

# VANTAGE

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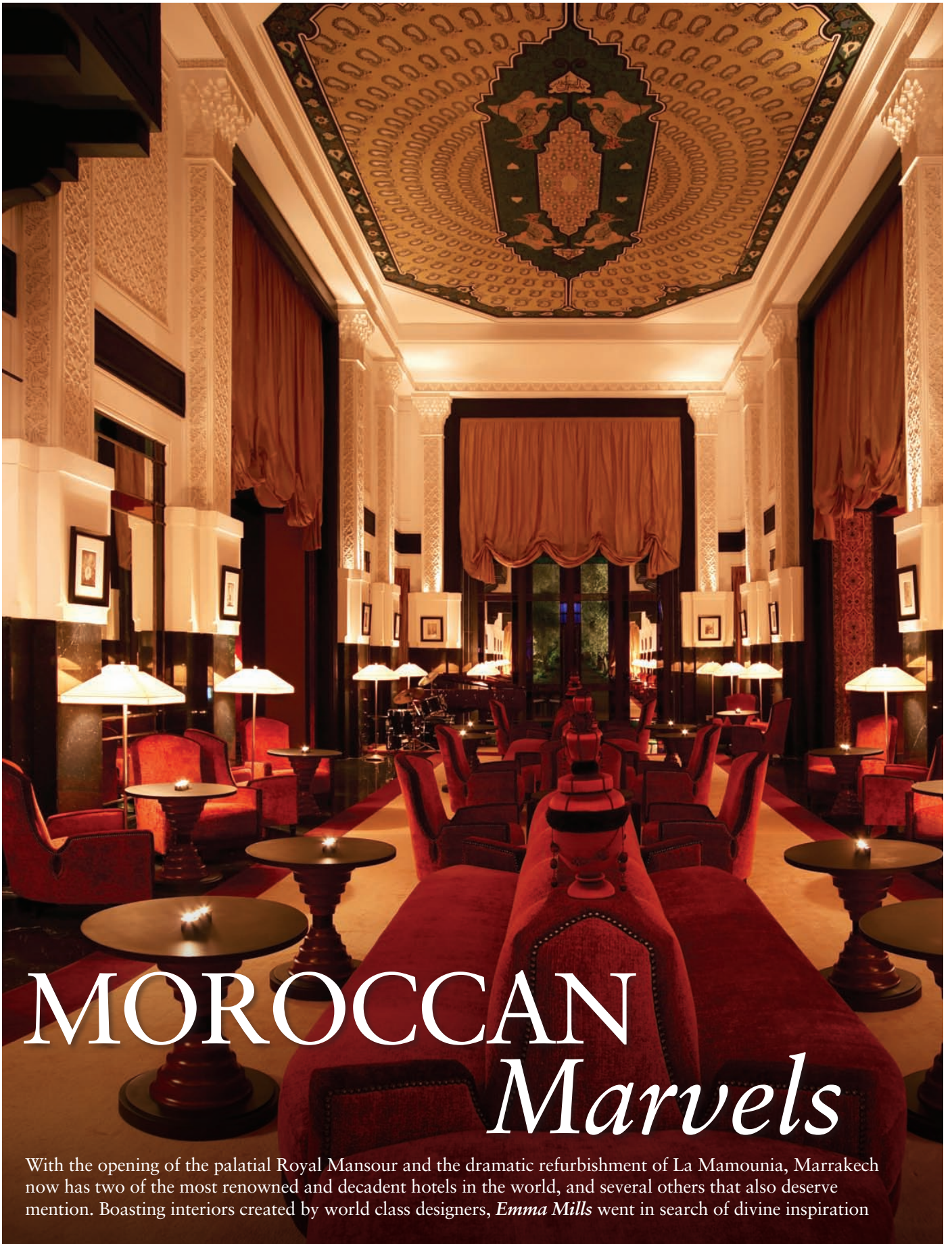
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# MOROCCAN *Marvels*

With the opening of the palatial Royal Mansour and the dramatic refurbishment of La Mamounia, Marrakech now has two of the most renowned and decadent hotels in the world, and several others that also deserve mention. Boasting interiors created by world class designers, *Emma Mills* went in search of divine inspiration



**A Timeless Palace**  
**La Mamounia**

Let's start at the beginning. And there really is no better place to start than the legendary and iconic La Mamounia. A stalwart of class and elegance throughout the hotel world, while being the most renowned hotel in Marrakech, La Mamounia has been open since the

1920s and loved in turn throughout the years by the Queen, Churchill, Gwyneth Paltrow, Orlando Bloom and Sarah Jessica Parker. Even today it is still the place to see and be seen; everyone from major celebs to the non-famous mega-rich has graced Mamounia's poolside loungers with their particular dose of style and charisma.

