

# sleeper

HOTEL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & ARCHITECTURE

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**HOTEL VERTA**  
VON ESSEN HOTELS LAND  
AT LONDON HELIPOINT

**THIERRY DESPONT**  
THE FRENCH MAESTRO ON  
THE CHATWAL NEW YORK

**VIDAGO PALACE**  
GRACE LEO REINVENTS A  
PORTUGUESE LANDMARK

SAFFIRE - TASMANIA • BARNSLEY HOUSE • VERDURA - SICILY • THE CORNWALL • COSTA NAVARINO

Nini Andrade Silva has drawn the curtain on her latest project – a boutique hotel packed to the rafters with theatrical references, in the dramatically inclined city of Porto.

## Teatro *Porto*

Words: Guy Dittrich Photography: Courtesy of Nini Andrade Silva

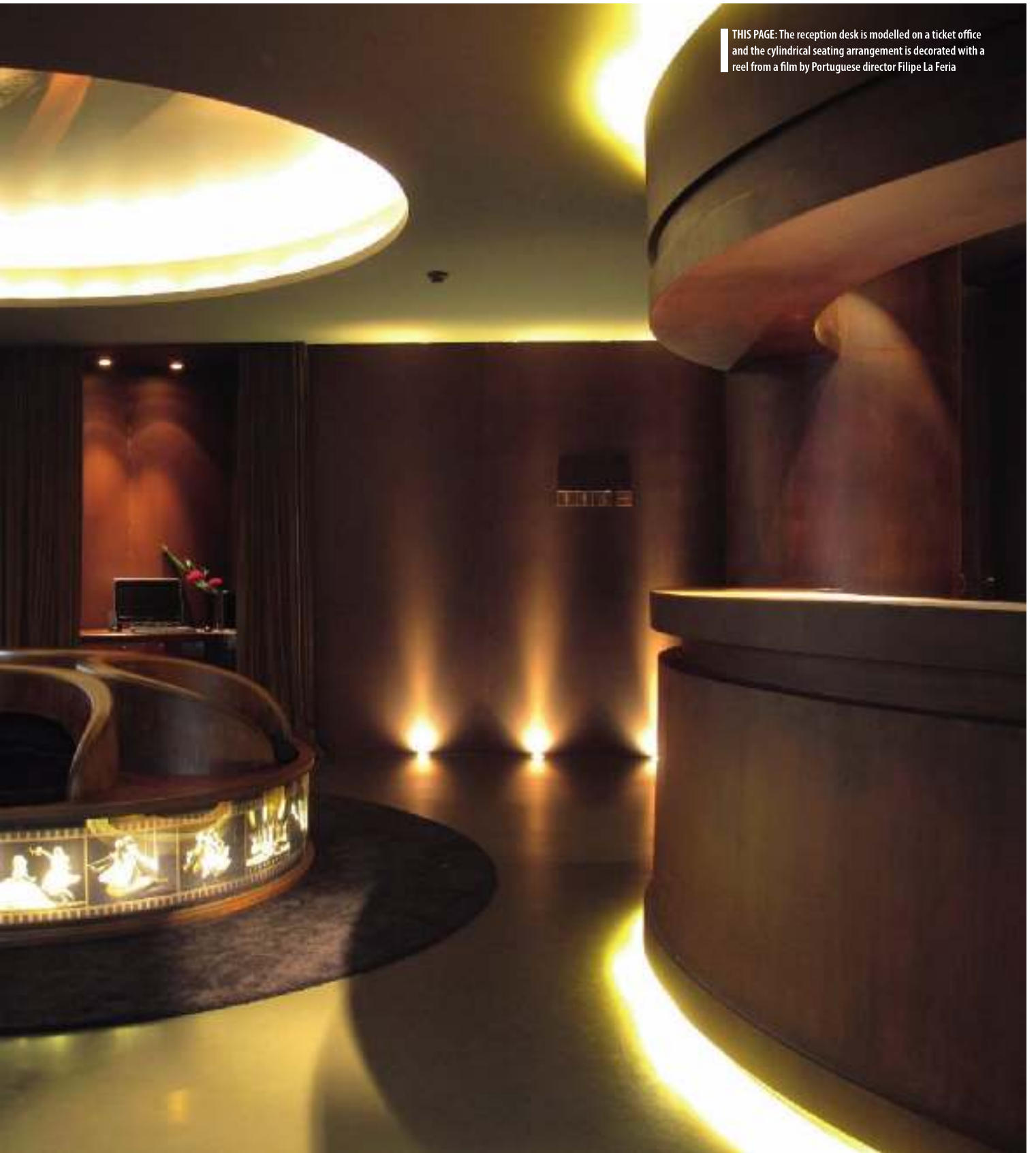
Porto perches on the steep valley side of the Duoro River with cobbled streets leading down to the quays of the Ribeira. This dramatic location has inspired a preponderance of venues across the city devoted to drama and the performing arts – notably the Rem Koolhaas designed Casa da Musica. So when Nini Andrade Silva was approached by Alexandra Lopes of owners, City Lodge Soc Investimentos Gestão Hotéis Lda, to develop the interiors of a hotel constructed on the site of the former Teatro Baquet there was no doubt as to the source of her inspiration.

