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BROWSING INKOGNITO

Scouring the back alleys of Europe for your dose of deluxe Art Deco? Oslo's Villa Inkognito is sure to wipe out your search history



By Harriet Thorpe

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Cities love to harbour well-kept secrets – it's in their nature. If you're ever in Oslo, there's one that we can let you in on. In the upmarket neighbourhood of Frogner lies a grand 19th-century villa which can only be accessed by means of a hidden key. What it conceals is wildly luxurious, kitted out to the nines by Greco Deco – the New York- and London-based interior design duo, Adam Greco and Alice Lund, who are also behind the opulent scheme inside the Ned in London.

But it's not just luxury awaiting behind these locked doors: Villa Inkognito's interiors sweep you up in an experience worthy of Jay Gatsby. The rooms are sumptuously layered with antiques, rich fabrics and bespoke craft, inspired by everything from Norwegian art history to Greco Deco's global rolodex of design suppliers.

<https://www.worldofinteriors.com/story/villa-inkognito-hotel-oslo>



Photograph: Francisco Nogueira

So how exactly to acquire the key? Villa Inkognito is linked to its next door neighbour, the Hotel Sommerro, by a secret skybridge. It can be hired out as a whole (complete with its 11 suites, library, living and dining spaces, open kitchen, cocktail bar and fitness room) or on a suite-by-suite basis for an exclusive and high-end homely experience – with all the hotel perks, plus a private chef and ‘lady of the house’ to tend to your every whim.

Its more open-access partner, the 231-room Hotel Sommerro, has also enjoyed the touch of Greco Deco. The establishment has been causing a buzz in Frogner since it opened in September 2022 – and little wonder. The impressively restored and expanded 1930s Art Deco building was once the former HQ of the national electricity company. Design-lovers will be particularly dazzled by its original lighting fixtures and metalwork, not to mention the vast pictorial murals, created by by Norwegian artist Per Krohg, that adorn the Ekspedisjonshallen brasserie and Vestkantbadet swimming pool. From morning to evening, the hotel’s ground floor café and restaurant attract a lining of well-dressed flâneurs along its street-side façade; meanwhile, on the vertical axis, the lifts are busy transporting diners up to the spaceship-style rooftop extension.



Photograph: Harriet Thorpe

For all the shared Art Deco ritziness, Villa Inkognito has a markedly different identity to the Hotel Sommerro. It was originally built in 1870 and designed by architect Thøger Binnealle as a summer residence, before the city expanded to absorb Frogner, the place where ‘successful Oslovites’ would have previously had their summer homes. The villa’s street, indeed, is called ‘Sommerrogaten’, meaning ‘summering place’ in Norwegian, as Adam Greco explains – a marker of its exurban past. Later, the villa became an office for the city electricity company, Oslo Lysverker, and then in the 1980s, it became the Algerian Embassy.

The duo was as inspired by the story of the villa itself as by their luxurious brief, and worked to retain, restore and reimagine its history in creative ways. ‘We came across some old photos of the interiors from the turn of the century: it was all done up to look very eclectic and layered, almost Victorian in a way, with potted palms and antimacassars on the armchairs. We thought, rather than taking it back to how the original family furnished it, we would sort of imagine different snapshots through the decades and layer them on top of one another to create something new,’ says Greco.



Photograph: Harriet Thorpe

The suites' elaborate plaster ceilings, with their detailed mouldings and bespoke central medallions – each one unique to its room – were, for instance, carefully preserved. In one of the suites, a decorative tiled heater with oyster motifs and gilt accents has been returned to its full (albeit non-functioning) glory. Elsewhere, the past has been given a contemporary frame: original stone and textiles left over from the renovation have found new lives throughout the suites, repurposed into objects from vases to upholstery. Greco Deco also worked with local wallpaper supplier Molo – 'they have this huge archive of old Norwegian wallpapers,' gushes Greco – to reproduce old patterns with new colours, many of which sample the typical ochre tones seen around the neighbourhood.

Snapshots of classic Norwegian design, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and Japonisme are beautifully overlaid and blurred. The result is a mouth-watering banquet of art and design, layers of cultural history enriching every morsel. To achieve this, Greco Deco consulted the expertise of Norwegian designers and makers working today, as well as the local design archives. A painting of a koi floating with lily pads, indeed, by Gerhard Munthe – a real 'modern medievalist', says Greco, the Scandinavian Arts and Crafts member prodigiously illustrated fairy tales and Norse lore – was one of the starting points for for the entire villa's scheme.

A closer look bears this out, too. Take the motifs on the Rococo-flavoured vanity unit in the bathrooms: created by British artist Rosie Mennem, these details were inspired by the Romantic rural landscapes of Norwegian painter Peder Aadnes. Each oak bed frame, designed by Greco Deco, features a 'carved frieze of lily pads in a florid Art Nouveau style', while a series of bell-shaped glass lampshades with peacock feather motifs parade across ceilings and walls throughout the villa. 'Playing with Art Nouveau themes led us to create this lighting series in collaboration with local maker Hadeland Glassverk, which has been active in Jevnaker since 1762,' Greco tells me. 'Tiffany's 'Quezal' shades were definitely an inspiration, and we worked with the glassblowers to create a new version of this with local materials.'



The swimming pool at Villa Inkognito. Photograph: Francisco Nogueira



Photograph: Francisco Nogueira

Hunting down antiques is an important aspect of this approach. 'We bought a few ebonised pieces from Nick Jones Antiques in [London](#) and some great wingbacks from Desired Effect in Yorkshire,' says Greco. For the dining room they sourced a 'wonderfully weird' mirror with a double frame twisting with organic motifs from Handelshuis Wassenaar in the Netherlands, plus a decorative Murano glass lampshade from Sogni di Cristallo in [Venice](#).

While the team at Hotel Sommerro is still curious about how life will play out behind the white façade of the newly opened Villa Inkognito, Greco Deco has set the stage for atmospheric summer evening soirees in the sitting room; slow breakfasts at the long table in the bright blue-tiled kitchen; languid mornings frittered away in sumptuous bedrooms; and easy sojourns over in the Hotel Sommerro – perhaps for a sit-down dinner, or maybe to make use of the Art Deco spa. So while the key to the villa does come at a price (single room rates start from £495/night and full villa rentals start from £8,190/night), there's still something thrilling about being 'in the know', isn't there?



Photograph: Francisco Nogueira



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