



## The Modernist

ATHENS

Kostis Karatzas looks to local partnerships and tailor-made touches to establish a community-focused hotel in an Athens neighbourhood.

Words: Emma Love • Photography: © Ioanna Roufopoulou

When Greek entrepreneur Kostis Karatzas was planning a second hotel as part of his hospitality brand The Modernist – the first opened in Thessaloniki in 2018 – Athens, in particular the upscale Kolonaki neighbourhood, was the obvious choice. “Thessaloniki is my home city and where I’ve lived my whole life, but Athens is the natural next step,” he explains. “I knew that I wanted the hotel to be in this part of the Kolonaki neighbourhood. Plaka and Omonia are the other hotspots but they are both very crowded and busy. This is still central but quieter and we have a park in front of us, which is not easy to find in Athens.”

It’s not only the location that Karatzas lucked out on, but the post-war 1950s corner building too. “It was the old Canadian Embassy and when I visited, everything was left exactly as it was, from the panic room to the secret doors and bulletproof guard booth at the entrance,” he recalls. The transformation into a hotel began in January, only to be put on hold two months later when the country went into Covid lockdown. “I had to make a decision whether to abort the project or keep going under this uncertainty, but I have a very strong belief in the brand and the way we’re expanding,” Karatzas continues. “The vision has always been to grow, not just in one direction but in different directions, introducing



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features such as our lobby shop, which adds to the experience. This is only the beginning for our brand.”

The hotel was completed mid-September with 38 rooms across six floors, ranging from Small (20m<sup>2</sup>) to XL (30–34m<sup>2</sup>). Medium rooms come with a writing desk and furnished balcony, while the XL option features a large outdoor living space complete with hot tub.

For the design, Karatzas turned to Form Related, the Thessaloniki-based architecture and interiors studio who also worked on the first hotel. This new project maintains the same playful juxtaposition of Art Deco elements, mid-century detailing and Danish design found in Thessaloniki. “The main idea was that we wanted to keep certain elements of the design that are characteristic of the brand – the white tiles in the bathrooms, the open closets, the shelving systems – but treat them differently,” says Karatzas of the brief. “We wanted it to be minimalist but at the same time warm so it still feels cosy.”

In the rooms, solid timber floors and white walls are combined with black furniture and ceilings, as well as tactile leather and brass details. “We used black in Thessaloniki but decided that we wanted to enrich it even more in Athens; for us, it helps to create contrast and depth,” says Eleni Papaevangelou, co-founder of Form Related, also citing the lobby as a space where black has been used for atmosphere.

This notion of contrast extends to the exterior, which has been painted two tones of very dark grey. “The building next door is completely white, so we thought it would be an interesting distinction if the hotel is the opposite,” continues Papaevangelou. Together with her partner Konstantinos Theodoridis, she has designed the majority of the furniture other than a handful of cherry-picked pieces by Danish brands – such as the Palissade chairs by Hay on balconies and the decorative, wooden Little Birds by Normann Copenhagen on the artfully arranged shelves in the rooms – which fit seamlessly in with the sleek aesthetic. On

Bathrooms are designed in all black-and-white and feature amenities by third-generation Thessaloniki pharmacy, Physis Laboratory



the surface everything feels effortlessly simple yet layers of details are woven throughout, from the record players and drinks trolley in the three XL suites to the custom bathroom amenities by third-generation Thessaloniki pharmacy, Physis Laboratory. Even the small basement gym, so often an afterthought, is seriously smart with a wooden bike and treadmill by German manufacturer NOHRD.

The ground-floor restaurant has marble-topped tables and brass ceiling lights where guests sit down for breakfast; later it becomes an all-day café serving delicious ‘bowls’ (smoked tuna with quinoa, avocado and olives, or shrimps saganaki with harissa sauce, feta cheese and spinach), followed by drinks in the evening. “It wouldn’t be smart to believe that we can have the best restaurant or the best bar in town but whatever we do, we try to be as good as we can to create a holistic stay. The food is simple and super high quality, and if guests would like to have a drink then we have one of the best menus in the city,” says Karatzas of the eight signature cocktails that are specially-designed by Nikos



Bakoulis, co-founder of Athens' most famous bar, The Clumsies (Clumsies Original Cocktails are also in the minibar).

Partnerships like these are key to Karatzas, who has also tasked Athens-based composer and DJ Spilios Christopoulos, aka Palov, with curating playlists for the social spaces; commissioned Open Studio Ceramics to make black stoneware espresso and cappuccino cups that are also sold in the lobby shop alongside the bathroom amenities; and chosen timeless all-black uniforms designed by cutting-edge local fashion label 2WO+1NE=2 for the staff. "Collaboration is important," he explains. "The idea is that each Modernist is connected to its own city through working with interesting creatives and bringing their work inside the hotel. We want to do more of that."

Future plans include events on the rooftop terrace, reached via a marble staircase and with views of the Acropolis in the distance; it doubles as a cinema and is the best spot for cocktails – there's no bar service, instead guests use

the retro telephone to place an order. Also in the works are making use of the ground floor as a space for workshops and talks by guest artists; tailor-made touches that evolve each time someone stays (such as a polaroid camera appearing in the room for guests to use); and a Modernist membership with benefits and discounts on rates.

"It's another way of building a community and linking the two hotels," Karatzas confirms. "Architecture and design has always been my passion – I studied and worked in civil engineering – and the idea of creating a very unique experience inside a space for someone isn't too far from designing a home. The difference is that in hospitality, someone is only going to stay for a day or two so all the extra bits around the building are crucial." And that's precisely where Karatzas' eye for design and detail-driven approach comes into its own.



#### EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: Kostis Karatzas

Operator: The Modernist

Architecture and Interior Design:

Form Related

Graphic Design: Post-Spectacular Office

Art Consultant: PrintSin

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