As we arrived at the hotel, fresh from the airport in the Mamounia branded Jaguar, immaculate butlers arrived to open the doors and sweep us effortlessly into the vast lobby. Striking and imposing glass details, modern flourishes, marble sculptures and traditional touches were everywhere. We relaxed in the tea lounge while we were checked in, sipping mint tea and eating Moroccan pastries, admiring the plush velvet, ruby reds, deep purples and gold brocade details all around us.

A refurbishment that took over three years has clearly revolutionised this hotel. While its history and charm had long touched people's hearts, the striking Art Deco design had started to look dated, and it was decided to bring La Mamounia up to date, while at the same time reconnecting it with its Moroccan roots. To this end, you are in no doubt that you are in Morocco; signature white and red lanterns are dotted throughout the hotel, while in the suites and rooms arched doorways, tiling, rich colours and fabrics conjure classic Moroccan style.

Designer extraordinaire Jacques Garcia was hired to head up this dramatic rebirth, and his flair and signature touches are evident everywhere, not least in the famous 'Garcia red' which is used throughout the hotel. Signature suites pay tribute to the hotel's illustrious past, with the Royal Suite resplendent in extravagant baroque flourishes, and the Churchill suite channelling a certain British pomp and ceremony. Further down the scale, standard suites offer a separate lounge area and two balconies, all with wonderful views across the gardens, the pool or the famous Koutoubia Mosque. Even rooms enjoy generous space, balconies, and vast bathrooms, marbled throughout.

Four restaurants offer not only more choice than you could ever need, but a wealth of inspired ideas for your own dining spaces. Al fresco dining is perfected in true Moroccan style at La Marocain, hidden away amidst the palm trees of the renowned gardens; while L'Italian offers cosy dining in hidden booths and corner tables bedecked in rich, deep colours. Le Français offers a more modern style of decor, akin to some of London's best Michelin eateries, while La Pavillion de la Piscine serves divine, cold bottles of rose, with platters of fresh fish and salads in a relaxed sunlounger-to-table atmosphere.

I could go on and on about the beauty of La Mamounia – the five bars, for instance, are all stunning spaces with their own individuality and class. We especially loved the Churchill bar, styled in leopard print and red velvet, complete with lounge singers and lethal cocktails. But there is also something else unique and extraordinary about this place, it has a comfortable, established air that reassures and impresses at the same time. Service is beyond impeccable, without ever being obsequious. La Mamounia knows what it is, and what it has, and it wears its history with pride, while effortlessly offering the best in modern style and world class interior design. Perfection.

[www.mamounia.com](http://www.mamounia.com) ●



## ❖ **A Hymn to Morocco** **Royal Mansour**

From the old to the new, and onto the out-of-this-world Royal Mansour; a veritable playground of luxury which opened in 2010, after an immense building project, and is owned by the King of Morocco. This is the kind of place where you can lose yourself completely - and you might do if the meandering inner-medina they've created has its way with you. Not content with building just a hotel, Royal Mansour is an entire walled city, filled with a series of one, two and three bedrooms riads, which even at their most basic offer four floors of private accommodation including your own entrance courtyard, roof terrace, butler and lounge. The two and three bedrooms riads are veritably palatial with sublime courtyards, dining rooms, open fires, private hammams and an expansive roof terrace offering dining and sunbathing areas, Bedouin tents and a beautiful day bed/chill out space.

Enter through the vast tiled gates, and you're instantly transported to another realm. Despite the oppressive August heat, the vast reception courtyard had its own natural cooling system which draws air through the al fresco space with a light, wonderful breeze. In the colder months you are greeted in the reception by a floor-to-ceiling open fire with a glass chimney. We were offered fruit cocktails and walked with them to our riad, situated a short walk from the main building down winding streets where gardeners work quietly among pomegranate trees and trickling water features. On arrival at our riad we tried to play it cool, but it was hard. Everything about this place is designed to impress, and as we made our way up to the private roof terrace complete with plunge pool, sun loungers and a dining table we had to pinch ourselves. We ordered wine and lunch on the terrace, which was brought to us via a vast network of behind the

scenes tunnels which ensure the staff can enter and leave your property almost unnoticed. The 24 hour butler service - which even insisted on unpacking our luggage - also means you are never left wanting.

