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SWEDISH ARCHITECTS DESIGN RUSSIAN HOTEL USING DOSTOYEVSKY'S 150 YEAR-OLD CLASSIC

It's 150 years since one of the literary world's most well-known novels was written. But it's only now that you can stay at the hotel. Fyodor Dostoyevsky's classic "Crime and Punishment" is the basis on which Russia's hottest new hotel has been built, the Reval Hotel Sonya in St Petersburg.

"It felt only natural to create a fantastic hotel around a fantastic story," says Erik Nissen Johansen at the Swedish architectural firm Stylt in Göteborg. "The assignment in Russia is one of our most important international projects to date."

St Petersburg is still classed as Russia's cultural capital, which isn't however reflected in the range of hotels on offer around the city. When the Baltic hotel chain Reval Hotels wanted to make inroads into the Russian market and create Russia's newest prestige hotel, it employed the services of Stylt, a Swedish firm of architects and identity consultants, which specializes in storytelling. Instead of copying conventional Western luxury Stylt opted to tie the city and its historical heritage and gathered inspiration from a classic 150 year-old novel.

A TASTE OF THE DESTINATION

"Travellers' behaviour has changed. People are no longer satisfied with standard hotels that could be anywhere in the world," says Erik Nissen Johansen, creative director at Stylt. "Nowadays people want real, relevant experiences that provide a taste of the destination while at the hotel."

"We always start our projects by creating a story and writing a storyline that's then used by our architects and designers. A good story makes hotel management and staff feel involved and also acts as an effective marketing tool," he explains.

In this case inspiration came from "Crime and Punishment", which many have called the classic St Petersburg tale and one of the best guides to the city. The result is a hotel that makes foreign visitors gasp and Russians to nod with approval.

THE OPPOSITE TO MAINSTREAM

The Reval Hotel Sonya is the exact opposite to "mainstream" with an exceptional atmosphere and interiors that need to be experienced like a really good novel: exciting and unpredictable, surprising and inspirational. The furniture, colours, patterns, art and other décor were hand-picked to reinforce the Russian atmosphere, without compromising the strict demands on comfort and modernity.

"The Russian hotel staff love it. For us it's testament to the fact that we've hit the mark in finding the soul of the city," says Erik Nissen Johansen.

The Russian influence is reflected in everything from the décor to the restaurant menu. Inspiration from the novel can be seen everywhere. A giant bookcase in the lobby has been filled with versions of "Crime and Punishment" in many different languages along with a sofa shaped like a huge Russian lacquerware box with motifs from the novel. The hotel room's desks were inspired by Dostoyevsky's own desk and there are also parts of Rafael's "Sistine Madonna" which appear in many of Dostoyevsky's novels, hanging in each room.

A HOT SPOT FOR FOREIGNERS AND LOCALS

"A hotel with an amazing personality that tells a story defines a clearer position and becomes a talking point more easily," says Erik Nissen Johansen.

The Reval Hotel Sonya is located in the heart of St Petersburg and has already become a "hot spot" for foreign visitors and locals alike. The hotel has 173 rooms (from standard rooms to the Ego suite), bar and restaurant, gym, conference room and inner courtyard with banqueting facilities. The Hotel Sonya and a further eight first class hotels make Reval Hotels the leading hotel chain in the Baltic region. This is the chain's first hotel in Russia.

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