

# Going for gold

Rio's hotel market is upping its game as boutique retreats replace 'love motels' and the rundown makes way for the recherché

With the attention that Rio de Janeiro has received since the announcement of the 2014 football World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, the city has been exposed for its lack of hotel capacity. Save for the extraordinary Fasano, the classic Copacabana Palace and the charming Hotel Santa Teresa, there is a dearth of inspiring options that befit the city's status as a global hot spot. But things are changing.

Perversely, the true catalyst behind the imminent boutique hotel boom isn't the result of big sporting events, nor the subsequent infrastructure improvements and economic activity. Instead, a relative improvement in security has made revitalisation possible, opening up new areas of the city to development and tourism.

The pacification of the city's favelas was certainly a factor in getting intrepid developer and hotelier François Delort's Hotel Santa Teresa off the ground four years ago (it was winner of Best New Suite in Wallpaper's 2010 Design Awards, W¹). The district of Santa Teresa itself, once a no-go zone for tourists, has emerged in recent years as a boho-chic enclave, with an eclectic mix of artists' ateliers, fine restaurants, beloved *bocceos* and, increasingly, boutique hotels - the Hotel Santa Teresa standing out as one of the city's best.

In late 2015, Delort will launch his second multi-million-dollar bet on the area's arrival as a destination in Rio. Called Baba Square, the hotel will combine a pair of 19th-century buildings, juxtaposed with two new-build structures to create 62 rooms, a bar, a restaurant and a collection of fun amenities, including a large billiard hall.

As with Hotel Santa Teresa, Delort himself is behind the design, but 'Baba', as he calls it - wryly named after the senior citizens' home it once was - will be a less luxurious, more lighthearted offering. The roster of furniture designers hints at a tongue-in-cheek style: the Campana Brothers, Zanini de Zanine and local artist Zemog. There will be no talk of thread counts, but cute ideas abound, including a screening room that recalls an old drive-in

movie theatre and will play Brazilian classics on a 15m-tall white wall, while vintage Volkswagen Beetles provide the seating.

Just downhill from Santa Teresa, downtown Rio is also seeing a dramatic shift. The ambitious redevelopment of the Portuaria (W135) will see new commercial and residential towers emerge on the waterfront, and the arrival of at least two new cultural landmarks: the sustainability focused Museum of Tomorrow designed by Santiago Calatrava; and the new Rio Art Museum (MAR) by local firm Bernardes + Jacobsen. It amounts to a clean-up on a grand scale. A phenomenon only helped by the conversion of the unsavoury Paris Hotel, a former 'love motel' once popular with the

point for Copacabana Beach. The 92-room, five-star Emiliano Rio, currently under construction, will be the sister property to the Filgueiras family's flagship hotel in São Paulo - a world-class operation that has earned a loyal following both foreign and domestic for its highly personalised service matched with elegant, modern style.

The brand lends credence to the comeback of iconic Copacabana Beach, adding to the momentum created by the \$20m renovation of the Copacabana Palace Hotel earlier this year and the hotly anticipated Museum of Image and Sound - created by New York-based design studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro and currently being built on the site of an infamous gentlemen's club (called Help!). Where sex tourists and cheap package holidaymakers have been the target market, the Emiliano Rio makes 'Copa' relevant for in-the-know travellers and upscale business people.

Miami-based architect Chad Oppenheim is behind the Emiliano Rio's design, which will bring a fresh look to the rather prosaic string of properties that currently line the long, crescent-shaped beachfront. The concept is something of a chic monolith in motion; it features a system of perforated metal screens that will open individually to reveal the glass curtain wall behind and provide guests with one of the best water views in Rio. The glass swimming pool set to crown the structure will add a ribbon of turquoise-blue that runs its width, allowing the building to stand out against the cityscape.

Other Rio districts, from São Conrado to Botafogo, are experiencing a similar resurgence, with their own signature hotels. And even long-established Ipanema has a new Só Hotel to look forward to, which is a planned \$126m conversion of the supremely well-situated Caesar Park into Sofitel's new design-driven concept.

Given this hotel development boom, we're confident that 18 months from now the limited offering of stylish hotels will no longer be an issue. Their high prices likely will.\*

**Rio's most eagerly awaited new hotel also marks a tipping point for Copacabana Beach**

area's working girls and boys. The ambitious project is by brothers François-Xavier and Jacques Dussol, the Parisian businessmen-turned-hoteliers behind La Suite, a waterfront mansion converted into a discreet boutique property perched on a cliff above Joatinga Beach. Due to launch in 2015, tying in with Rio's 450th anniversary celebration, the 25-room Le Paris should attract the same well-heeled clientele as La Suite, but they'll be trading privacy and waterfront views for ultra-comfort and convenient access to some of the city's cultural gems.

Perhaps the most eagerly awaited addition to Rio's hotel market also marks a tipping