



# Wild Wild Rest

In northern Spain, architects Emiliano López and Mónica Rivera give an unconventional, nature-inspired twist to the designer hotel genre

TEXT: CECILE MAURY PHOTOGRAPHY: JOSE HEVIA

Every city now has its designer hotels — from Berlin to Madrid, Copenhagen to Hong Kong — with sleek interiors and state-of-the-art amenities. But how many have hotels that are truly outposts of design? This is exactly what makes the four-star Hotel Aire de Bardenas in Navarre, in northern Spain, so invigorating. Halfway between the city of Tudela and the arid Bardenas Reales national park, this single-storey, 22-room hotel stands, rather unexpectedly, on a wheat-field overlooking the semi-desert.

The brief for Barcelona-based architects Emiliano López Matas and Mónica Rivera contained very specific constraints. Rivera recalls, "The clients' conditions were that it be built entirely by dry construction and with as many steel elements as possible, in collaboration with an excellent local metal worker."

To answer this design challenge, the architects decided to occupy the 1,500 sq-m site with a series of simple, cube-shaped structures. Rivera explains, "In order to meet the budgetary constraints, we decided to employ a system of metal sandwich façade panels with a rigid foam core, because of its fast assembly time, the metal fabricator's experience of handling this material, its excellent thermal insulation qualities, and its low cost." Not only did this present advantages in terms of execution — steel elements and façade panels were prefabricated during the on-site construction and then assembled in very little time — it also offered a remarkable aesthetic alternative to traditional hotel structures: a stark, imposing outline in perfect harmony with its surroundings.

**left** The free-standing pavilions offer a privileged view on to the wheat fields



**above** Using the region's tradition colours and vegetation, the exterior spaces translate the spirit of the Bardenas **opposite page from top** Lined with plywood, the inhabitable window sills can be used as seating or as extra beds • The steel elements and façade panels of the cubic pavilions were prefabricated at a local metal shop, allowing the hotel to be completed in 12 months

López and Rivera, who handled everything from landscape to interior design, also had to deal and work with the building's appealing, yet rough environment. To minimise exposure to extreme temperatures and very strong winds — the 'aire' of the hotel's name quite literally means air — they installed large, recycled wooden containers that are usually found in the region's farmland. Economical and flexible, they act as windbreakers, while enhancing the hotel's raw beauty. "From the outside, the hotel intentionally blends in with the surroundings," Rivera says. "It presents itself as a lightweight construction that can be dismantled and recycled, recalling the local agricultural constructions, such as barns and vegetable coops found in the area."

The hotel's reception, main hall, meeting room, bar, and restaurant are located in the main body of the development, which also houses 10

rooms with private patios. The other rooms are free-standing pavilions overlooking the wheat-fields and positioned to create a central court which, reminiscent of the region's traditional constructions, also provides climatic protection.

While the hotel's layout turns it into a cosy — and necessary — shelter from the elements, many of the features emphasise its links with nature. From the ordered plantations of fruit trees, vegetable gardens, and aromatic plants to the use of the local reddish earth, boulders, and pebbles, all the components used for the design of the exterior spaces "seek to bring the dweller close to the rural and austere character of the surroundings by providing simple, generous, and silent spaces". It is a meticulous collection of colours and textures that conjures up an invigorating spirit of wilderness.

One is also struck by a simple, yet original

feature of the individual rooms — the projecting windows. Seen from the outside, they give the otherwise boxy structures an interesting relief. From the inside, on the other hand, they provide a resting place in the window sill that turns the room into a "projected outdoor viewing device" and perfectly embodies the inside-outside duality of the project. According to Rivera, "The window sill becomes inhabitable by the exaggeration of its depth and by lining its interior with plywood. This lining conceals the glass's metal frame and the solar filtering devices that roll down electrically. The window is perceived as a simple unglazed opening that creates a false perception of thickness not inherent to the light construction employed." These snug corners thus offer an original way to contemplate the engrossing view of the Bardenas — without a doubt much better than cable TV.





