

Casa Romana

By Derek Workman

MY ARRIVAL at Casa Romana could almost be described as stately. Not my car, of course, that's a bit of an old banger, but it's not often that I turn up at a fancy hotel under police escort - which just goes to show that the police in Seville must have been

years gone by.

I take a coffee on the roof terrace (tempted by the Jacuzzi), in the company of Antonio Jiménez, the hotel's enthusiastic manager, whose own history, geographically at least, isn't so far from the where we sit.

types and the señoritas. It was sold in 1925 and converted into the Hostal del Duque, with fifty bedrooms and five bathrooms, so you couldn't really say it had gone upmarket much." But it certainly has now!

When the current owners

rebuilding until the doors opened on its elegant transformation. The number of rooms were almost halved to twenty-six (and everyone has their own bathroom, often with a Jacuzzi), and if you can stretch to the Junior Suite you even get your own private roof terrace.

The publicity material will tell you that everything in the hotel is for sale; if the bed is more comfy than yours at home, the rattan patio furniture is just what you've been looking for, or you simply can't live without those divine little sofa cushions, then they can be yours - at a price. The reality is that it's very unlikely if you'll be taking them home with you.

"To be honest, it's a bit of a marketing ploy. Being called a 'boutique hotel' helps a lot, because people know that they can expect a certain quality, and it will be high, and we added the idea of offering everything for sale as an added extra. But I run a hotel, not a shop, although I suppose if someone desperately wanted something we'd sell it to them."

It is difficult to describe the Casa Romana as any other than subduedly elegant. Yes, it has all the elements of beautiful décor you'd expect, with plumply cushioned sofas and sensuous toiletries,



think that's what I liked most about it. I felt as if I could sit and read a book peacefully, but step outside the door and I'd be amongst the hubbub of life in a major Spanish city in a matter of moments.

When we'd done the official tour, Antonio shows me the hotels pièce de résistance, even though it isn't in the hotel, it's a ten minute walk away.

The Suite Alcazar Private Villa is a stunningly restored historic building almost in the lap of the Cathedral. The upper floors form a duplex with a large terrace high above the crowds milling in the square below. But more than just a posh place to lay your head, the Suite comes with its own butler!

As you enter, bright sunlight bounces off the lime-green tadelakt covered walls (it's the traditional covering of palaces, hammams and bathrooms in Morocco, and offers a lustrous, almost soft, dappled finish). As a wall colouring it might sound a bit strange, but in reality it works wonderfully to give an avant garde appeal to the room apartment. The Moroccan feel is continued in the bathroom, with tadelakt used once again, but this time in a velvety maroon.

"This is really special for us. We wanted somewhere where our clients could be completely independent but have the best service available. Even though they have a butler on call twenty-four

hours, most people who stay here are usually quite happy to take care of themselves, but they know he's there if they need him."

With the success of the Suite Alcazar, the company have begun restoring the building next door, and later this year will open the Puerta del Alcazar, five self-contained suites - but this time without a butler. But I decided I could live without one. Mind you...I do get a bit fed up of all that packing and un-packing, and I suppose if I really wanted to feel regal then just have to have one...and I'd quite like to have my shoes shining in the morning...and

Hotel Casa Romana has kindly offered two lucky Costa del Sol News readers the opportunity to stay at the hotel absolutely free. Fill in the coupon below for the chance to win a two-night stay. The prize is for two nights bed and breakfast for two people. The dates are by arrangement with the hotel and all other drinks, meals and extras must be paid for separately. For further information contact Hotel Casa Romana, Calle Trajano 15, Seville. Tel. 954 915 170, web page. www.hotelcasaromana.com

Derek Workman visited the Hotel Casa Romana with An Amazing Hotel. www.anamazinghotel.com, Spain's specialist website for boutique hotels. Tel. 659 734 684.



pretty quiet on the day I arrived or at least have a sense of humour. Mind you, I'm glad they did show me the way, because the streets of the old town are pretty difficult to negotiate and I'd probably have found myself heading back towards Jerez before I knew it.

And the day kept the same hugely hospitable theme when I walked into the hotel. A slim young chap all in black gave me a huge smile and scarpers out to the car to get my bags. Fortunately I didn't see his face when he saw it because I'm sure it's not the sort of transport their clients usually arrive in, but the smile was firmly in place when he got back inside. "Shall we park it now, and then you can settle in?" he asked. I hoped that it was more that he didn't want the narrow street blocked than that he shuddered at the thought of if being seen parked outside the splendid Casa Romana.

Anyway, car parked, I was shown to my room, with the lights flicking on ahead of us as we walked through the hallways, and slowly dimming behind us, as if acknowledging our presence and saying a polite goodbye. Yes, fanciful, I know, but I like a bit of regality now and again, and the Casa Romana is that sort of place.

When I do hotel reviews the first thing I like to do is stretch out on the bed and have a bit of a doze. It sets me up for discovery. And for discovering Seville, Casa Romana is about as good as you get, being only a gentle stroll from the Seville's famous shopping street, Calle Sierpes, and a modest meander from all the tourist hotspots. But the splendour of the boutique hotel that greets you these days is a far cry from

"My grandmother has a house just behind us, and when I told her we were building a roof garden she said, 'Why would someone want to

bought the building in 2000, it was in an atrocious condition having been empty for three years, with little spent on it in the way of maintenance or



sit on the roof?" because for many Spanish people the roof is where you hang the washing out to dry. They'd never think of sitting there."

He tells me the building's history as he shows me through the gorgeous rooms, rich in sumptuous furnishings and elegantly muted decoration. "In the seventeenth century it was the butler's and servants quarters for a large palacio, but about one hundred and fifty years ago it was turned into a boarding house, the Pension Delgado whose main clientele seem to have beenerm, how shall I put this...? 'ladies of the night', is probably about right. The area around the Alameda de Hercules had two famous theatres, and the pension catered for theatrical

decoration for decades before that. It was completely gutted, and it took three years of

but for somewhere slap-bang in the centre of a major city it is amazingly tranquil. I

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