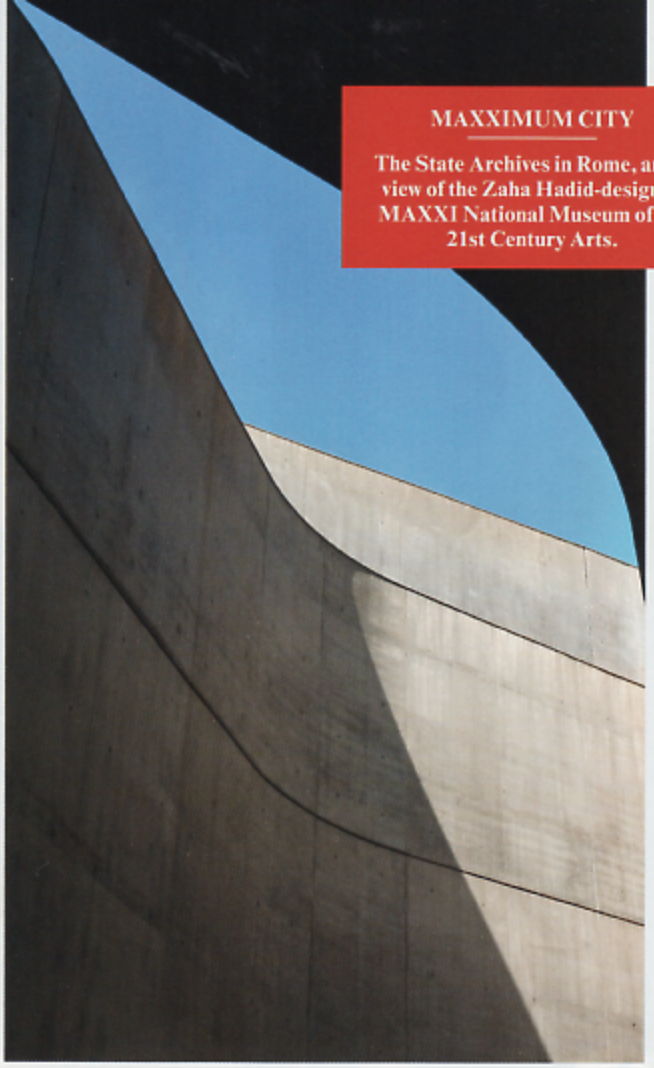

MAXXIMUM CITY

The State Archives in Rome, and a view of the Zaha Hadid-designed MAXXI National Museum of the 21st Century Arts.

Whoa, Man! HOLIDAY

If you haven't been to Rome for a while, you're in for a pleasant surprise. A sudden explosion of happening new hotels, clubs and galleries has brought the Eternal City bang up to date, says JAMES REGINATO

Rome may not have been built in a day but it sometimes seemed as if nothing had been built since the time of Julius Caesar, that La Dolce Vita was forever Anita Ekberg splashing in the Trevi Fountain and that the Eternal City needed romantically dusting off post-Audrey Hepburn and *Roman Holiday*. No palace hotels like Paris, no iconic Cipriani like Venice, or Villa San Michele like Florence, or anything happening recently other than *The Da Vinci Code*, a travelogue on churches. But then if you're Tom Hanks on a mission to save the world, you have no time to idle away on boutique chic.

Suddenly, everything has happened in Rome at once. Check boutique chic: all the hotels, with the exception of the De Russie, seemed stuck in another decade than the one we are in. Now J.K. Place Roma has opened in a palazzo off the Via Condotti; the slick Palazzo Manfredi overlooks the Coliseum, with a glass restaurant gorging on the view; and Ferragamo's Portrait Suites is all limed woods and dove grey, with a divine rooftop deck. Check fitness: Madonna has exhorted Romans to "Get ready to sweat!" by opening her latest Hard Candy gym, a three-storied luxury

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATHALIE KRAG

COULDN'T BE APPIA

Clockwise from top left: a view of the Via Appia Antica, on the outskirts of Rome; the Gasometro in Ostiense, an industrial neighbourhood on the banks of the Tiber that has become an entertainment and nightlife hub; the Fiorano wine estate, looking from the vineyards towards the main house; works of art on display at the Galleria Lorcan O'Neill; tables in the bar at the newly opened J.K. Place Roma.

DOME, OPEN CITY

Sunrise over Rome, seen from the Janiculum. *Below:* Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck in *Roman Holiday*, 1953. *Opposite:* the Coliseum, seen from the restaurant at Palazzo Manfredi.

palace of pumping and perspiration. Check restaurants: when in Rome, one never failed to eat at Dal Bolognese, Al Moro (trying to distinguish Valentino from the polished wood) or Da Nino. It would have been rude not to, rather like neglecting to visit one's grandmother when in town. Now the hot tables are at Caffè Propaganda, white brick'n'zinc leader of the pack of new bar/restaurant hybrids that has introduced Rome to the cocktail in a Balthazar way. Check contemporary art: contemporary, why? The point of Rome is the old stuff, but Larry Gagosian has swept into town, Zaha Hadid has designed the MAXXI museum and Irish dealer Lorcan O'Neill, very Tracey Emin, has moved from Trastevere to the Palazzo Passolini. Check nightlife: all happening at Gasometro in Ostiense, the Hoxton of Rome, a working-class and industrial quarter gone edgy in the south of the city. The abandoned gasometer, a circular metal skeleton 92 metres high that is the tallest of its kind in Europe, is the lynchpin of surrounding pop-up bars and clubs on the Tiber. And while braving Ostiense, check out gastronomic megastore Eataly, like Whole Foods on speed, in the former air-terminal building.