**from top** Turned into design features, elements such as reddish earth and large wood containers root the hotel into Navarre's local culture • Large, recycled wooden containers protect the site from the region's strong winds and extreme temperatures



**above** The projecting windows bring rhythm to the uncluttered, metal structures and create interesting reflective surfaces

## 閒情野趣

在西班牙北部，建築師Emiliano López和Mónica Rivera從大自然得到啟示，設計出非一般的酒店

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現時世界上每一個城市，無論柏林、馬德里、哥本哈根、香港等，都十分流行「設計酒店」。這些酒店環境舒適，而且都裝飾得非常華麗，不過貨真價實、真正夠資格用設計做賣點的畢竟不多，位於西班牙北部城市Navarre的四星酒店Aire de Bardenas，正是其中一間打正旗號賣設計的水準之作。它座落於Tudela與Bardenas Reales國家公園之間，酒店只有一層，共二十二間客房，遠遠看來就像是沙漠中的綠洲。

巴塞羅那出生的建築師Emiliano López Matas和Mónica Rivera表示，酒店委託人初時作出很明確的設計指示：「他們表示酒店只會運用無水建築法，並盡量多用鋼鐵，以便充分利用當地優秀的金屬業技術。」

為了迎接種種設計挑戰，兩位建築師構想出一系列簡約的立方體，用來裝飾佔地一千五百平方米的酒店。他們道：「為了控制成本，我們用金屬嵌板包裹堅硬的泡沫塑料，製成立方體，因為它們很快可以準備好，金屬技工亦有處理這種物料的經驗。此外，這種物料抗熱度高，而且成本較低。」除了這些好處之外，金屬飾面及立方體表面亦預先製作好，真正施工時很快就裝嵌完。最重要是，其外觀與四周環境非常協調，和諧地演繹出非一般的酒店設計概念。

從測量地質至內部設計，López和Mónica都親力親為。此外，酒店名字中的aire代表「大氣」，顧名思義，他們亦需要處理酒店的外觀，配合嚴峻的氣候環境。為了減低極端溫度及強風的影響，他們安裝了該區農地非常普遍

的大型循環再用木製容器，不但經濟實惠，可擋風，更塑造出一種原始美感。Mónica表示：「從外面看，酒店好像大自然的一部份，輕盈的結構可隨時拆除循環使用，猶如當地農田常見的穀倉及菜場。」

酒店的主大樓設有接待處、大堂、會議室、酒吧和餐廳，其中十間客房擁有私人露台，其他就採用分館式建築，讓客人可一覽麥田景色。此外，這些分館亦仿效當地的傳統建築，建造一個置中的庭院，天氣不好時有保護的作用。

酒店不少特色設計，都著重與大自然的聯繫，整個佈局感覺很舒適自在。從種植果樹、芳香藥草、開設菜園，到大量採用本地出產的紅土壤和卵石，所有室外設計最終目的，都是「帶來簡約寧靜的環境，將城市人和簡樸的鄉郊拉近」。一絲不苟的選材和顏色搭配，營造出置身荒漠的刺激與振奮。

獨立房中的投射窗戶線條簡單而不失特色，印象鮮明。從外面看，這些窗戶點綴了呆板的四方形建築結構；從裡面看，窗櫺就變成一個觀賞戶外景象的休閒設備，如預期中一般體現室內和室外的雙重性。Mónica說：「窗櫺誇張的深度和夾板的配合，令房間變得更適合居住。夾板修飾了玻璃的鐵框和太陽能過濾裝置。窗戶更形成一種厚度上的錯覺，與酒店的輕盈建築風格恰成對比。」在這個溫暖的角落，旅客可一睹既真實、又美麗得不像現實的Bardenas景色，從電視紀錄片看到的，感覺當然完全不能相比。E