

25 October 2018

Dear friends of Hotel Gračanica,

The British magazine "Monocle" (founded by Tyler Brûlé of "Wallpaper") has published an **article about our hotel**, describing it as "Pristina's architectural white elephant" (for a readable version s. attached pdf).

STYLING: FRODO

A world apart

A hotel in historic Kosovo combines local tradition with international modernism. It's an unlikely triumph.

COURTESY: JANE PAVLOVIC ARCHITECTURE/MONOCLÉ

The Hotel Gračanica is not a place you stumble upon; you have to look for it. As you leave Pristina, capital of Kosovo, the drive south occurs through common-and-sensitised buildings of self-identical buildings before you enter Gračanica. The suburb of Pristina is typical enough: a main street lined with low houses, bakeries and pharmacies, flanked by more dilapidated ones on the side. But follow a discreet sign reading "Hotel Gračanica" down a narrow, unmarked road and you'll find Pristina's architectural white elephant, and a fine one at that. This long, two-storey building with a white-washed facade and a timber-lined upper floor is Swiss modernist design at its finest – surprising considering the Kosovoan setting.

"I missed a few systems by building my hotel here," says Swiss architect Werner, the hotel's founder and manager, seated behind the reception desk, during his Sunday visit. Although the perception of Kosovo as a hot zone is beginning to change and the area has experienced a significant increase in tourism, Gračanica is not among Kosovo's main draws. The area is known mostly for its well-preserved 19th-century Orthodox monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Gračanica's historic significance has been beneficial to Werner, who points towards the hotel's garden, unadorned by walls

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or fences and overhanging fields and hills. "It is the view," he says of the property's prime asset. "The archaeological site of Ulpiana (in ancient Roman times) is over there so any further construction is forbidden."

Before going into the hotel business, Werner worked for the Federal Office for Refugees in his native Switzerland. The job brought him to Kosovo in 1999, only two months after the conflict that pitted ethnic Serbs and ethnic Albanians against each other, had ended. In 2004, his mission terminated and he returned to Switzerland. But he hoped to go back to Kosovo. "I would have preferred to start something in manufacturing, but I didn't find like I had the skills," he says. "So I ended up in the hotel business with two other local friends. I just wanted to bring tourism to Kosovo." His 19-room hotel opened its doors in April 2014, the first boutique hotel in Kosovo.

Werner's aim was to offer his guests comfort coupled with great design. The men who turned this idea into reality were Boze Nreca, an architect, Klementina, and Basha Strati. None of them would build a hotel where guests would come just to sleep. "It started to be a destination per se," he says. A fan of Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza, with whom he worked as a graduate, and Alvaro Siza Vieira, Nreca looked to them for inspiration because, he explains, "they are capable of creating different experiences for stays in one place."

Gračanica's clean lines and the use of wood – mostly pine from Slovenia and Austria – evoke modern Alpine design, but local experiences and stories are also built in the hotel's design. "Though they are hard to spot at first glance," adds Nreca.

At the hotel is Loshkop, guests can take two completely different routes from the reception area to their private rooms. One takes you outside, by the pristine swimming pool in the garden, via the paths that other in the upper floor terraces and down the main again. For Nreca, this mimics the experience of an

through the old scenes in Kosovo, with their narrow, maze-like streets.

Other fine detailing includes the shape of the perforations on one of the walls, reflecting the pool. Nreca's homage to the facade of one of Kosovo's traditional buildings, threatened with demolition. The wood-clad interior living room features an old (the central room in a traditional Kosovo house, carefully decorated, and empty of any furniture).

The hotel's architecture also blurs the lines between indoor and outdoor, with the rooms that line the length of the building each having a large glass wall. Not are the hotel's verandas completely closed, while the floor is covered in terrazzo stone – both inside the rooms and on the terrace. Yet the hotel has little connection to the street, as it guarantees towards its park with an inviting swimming pool at its centre. On weekends, the pool draws guests from Pristina, who lounge in the garden.

"The idea is to forget about the outside world and relax," says Nreca. "As you join the big wooden doors of the entrance, you enter a new world."

Local hero

Werner's hotel is a local entrepreneur's success. By having local staff and financing, it has managed to support its business in its own way, he says.

