

# H15 Luxury Palace

KRAKÓW

Hotelier Grzegorz Rygiel tasks architect Mariola Tomczak with restoring a 19<sup>th</sup>-century palace to its former glory, marrying heritage with contemporary touches.

Words: Kasia Dietz • Photography: © Piotr Gesicki (unless otherwise stated)

In the heart of Kraków’s old town, a stone’s throw from the Rynek Główny, sits one of the city’s most prestigious addresses. Dotted with a rich variety of architectural styles, ranging from Renaissance to Baroque to Gothic, the neighbourhood is teeming with national treasures and historic landmarks. Yet H15 Luxury Palace tells a unique story. The newly-opened hotel was indeed a palace in its heyday, having been formed by connecting three adjacent townhouses and occupied by the Lubomirski family through the 1800s. Over the years, the property has taken on various uses. In the 1850s it became a cultural centre, hosting art exhibitions and social gatherings including a showcase of Polish antiquities by the Kraków Scientific Society. Following World War II, it operated as the headquarters for the French Institute, and more recently was the setting for two popular nightclubs.

It wasn’t until 2016 that historical conservation and expansion of the Lubomirski’s former home began, with owner Grzegorz Rygiel enlisting architect Mariola Tomczak to restore the mansion to its former glory. The partnership

marks the second H15-branded property from Dobry Hotels – the first being H15 Boutique in Warsaw, a member of Design Hotels. While both hotels are different in their architectural styles, they share the same approach in marrying heritage with contemporary touches.

“Due to the museum value of the facility as well as the interior design elements, I proposed a continuation of what the Lubomirski family started,” explains Tomczak, who consulted with the Bureau of Historic Preservation on every architectural and interior design detail. “The scheme combines a respect for history with contemporary elements of architecture and art, using precious materials such as natural stone, wood, metals and glass.”

From the outset, historic details abound. At the entrance, a Baroque metal gate remains intact, while inside, original timber tiles were carefully cut and replaced. “The floor in the lobby is a historic masterpiece of paving stones made from larch. It was removed, restored and then meticulously relaid,” Tomczak confirms. Even the Baroque-era ceiling in the main hall has maintained its original luster.







Original murals decorate the ceilings of four imperial apartments, while linen drapes open to reveal original window casements and handblown glass

Such elements blend seamlessly with modern furnishings, from velvet couches and reception counters in brushed brass by Tom Dixon – the latter reminiscent of medieval dining benches – to refurbished stucco ceiling decorations accented by gold lighting fixtures. Elsewhere, the floors on the landing are decked with Carrara granite, while family busts appear throughout the space in a playful contrast to vibrant paintings by artist Ivo Nikić. “The main staircase, crafted from original black oak, is finished with spatial abstract installations by the same artist, whose pieces also adorn the walls of all guestrooms and corridors except the first floor,” says Tomczak.

From the maze of hallways into the 71 guestrooms and suites – each of varying sizes and some with balconies – there’s glimpses into the lives of the palace’s previous inhabitants, with family portraits and antique armoires keeping the Lubomirski legacy alive. “I had furnishings from the original palace at my disposal,” shares Tomczak, adding that the bathrooms are dressed in Italian marble to “integrate with the colours of the rooms.”

Accommodations also include four imperial

apartments, where original murals decorate the ceilings – some of which feature elaborately detailed wooden beams – and linen drapes open to reveal the same window casements and handblown glass that the Lubomirski family once looked through. “Fireplaces and chandeliers may have changed locations but all are original,” adds Tomczak. Paintings from the family’s museum collection hang on the walls too, while additional furnishings were crafted by Polish and European factories according to Tomczak’s direction.

The museum quality continues to the ceremonial conference room on the first floor, where coats of arms from notable Polish families line the ceiling and 19<sup>th</sup>-century fireplaces stand on either side of The Crest Hall’s salon. Along with portraits of the Lubomirski and Czartoryski families, one painting is also on exhibit at the city’s Wawel Royal Castle, the former seat of Polish rulers. For events, the hotel’s facilities extend to a 140m<sup>2</sup> club space below ground, and future plans include a stage for live entertainment as well as a wine cellar, tasting room and landscaped gardens for al fresco dining.

The subterranean level is also home to a gym,





swimming pool, sauna, steam room and three treatment areas defined by 15<sup>th</sup>-century stone walls that required special treatment. “After long-term geological research, we received a permit to strengthen the side walls in the basement,” Tomczak explains. “After reinforcement and cleaning, they can be seen in the spa, bar, club rooms and wine cellar.”

The history of Poland can also be discovered at the hotel’s signature restaurant, opening this Spring. Once occupied by an orangerie, the space takes guests on a journey back in time with chef Mateusz Suliga, who puts a modern twist on historic recipes. “We will reconstruct the dishes of old Polish cuisine, little known not only abroad but even in Poland itself,” says Suliga. “This way, diners can discover the richness of our culinary heritage.” The story being told will fuse regional produce, Polish crafts and treasures from small family farms. In addition to plants, Tomczak plans to decorate the venue with wicker chairs from Feel Good, Carl Hansen and Ton, as well as her own sofa designs. “The

16<sup>th</sup>-century openwork backrest of the bench flanking the restaurant will draw the eye of the visitor, while Flemish tapestries from the same period will add even more seriousness and museum charm,” confirms Tomczak.

Already open and equally rich in history, Bistro The Hours on the ground floor is set beneath the palace’s original vaulted ceilings and uses mirrors to enlarge the space. A sizeable bar connects its two rooms, both of which are decorated with Fornasetti wallpaper and custom sofas. Here, guests can turn back the hours, and the centuries, dining on local products and recipes also prepared by Suliga. “In centuries gone by, Polish cookery was enriched by the flavours of Italian, French, Jewish, Hungarian and Austrian cuisine. It was here in Kraków that trade routes from the Far East led into Europe. This is where culinary fashions and novelties spread,” says Suliga. At The Hours, and the wider hotel for that matter, this mélange of history and culture is brought back to life.



#### EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: Grzegorz Rygiel

Operator: Dobry Hotel

Architecture and Interior Design:

Mariola Tomczak

[www.h15palace.com](http://www.h15palace.com)