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by the book

Narrating a contemporary concept in St. Petersburg

By Tara Mastrelli

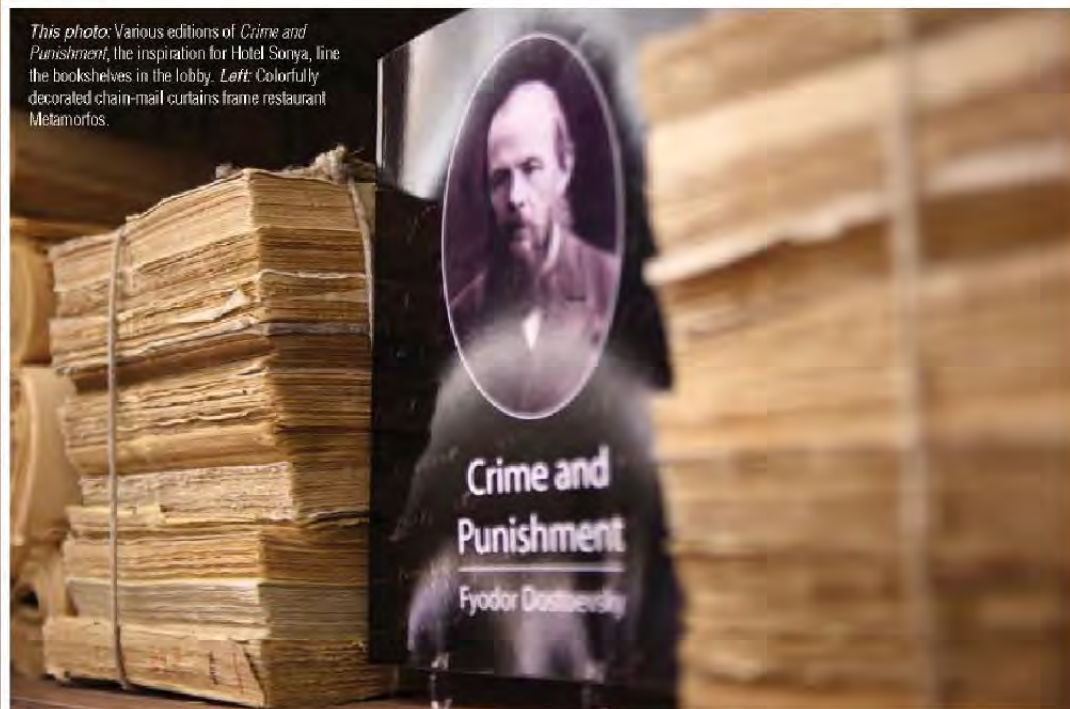
Photography by Erik Nissen Johansen

Erik Nissen Johansen loves a good story. As creative director and senior partner at Stylt, a Swedish firm of architects and identity consultants, he and his colleagues find a story that inspires them and design everything from the overall brand to the sofa cushions and menu fonts around it. Which is exactly why Reval Hotels, the leading chain in the Baltic countries, hired them to develop the concept for its first hotel in Russia.

While searching for inspiration in St. Petersburg, Johansen asked a famous local chef what was the best guidebook to the city. His answer: *Crime and Punishment*. "He said it's the most accurate portrait ever written of the city," says Johansen. "But if you ask anyone from St. Petersburg, they tend to agree. It's a good mirroring image of the city, all the emotions and all the contrasts." The big task, of course, was convincing the fairly conservative Reval Hotels that branding the hotel after the not-so-inviting-sounding title was a good idea. Johansen managed to get buy-in on the full story, ultimately convincing the owners to even name the city's first contemporary boutique hotel after a prostitute in the book—Sonya.

