



First Look: Ca' di Dio, Venice's New Hidden-Gem Hotel



Photo courtesy of Ca' di Dio

In a city that is often celebrated for being frozen in time, the opening of a contemporary boutique hotel—**Ca' di Dio**—is attracting locals and travelers alike with a new experience of **Venice**.



Photos by Elizabeth Harvey

The only five-star property to open in the Floating City in 2021, Ca' di Dio offers a prime waterfront location on the San Marco Basin, in the Castello District, which is known for its contemporary art scene (making it a fixture of the Biennale) and for being less crowded—even though it is less than a 20-minute walk from the Rialto Bridge and Piazza San Marco—thanks to its location next to the protected Arsenal area. Like many things in Venice, the hotel is housed within a 13th-century mansion that has, over the years, occupied many roles. Ca' di Dio's history includes operating as a hostel for Crusaders, as well as a sanctuary for women in need. In this its latest chapter, after a three-year restoration and redesign directed by the renowned Spanish architect and designer Patricia Urquiola (behind Lake Como's [Il Sereno](#) and the [Four Seasons Milan](#)), it is now a coolly contemporary retreat with just 66 rooms, 10 suites, two restaurants and a cocktail bar, a courtyard and a small gym and spa.

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Photo courtesy of Ca' di Dio

When I arrived to experience the hotel in October, Venice was far from empty—as it was during the summer, right when the borders reopened—but once I stepped off of the most typical tourist paths, I found myself surrounded only by locals and other Italians. At Ca' di Dio, this feeling of being in the “right” place—and in a place that not everybody knows about—is prevalent. Compared to the gilded, glittering palaces that are the [Aman](#), the [Cipriani](#) and the [Gritti](#), Ca' di Dio is a hidden gem—or a pearl, plucked from the beds of the lagoon. Indeed, at certain times of day, when the light is refracting off the canals in through the hotel's many windows, it can feel like you are underwater: Urquiola's chosen palette abounds with soft tones of sea green, moss, mauve and deep and pale blues.



Photo courtesy of Ca' di Dio

Glistening at every turn are hand-blown Venetian glass pieces that were designed by the masters in nearby Murano, just for the hotel. The *pièce de résistance* is the entrance hall's massive chandelier, which was created using over 14,000 handmade Murano glass tiles to resemble the sails of the boats that can be seen passing by at any time of day—but the smaller details are just as eye-catching. Fanciful lamps of amber and emerald cast an intoxicating glow throughout the rooms at night, while the delicately geometric glasses bring even greater pleasure to every taste of the restaurants' wonderfully curated wine list (which features Veneto producers almost exclusively, presenting a fresh education in a highly underrated region). Even the ashtrays—golden, abstract and also custom-designed in Murano—are exquisite and covetable—and you may just be able to get your hands on one, if you talk to the right person: the charming and formidable general manager Christophe Mercier, who was involved in the creation of nearly every element of Ca' di Dio and is equal parts rockstar, master chef and Ralph Fiennes' Monsieur Gustave H. in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. (The hotel can also arrange tours of the workshops and showrooms of the glass factory where these items were produced—a truly dazzling experience that should not be missed.) Per Christophe's direction, almost everything in the hotel is sourced locally—which is perhaps why you'll find plenty of locals hanging out there. Or perhaps, as Christophe told me, simply, it is because, "This place is a home, not a palazzo."

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Photo courtesy of Ca' di Dio

At Ca' di Dio, guests are encouraged to make themselves comfortable—and to spend as much time enjoying the rooms and public spaces as they do exploring in town. The internal courtyard garden and waterfront patio are perfect places for people-watching or taking a coffee, while hours can be spent sipping inventive cocktails, conversing or sifting through photos in the gold-ceilinged Alchemia Bar and warm wood-paneled Reading Room. Throughout the hotel, materials representative of Venice are emphasized, and the combination of glass, wood, wrought iron, stone and marble—as well as wool, velvet, silk and leather, with the majority of the textiles being produced by the Venetian house Rubelli—creates an elevated yet warm and calming atmosphere.



Photo by Elizabeth Harvey

The building's original structure and historical details have been preserved as much as possible and can often be admired; the courtyard features two original wells, while restored frescoes adorn the lobby. The rooms are open and thoughtfully designed, and the two "Altana" suites also offer access to private rooftop terraces, with views of the lagoon and the isle of San Giorgio; private experiences like a wine tasting, cocktail hour or dinner can also be hosted here.

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Photos by Elizabeth Harvey

Another major draw is the dining program, which celebrates local ingredients and traditions to the utmost. The main restaurant, VERO (which stands for “Venetian Roots” and is open to external guests) features a rotating seasonal menu that is delicate and flavorful, under the direction of Executive Chef Raimondo Squeo, with highlights like vegetables from the in-house garden, fish caught fresh from the lagoon and bread made in-house from stone-ground organic flour produced in the Veneto (which may be the best bread I’ve ever tasted). If Ca’ di Dio is an expression of “the most intimate essence of Venice,” there are few better ways to experience this than at the restaurant.

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Photos by Elizabeth Harvey

In a destination that is beguiling and sometimes overwhelming in its romance and richness, Ca' di Dio offers a serene enclave that emanates warmth, authenticity and gentle glamour. It is a celebration of Venetian artistry and hospitality, while remaining modern and approachable. If you wish to live like a local, it's the perfect place to call a home away from home.

Contact [Indagare](#) to start planning a trip to Venice, featuring a stay at Ca' di Dio! Our expert team can also arrange touring and reservations at the top restaurants, and advise on traveling responsibly.

- Elizabeth Harvey on December 11, 2021

