

Tablet10

Top Ten New Hotels | Volume 7 | Europe

The best new hotels from
Andalusia to Zealand

Star picks from
chef Jean-Georges
Vongerichten

Exclusive interviews
with hoteliers,
architects and designers,
including Matteo Thun,
Michele Bönan and
Philippe Starck

Destination guides from
hotel concierges





Aquapura Douro Valley

DOURO VALLEY, PORTUGAL

If Portugal's Douro Valley isn't as famous as some of the world's other wine-producing regions, say Burgundy or Tuscany, it's certainly not for lack of natural attributes. The country just inland from Porto is as stunning as any in Europe, with a character all its own—green terraced hills, covered in vineyards, flank a meandering river, the entire scene just about too idyllic to be real. These days, though, it seems the Douro Valley is about to get its due. If hotels like Aquapura are any indication, there's quite a bit of investment going into the future of tourism in the north of Portugal—and if the sheer quality of this place is anything to go by, it will have been money well spent.

It centers, as so many successful wineries do, around a classic building, a 19th-century chateau, or whatever the Portuguese equivalent of a chateau is, with red brick walls and Mediterranean-style tile roofs. It's the interiors that have been updated, in an ultra-stylish modernist style, one that's quite a bit more inspired than the average white-box boutique hotel. Colors are warm and masculine, surfaces are rich, almost opulent, and however clean the lines, this particular brand of minimalism positively radiates comfort.



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“IT’S NOT WHAT YOU SEE, BUT WHAT YOU FEEL WHEN YOU GO INTO A HOTEL.”
—NINI ANDRADE SILVA



Rooms and suites number fifty in total, and range from the very comfortable vineyard-facing standard rooms to the massive two-bedroom presidential suite, and more than a few variations in between. Balconies are standard at all levels, the hyper-modern bathrooms are everything you’d expect from a spa-oriented luxury hotel, and the technology throughout is up to the latest five-star specs. For those guests who somehow find the suites constricting, twenty-one villas offer even more space and even more privacy (and with units available for sale, the opportunity to rather significantly extend your stay).

While the accommodations are surely impressive enough it’s the spa that’s really the heart and soul of this place—at this level it’s not an amenity that’s added on to the hotel experience so much as it is the central attraction. Spanning over two thousand square meters it’s

enormous, housed in its own modern glass-walled annex, comprising ten treatment rooms, an indoor pool, steam bath, sauna and laconium (like a dry sauna but more ancient Roman).

This being port country, the wine is a matter of great importance as well. Portuguese may not be a cuisine the average traveler is instantly familiar with; but the cooking at Aquapura’s two restaurants makes for a fine and refined introduction, accompanied, naturally, by wines, both local and otherwise. Wine tours are a natural complement to the experience, and a trip down the river in a *rabelo*, the sailing barges traditionally used by the Portuguese wine traders, is an activity that you’re certainly not going to find in the Loire Valley or the Rioja. ❖

To reserve, visit Aquapura Douro Valley at www.tablethotels.com/AquapuraDouro



I always say it's not what you see, but what you feel when you go into a hotel. I like these special places where people go in and say "wow." I think the wow is important in a work. You must feel something.

Is there a moment or a detail in Aquapura that you think is particularly special?

I love the reception. The roots we have under the reception—I saw those roots a long time ago in Asia. And when comes up Aquapura, the hotel, I said, my God, I must put those roots at the reception. I ordered that, without saying to the client. And then when these things arrive in Portugal they really loved it, and they accepted. Imagine if they said no!

Everything in Aquapura is very special, because I did many trips in many, many different places. I travel around the world and buy in different places in the world. And everything inside, they have a story. That's what for me is so special.

It's good to walk into a hotel and see things that you haven't seen.

Yeah, and this is completely new. Some pieces are my de-

sign, some pieces are from new designers that are not well known in Europe or America. When I was doing Aquapura I traveled a lot to India, the Philippines, China, Thailand. I traveled everywhere and I found new designers, new pieces, special things. It was really important for me.

As someone who has traveled a lot, do you have a hotel out there that's a favorite of yours?

So many. But I have one. It is the Park Hyatt in Tokyo. It's not really the hotel, it's the lobby when you arrive. You go up like 80 floors, and when you are on the top you come out, like you are in a garden. I loved that it was night. It was full of bamboo, and lights on the floor, candles, and you see Tokyo through the windows. It's amazing. When you go up in an elevator, many floors, you never think you're going to come out in a garden.

So that element of surprise is important to you.

Yeah. Certainly surprise is very important. And everything must have a story. More and more I'm doing hotels with a story. For me the thing must flow.❖