



Curves with Attitude Hotel Cram – Barcelona

If Hotel Cram could be personified it would make a good sultry brunette: sleek, sexy, unapproachable. For this reason the new Barcelona boutique hotel has been praised by many, and yet has also withstood some valid criticism. Those that love it adore its moody interiors, bold colour palette, innovative shapes and interesting design details. Those that go for comfort over glamour however, may walk into the lobby and wonder whether they should have worn nicer shoes.

When Josep Riu and Francisco DePaz of GCA Arquitectos Asociados was commissioned for Cram, the brief was to completely rework the interiors while leaving the 1892 modernist facade untouched. The floor configuration is fairly unique, partly due to the wide use of curvilinear forms. Designers arranged the floor plan around a circular central void, devised due to the natural light it brings into the hotel from above, and the circulation it allows for guests – opening the space so that it feels less cramped... or crammed.

The circular theme follows through to the round bathrooms, with exteriors that then define the surrounding spaces; in hallways and guest rooms. The programme saw three floors below ground, and seven above. Two of the lower underground levels are meant for subterranean parking and hotel services, while the floor above features a multi-purpose room for breakfasting and meetings, joined to the reception by a staircase. The top floors then comprise 51 standard rooms, 11 superiors, two executive, one privilege and two suites.

Beatriz Cosials, also from GCA, lead the interior design concept. On the multifunctional lower level she envisioned a mobile white, padded wall system – designed to accommodate everything from buffets to conference calls. Charcoal carpeting and black painted ceilings maintain an intimate atmosphere, while an interesting, curve-walled labyrinth leads guests to gleaming white bathroom chambers – past Cram's much celebrated (and slightly incongruous) cigar exhibition. This floor is soon set to become a health and beauty area.

The lobby and lounge areas probably form the most striking part of the hotel, defined by low lights, and a strong, warm palette of charcoal, black, amber, rust and scarlet. Guests can enter through an expanse of glass (after all, this is all about 'being seen') into a long angular space, with a sculptural reception desk, and brightly lit alcoves. A horizontal glass tank lined with pebbles and a series of vertical glass alcoves allow a visual link through the dividing wall, into the lounge, which is a vast, open planned space of low lying furniture, and taller organic pieces, brightened with throws, cushions and contemporary chandeliers. At the far end of the room, near the second exit stands the sleek, rectangular bar – mirroring the reception counter in all but its red accent colour. Only part of the lounge is double height, since the second floor Restaurant Gaig – a riot of scarlet leather and crisp white – juts into the space and allows diners a good view of loungers below, and out through the glass facade onto the street.

Rooms at Cram are space saving wonders, folding all the basic necessities (and large plasma screen TVs) into a relatively small room. A large unit at the foot of the bed takes care of most functions, from desk to wardrobe to entertainment system. Various climate and lighting selections may be made (all probably clearer to the creator than the user), and the light fittings themselves range from pendants to freestanding. Muted whites are brightened with warm wood floors and retro furniture pieces in deep orange, while mirrored panels create the illusion of space. French balconies fringe the standard rooms, while the lucky few get an open air terrace. For occupants of the former, there's always the terraced roof upstairs, which offers a pleasing urban view downtown and is soon to be turned into a flexible restaurant space and relaxation area.

The bathrooms themselves are probably Cram's quirkiest feature. Shaped as a perfect circle, and entered through a frosted glass door, the white tiled space is sectioned into thirds with rain shower on the left, vanity counter and toilet on the right, and a middle strip for breathing space.

Some may argue that good design makes itself invisible, at least when it comes to comfort and to sleeping, but this is not what Cram is about. Meticulously worked from top to bottom, the GCA team have created a temple to their art, with every alcove and every chair announcing its presence. Some may find this hipper than hip approach a bit too much for a relaxing stint in Barcelona, but many more will delight in its pretensions.