The newbuild hotel is an €8 million development of 74 guestrooms designed by architect Miguel Nogueira, of Porto-based N.N. Arquitectura e Planeamento, and occupies the site where the Teatro Baquet was inaugurated in 1859. The street elevation, a severe façade of black steel and tinted glass, belies the drama within. A slightly awkwardly tapering rectangular footprint of the building adds variety to the guestroom layouts, its L-shaped offering natural daylight to the rear guestrooms.

Such is the strength of the sun streaming into these rooms that curtains are closed for arriving guests. ▶



THIS PAGE: The reception desk is modelled on a ticket office and the cylindrical seating arrangement is decorated with a reel from a film by Portuguese director Filipe La Faria





► This cooling darkness will have already become apparent in the public spaces. Dark wooden panels covering the walls and ceiling have been stained to match the rusting sheet metal at the exterior of the entrance. The ceiling of the lobby has a wave-like curve and the banquette seating in the adjacent restaurant is made more intimate by a continuum of panelling that curves up from the walls and across the ceiling. This material is a unifying force throughout the hotel and used in the guestroom casework of desk and bed surrounds, some of which also extend to the ceiling.

The panelling's relative ruggedness is reflected in the extensive smoked-glass mirrors of the bedrooms and softened by the display pillows and velvet or Alcantara upholstered lounge chairs and chaise long. There is no artwork in the guestrooms; the dark patterning of the closely cropped carpet by Lusotufu is imaged with banks of highly magnified theatrical spotlights. This is a busy and large enough detail, flashed with gold, bronze and white highlights.

Within the darkness, theatrical references abound. "The hotel reflects its theatrical past as well as a permanent search between the space harmony and design, which is felt in every room, area or detail of the Hotel Teatro," explains Andrade Silva. There is no doubt

as to the thoroughness of Andrade Silva's exploitation of the thespian narrative.

Take the curtains. Many walls are curtained with fabrics from Barreiros & Barreiros, irrespective of whether there are windows behind them. In guestrooms, bathroom entrances are accessed by curtains. Hanging cupboard spaces are hidden by curtains. Even the carpets have images of curtains running through them. The heavy ropes strung up the walls and across the ceiling of the dark Plateia bar (*plateia* is Portuguese for stalls) are exactly those used to move stage curtains. The reception desk is modelled on a ticket office; the low cylindrical arrangement of fixed seating opposite is decorated with a film reel of footage from productions by Portuguese director Filipe La Fera. Significant costumes used in La Fera's work are displayed on hanging rails or, more dramatically, dressed on mannequins within glass display cases. Staff uniforms are also suitably theatrical whilst a wall in the Palco restaurant (*palco* is Portuguese for stage) depicts a black and white image of a theatre audience, doctored to include the faces of those involved in the project.

"The scenery recreated in every environment keeps the intended drama to the fore," says Andrade. A drama seen when walking towards the darkened ends of ►

TOP LEFT: Costumes from the films of Filipe La Fera are displayed on hanging rails or on mannequins in display cases  
 ABOVE: A curved ceiling and wall feature in rusted sheet metal overhangs the banquettes in the Palco restaurant



ABOVE: Guestrooms also feature rusted sheet metal curving up from the bedheads to the ceiling. Curtains mark the entrance to the bathrooms, which feature brassware by Cifal and basins by Banho & Co



► the relatively short corridors as theatrical spotlights are activated via movement sensors. There's drama too in Palco with the black glass dining table tops reflecting pools of light onto the ceiling. Keeping the tables clean during the breakfast rush is something of an issue. Having cleaned the tables staff then don white cotton gloves to reduce smudging whilst setting the tables. To say nothing of the noise of cutlery, crockery and glassware contacting with the glass whilst eating. The broad wooden tables with their rough, sapwood edges are a less noisy option; the open-framed Scandinavian-style chairs a delight.

Separating Palco from Plateia is a small high-sided courtyard deeply shaded and perfect for hot Portuguese days. Access is via tinted glass sliding doors that are conveniently automated for busy staff heading out from the bar. Velvet upholstered loungers litter this access area whilst the walls of the rest of the bar are lined by a continuous deeply padded sofa that gently sways away from the wall providing an elegant solution of casual privacy. Freestanding furnishings combine laid back antiqued leather lounge chairs with modernist

chrome frames, Chesterfield-style ottomans and low tables with stone and marble tops. The counter face of the bar in Plateia is a bold statement of ribbed glass backlit yellow and was designed by Nuno Fitz.

Most of the furniture and casework was designed by Andrade Silva herself and made by Esboço, an interiors business in her native Madeira related to her design practice. The freeform shape of the smoked bronze acrylic stool under the guestroom basin is by Andrade Silva. The goldleaf lined glass basins were supplied by Banho & Co (with no overflow and therefore no plug) and the unusual antiqued bronzed brassware by Cifal. Silva's ability to deliver on a theme has been seen in her earlier hotel work at Aquapura further up the Duoro River valley and at The Vine in Funchal, Madeira. The latter's oenological references were ubiquitous, but layered, taking a little time to be unravelled by guests. The effect at Teatro is less subtle. Such direct themeing leaves less for the guest to discover on return visits – perhaps more of a one-stay wonder than a performance which will continue to run and run. ■

#### EXPRESS CHECKOUT

**Hotel Teatro**  
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74 guestrooms  
Palco  
Plateia  
Wellness studio

**Developer / Owner:** City Lodge Soc.  
Investimentos Gestão Hotéis Lda.  
**Operator:** Vitruvius  
**Architect:** NN Arquitectura e Planeamento  
**Designers:** Atelier Nini Andrade Silva