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HOME REVIEW

VOL 16 ISSUE 04 APRIL 2017 TOTAL PAGES 140

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"As there is no road access, everything had to be carried up by mule or man. It meant that re-building took longer but also resulted in a more authentic outcome."

HIGH IN MOROCCO

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give!" These words by Winston Churchill are sure to ring a bell as you experience a heady combination of sustainability and luxury at Kasbah du Toubkal in Morocco.

Text By Kanupriya Pachisia
Photographs Courtesy Alan Keohane



Utilising its own water filtration system and sourcing much of its food from its own gardens, the hotel also generates its own solar power for electricity.



Crafted out of vernacular materials, the balconies expose you to soothing shades of blue, green and grey which are emblematic of the High Atlas range.

Forty miles south of cosmopolitan Marrakech, the tarmac shrinks to a stony footpath at Imlil, Morocco. From here begins the walk to an inebriating contact with luxuries that co-exist with a respect for the environment. Tucked into the saw-cutting peaks of the Toubkal National Park, in view of the highest mountain, the Kasbah du Toubkal is a magnificent mountain retreat that has completely transformed the village of Imlil.

With views framed by rugged peaks and villages that pass through walnut groves and terraced barley fields, you might clearly not pay much attention to your immediate surroundings, "but the plate you eat off, the stool you sit on, the beautiful rug beneath your feet and the straw hat on your head, nothing got there by chance!"



You can also loll around 300 square metres of roof terraces amidst comfortable cushions and carpets where hints of rustic orange culminate in the intimate seating area, balancing out moments of excitement and calm.

Mike McHugo, owner of the Kasbah tells us, "As there is no road access, everything had to be carried up by mule or man. It meant that re-building took longer but also resulted in a more authentic outcome."

A British-Berber partnership transformed this crumbling home of a former ruler, perched over a hilltop into a comfortable fourteen room boutique hotel. While it took a village to build it, Mike tells us that, "When building the Kasbah, right from the beginning, before any plan was drawn or any stone was laid, we said that we would only work with the environment and in the best interest of the people of the Imlil Valley. It made it much harder and more expensive but we refused to compromise.

We used local materials and the local people of the valley to build the Kasbah, not only to curtail travel miles but also due to their knowledge of how to build in inaccessible places, keeping in line with local building traditions."

The Kasbah has a range of rooms from luxury villas to basic dormitories. While the bathroom floors rest on locally sourced marble, the rooms and balconies sport recyclable clay tiles that help prevent penetration of heat. Mike tells us, "**We wanted to preserve or recreate many of the old skills that were beginning to die out - so we tried to resurrect wood carving and use local materials such as walnut wood.**"

Carved walnut and cedar furniture along with heavy wooden beams and doors adds to the rustic ambience. In the suites, the local granite stone used seems to recreate the strength of the walls while a fireplace takes the chill out of the evening air. Held together by cane and structural wood, the ceilings are so tightly packed that they pose no interest to birds or rodents and are highly resistant to bad weather.

The contrasts in the restaurant are unexpected and they create a unique kind of energy as all sorts of juxtapositions of rough and smooth, dark and light, rustic and refined are played up against each other. The architecture and interiors have echoes of Moorish style and discipline."



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While the bathroom floors rest on locally sourced marble, the rooms and balconies sport recyclable clay tiles that help prevent penetration of heat.

Traditional Moroccan carpets in geometric patterns warm floors as they add a bit of history to the place. Crafted out of vernacular materials, the balconies expose you to soothing shades of blue, green and grey that are emblematic of the High Atlas range. You can also loll around 300 square metres of roof terraces amidst comfortable cushions and carpets where hints of rustic orange culminate in the intimate seating area, balancing out moments of excitement and calm. At the end of the day a relaxation ritual of the typical Moroccan hammam awaits you.

The Kasbah demonstrates sustainable tourism across its accommodation and the variety of services offered, integrating it in its unique hospitality concept. Mike shares, "We mainly used local materials and incorporated them into the design in an effort to give guests an experience that they will never forget."

In addition to employing local people and involving them in its management, the lodge uses a percentage of guest proceeds to fund a non-profit organisation that supports education, health-care and ecological waste disposal. **Utilising its own water filtration system and sourcing much of its food from its own gardens, the hotel also generates its own solar power for electricity.**



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It has thermal heaters located on the roof to heat water. Guests are encouraged to drink spring water so as to minimise plastic disposal. Eco-products like trash bins made out of tyre rubber can be found scattered all over the place. The Kasbah also participates in mountain waste collection and other clean-up activities.

Recipient of myriad awards, Kasbah du Toubkal is a pacesetter in the Moroccan tourism industry. It is one of the most authentic and treasured destinations of Morocco and a tribute to Berber culture and hospitality.

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