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PERSPECTIVE

JUNE 2019

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Eternal chic

BY ELIZABETH KERR

Dizzying and vibrant restaurant Liòn crouches behind a discreet facade in an early 20th-century Roman palazzo



ABOVE Mosaic-tiled columns contend with the tiled floor TOP RIGHT Repeating circular brass rings adorn the wall and RIGHT the themed exterior



Rome, the Eternal City, is an eternally enlightening place that reveals its more creative, surprising and memorable locations when and where you least expect them. In a city crammed with tiny cobblestoned alleys and repurposed ruins, there is no shortage of engaging architecture to stumble upon. Tucked away between the Instagram-ready Pantheon and Piazza Navona and snugly in the heart of Rome's historic city centre, restaurant and cocktail bar Liòn is a fine example of the city's endless hidden gems.

Designed by Daniela Colli of studio COLLIDANIELARCHITETTO, Liòn spans two levels and 185sqm (1990sqf) in a revitalised and redesigned palazzo from the rationalist era, a movement in the 1920s and '30s that believed in logic and rationalism. Aggressively ornate and gleefully exploiting geometrics, reflective surfaces and bold colours, the restaurant/bar's interiors recall the style and contemporary decadence of *La Dolce Vita*, in stark contrast to the spare construction of the palazzo's architecture. It's owned by Emidio and Fabrizio Pacini, and Andrea Girolami of the Tridente Collection (the Mood, Smooth and Mag boutique design hotels in Rome and one Venice property).

Liòn expands behind an unassuming facade but is recognisable by the retro-cool travertine-framed doors and windows. The interiors are a meticulously composed riot of colour, pattern and texture in contrast to the restraint of the menu's classical, unfussy Italian fare. Teal, red, brass, velvet, mosaic tiling, diamond harlequin tiling, lacquer and arching friezes are among the elements bound together with a circular motif under soft lighting.

The ground floor restaurant is outfitted with custom-designed furniture that takes advantage of the space's length and incorporates a room-spanning banquette. An invisible menu slot and cutlery drawers featuring metallic detailing add a touch of modern aesthetic and sit in clever complement to Liòn's transparent elements, both decorative (suspended tinted discs) and functional (the bar bottle rack). Mosaic tile-covered columns disrupt the turquoise diamond-glass bar surface and in doing so add a pair of statement pieces to the space around which the action can unfold. The basement level, accessible via a marble and brass-accented staircase, conceals the wine cellar and kitchen, while the terrace mimics the view into the restaurant the way the main entrance does from Largo della Sapienza and, as Colli describes it, "an all-engaging experience between design and cuisine". ■

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Photos: Matteo Piazza