

# San Domenico Palace



**Plankfist**



San  
Domenico

Palace





YEAR

2021

LOCATION

Taormina, Italy

PROJECT

San Domenico Palace

DESCRIPTION

San Domenico Palace in Taormina is a luxury hotel in a converted 14th-century convent. It opened in 1896, when the Sicilian town became a stop on the Grand Tour of Italy, and remained a sought-after destination throughout the 1900s. A charming place that speaks a contemporary language thanks to its recent renovation.

















"A historic hotel with an ancient tradition of hospitality, with a spectacular clifftop location overlooking the sea, under the watchful eye of Mount Etna, and one of the most beautiful panoramas in the world."











"The challenge with this project was to give a new appearance to a place imbued with austerity and sacredness, that was both luxury and future-proof. The source of inspiration was the place itself, with a close reading of the architectural elements within the complex."



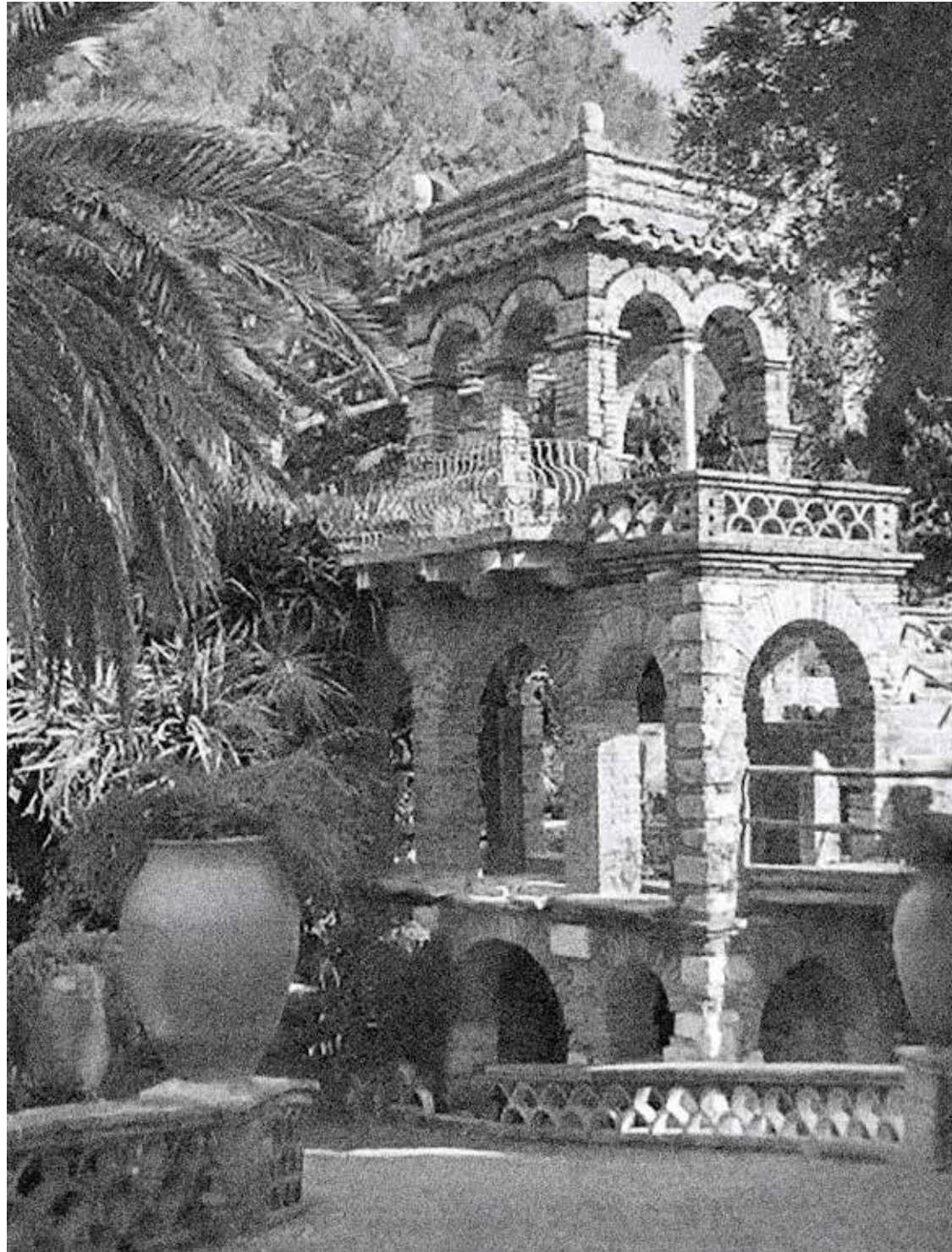












San Domenico Palace in Taormina is a legendary place. Perched on a clifftop above the sea, it is located in the heart of the city's ancient Jewish ghetto and enjoys extraordinary views of Etna and the Greek theatre. Born in 1896 from the conversion of a 14th-century Dominican convent into a Grand Hotel, San Domenico Palace became one of the most sought-after destinations by the international elites. The youth of Europe's polite society who stopped in Taormina during their Grand Tour stayed here, but it was also a favourite with intellectuals, such as Thomas Mann, Truman Capote, Jean Cocteau and Luigi Pirandello, as well as celebrities of the international jet set including Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Liz Taylor, Richard Burton and Audrey Hepburn. Its corridors and facades are the sets of iconic films such as *The Adventure* by Michelangelo Antonioni and *Le Grand Bleu* by Luc Besson.

"We're on the slopes of Mount Etna, in the most luxurious hotel, a thousand feet above sea. There are flowers everywhere," wrote Nobel-prize winner John Steinbeck in a letter. The image will resonate with anyone who enters the hotel today. Opened again in July 2021, San Domenico Palace was renovated by Neapolitan architecture firm Pisani Morace. Rosaria Catania, from Messina, oversaw the restoration works, whilst the garden was designed by landscape architect Marco Bay. Fit-outs and furniture were created by Plankfist Contract following designs by architect Valentina Pisani.

