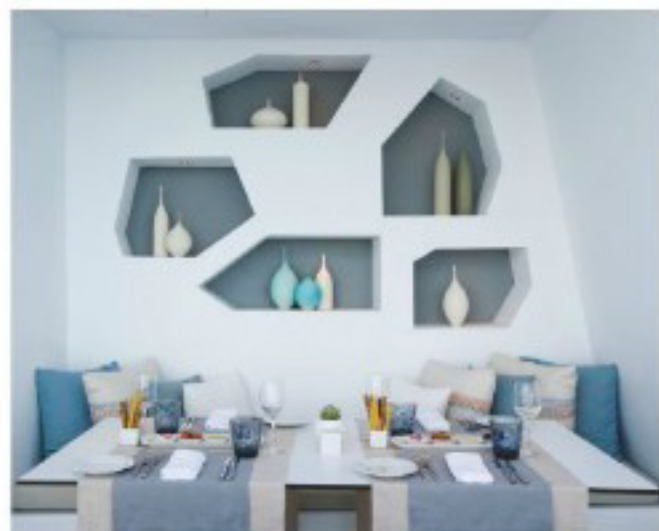
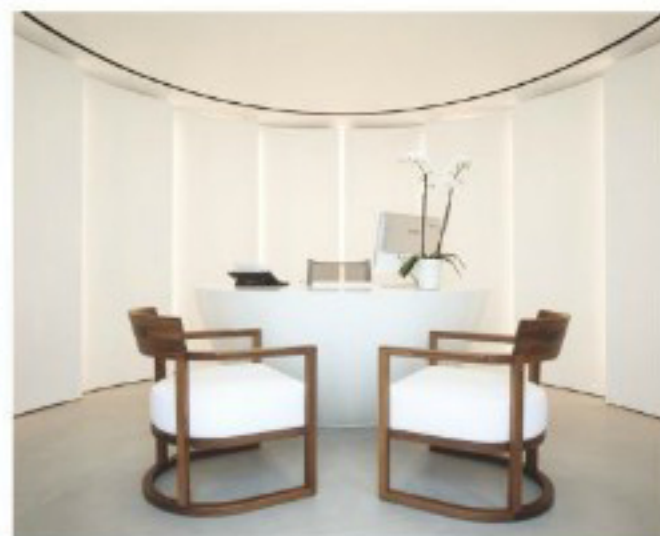
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The hotel's most recent full-scale renovation to the inside of the property adds a fresh new layer of design. "We never try to contend with the view, instead we capitalise on it as one of the hotel's greatest assets," explains Staci Perkins-Surla and Christina Logothetis, Founders of Fifth Element Interiors. The renovation consultancy and interior design was handled by Fifth Element Interiors in collaboration with SMK Interiors Greece. Accents of turquoise, aubergine or navy are featured in the recently renovated guestrooms. The palate has a deliberate relationship with the island and London-based interior design consultancy, Fifth Element Interiors decorated the space in an authentic style true to its Hellenic heritage. "The understated design allows the extraordinary location and landscape to take centre stage," Perkins Surla and Logothetis explains. "Our challenge was to preserve the original design's strong use of white while introducing a subtly deployed new colour palette with furnishing, fixtures and fittings exuding the highest standards of luxury without betraying the elegant simplicity that

is a hallmark of Grace Hotels. Achieving understated beauty without resorting to cold minimalism is one of the great tests of interior design." One objective of the hotel's renovation that completed in May 2016, was to integrate the interiors with the beauty and sense of calm of the space outside. As a result, all guestrooms and suites boast a view of the caldera and the Aegean beyond so that guests can make the most of the picturesque scenery from dusk until dawn.

Traditional Aegean walnut was used for the design, as opposed to non-indigenous wood like teak and driftwood found in other island properties. Products from the local region complement the interiors and include handmade walnut desks with Vibieffe 9500 Marble and walnut coffee tables. Wardrobes with solid walnut interiors include an innovative in-room bar.

The bathrooms offer double vanity units with basins hand carved from solid Greek Statuario marble and spacious rain showers with mosaic feature walls. As part of the renovation, the new Champagne Lounge again provides

stunning views of the Caldera and offers an exclusive vantage point to witness dramatic changing hues of the legendary Santorini sunset. "Inside, a feature wall is made of lava rock from Santorini using local architectural techniques," says Fifth Element Interiors. A fully lit honey onyx bar with brass shelves provides a stark statement foil to the dark volcanic stone.

It doesn't end there. Inside the hotel, regional products and local craftsmanship can be found within each room such as the handmade floating walnut desks. "The most innovative aspect of the rooms is the specially commissioned capsule collection of photographs," Fifth Element Interiors explains how the artwork will quite literally come to life. These will soon feature 'augmented reality' technology - when guests point their smartphones at the photograph a dedicated app will play a video with commentary by the photographer describing the location of the image, how the shot was taken and the inspiration for the photograph."

So there you have it, a hotel that challenges design, architecture and those who suffer from vertigo. Grace Santorini's charm comes from the breath-taking views that surrounds it. Its new interiors reveal an unmistakable sense of luxury without a hint of ostentation - a difficult balance which has clearly taken much

care and thought. They are understated and at one with the serene surroundings. Its 21 guestrooms are kept private and lifted with a typical Greek palate. Carefully concealing the true extent of the changes, the hotel has kept true to its original well-built design with quality interiors, setting standards on the global stage. I rest my case: Grace Santorini is one of the best-designed boutique hotels in the world.

**ARCHITECTURE:** Mplusm Architects, Divercity Architects  
**INTERIOR DESIGN:** Fifth Element Interiors, SMK Interiors  
**SUPPLIERS:** *Lighting:* New Works *Ceramics:* Jonathon Adler, Lindform, Sophie Cook, Hay *Furniture:* dk3, Vibieffe, Cattelan Italia *Fabrics:* C&C Milano, Holly Hunt *Bathrooms:* Grohe  
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