

# villa

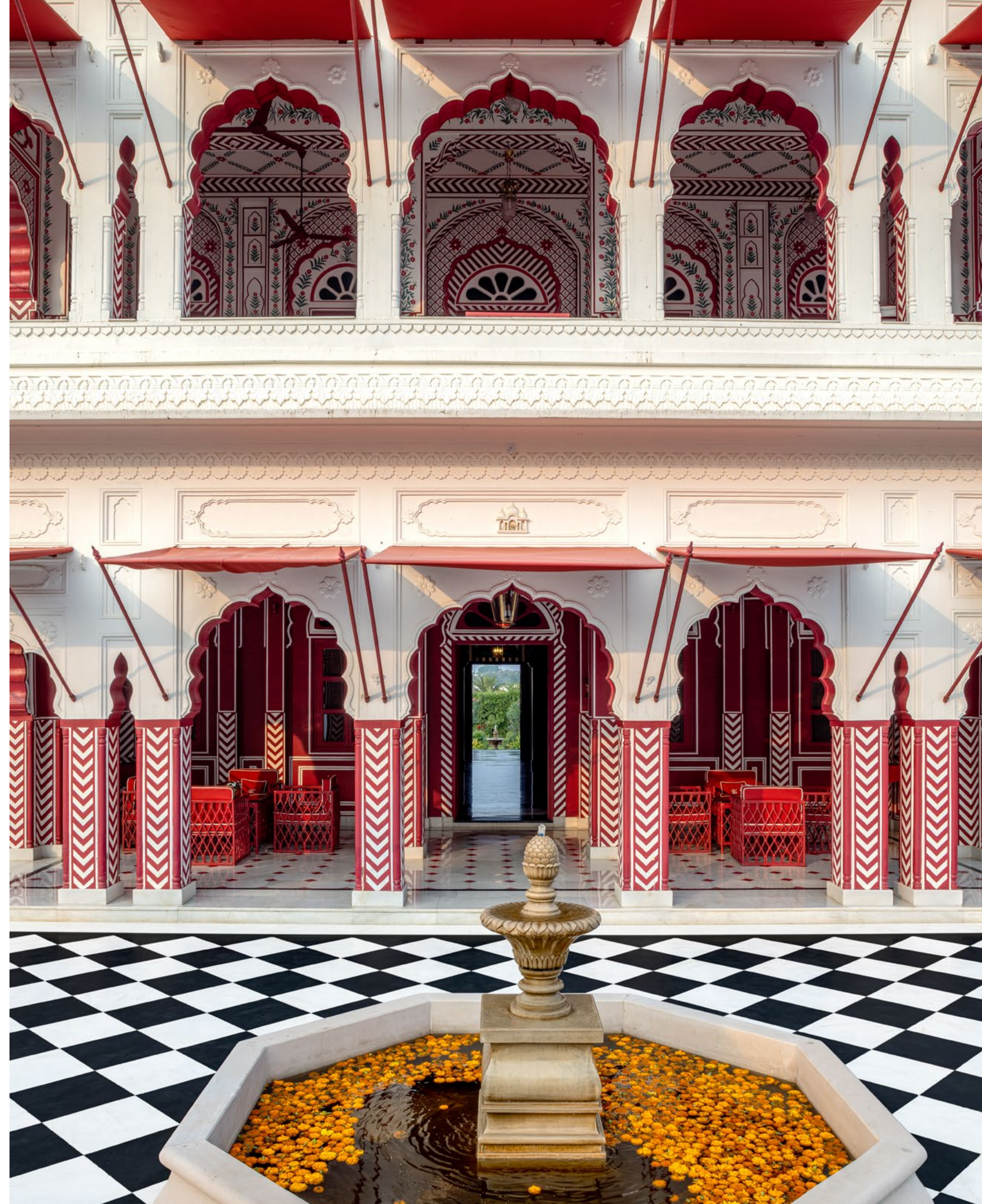
A vibrantly coloured villa in Jaipur is a dream-like retreat

Words by Alexis Barrell Photography by Atul Pratap Chauhan

# palladio

from the urban hustle and energy of the nearby city





*As you sip your imported Italian liquor,  
breathe in the garlands of fragrant  
mogra flowers, you start to slip out  
of your worries.*

Previous spread, above and right Villa Palladio in Jaipur is an unapologetic explosion of colour that makes you feel like you're in a dream that holds beauty and frivolity in high esteem. Interior designer Marie-Anne Oudejans's signature frescos were handpainted by local artisans.



I left Jaipur on 17 March 2020. It was the eve of an enormous shift in South Africa and India as the pandemic was intensifying. Before that life-altering afternoon when I hastily packed a suitcase and rushed through goodbyes, I had been a sporadic member of Jaipur's eccentric and often flamboyant creative community. Novels could be written about the collection of characters settled in Jaipur – attracted by crafts and kindred spirits – as well as the local guardians of vibrant textile and jewellery histories or Rajasthani heritage. The heady mix is glamorous, heaped with mystery and, above all, extremely un-boring.

