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MATTEO THUN

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a sense of place

Looking across to Venice, the Isola delle Rose has a rich and complex history. When **Matteo Thun** was asked to design the JW Marriott Venice Resort + Spa on the island, he knew respecting it was crucial. He talks to Magali Robathan



INTERVIEW: MATTEO THUN



The biggest challenge of this project was preserving the cultural heritage of the island," says Matteo Thun, the designer and architect behind the JW Marriott Venice Resort + Spa, which opened recently on the Isola delle Rose island in the Venetian lagoon.

When he took on the job, the Italian designer – who provided architectural and interior design services for the project – was faced with a complex site featuring a series of ruined buildings dating back to the 1930s on a man-made, state-protected island.

His brief was to create a contemporary luxury resort in keeping with his signature style, while respecting the heritage of the island and its buildings.

"The design across the hotel resort is focused on integrating contemporary elements within the existing buildings, rather than replacing them, in order to showcase their unique history and personality," says Thun.

Isola delle Rose (also known as Sacca Sessola) was created in 1870 using soil and earth left over from the construction of Venice's Santa Marta commercial port. It has housed various different buildings – in 1936 a pulmonary hospital was built for patients to recover away from Venice's humid air, along with various pavilions, a park and recreational facilities including a cinema. The hospital closed in the 1970s and the buildings fell into disrepair. In 1992, the island was given to the UNESCO International Center for Marine Sciences and Technology by Venice City Council; before being sold to Marriott.

Thun has used the former pulmonary hospital building to create the resort's hotel, which features 230 contemporary suites. It also has a large rooftop terrace, an outdoor pool, four restaurants and five bars. The hospital's former gardens have been maintained and feature an olive grove, vegetable gardens used for the resort's restaurants, and a green belt planted with turnips which are used for soil regeneration.

Thun restored the original buildings and built new structures within them without touching the old walls according to the 'box in a box' principle. This means that although the interiors are contemporary, the buildings still look historic from the outside. Locally made bricks, tiles and glass have been used throughout the resort.

The spa has a range of facilities including an outdoor relaxation area, four outdoor cabanas for use in the summertime, a hammam, indoor and outdoor heat and water experiences, a Finnish sauna and a salt bio sauna.

MediSpa suites, a café and yoga and meditation gardens complete the mix. The spa is operated by GOCO Hospitality, with wet zone facilities by Barr+ Wray.

To transform a state-protected island into a luxury resort and park meant looking for new solutions while respecting nature and history