Throughout the 173-room hotel, references to Dostoevsky's 1866 novel range from overt to subtle, with a pervasive penchant for signature Russian layers and contrasts. "We looked at a lot of books about home interiors in Russia and tried to understand the preferences; it's a lot of multi-layers," says Johansen. "In the guestrooms, the four walls have different wallpapers. They may be the same color, with a kind of shade

*This photo: Various editions of *Crime and Punishment*, the inspiration for Hotel Sonya, line the bookshelves in the lobby. Left: Colorfully decorated chain-mail curtains frame restaurant Metamorfos.*



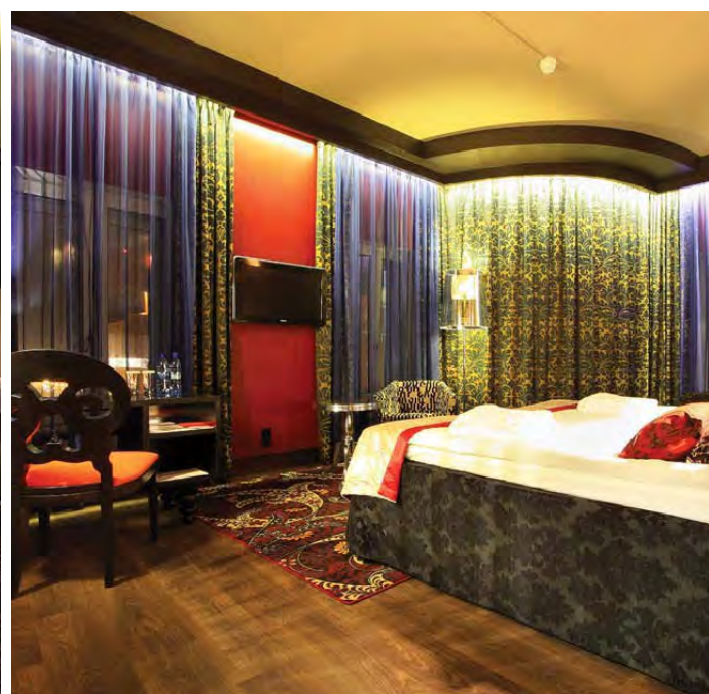


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Above: The bar at Metamorfos. *Right:* Guestroom signage reads like a code: each floor corresponds to a different chapter, and each room number is a different line. *Opposite page:* Custom carpets in the corridors feature passages from the book in both Russian and English.







in shade pattern, but if you look, and study them, you see that they are different, which is extremely typical of a Russian home.”

The lobby offers the first taste of transformation, bringing guests from the bustling streets in an area of St. Petersburg that Johansen likens to New York’s Meatpacking District in its infancy, to a peaceful space dominated by grand bookshelves, filled with Russian objects, accessories, and books. (Actually, just the one book, but in multiple editions and languages.) Black Matrioshka-inspired ornamentations hang from the bottom of the sleek reception desk, which rests on two handpainted miniature Matrioshka dolls; a giant Russian lacquer box, featuring a handpainted depiction of *Crime and Punishment*, serves as a sofa; while a custom table shows a 19th century map of St. Petersburg outlining the main character’s feverish walks.

Starting on the second floor, the hotel’s corridors echo a dramatic walk through nighttime St. Petersburg. The carpet’s pattern consists of the initial passages from the novel in English and Russian, corridor signage is designed to look like the spines of old books, and starting with room 201,