Although the Pink City sprawls outwards, it retains a small-town feeling through a few known spots. Most evenings, Jaipur's great personalities can be spotted at the iconic Bar Palladio. It's a staple for weary designers covered in dust after a day at the block printers; gorgeous women casually draped in jewels that would feel OTT on a Monaco bender; elegant men in bhagala jackets or airy linens; a few gorgeous children asleep on the canopied divans and perhaps, discreetly, a royal guest or two.

The interior's lasting success is apparent through its many failed imitations worldwide. Marie-Anne Oudejans, its maverick designer, considers this space her first love. It has, like any great bar, become a balm for disenchanted spirits – a sanctuary in the often overwhelming urban landscape. It is no wonder then that the next step would involve a boutique hotel – an opportunity to curate an entire hospitality experience within the whimsical Palladio dream. Villa Palladio had only to find its home to bloom.

Barbara Miolini, Italian-Swiss co-owner, is a country woman at heart. She wanted a place to breathe, but not too far out. Her ideal travel time was 30 minutes – almost impossible, but she remained open to possibilities. One afternoon her business partner, Indrajit Singh Jawli, took her to a 1970s *haveli*, a noble Rajput family's labour of love, constructed using heritage techniques and local materials. The road out was largely free of Jaipur's stifling traffic, flowing into a pastoral landscape populated by farmers, cows and mustard fields. It was a yes for Barbara, who had found her haven.

In November 2019, Barbara and Marie-Anne set to work in utmost secrecy. I was aware of the rumours but the project remained largely enigmatic, as did its signature colour. In the wake of Bar Palladio's potent peacock-blue infusion, The Villa was expected to adopt its own signature hue. Marie-Anne's love of red is known by all who have been fortunate enough to attend her beautiful dinners, but such a bold choice of colour would have surely been completely overwhelming.

Well, Villa Palladio is red. It is as red as red could ever be. Juxtaposed against crisp whites and lush green gardens, its redness

stands out like a totem to playfulness, a firm stance on joy. Upon entering the hotel after a full day in bustling Jaipur, you might expect such a colour to be confronting, yet it transports. It did take me a few slow seconds to digest my candy-striped room, after which I giggled out loud at the magnificent cheekiness of it all and skipped off to dinner in wonderment like a velvet-clad Alice. Barbara's menus are not exactly known for their traditional Indian fare. Italian done well on foreign shores is a rarity, although she manages to succeed by keeping choices fresh and simple. I unwittingly ordered a fully crimson spread – gazpacho, puttanesca and Campari soda – cue another solo laugh to the floral-trousered waiter's amusement. There is a perfectly crafted Rajasthani thali on offer, although this must be ordered in advance.

The dinner scene is ornate, adorned floor-to-ceiling with Marie-Anne's signature frescos hand-painted by local artisans, softened at the edges by a stellar playlist, candlelight and friendly staff. As you sip your imported Italian liquor, breathe in the garlands of fragrant mogra flowers and start to slip out of your worries, it becomes clear that you are part of a collective dream.

After a perfect night in a plush octagonal jewel of a room and a shower behind a hand-carved marble *jaali*, breakfast is served on the first-floor terrace overlooking modern-day gardens of paradise, designed by Aude de Liedekerke, and the ancient Aravalli Hills beyond. The delectable culinary display and its setting boast a symmetry and colour coordination worthy of Wes Anderson's envy. I had picked up a few books as companions from the library's luscious literature collection, a rarity in hotel spaces, covered boldly in red, of course. The soundtrack of parakeets circling rose-sprinkled fountains firmly establishes a bubble of the senses within a 'personal fairytale', as Marie-Anne puts it.

My fellow guests and I bathed in wonderment for a while in the morning light of the hall, as it filtered through stained glass onto floral explosions of colour. With no time to enjoy the vibrant little spa, I wandered through the jasmine-scented formal gardens, past lazy palms and overflowing hibiscus. Echoing the Kanota Lake beyond it and the perfect blue skies of Rajasthan, the pool is bordered by a newly constructed pavilion dancing the line between opulent and approachable. I was in an Instagram paradise and I wanted to put down my phone to soak it all in.

From the marvellous hand-painted tiles by Simon Marks lining the hotel's kitchen herbarium to its impeccable front of house, Villa Palladio provides a home for dreamers, an antidote to ennui. Marie-Anne told me, over cocktails at The Bar, that she had left a piece of her heart and soul within its grounds. Aren't we blessed that she did? ● villa-palladio-jaipur.com @villa.palladio.jaipur

**Left** The 'red as red could be' interiors could have been overwhelming but have the opposite effect, transporting guests through their sense of joy and playfulness. The ornate dining room is softened at night with candlelight and an excellent playlist.



Above and right The bedrooms don't escape Marie-Anne's colour treatment – they inspire a sense of glee and make you feel as if you're sleeping in a jewel box. The bathrooms are equally vibrant and feature touches of marble and other traditional materials. Next spread The candy-striped swimming pool pavilion is a confection against the blue sky, flanked by palms standing sentry.