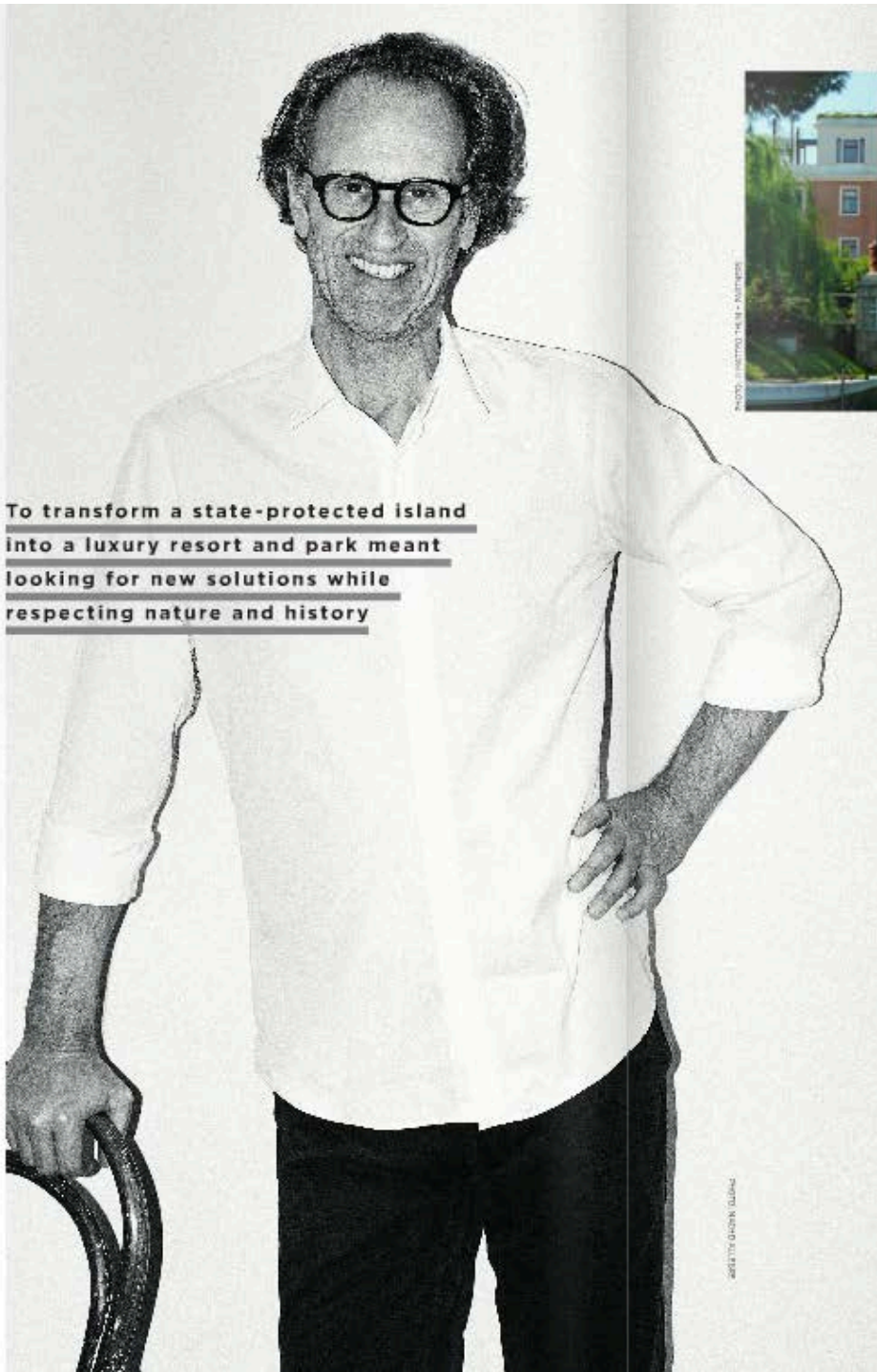


PHOTO: MARriott

Guests arrive at the resort by boat (above); The hotel and spa are housed in historic buildings but feature contemporary design (above right); The hotel has been built in an old pulmonary hospital, which closed in the 70s (right)

Why did you take on the JW Marriott Venice Resort & Spa project?

This is the first resort/hotel project that we've designed for JW Marriott.

When my office was approached by the investors and the planning committee we were instantly inspired by the project. To design a project from masterplan to detail, from macro to micro, means you have to take a holistic approach; this is one of the strengths of our office. To transform a state-protected island into a luxury resort and park meant looking for new solutions while respecting nature and history. It was a fantastic challenge.

How did the location of the resort influence its design?

The resort is on an island embedded in the Venetian lagoon. The project focuses on the landscape – water, slowness and silence. It's all about the spirit of the site.

The site featured a number of historic buildings. How did you approach these?

Apart from the main hotel building, most of the various pavilions throughout the island were nearly ruined and vegetation had grown wild. The pavilions have been preserved according to the 'box in a box' principle:



PHOTO: MARriott



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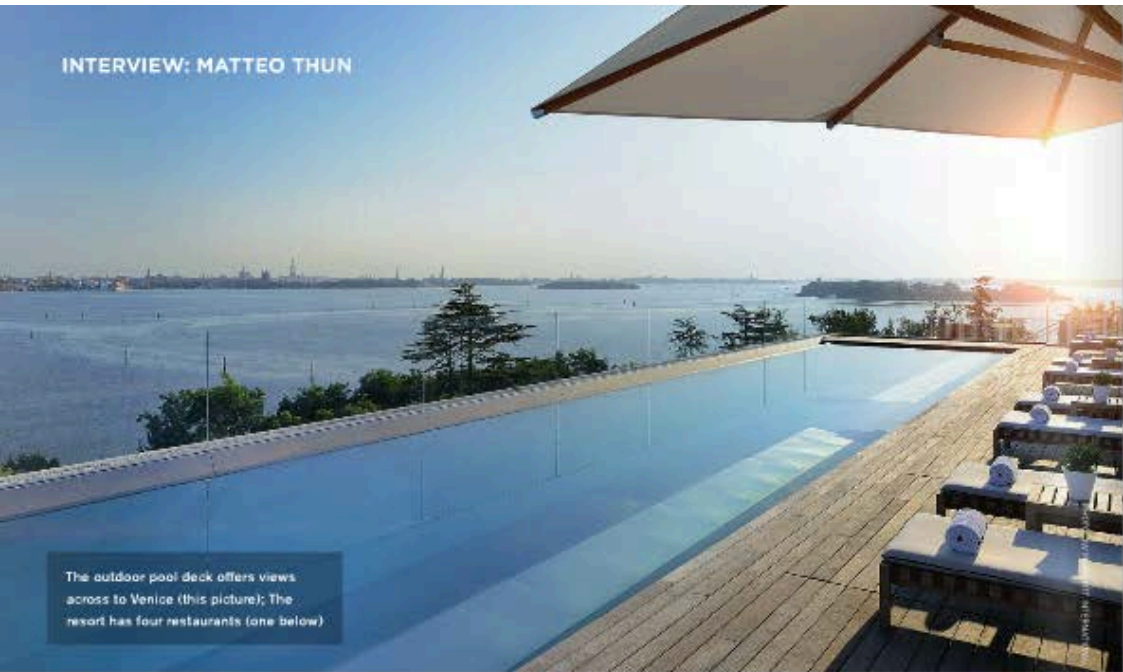
building inside without touching the old walls in order to protect the historic character as encouraged by the latest heritage conservation guidelines.