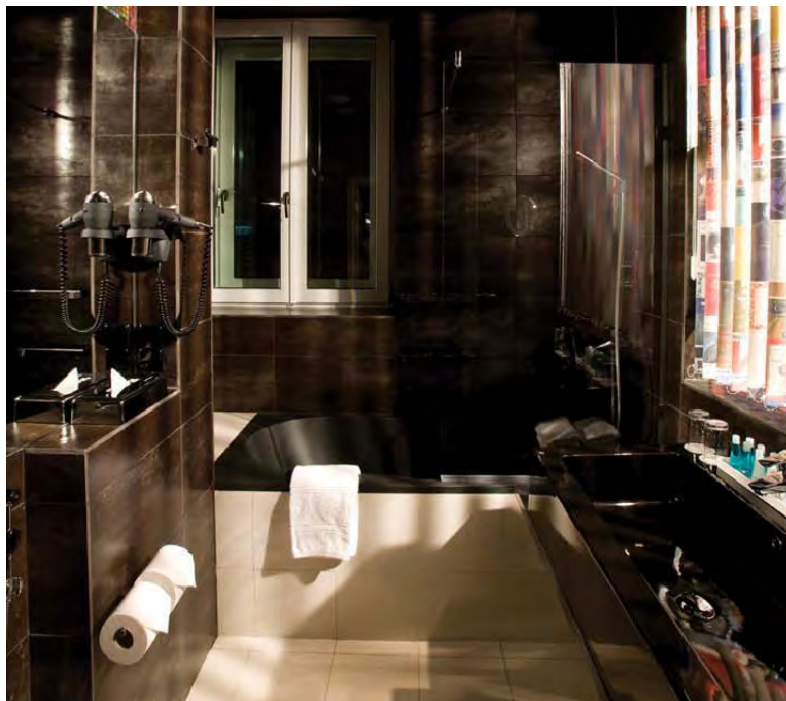
each room number is surrounded by a sentence in both Russian and English in ascending order (for example, room 504 features the fourth sentence from the fifth chapter of the book). “That way you could actually walk through the corridors reading the book,” says Johansen.

Guestrooms are divided into four categories—Conscience, Grace, Rebirth, and Ego—playing on Reval’s typical room types. The larger than average desk is a modern take on the author’s original using the exact measurements; each guestroom features a portion of Rafael’s Sistine Madonna, a painting that was an obsession of Dostoevsky’s and which appears in many of his novels; and a copy of you-guessed-it takes the place of the Bible.

But perhaps the most conspicuous tribute to the author may be found in the aptly named restaurant/bar Metamorfos: keep an eye out for Dostoevsky’s grandson, who has been guaranteed free drinks for life. **hd**

www.stylt.se; www.revalhotels.com

Left: A custom lacquer box sofa depicts the story of *Crime and Punishment* in the lobby. *Below, from left:* Two guestrooms feature a piece of Rafael’s Sistine Madonna hanging above the bed and bright colors and bold patterns; a typical bathroom.



Reval Hotel Sonya

St. Petersburg, Russia

Owner Linstow AS

Architecture Firm and Contractor

Adamant, St Petersburg, Russia

Interior Design Firm Stylt Trampoli AB, Gothenburg, Sweden

Interior Design Project Team Erik

Nissen Johansen, creative director; Jenny Bornstein, architect and interior designer; Magnus Stenberg, concept developer and copywriter; Andreas Hagersjö, art director; Frida Lundberg, in charge of final art; and Hanna Björklund, project manager

Purchasing Firm Oy Vallila Interior AB (furnishings and conceptual accessories); Standard (permanent interiors), and Stylt Trampoli AB (decorative items in lobby)

Lighting/Engineer/Kitchen/Landscape Consultant Adamant

Barcelona Beach Chair and Side Table Dedon

Prince Chair HAY

Wingback Chair Gärsnäs

Omni Chair Materia

Bergere Alba Capitoné Chair Lujosa

Stools Andy Thornton and Kartell

Seating Andreu World, Inno, Infurn, CM Chairs Modonutti, Swedese, Steelmobil, and Moroso

Seating Upholstery Baumann Dekor, Creations Metaphores, and Kvadrat

Tables Eichholtz, Cappellini, Mobel, Infurn, DK Home, and Andreu World

Dining Table Laminat Abet Laminati

Lighting Belux, Igor Paris, Chelsom, Flos, DK Home, Zonca, Moooi, Tom Dixon, SIL, and Lucifer

Custom Mirrors Adonis Pauli

Coat Hooks/Towel Hooks/Towel Rack/Grab Rail Gesa

Clothing Cabinets Sonesson

Curtains Akustikmiljö, Kriska Décor, and Baumann Dekor

Bedding and Fabric Carlucci di Chivasso, Baumann Dekor, and Creations Metaphores

Reval Hotel Sonya - St. Petersburg, Russia

Mar 3, 2010

By Tara Mastrelli; photography by Erik Nissen Johansen

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