

John Fox | Going Places

# Nairobi's unique boutique hotel

**W**hen Paulina Raguz invited me to take a look at the suites she and her partner Aaren Macksoud have added to their Palacina, I hope I was polite – but I

wasn't too excited.

"But I've already written about the Moonflower and the Palacina," I said.

"Yes, we know – and we appreciate that. But, this new development is something special – we're sure you will agree."

So I went.

And as soon as I walked through the door, I knew Paulina was right. Only a few minutes later, when I was in one of the guest rooms, I realised that, for me, this place is really special – it is the most elegant yet comfortable hotel I have ever seen.

But let me back-track a little. The Palacina is the complex of apartments, conference centre and Moonflower restaurant in the rather unlikely setting of Kitale Lane, off Dennis Pritt Road and out beyond State House. (Though perhaps I should revise my opinion about that 'unlikely' – since it is rapidly becoming an area for smart restaurants and sophisticated bars).

## Conference centre

The residence is a block of fully-serviced one, two or three-bedroom apartments that are ideal for long-stay clients. It overlooks the pool and the Moonflower, which must rate as one of the most 'atmospheric' restaurants in Nairobi – with a cosy lounge for pre-dinner drinks, and a choice of tables, inside for the rain or outside for the moonlight.

Beyond the restaurant there is the small conference centre, set on a river bank and looking out to the State House Valley. The furnishing is not at all conference-like. It is different. That's the point. You can hold your meeting in style.

Doing your business at the Palacina is a memorable experience. And there's also the food in the Moonflower to look forward to. Better to look forward to rather than look back on – because the Moonflower food is so good and so much that, afterwards, snoozing usually wins out over working.

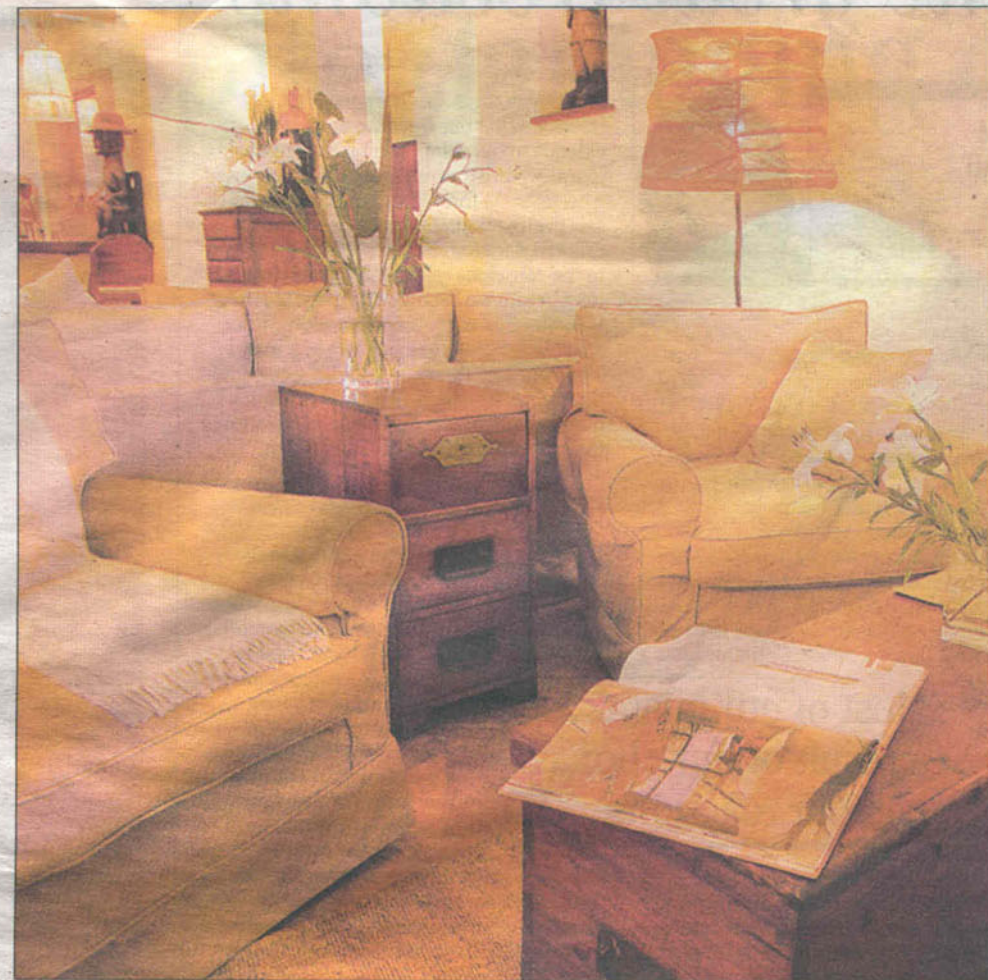
Now, alongside the Residence, Paulina and Aaren have built the Suites – or what they call a 'boutique hotel'.

## Distinctive and personalised

The day I went, I was shown around by Paulina, director, and Tony Sawe, the assistant manager. For a few minutes we sat in the lounge, sipping a fresh orange juice, and with one of those lanky, carved colonial soldiers bending his wooden ear.

I asked Paulina and Tony what they meant by a 'boutique hotel'. They told me that it is a little to do with smallness – and a lot to do with a distinctive and personalised service.

'Breaking the Chains' is the header on their flier – and I see what they mean. 'A staff that



Photo/Joh Fox

**The elegance in the lounges: "There's a lot you will find in the Palacina Suites that you will not find in any of the big and prestigious hotels."**

knows you by name,' the flier says, 'homemade chocolate chip cookies waiting in your room. Is this really a hotel?' True, there's a lot you will find in the Palacina Suites that you will not find in any of the big and prestigious hotel chains.

First, it is the décor that strikes you. I see why Paulina calls it 'elegant yet edgy'. Everything tones so closely and so carefully that the rooms are almost too good to live in, if you see what I mean. But it had the opposite effect. It wasn't easy to take a walk round. In every room, I wanted to stay a while, to relax, to enjoy.

The dominant colours are beiges, browns and creams. The suites are spacious and extremely well appointed, with coconut fibre lamp shades in the bedrooms, a Jacuzzi in every bathroom, and a rustic terrace looking out to gardens with flowering trees and red-tiled rooftops.

The resident's lounge is generously furnished with beige-covered sofas, dotted with brown officer chests, hung with David Marrian paintings, and

guarded by the carved colonial soldiers from the Congo. In the evenings you are served with complimentary Swahili Tapas; in the mornings you can have home-made muffins, eggs and crepes, and café au lait in the farmhouse kitchen-style, breakfast room.

To keep you occupied or even busy, there's a DVD library and an Internet café.

## Professional massage

Finally, there's the Palacina Spa with its neat gym filled with those brutal machines. And (more my style) a small but beautiful massage parlour where you can get detoxified, or simply treated to a range of professional massages, including the exquisite Thai massage.

I just wish the Suites were in some other town, so I would have the excuse to go and stay there.

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