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Stora Hotel, Gulf of Bothnia

Stylt Trampoli's latest project is a venerable old hotel with a saltwater-stained past, way up north on the Gulf of Bothnia. Inspired by the city's seafaring heritage, the design firm has given it a sumptuous new look where refined meets rough – just as high society once mixed with sailors in the hotel's parlours and dining rooms.

Situated in Umeå – a city of about 120,000 on the Bothnian Bay in northern Sweden – Stora is a fitting tribute to a long and proud maritime history. This rich backdrop formed the central design inspiration for Swedish concept and design agency, Stylt Trampoli, which has reimagined the former splendour of the hotel and its paradoxical clientele through atmospheric material and textural combinations.

“The whole concept is about contrasts – velvet and sailcloth, sea spray and champagne,” explains Erik Nissen Johansen, founder and creative director of Stylt Trampoli. “We have let the ocean back into the elegant parlours of the hotel.”

Stora Hotelet, or ‘Grand Hotel’, was built in 1895 with funds provided by the local Seamen’s Mission. Interestingly, the building housed both the grandest hotel in town, as well as the Mission’s own offices and accommodation, which resulted in a vibrant blur of two worlds.

High society, and even royalty, were thrust in the midst of captains, sailors and old salts fresh off the ships in the harbour – the hotel at one time bringing the all-encompassing sweep of Umeå’s community under one roof.

Fast forward to 2011, having passed through the hands of multiple eager renovators, the hotel had naturally lost a great deal of its glamour and character.

Understandably keen to preserve something of the structure’s history as a cornerstone of Umeå public life, the owners of Stora Hotelet tasked Stylt Trampoli with restoring the hotel to its former majesty.

After stripping decades of characterless plasterboard and vinyl flooring from the building, the team set to work on their unique ‘rough and refined’ concept.

Of course, given its history, the hotel still bore some defining architectural details well worth preserving. The design of the original cast-iron bannisters and radiators became the inspiration behind the hotel’s new logotype, while the old headboards were transformed into quirky panelling in the corridors on the top floor. Old armchairs have been given a new lease of life by being draped in soft leather, while in the master suite, the wallpaper reproduces the original wooden wall panelling.

The ability to instill grandeur, narrative and visual impact into a space is seemingly effortless for Stylt Trampoli. From a three stories-tall chandelier made from rope and glittering plexiglass crystals in the main stairwell, to an almost sinister attic staircase complete with twisted gnarls of wood, the hotel is packed full of drama and character.

Ranging from the luxurious master suite – complete with its own sauna – to the cosy 'berths' in which guests sleep in generously proportioned bunkbeds under the eaves of the hotel, each and every room has been artfully considered and curated. Even the names of the 82 guest rooms are categorised by maritime themes, among them Superstition, Longing and Adventure.

Several of the public spaces are dedicated to historic citizens and important figures of the hotel's past. For example, Naezén's Library, the hotel's downstairs drawing-room, is inspired by Daniel Erik Naezén, the 18th century doctor who once ran the most northerly physician's practice in the world at the time in Umeå. The library's display cases of old scientific instruments, books, notes and a hortus siccus full of local flowers reflect Daniel's passion for the history, nature and flora of Westbothnia.



The hotel restaurant, Gotthards Krog, is dedicated to the hotel's first proprietor, Gotthard Zetterberg, a veteran of Nordenskiöld's 1883 Greenland expedition. Featuring a bar, dining hall and outdoor dining area in Umeå's new indoor square, Gotthards Krog centres on local produce and draws culinary inspiration from the great port cities of the world, from Sydney to Cape Town and Shanghai.

Instilling a space with so many narrative strands and stylish quirks, whilst also paying tribute to a structure's weighty past and reputation, is certainly no mean feat. But Stylt Trampoli has remained true to their brief and to the history of the building, creating a dynamic space that, as Stora's hotel manager so aptly expresses, "belongs as much to the locals as it does to guests from afar."

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