

REVIEW:

First in: Brach Madrid

Amid the new constellation of hotels on Madrid's rapidly evolving scene, this is a true boutique that twinkles brightly







Why book Brach Madrid?

For a true-boutique experience curated by Philippe Starck that's bang in the centre of Madrid's lively energy.

Set the scene

In a ground-floor street-facing window at Brach Madrid, éclairs, tarte tatins and Paris-Brests are laid out to torment passers by with their deliciousness, like something out of Tiffany's. They are a sweet soupçon of the Evok Collection's Frenchness: this is the group's first location in Spain and second outside [Paris](#).

Brach tucks 57 bedrooms, including four suites, behind its elegant, unobtrusive facade. Inside, it's a vibe. Because the hotel reception – which can be a bit of a turn-off – has been popped up onto the first floor, the ground floor is taken over by the bar, restaurant and patisserie, which segue into each other, creating a clubbable, enveloping, brasserie feel with an open kitchen at the back. The low-lit, dusky restaurant has woven-leather ceilings hung with double lampshades that create a canopy of warmth, and the mahogany-panelled walls are lined with interesting limited-edition Hispanophile books and vivid modern art. There are brown leather banquettes and chairs and columns tiled in glazed terracotta. American brasserie mirrors from the 1920s are tilted at angles so diners can glance surreptitiously around, and the organic polished shapes of sculptures by Patrick Kim-Gustafson are dotted about like little creatures.

If ten years ago Madrid was a hotel backwater, the capital now has a checklist of top-brass marques. Pre-pandemic, Urso, Unico and Gran Hotel Inglés arrived. Then Four Seasons unveiled its ornate, Martin Brudnizki-designed space in 2020, moments from Puerto Del Sol (the Madrid Edition unveiled some sleek minimalism here two years later). In 2021, Rosewood Villa Magna created a buzz in Salamanca, and [Mandarin Oriental Ritz](#) revived the Belle Epoque Ritz by the Prado. A year later Thompson Madrid opened off Gran Vía, blithely overlooking the old sex haunt of Calle Montera, and pushing that street way upmarket.

So what does Brach Madrid add? Well, it's leading a third boutique wave (in the next couple of years it will be joined by Nomade, ZEL by Meliá, Bulgari and Nobu). And that's probably unsurprising, since it's been designed by the man who invented the boutique hotel in the first place and spawned a thousand imitations: Philippe Starck. For Brach Madrid, Starck has not emulated Brach Paris's "modern nostalgia", inspired by the 1920s and 1930s, per se, but continued the conversation for a Madrileño setting.

The backstory

While the 20th century was in its birth throes, King Alfonso XIII of Spain developed envy issues around the great capitals of [Europe](#) and their grand thoroughfares, and ordered the demolition of a vast swathe of properties to realise a Haussman-inspired dream for his own home town. Construction started on Gran Vía, Madrid's answer to Regent Street and the Champs-Élysées, in 1910. Its tall, emblematic buildings mostly went up in a 20-year period until the early 1930s (when they were bombed savagely during the Civil War), and so, despite their eclectic blend of Haussmannian, Art Deco and revivalist styles, there's a pleasing unity to them.

This elegant, seven-storey, belvedere-topped building, with a handsome wrought-iron stairwell, was finished in 1922. It has variously been tenant apartments and government offices, though there was a fun spell from 1922 when the American Bar Pidoux, known for its Champagnes and Grand Marnier cocktails, occupied the ground floor.

The rooms

The rooms and suites have a similarly warm palette as the restaurant, with jatoba wood joinery brightened by pinks and oranges, terracottas and flashes of moss green. Here Starck was inspired by the idea of a man who loved a woman with such fervour he adorned his spaces with objects that reminded him of her, graffitising the walls with their memories (perhaps he has read Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* lately?) In ours, boxing gloves dangle from the wall, and a mandolin and other curios. It's all suitably, reassuringly and conceptually Starckish.

In our room, we have a truly splendid terrace, a private version of a seventh-floor alfresco lounge bar that opens in summer, and has ceramic lamps, a dining table, citrus, pink and orange tasselled cushions. There's a phrase Madrileños are wedded to, "De Madrid al cielo", which roughly translates as "From Madrid to eternity" – some say it refers to those big, periwinkle skies they always have, even in January. This suntrap terrace is the perfect place to read.

The food

Chef Adam Bentalha's delicious menu is pan-Mediterranean, with recipes that roam from the Middle East (the croissant-fluffy challah with juicy fig and olive tapenade is exceptional, as is the zaatar-drenched suckling lamb shoulder) via the Iberian peninsula using Spanish produce (red tuna, Bellota ham et al), and sometimes a Spanish charcoal oven. The sea bass tartare topped with avocado, radishes, and kalamansi needs to be ordered twice, as does the "Las Huertas" cocktail with beetroot, bitter oranges, and hints of lime and peach.

The Spa

Departing from the general aesthetic, the subterranean "La Capsule Spa" is decked with white and floaty curtains and low-hanging tubular lights (very Delano Miami a la 1990s). It packs a punch: a 20m pool decked in cream marble and a suite of biohacking gadgets: the only hyperbaric chamber in a Madrid hotel; a steam room; float tank; infrared sauna and icebath; as well as an impressive jewel-box gym and a menu that ranges from facial electrostimulation to the Chinese internal organ massage Chi Nei Tsang.

The location

Gran Vía has always had a kinetic energy, but it's never been smart, per se. More utilitarian, lined with giant, faded cafes and workaday cinemas, its back streets secreted with dens of iniquity. But over the last decade, central Madrid has been radically gentrified. Downtown neighbourhoods have soared upmarket, and high street brands have invested in Gran Vía. It's also on the cusp of everything fun, such as the neighbourhoods of Chueca, Malasaña, Huertas and the Barrio de las Letras, as well as being within walking distance from des-res neighbourhoods such as Chamberí. All these downtown hoods now have more concept stores, artful florists, boutique gyms and bougie wine bars these days, though the tiny, intense bars, cut-price tattoo shops and drag-queen live shows can still be rooted out.

Service

The service is pleasant and friendly, efficient but not obtrusive.

Eco effort

The Evok Collection does have a Green Globe certification for the way it manages its carbon footprint, meaning no single-use plastics, eco-cleaning products, or recycling waste. At Brach Madrid, there's energy-efficient lighting, heating, and cooling; energy conservation in unused rooms; water-waste measurement; composting; food donating and recycling. The restaurant adopts a local-ingredient policy and hires locally.

Accessibility

The lifts and public spaces are accessible for wheelchair-users and there are accessible rooms with wide doorways, roll-in showers, grab bars, lowered beds and turning space. The pool has an accessible shower.

For families

There are three pairs of connecting rooms, and one room that connects to three others. Babysitting services and a 24-hour concierge are also helpful.

Anything else to mention?

A charming roof terrace bar opens in summer; on a clear day you'll be able to see the peaks of the Sierra de Guadarrama.