



CIAO MILANO!

EXPERIENCE THE ITALIAN FASHION CAPITAL THROUGH A LUXE NEW LENS.

BY COLLEEN KRATOFIL
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LA COMPAGNIE AND GALLERIA VIK MILANO

There's hardly any Instagram-vs.-reality paradigm more striking than that of international travel. On the grid, you are glowing, carefree, exuding main character energy. Every hour is golden hour. Far too often, though, the reality is a little more grim. At *GRAZIA USA*, we strive to make every moment effortlessly chic – even on a red-eye, and especially when visiting our hometown of Milan. So, the news that a longtime staple for frequent fliers to the continent, La Compagnie, has launched an all-business-class flight to the Italian fashion capital had us running to book a flight – and a hotel room (at the gorgeous, 5-star Galleria Vik Milano, of course).

La Compagnie first launched in 2014, servicing New York to Paris with seasonal flights from New York to Nice. In April, it expanded its route from New York (Newark International Airport) to Milan (Milan Malpensa Airport) offering five weekly flights (Thursday through Monday) departing at 9:40 p.m. on the new A321neo aircraft with 76 full flat-bed seats.

Paris and Milan are an obvious pairing to anyone who's shuttled themselves through the fashion week calendar. However, the company's decision to expand to an Italian destination was actually the result of pandemic-inspired creative thinking. The airline's planes were grounded for 15 months during the pandemic until June 2021, when the European Union reopened its borders to Americans.

"We thought that it was a bit risky to operate two flights per day from Paris to New York, which was our business model prior to





COVID-19, because we knew that the volume of traffic between Paris and Europe wouldn't be fully back to normal and we would need to wait until 2023 or 2024 before getting back to the figures we had in 2019," Anne Crespo, Head of Marketing & Communications at La Compagnie, told *GRAZIA USA*.

"We started to see where our business class product would have strong interest," said Crespo, adding that New York to Milan is the third-most-popular route when it comes to business class traffic, behind Paris and London. (The European company can't fly from the any non-EU country to the US, and after Brexit that includes the UK.) "Basically, the figures were telling us, Milan has a lot of business class traffic."

Crespo said two more factors lead to the Milan route expansion: lack of competition from Italian airlines and the city's fashion influence. "During COVID, Air Italy collapsed, and Alitalia switched to ITA," Crespo explained. "In terms of competitors, there were only the American airlines and Emirates and there was room for another operator in the business class travel market."

As with the other La Compagnie routes, Milan is an enduring destination for the jet set. "Since day one, flyers of La Compagnie have been people in the fashion, luxury, and arts spaces and Milan has all of those types of people," Crespo continued.

For that reason, La Compagnie offers all of the amenities that such travellers expect: access to airport lounges, two free checked bags, 76 lie-flat beds, and quick 10-minute boarding and deplaning processes. "It's not a private jet, but you feel like you're in a private environment," Crespo explained.

On board, passengers are greeted with a glass of champagne before takeoff before logging on to the free (and fast) Wi-Fi to work en route. Meanwhile, they are treated to high-end skincare products and menus curated by Michelin-starred chefs.

All La Compagnie flights offer these amenities, but for the Milan route, the airline partnered with Italian brands, including skincare products from sustainable Parma-based beauty brand, Comfort Zone, menus by chefs Isabella Poti and Floriano Pellegrino of the restaurant Bros in Lecce, and the Vicenza-based Lorenzo Cogo of El Coq and Dama restaurants in Venice. Beverage offerings feature varietals from Italian organic wineries.

"We tried to avoid being 'the French guys going to Italy,' so we switched our partnerships and collaborated

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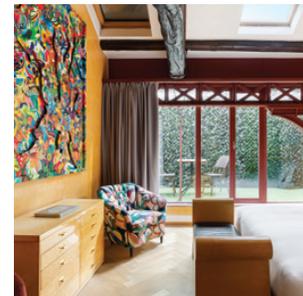
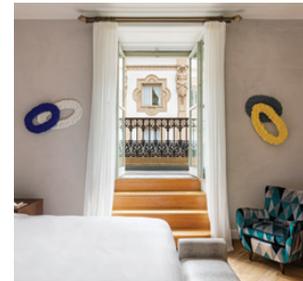
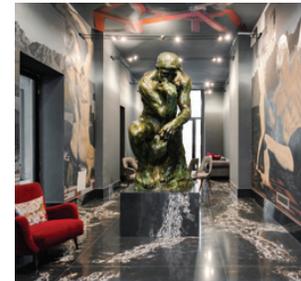
with Italian brands. We also created a coffee menu, because we felt it's very important for the Italian culture, which is crazy about coffee," said Crespo.

The one thing that will remain the same, however, is the French flight crew and pilots – all of whom were kept on staff throughout the entire pandemic. "We never fired anyone during COVID," Crespo revealed. "Our CEO was very clear on the fact that we would keep the whole staff and they'd be able to fly to Paris and Milan. The good news is that we have a lot of pilots and three or four cabin crew members who speak Italian."

