

# WHERE TO STAY

INSIDER REPORTS ON THE BEST SPOTS TO BED DOWN. EDITED BY LYDIA BELL



Clockwise from above: façade of the Immobilia Building, dining room in The Embassy Apartment at Immobilia Cairo; rooftop terrace there



## GOLDEN AGE

TOWERING ABOVE THE HUSTLE OF CAIRO, A REVIVED ART DECO BUILDING HAS BECOME THE COSMOPOLITAN SPOT DU JOUR

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS SCHALKX.  
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK ANTHONY FOX

DOWNTOWN CAIRO, LIKE MUCH of the Egyptian capital, doesn't ease anyone in gently. On the roads, carved like canyons through apartment blocks caked with the patina of the years, traffic honks in perpetual gridlock. Street vendors hawk fresh fruits and bootleg T-shirts with admirable zeal, while exhaust fumes and Saharan dust hang thick in the air.

But this corner of town, east of Tahrir Square, hasn't always felt so gritty. Its peeling belle époque façades hint to a glossier past, a time when Cairo's beau monde coveted this Paris-inspired arrondissement for its wide boulevards, salons and late-night cabarets. At its heart stood the Immobilia Building, once the tallest tower in all of Egypt, which was built during the 1930s as a kind of art deco utopia for the country's upper crust. The A-listers of the Arab world flocked here in droves: singer Abdel Halim Hafez took over one of its apartments, as did actor Omar Sharif and superstar Leila Mourad. For a good while, it was ➤

## WHERE TO STAY



*Clockwise from left: terrace in Leila's Apartment at Immobilia Cairo; basketry and textiles in the El Sheikh Apartment there; suite interior at The Immobilia*



all satin-gown soirees and rooftop martinis, until the revolution and rent control rang in a long, slow fade into obscurity.

Today, though, the Immobilia Building is stirring again. Over the past decade or so, Egypt Beyond, whose portfolio includes Luxor's legendary Al Moudira hotel and two sumptuous dahabeah Nile cruisers, has been scooping up the property's prettiest units to launch a secret hotel of sorts. Spread over the upper floors of the two towers, Immobilia Cairo's four residences offer refuge to in-the-know visitors for whom the city's other five-star options are either too elaborate or too beige. Entered via the building's dingy elevators, through a timeworn lobby, the apartments unfurl into high-design hideaways that fuse art deco bones – original French doors and herringbone parquetry – with art and objects pieced together with the help of aesthetes such as Italian Lebanese designer (and Al Moudira founder) Zeina Aboukheir.

Since their low-key launch at the end of 2024, the residences have become honeypots for the global art scene, members of which gather for dinner parties on the cactus-lined rooftop terraces and lean on butler Ali (who formerly serviced the US embassy) to help arrange antiques shopping trips or private viewings at Downtown ateliers. Last September another rendezvous spot was added to the project's blueprint: taking over the former Mobil Oil Club lounge on the eighth floor, The Immobilia club introduced three suites, a snug studio room and a sprawling salon.


Like the apartments, each suite is unique, furnished with a Milan-meets-arabesque mix of vintage kilims, art deco antiques and bespoke wicker bedframes inspired by Italian designer Adalberto Dal Lago. Walls come draped in heavy curtains of gleaming velvet; double-vanity bathrooms are covered in swirling marble. There are licks of Murano glass and Moorish sidetables with mother-of-pearl inlays, and arm-sized tassels are sourced from the same Egyptian passementier that provides Buckingham Palace with its opulent trimmings. Ecuadorean designer

Margarita Andrade added the finishing touches with textiles by her local homeware label, Malaika Cairo (whose sister business, Threads of Hope, worked with refugee women on the embroidery), and glassware plucked from her Madu shop in the nearby Zamalek district.

The central salon – a handsome high-ceilinged space with mahogany panelling, well-worn leather chairs and the club's original dining set – nods to Cairo's old-timey cafés. Large-scale works by Russian artist George Khomich echo the city's frenetic energy, and French windows frame sweeping views over the rubble-strewn rooftops of Downtown. A bar doles out everything from sweet orange blossom tea to watermelon coolers, and a screen comes down for movie nights.

There's a small restaurant run by chef Adel El Helbawy, who previously led the kitchen at Al Moudira. The menu is tight and light, often built around what's best at the market that morning. One night it might be fresh-caught Alexandrian fish, the next a bowl of Egyptian freekeh with roasted vegetables or handmade pasta with a punchy arrabbiata. Cold gazpacho and tart lemon desserts help temper the Cairo heat, and ice cream comes from Mandarine Koueider, a local institution.

For Egypt Beyond cofounder Philomena Schurer Merckoll, the project fills a long-standing gap. "Cairo is full of big chains," she says. "We were looking for a more personal stay but couldn't find it. Immobilia Cairo adds a unique point of view to the city – this mix of incredibly tasteful and luxurious spaces, blended with the faded glory of the building. It feels essentially Cairo." She sees The Immobilia as an extension of that ethos: a place for guests and clued-in Cairenes to connect.

And in doing so, it brings the building full circle. Some 85 years after it opened as a vertical symbol of Cairo's cosmopolitan golden age, it is once again a magnet for culture, creativity and conversation. It may not be a rooftop rendezvous with Omar Sharif, but the spirit isn't far off. 

**BOOK IT** Doubles from about £240; [egyptbeyond.com](http://egyptbeyond.com)

# BOTTEGA

FAMILY ★ VINTNERS  
SINCE 1635



PREMIUM VINTAGE COLLECTION  
PROSECCO DOC



CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING  
TO REG. EU N. 2021/2115



MINISTERO DELL'AGRICOLTURA  
DELLA SOVRANITÀ ALIMENTARE  
E DELLE FORESTE



[www.bottegaspa.com](http://www.bottegaspa.com)