Indubitably the new J.K. Place Roma has upped the city's cred from classic to cool. Previously, the most wow place you could stay was the Residenza Napoleone III, a private apartment on Via Fontanella Borghese that is pure Grand Tour. Hotelier Ori Kafri's J.K. Places in Florence and Capri are the Soho Houses (see page 67) of Italy: clubby, scrambled eggs at 4pm in the library if you want it, an honesty tray loaded with homemade pastries. "Guests can have anything, anytime. We like them to feel that they're in a private house," says Kafri. His Rome property only has 30 rooms, registers huge on the bathroom scales (big bathrooms are the new essential in hoteldom), and is lavished with lush-but-funky design by Michele Bönan. The staff are your friends, gentle but modern, nothing Carson about them. A P.G. Wodehouse butler with ice forming on his upper slopes is so not J.K. This is a cocoon of the simple luxury of feeling comfortable, being three minutes from a shopping accident in the Condotti or a selfie on the Spanish Steps and then retreating to a nourishing cocktail. It makes the old guard of hotels look very ancient Rome.

Of course, all roads lead there, but even the Via Appia Antica, the world's first highway, dating from 312 BC, has had a shot in the arm. The rutted volcanic stones are the same ones upon which Roman soldiers marched, there are old mausoleums among the majestic cypress trees along the roadside and sheep safely graze amid the ruins of aqueducts.

One passes high gates, behind which are hitherto mysterious villas; but one estate, Fiorano, has now opened. It belonged to Prince Alberico Boncompagni Ludovisi, an eccentric aristocrat-farmer

PHOTOGRAPH: PARAMOUNT/THE KOBAL COLLECTION (HEPBURN, GRANT)

who introduced organic farming to Italy in the 1930s here, producing wines, growing crops and raising livestock. A decade after his death, his granddaughters—sisters Alessia, Allegra and Albiera Antinori, the 26th generation of the Italian wine dynasty—have revived the estate, closely adhering to their grandfather's organic methods. At weekends the girls now operate a rustic *cucina aperta*, a farm-to-table fantasy. "We take guests out into the garden and they can pick the vegetables they want for their meal," says Alessia.

Enough work. One then leaves it up to chef Sara Bugiada to choose the right ingredients from the multitude of good things produced on the farm, including fruits, nuts, honey, grains and cheese. The first vintage of the organic wine being produced on the estate is due to be introduced next year. Bugiada also uses the mother yeast that was handed down by Prince Boncampagni to make crusty country loaves, focaccia and pizza bases. Take one of her picnics with you on a bicycle to explore beautiful Lazio, often overlooked in the race to Tuscany.

Fiorano is now not the only princely establishment where one can peek behind the scenes. Been to the Galleria Borghese (staggering Bernini and Canova masterpieces)? Seen the Capitoline Museum (classical Roman art from the 8th century BC)? Then go to the Galleria Doria Pamphilj, on the Via del Corso, which Prince Jonathan Doria-Pamphilj has recently renovated and dotted with the usual suspects for a Renaissance palace: Raphael, Titian, Caravaggio. Then totter two minutes from there to the Galleria Colonna—so beautiful—home to Colonna popes and military heroes and now Prince Prospero Colonna, begun in the 13th century and finished in *Roman Holiday*. Audrey Hepburn's farewell scene was filmed in the gallery, one of the world's most breathtaking spaces. A cannonball fired by the French during their siege of Rome in 1849 remains where it landed, embedded in the elegant marble steps just below the family throne.

So the old Rome we love is vibrant. Every decade of civilisation has left its mark here, the epochs merging gracefully into one another. Yet it is good to see the old girl kicking up her heels with the new and different.

Ciao, bella. □

VANITY FAIR *Travels to...*

ROME

WAY TO GO

All planes fly to Rome, but Leonardo da Vinci airport is a nightmare. Endure. Or take a train. **Portrait Suites** (lungarnocollection.com): elegant, calm, cool, all 14 suites have mini-kitchens. Suite 651 has a roof terrace, 652 is a divine duplex. **J.K. Place Roma** (jkroma.com) is the new kid on the block bringing contemporary pizzazz to ancient Rome. **Palazzo Manfredi** (palazzomanfredi.com) has the best shower with a view—you could tickle the Coliseum with your toes. **Residenza Napoleone III** (residenzanapoleone.com) is gorgeous, the world's most glamorous B&B. The former house of Emperor Napoleon III, you enter through a whacking wooden door on the Condotti; just two suites, the Napoleone (all silks and antiques) and the Rooftop (with wondrous views over the Eternal City). **Casa Howard** (casahoward.com) is kooky. Ten unique rooms by the Spanish Steps. Very Merchant Ivory, like staying with a stylish friend. Apart from the usual suspects (**Dal Bolognese**, etc) do collapse into **Il Matriciano** on the Via dei Gracchi (06 321 2327) after St Peter's and the Vatican for the best bucatini. **Enoteca Buccone** on the Via di Ripetta (06 361 2154) is a tradtastic old deli store for the best rustic blow-out lunch, **Fiorano** wine estate (fattoriadifiorano.it) offers guests a farm-to-table fantasy feast and **Oliver Glowig** at the Hotel Aldrovandi (06 321 6126) epitomises the cool new Rome.

NEED TO KNOW

John Fort is a great man, the most fun and the best guide to Rome. Contact him through **Bellini Travel** (bellinitravel.com), who will also sort your travel. Bellini's founder, Lady Emily FitzRoy, has the insider info on shopping and hot bars.

READ ON

The Luxe guide to Rome (luxecityguides.com) delivers indispensible, irreverent brilliance on all the latest and greatest in a light, convenient concertina shape that you can pop in your pocket. Tells you handy things like "Scowling owner Franco can be a right grumpy ol' sod" at Al Moro.