He also offered jobs to former government employees. Gračanica is probably the only boutique hotel in Kosovo that employs local staff.

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The title is a nice addition to previous ones of media reports featuring the hotel: "Hotel Gračanica, un po' di unità in un paese diviso", "Ein Hotel, das Hoffnung macht", "Projekt Versöhnung - das Roma-Hotel im Kosovo", "Hotel Hoffnung", "Welkom in het hotel van de hoop in Kosovo", "Hotel Heimat", "Kosovo: á Gračanica, le pari fou d'un hôtel écolo et multiethnique". To see all the media reports about the hotel, s. <https://www.hotelgracanica.com/about-us/media-about-us/>.

The **Jimmy Mustafa Band** that plays regularly at our Sunday brunch has had a successful concert tour in Switzerland in August, and two more concert tours are already planned! From June 7th to 24th, they will be in **Germany**, and in October 2019 again in **Switzerland**. If you can organize a concert in your town, please contact us!



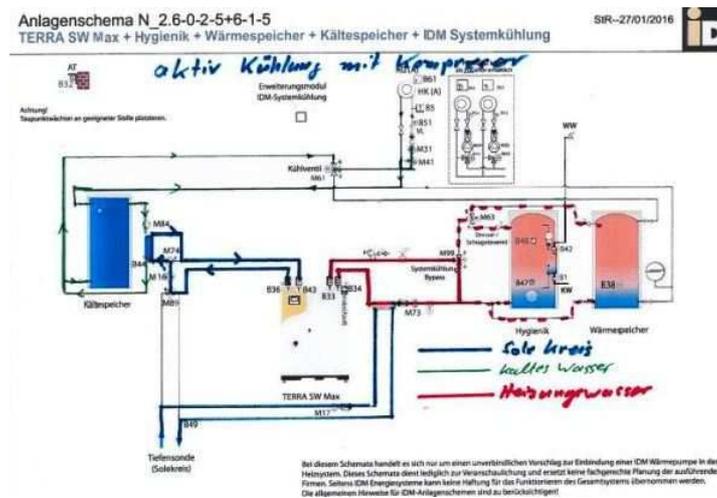
From left to right: Hasib Karaçi, Avni Mustafa, Ersad Bunjaku and Djimi Mustafa

From November 13th to 16th, the fifth edition of the [Rolling Film Festival](#) will take place in Pristina, with films by and about Roma, but also exhibitions, lectures and concerts. Mark the date!



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If you have been staying at the hotel in a hot summer month and were not so happy with the air conditioning, there is good news: Since August 23rd, the **stronger "active" air conditioning system** we ordered in March last year finally works!



It was a bit complicated, and we had to fly in the expert from Germany three (!) times to make it work!

On the other hand, the solar heating system for our pool, that helped us reach a pool water temperature of 23° on April 28th, stopped working in July, and since then we have been waiting for the repair. We hope to have it working again by next spring...!

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German speakers: Falls Sie eine **geführte Reise in den Kosovo** suchen: Die dieses Jahr erstmals und mit grossem Erfolg durchgeführte Reise „**Prishtina hautnah**“ unter der Leitung von Tanja Polli, Journalistin und Buchautorin, mit spannenden Einblicken in verschiedene Bereiche dieser faszinierenden Stadt wird nächstes Jahr wiederholt, vom 4. bis 8. September. Es lohnt sich! Mehr Informationen auf <https://kulturreisen.indyaner.ch/prishtina-hautnah-programm/>. Sie können den Kosovo aber problemlos auch auf eigene Faust erkunden oder sich von uns Tagestouren organisieren lassen.



PRISHTINA HAUTNAH

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If stray dogs are close to your heart: The Swiss [Straycoco Foundation](#) with its CNVR program for stray dogs will inaugurate its new veterinarian clinic, built together with its partner [ProVet](#), on the outskirts of Gjakova this Monday.



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If you would like to get more often **updates** on what is going on at the hotel, follow us on Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/HotelGračanica/!](https://www.facebook.com/HotelGračanica/)

Best regards,

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Hotel Gračanica supports [The Ideas Partnership Learning Center](#) for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians through [Pack for a Purpose](#). Click [here](#) to find out how you can help by using spare space in your suitcase to bring supplies.

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