The riads themselves are beautifully decorated, in a style echoed throughout the entire resort. No expense has been spared, and it's worth the effort. Handmade, local and traditional crafts have been used to tile the floors, make the fabrics on the beds, create intricate glass details in the lounge, furnish the bathroom and paper the walls. In fact, Royal Mansour had so many expert artisans working on site during the construction period, that much of the hotel can be considered entirely handmade.

Restaurants are equally beautiful, and overseen by three Michelin-starred chef Yannick Alleno from Le Meurice in Paris. The casual La Table offers a wonderfully cool and exotic location for breakfast and lunch; while La Marocaine and La Francais are stunning examples of their respective cuisines, with decadent decor to match and an intimate setting for dinner, with only 35 covers in each restaurant.

The next day held delights of spa treatments, a relaxing massage and some chill out time in the awe-inspiring birdcage lounge complete with fountains, trickling water and calming lighting; while that evening we enjoyed a civilised drink in the cigar and Armagnac room, a delight for any connoisseur.

Royal Mansour was, and is meant to be, an experience in the kind of divine life of kings, and yet at the same time it has retained a real loyalty to its setting and history, and the traditional handicrafts, skills and styling of Morocco have been celebrated with considerable style and aplomb. If you want privacy, service and luxury of the highest order, this is the place to come.

[www.royalmansour.com](http://www.royalmansour.com) ➤



● **Authentic Moroccan Style**  
**Dar les Cigognes**

The perfect place for a first stop in Marrakech, greeting weary travellers with warmth, hospitality and sweet mint tea. Discreetly hidden behind the thick red city walls, Dar les Cigognes's particular quality is that it offers all the comforts of home in a simple, stylish way. The rooms are large and cool, despite the oppressive August heat, and all boast vast bathrooms with marble and mosaic tiles covering the floors and walls. Rich Moroccan colours are all around, painted walls, tiled ceilings, authentic fireplaces and traditional furniture reinforce the sense of where you are. The hamman is traditional and relaxing, a newly created massage room is cool and inviting, rose petals were sprinkled on our bed every night, fresh fruit and water kept us refreshed, and everywhere, the smells of Morocco abound, even in the shower gels and soaps left in our bathroom, created using natural products.

The roof terrace is the jewel in the crown of Dar les Cigognes – a cactus and palm tree filled haven with wicker chairs and stunning views across the medina rooftops. We grab a spot and relax in the warm evening sun with a bottle of Moroccan wine, and enjoy watching as the huge iconic storks return to their vast nests atop the nearby Royal Palace. The next morning, having slept soundly in our beautiful room, we awoke to a leisurely breakfast served on the terrace, with the sun warming our backs and the sounds of the city slowly coming to life. Simplistic perfection.

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



**Artistic Boho Chic**  
**Riad el Fenn**

Funky chic resonates from this traditional riad, a literal oasis amid the busy souks of Marrakech. But don't expect sweeping drives and grand entrances, accessed via a series of pedestrianised alleys, this riad owes its charm to its location. A simple oak door opens to reveal a stunningly bohemian courtyard where trees and jungle plants climb skyward, birds flit through their leaves and tortoises slope around their trunks. El Fenn – a literal translation being simply 'riad of the art' – is the brain child of Vanessa Branson, a champion of art in Marrakech and a keen art collector herself.

Her own art lines the walls of the surprisingly vast space, which, despite its modest outward appearance, boasts two floors of accommodation, three decadent swimming pools, several other courtyards and the kind of rambling roof terrace that other riads only dream about, complete with views of the city and Koutoubia mosque, a cool bar and traditional and impressive restaurant, as well as a variety of sun terraces and even a putting green. Not to be outdone this place is also wonderful in the winter; libraries, log fires, a cinema and the downstairs restaurant and bar are a Mecca for anyone who's someone, while a variety of shows and performances mean it makes for one of the most unique places for a night out.

Rooms too are impressive; vast and generous in space, they have gigantic bathrooms with deep, luxurious tadelakt baths, while beds are big and sumptuous. Riad el Fenn has a sublime lackadaisical feel about it, topped up with effortless cool and a nice slice of authenticity. A wonderful Moroccan experience.

[www.riadelfenn.com](http://www.riadelfenn.com) ■