

JUGENDSTIL REJUVENATED

The Kärntnerhof hotel in Vienna's first district charms its guests with Viennese Gemütlichkeit and good humour **BY ROSEMARIE NOACK**

The lavishly ornate elevator is nearly as old as the building itself. Below: a refurbished room, the hotel entrance and reception desk.



Such as an egg in its warm nest, the Hotel Kärntnerhof lies tucked away in the middle of the narrow winding streets of Vienna's old town. The houses around it bear enamelled signs with quaint old-fashioned names like "Schönlaternengasse" "Wollzeile" or "Fleischmarkt". And the district itself with its wealth of tiny narrow-fronted shops is teeming with famous taverns and eateries which seem to make it the very essence of old world Vienna. It's only a few steps to the Stephansdom, the city's landmark cathedral, and to the main post office with its special counter for commemorative editions of stamps.

I want to know whether hotel director Wolfgang Krenn writes his name as "Kren" which is the Austrian word for "horseradish". Without batting an eyelid he looks at me and says "That's Kren with two n's because I'm twice as hot" – a reply that's all the more surprising because Herr Krenn just seems to be a modest, unassuming middle-aged man. Although not born in Vienna, he has spent most of his life in the city and is now a walking glossary and a tireless information bureau for his guests. He tells me that the privileged situation of the Kärntnerhof isn't the only reason for the hotel's success. Guests love the charm and intimacy the hotel exudes – and also the contemporary standard of comfort it offers. The Kärntnerhof's old Viennese charm is enlivened with a refreshing quantum of modernity.

Many of its 44 rooms have just undergone renovation and are cheerful and bright with parquet flooring, pretty Belgian wallpaper and window blinds of thick fabric in pleasing shades of colour. The whole building and even the dainty roof terrace has wireless Internet access. And the Kärntnerhof allows its guests to bring their dogs – provided of course that the pooches are properly house-trained!

The prize feature of this former residential property, built at the turn of the 20th century, is its elevator, that was installed about the same time and which still gives sturdy service. On the inside it's a mahogany coloured jewel box with gleaming brass rods, mirrors and artfully decorated glass. On the outside it's a snow-white, enclosed shaft, ornamented with a Jugendstil frieze at the bottom, in which the elevator glides up and down between the hotel's five floors like an oversized bird cage. One deeply impressed Japanese visitor told the hotel director, that for him the elevator was just as much of an unforgettable experience, as the giant Ferris wheel on the Prater.

The history of the building at Grashofgasse 4 wouldn't be complete without mentioning that in the wake of the Second World War it served as a high-profile high class brothel with its main stream of clients coming from members of the four allied occupying forces who jointly administered the first district in Vienna's city centre. Some of the soldiers

returning later on as tourists would ask in disbelief at the reception desk of the new hotel "But where are all the girls?"

In the breakfast room with its parquet floors and chandeliers a splendid buffet with oven-fresh bread rolls and strong Vienna-style coffee gives guests a swinging start to their day's sightseeing. What should it be today? The ladies and gentlemen staffing the reception don't just get you tickets for the opera, babysitters or see that your ball gown is properly ironed before you go to the opera, they're also a font of friendly expert advice on Vienna's museums and markets, coffee houses and Beisl – traditional taverns with their sumptuous fare of Palatschinken (filled pancakes) and Kaiserschmarren (cut-up sugared pancakes with raisins and preserved plums) both sworn enemies of the slim-line diet conscious. Or the star of Austrian cuisine, the Wiener Schnitzel. On the wall of the underground passage on Karlsplatz there's a neon sign which announces "Since the 1st January 14, 715, 902 Schnitzels have been eaten in Vienna". By now you can add at least another 2 to that number. Those are the two I tucked into in Fieglmüller's and the Café Engländer – Wiener schnitzels of truly awesome size.

Hotel Kärntnerhof, Grashofgasse 4, 1010 Vienna, Austria
Tel.: +43 1 512 19 23, www.karntnerhof.com
Two-bed rooms from € 89 including breakfast

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