What's next? The company "definitely" has its sights set on expanding to more routes down the line, but right now it's focused on bringing "the soul of La Compagnie" to a new market. "We are small and we deliver intimacy to passengers," Crespo said. "They feel like they belong to our airline. Like they are in the club."

Equally as intimate and thoughtful is the artistic enclave that is Milan's Galleria Vik Milano – a perfect destination for a La Compagnie traveler to Milan. The hotel is located inside the bustling historic Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, a breathtaking glass-domed shopping center designed in 1861 and completed in 1877. The gallery connects the Piazza del Duomo (home to Milan's soaring cathedral) to Piazza della Scala (home to the historic Teatro della Scala). (The Galleria itself is home to one historic landmark dear to fashionophiles: the first-ever Prada store, opened in 1913.)

It's a truly incomparable location for a boutique hotel. Indeed, when the owners of Vik Retreats, husband and



wife duo Alex and Carrie Vik, learned that the TownHouse Galleria hotel property was for sale, they were immediately “intrigued.” They had been wanting to open a hotel in a city and Milan just “made sense.”

Though the TownHouse was labeled as a 5-star, “it was not a particularly inspiring hotel,” Carrie says. “There was no art, there was no interesting furniture. All the walls were painted the same color throughout the entire five floors, but the architecture was extraordinary.”

A true diamond in the rough, the property would soon join the Vik portfolio alongside five properties in South America – all created to highlight remarkable art and design from around the world. Of course, a substantial renovation came first.

“Our projects are ‘projects for love.’ We do them because we love art and design and architecture, and we like to be creative,” Carrie told *GRAZIA USA*.

“We built all our other projects from the ground up, but this was going to be something that we were going to be inheriting,” Carrie shared. “And to inherit a hotel in a historic monument was really appealing.”

The bones of the structure were intact, but Carrie and Alex set out on a major renovation to make the space more functional with the help of architect Marco Daglio, who assisted with the expansion and reworked the layout from 58 rooms to 89.

Today, rooms on the second level feature double-height ceilings and loft-like spaces with living quarters below beds accessible by a staircase. Rooms on the third floor feature balconies that overlook the Galleria, while the fifth floor is situated above the Galleria structure and features cozy outdoor garden terraces.

Carrie found the variety of rooms “really inspiring” and put the signature Vik Resort spin on the space by making each space totally unique through one-of-a-kind art and décor. Two Italian art curators helped bring in artists from Uruguay, Italy, and other countries around the world to create site-specific installations in the rooms, hallways, and gathering spaces. Even some of the bathrooms feature site-specific art installations or exceptional marble design.

“They all really committed themselves to the project,” said Carrie of the Vik collaborators. “Many of the artists came and stayed for long periods of time while they created their spaces, so you feel that passion and the creative energy that was put into it by all of these artists. It’s not just us putting paintings and hanging them on the wall. It’s about involving the artists and collaborating with them.”

One of the most striking artworks in the hotel is in the lobby, with a bronze cast of Auguste Rodin’s famed sculpture, *The Thinker*, in monumental scale to greet guests. It’s surrounded by a dry fresco covering the walls



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and ceiling that features eight mythological figures holding up the world by Italian artist, Alex Folla. “I think it’s a great way to arrive in Milan because you are completely absorbed into this world of Italian Renaissance art with a modern twist,” said Carrie. “It’s really inspired.”

The hotel opened in November 2019 and hit its stride with full occupancy by Fashion Week of February 2020, but was forced to shut down at the start of the pandemic. After a brief reopening in 2020, it closed again during the second wave and has remained open – at last – since March 2021. “We felt we needed to be open because we were the new hotel and nobody knew about us,” Carrie explained. “We needed to get our name out there because we just never really had the opportunity to do that before the pandemic.”

The hotel features two restaurants: Pellico Otto is open daily for breakfast, lunch, aperitifs and dinner. It doubles as an art gallery with many of the works by artists represented at Galleria Vik Milano throughout the space. The rooftop houses a pizzeria, I Dodici Gatti.

Equally delectable is the art that covers every inch of the property – from hallway murals to the view at breakfast overlooking the Galleria. Still, Carrie is the first to acknowledge that Galleria Vik Milano “is not a hotel for everybody.”

“We are not a cookie-cutter hotel, and some people want a cookie-cutter hotel. They want to know that when they go into the room, it’s going to have the desk in the corner, and a TV, and the same amenities everywhere you go. We’re not like that,” she said. “Every room has different furniture. Most of the rooms don’t have TVs. That’s not our brand.”

While guests may request a TV, the focus here is on helping guests immerse themselves in a world of design, architecture, style, and history. What could be more effortlessly chic, more *Milano* than that? **10**

