



Making waves

A stately pleasuredome is piquing interest in Porto

PHOTOGRAPHY: FRANCISCO NOGUIERA WRITER: DAVEN WU

It's easy to imagine why Avenida de Montevidéu was once such a choice address for Porto's well-heeled upper class. A breezy 20-minute drive from the Portuguese city's denser centre, the long esplanade in the Foz do Douro neighbourhood featured an ornate necklace of 19th-century palatial mansions whose grand fin de siècle façades and sprawling gardens serenely faced the broad stretch of beach and the Atlantic beyond. Only a handful of these stately homes have survived Porto's regeneration, but the debut of the 68-room Vila Foz shows how a thoughtful and light-handed architectural intervention can so vividly rejuvenate a faded pile.

For this, full credit must go to the architect Miguel Cardoso and interior designer Nini Andrade Silva, who faithfully realigned the building's old bones to create imposing room sets, especially in the public areas.

Under their watchful eyes, a squadron of artisans scraped away a century of accretions, painstakingly regilded pilasters, restored elaborate cornices and mouldings, while reworking iron gratings in curling staircases, and polishing gorgeously retiled walls and ornate Baroque fireplaces. The result of this almost maniacal obsession with historical and aesthetical accuracy is that, from the moment you roll in through the garden and pull up at the stone steps, the hotel feels wonderfully out of time.

The momentum of the restoration also meant that it is only in the bedrooms that Andrade Silva has felt free to experiment and be more playful in her palette of green hues,

ABOVE, BEDROOMS SPORT HEADBOARDS THAT EVOKE FLOWING RIVULETS
OPPOSITE, A FADED PILE HAS BEEN REJUVENATED WITH LOVINGLY REGILDED PILASTERS AND RESTORED CORNICES

travertine, bevelled mirrors and brassy hardware. Here, the eye is drawn especially towards the bed, where the ubiquitous headboard has been replaced by an organic cut-out, its curved ridges evoking a rivulet flowing upwards to the ceiling, and angles quietly counterposed by the asymmetrically-cut carpets and sharper lines of the stone flooring.

If additional privacy is required, the Manor House features a clutch of suites with bracing views of both sea and garden, as well as easy access to the in-house restaurant. And set deeper within the garden is a spa with Turkish bath, sauna, indoor swimming pool and fitness facilities, though we reckon that the rolling waves of the Atlantic Ocean, a few minutes walk away, are an equally compelling diversion. ✪
Avenida de Montevidéu 236, Porto, tel: 351.930 462 560, vilafozhotel.pt. Rates: from €191

