



THE RISE of ROME

Rome's most beloved sites are sparkling once again thanks to a concerted effort by cultural crusaders, which makes now the perfect time to (re)visit the Italian capital

TEXT MITCHELL OWENS ADDITIONAL TEXT MARTIN JACOBS

SPANISH STEPS PHOTOGRAPH: DARIO GAROFALO

ABOVE, FROM LEFT The rejuvenation (financed by jewellery firm Bulgari) of Rome's famous Spanish Steps, which reopened in September 2016, cost around R23 million; each of the six apartments at CasaCau has a unique, offbeat interior

Like most Italians and millions of tourists every year, Diego Della Valle was used to Rome's Colosseum looking magnificently woebegone – its travertine blocks greyed with soot, pitted by acid rain and loosened after centuries of freezing and thawing as well as by traffic and subway vibrations. But in 2011, at a time the Italian government admitted it was too cash-strapped to restore the world's largest amphitheatre, Diego, the dashing silver-maned chairman and CEO of Tod's, chipped in some R400 million. 'One of the reasons for doing the restoration was to emphasise the pride of being Italian and doing things for the country,' says Diego, who was the man of the hour last July, when the completion of phase one of the Colosseum's reconditioning –

a three-year-long cleaning and stabilisation of the massive first-century structure – was officially celebrated. (The landmark stayed open to the public throughout the work.) The grimy stone walls are golden again, and traffic has been largely restricted on the adjacent Via dei Fori Imperiali, granting travellers and locals alike more space for a leisurely appreciation of the Colosseum and the historic centre's other ancient ruins. Up next at the amphitheatre is the restoration of underground chambers, followed by the construction of a visitors' centre and a cafeteria. 'When I see the Colosseum now, I feel proud for me and for the people who work in my group and for all the people who are loyal to my products,' Diego modestly continues. 'Everyone has partly contributed to this project.'

Call it patrimonial bliss. All across Rome – and for that matter, Italy – top fashion houses have revived endangered treasures, taking them into their ardent embrace. The Trevi Fountain reopened in ▶



November 2015 after a R32 million revamp by Fendi, which also revived the city's Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, a long-abandoned 1940s Mussolini-modern tower that is now the firm's headquarters. For more than a year, Bulgari has been financing the overhaul of the mosaics at the Baths of Caracalla. And in September last year the jewellery firm unveiled its rejuvenation of the Spanish Steps following a 10-month rehabilitation, repairing broken stone and cleaning off dirt and graffiti, that cost around R23 million and involved nearly 100 expert craftspeople. To celebrate, Bulgari hosted a lavish soiree at the site, complete with a cavalcade of fireworks.

Thanks to a postrecession economy now showing signs of vitality, the Italian government's coffers are filling up again, and historic sites are feeling the love. Still, 'the issue of cultural preservation remains very urgent in Italy,' Diego cautions. 'Besides it being an important economic resource for us, we have the duty to protect this heritage for everyone.' And not just in his homeland, he points out: 'We need to preserve our cultural heritage all over the world.' Fellow fashion magnates, consider that statement a well-tailored gauntlet thrown down. ■

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP Luxurious details make the dining room of Palazzo Dama Hotel inviting; the jewel-coloured JK Cafe at J.K. Place Roma; the recently revamped Trevi Fountain



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Location, location, location **Check-in to these super-stylish hotels, perfectly positioned for seeing the sights**

PALAZZO DAMA HOTEL Perfectly located near the Piazza del Popolo

Overlooking the Tiber River, this gracious Roman villa has been revamped by Italian architect and hotelier Antonio Girardi. It tastefully combines sleek

vintage furniture, decadent design and historic mosaics. Its USP – a courtyard garden with pool (set amongst olive and lemon trees) that, in addition to attracting an eye-pleasing crowd, offers the perfect respite from the summer heat.

📍 palazzodama.com

J.K. PLACE ROMA Shop your way down Via Condotti to the Spanish Steps

Housed in what was formerly the city's school of architecture, J.K. Place Roma is the ultimate urban escape. With an almost-hidden entrance, the

hotel's striking interiors, by designer Michele Bönan, fuse bold colour with sophisticated sexiness. Wooden panelling pays homage to Tom Ford's *A Single Man*, and the library, brimming with glossy hardcovers, is ideal for a cocktail. 📍 jkroma.com

CASACAU APARTMENTS A minute's walk from the Trevi Fountain

Living like a local is key to the CasaCau ethos. Opt for one of six spacious apartments, all uniquely decorated, in this 17th-century building metres

from the famous fountain. Apartments include daily fresh fruit and bread, and ingredients ideal for classic Italian pastas. Or eat out at either Stazione di Posta or the Michelin-starred Piperò al Rex, restaurants recommended by the friendly staff. 📍 casacau.com