What was the biggest challenge of this project?

Preserving the cultural heritage of the island. All interventions had to be coordinated with the authorities; they had to meet with their requirements and had to respect the protection of the island's history. Every building on the island has been reworked to enhance the architectural heritage of the location while also nodding to the urban environment of the island. For us, this was an incredibly exciting and interesting job.

What's your favourite part of the resort?

We're very much looking forward to seeing all the greens grow in nicely so that the chef can harvest the island's vegetable gardens. ▶



The outdoor pool deck offers views across to Venice (this picture); the resort has four restaurants (one below)



Every architect should think about how to dismantle a building while designing it

► Why was it important to you to use locally-sourced materials?

The resort is built in line with the spirit of the site – that's why we emphasised the artisanal skills and heritage of the area. Fabrics are from the Venetian manufacturer Rubelli, bathroom fittings from Zucchetti, tables are made from the wood of the lagoon and we worked with Mirano based glassmaker company Barovier + Toso to develop customised, exclusive light installations.

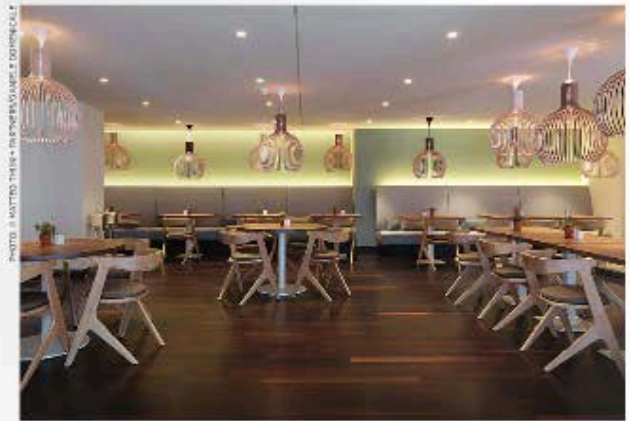
You have said that you wanted to use local materials, but in a contemporary way. How did you do this?

Rather than reproducing historic elements we used the strength of Venetian craftsmanship and tried to transfer this particular sensitivity into modern design. The result is a dialogue between the historic façades and the warm and delightful atmosphere created by the interior design.

Why is it so important to you that your design is sustainable?

We think that every architect and designer should aim for innovation, save resources and energy, take cost engineering seriously and think about how to dismantle a building or how to dispose of an object while designing it.

PHOTO: MATTEO THUN - BILDERBEREICH & DORNIG/CLA



Local wood has been used extensively throughout the resort

How did you want the design of the resort to make people feel?

We wanted to create a contemporary, unique place in an outstanding location while protecting the historic character of the island and its buildings. It's all about luxury through subtraction without creating waste.

Have you achieved what you set out to achieve with this project?

When a project is finished I always see details that could have been improved.

What are you working on next?

Waldhotel Healthy Living (below) is an innovative type of hospitality offering, with wellness facilities for versatile medical care.

The building sits in an unspoiled setting in Bingenstock, Switzerland, and steps gently down the slope, expanding in a series of terraces and 'green' roofs that will regulate the building's temperature.

Again we used local stone and wood for the façade's structure; this helps to seamlessly integrate the architecture into the wild surroundings. The water from Lake Lucerne is used to cool the technical equipment and the room's southern exposure ensures a high level of energy efficiency.

How would you sum up your philosophy when it comes to design?

We're always keen to create iconic objects for long lasting projects.

What inspires you?

Travel inspires me. Often I get inspiration from small impressions – a swathe of land, music playing in an urban quarter – but it's the pure beauty and power of nature that energises me the most.

Can you tell us something about yourself that not many people know

I love old – very old – hotels.

What has been the biggest influence on your work?

I was raised in South Tyrol, Italy by a creative mother. I think that the beauty of the Dolomites and my mother's pure eye working on her ceramics moulded my aesthetics. I'm very grateful for this.

PHOTO: MATTEO THUN - BILDERBEREICH & DORNIG/CLA



Upcoming Matteo Thun project, the Waldhotel Healthy Living in Switzerland, will open in 2017