The hotel has kept the original structure and suggestive monastic atmospheres of the ancient convent, with cloisters, frescoes and rooms created from ancient cells. The challenge with this project was precisely to give a new appearance to a place imbued with austerity and sacredness, that was both luxury and future-proof. The source of inspiration was the place itself, such as in the new paving of the cloister porticoes, where octagonal slabs recall those of the ancient sacristy. The materials follow the same line of thought, with the introduction of Modica Stone and Port Laurent marble from Morocco, in the spirit of the Sicilian architectural tradition of reusing ancient materials and Arabic cultural influences. The colours are pale and neutral, with the generous use of antiqued and fume mirrored glass creating scenographic three-dimensional perspectives, which are elegant without being opulent.

111 rooms and suites, including 19 with a private pool, are located between the ancient complex, where they have replaced the ancient monastic cells, and the adjacent 19th-century building, built when the convent was transformed into a hotel. The interiors are welcoming and luxurious. Custom furnishings were made exclusively by Plankfist Contract, which also curated other aspects of the interior design. As the ancient convent dates back to the 14th-century, no two rooms are quite the same: ad-hoc furniture was therefore designed and fitted into each room, adapting perfectly to the environment. The materials used are Canaletto walnut, Patagonia marble, bronze-brushed brass and antiqued mirrored glass. The style is sober and elegant, expressing a contemporary aesthetic that is respectful of the past and enhances the specific character of each room, such as the portraits of saints above the doors, chosen by each monk to protect their room. In keeping with the requirements of a luxury hotel, from precious finishings to the latest technology, the standard is extremely high.

The common areas are in the former convent. At its heart is the ancient refectory, now the Museum room, where part of the important collection of paintings once belonging to the convent is on display. Art consultant James Robertson curated the selection of works, dating between the late 16th and the 19th centuries and attributed to painters of the Sicilian or Southern schools. In the majestic hall, the Taormina stone fireplace and the ancient bread trough were both restored along with the original walnut boiserie. In the centre of the room, sofas, armchairs and coffee tables create intimate and comfortable sitting areas, where guests can indulge in the artworks and the atmosphere.

Areas dedicated to conviviality include the Anciovi restaurant with a panoramic terrace, the bar in the Chiostro Grande and the Principe Cerami restaurant. In the cocktail bar next to the restaurant, the large curved bar is an element of rupture. A one-off piece made in twice-curved fume mirrored glass with a marble Port-Laurent top, it was designed by Plankfist Contract along with the vertical mirrored bottle rack, which is completely lit.

The renovation was completed in one year and a half. A team effort conducted at the highest levels, which rewrites the concept of luxury and marks a new step in the story of the former convent and the city of Taormina.

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