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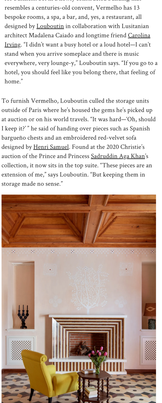
Giuseppe Ducrot's ceramic appliqués distinguish the façades of Vermelho Meliões, Christian Louboutin's new hotel in Portugal. Photo: Anderson Tezeras

MAGAZINE

Fashion Royalty Christian Louboutin Sweeps a Portuguese Village Off Its Feet With the Opening of His New Hotel

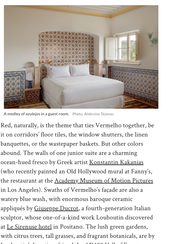
The French designer collaborated with architect Madalena Caiado and his friend Carolina Irving to bring Vermelho Meliões to life

By Dana Thomas
March 15, 2023



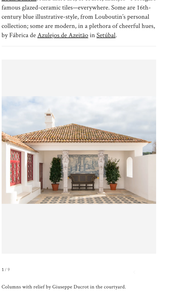
The lounge's floor tiles reinforce the scarlet leitmotif, a nod to Louboutin's signature soles. Photo: Anderson Tezeras

Twelve years ago, French shoe designer Christian Louboutin bought a holiday home in Meliões, an agricultural community on the Atlantic coast, south of Lisbon. Everything was perfect, except this: "There was no restaurant where I could go every night and hang out," he says. "My house was not built to have dinner. Lunch, yes. Dinner, no." He found a small, nondescript home on the edge of the historic village and thought he'd open a bistro there. The local mayor had a grander idea. "He said, 'Do a hotel,'" Louboutin recalls. "So I did."



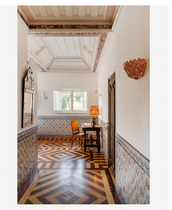
Trompe l'oeil shell mosaics enliven a corridor landing. Photo: Anderson Tezeras

This month, Vermelho Meliões—named for the word *red* in Portuguese, a nod to his signature scarlet soles—opens for business. Set in a newly constructed building that resembles a centuries-old convent, Vermelho has 13 bespoke rooms, a spa, a bar, and, yes, a restaurant, all designed by Louboutin in collaboration with Lusitanian architect Madalena Caiado and longtime friend Carolina Irving. "I didn't want a busy hotel or a loud hotel—I can't stand when you arrive somewhere and there is music everywhere, very lounge-y," Louboutin says. "If you go to a hotel, you should feel like you belong there, that feeling of home."

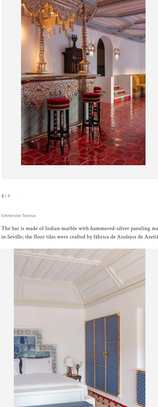


Tray ceiling coves, tiled wainscoting, and graphic parquet in one guest room. Photo: Anderson Tezeras

To furnish Vermelho, Louboutin culled the storage units outside of Paris where he's housed the gems he's picked up at auction or on his world travels. "It was hard—'Oh, should I keep it?'" he said of handing over pieces such as Spanish bargueño chests and an embroidered red-velvet sofa designed by Henri Samuel. Found at the 2020 Christie's auction of the Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan's collection, it now sits in the top suite. "These pieces are an extension of me," says Louboutin. "But keeping them in storage made no sense."



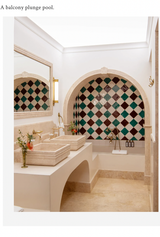
A medley of sculpins in a guest room. Photo: Anderson Tezeras



In the Mazinha suite, frescoes by Konstantin Kakanias surround the fireplace. Photo: Anderson Tezeras

Red, naturally, is the theme that ties Vermelho together, be it on corridors' floor tiles, the window shutters, the linen banquettes, or the wastepaper baskets. But other colors abound. The walls of one junior suite are a charming ocean-hued fresco by Greek artist Konstantin Kakanias (who recently painted an Old Hollywood mural at Fanny's, the restaurant at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles). Swaths of Vermelho's façade are also a watery blue wash, with enormous baroque ceramic appliqués by Giuseppe Ducrot, a fourth-generation Italian sculptor, whose one-of-a-kind work Louboutin discovered at Le Sirenuse hotel in Positano. The lush green gardens, with citrus trees, tall grasses, and fragrant botanicals, are by Louboutin's longtime friend the AD100 Hall of Famer Louis Benech. And there are, of course, azulejos—Portugal's famous glazed-ceramic tiles—everywhere. Some are 16th-century blue illustrative-style, from Louboutin's personal collection; some are modern, in a plethora of cheerful hues, by Fábrica de Azulejos de Azeitão in Setúbal.

In December, Louboutin hosted a cocktail party at Vermelho for town locals and gave them a tour of the place. "They said it was like the hotel had always been there," Louboutin recalls. "That's the nicest compliment of all." vermelhohotel.com



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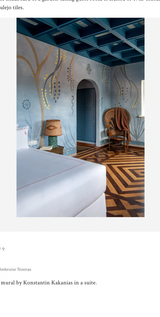

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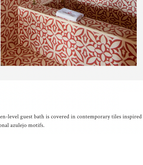
Columns with relief by Giuseppe Ducrot in the courtyard.

The Xisan restaurant.



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Geometric parquet lends visual verve to a hallway.

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The bar is made of Indian marble with hammered-silver paneling made in Seville; the floor tiles were crafted by fábrica de Azulejos de Azeitão.

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A balcony plunge pool.

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The headboard of a garden-facing guest room is crafted of 17th-century azulejo tiles.

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A niche of monochromatic tiles in a checkerboard pattern adds a bold touch to a serene guest bath.

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A mural by Konstantin Kakanias in a suite.

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A garden-level guest bath is covered in contemporary tiles inspired by traditional azulejo motifs.