

The Edit

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HISTORY COMES ALIVE IN THIS RESTORED PORTO PALÁCIO, SAYS EUAN FERGUSON

TOREL 1884
PORTO
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'PORTO WORKS WHILE Lisbon plays,' goes the Portuguese saying. But work was scarce in the 00s recession that hit the country hard, and left loads of buildings empty and derelict. Portugal's northern city is in places a scene of picturesque decay. In 1884, a wealthy merchant built a palace for himself on Rua de Mouzinho da Silveira in the city centre, which could have ended up a shell like its neighbours, but it's been given a new life as this seriously handsome hotel near the riverfront.

Whatever the original owner did for a living, he must have been good at it. (His former bank vault in the basement has been turned into the wine cellar.) This place is palatial at every turn – through the grand, palm-filled entrance, up the extravagantly wide staircase, into the huge rooms with their 3.6m-high ceilings (and 3.6m-high doors to match). He also would >





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A LOT OF BOTTLE

Left: The hotel has a wine cellar in a former bank vault. Below: A huge skylight floods the public areas with sun



have been pleased with what the new inhabitants have done with it: walls are touched with those elegant greys, browns and dark blues that make you think, 'Why can't I paint my house like this?'; there are exotic ornaments dotted around and original artworks hang gracefully. The decor's inspired by Portugal's adventurous seafaring past, so my room on the 'Asia' floor is called Spices – the 11 others are named after the other sort of (SFW)

things Portuguese explorers picked up on their maritime voyages – Tobacco, Coffee, Porcelain. Next time I want the room with the hot tub in the private courtyard.

An enormous skylight in the middle of the building makes the book-and-knick-knack-filled communal area on the top floor a joy. I sit before dinner and dip into the travel-trunk-turned-honesty bar for a white port and tonic, this city's super-refreshing go-to aperitif. Having never as much sipped it before my visit, I'm a total convert. It's then down to the in-house Bartolomeu restaurant, named after Bartolomeu Dias, the first European to sail around the southern tip of Africa, for its all-Portuguese, small-producer wine list and twists on local dishes, like melon soup, and Portuguese sausages.

I might never sail round the world, discover new lands or even set myself up as a successful merchant, but at least for a night I knew what it felt like.

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