



THE URBAN TOWNHOUSE

TOREL 1884, PORTO

On the other side of the street from Torel 1884, a moustachioed man occasionally steps out of a workshop fringed in blue tiles and props a freshly varnished cork board on the pavement, quietly standing guard while it dries in the sun. Porto is one of those rare European cities that actually makes things; it takes its time. But cranes are stalking the horizon. At the start of the millennium, its historic centre was almost a ghost town; these days its façades are being reclaimed. Case in point is this hotel, a former *palazzo* and bank that now stores wine in its vault. Torel's owners launched their first outpost in the city a couple of years ago, high above the Douro River, filled with Pop Art flourishes and with a ceiling of silk flowers. This sequel is more neoclassical, a high atrium opening up the interior as if it were a doll's house. Its designers celebrate the Age of Discovery, the period of seafaring, map-pushing adventurers – the spirit of which inspired the gaping, sculpted heads lining the entrance. At the top is a library with coolie hats, books on Java and Rimbaud and the kind of wooden floor you want to skid across in socks. In the middle are bedrooms where jade green, rattan and velvet evoke Africa, Asia and the Americas; tiny strips of banana leaf lining the bathroom walls of one mezzanine space, a portrait of a woman smoking actual paintbrushes in another – one of many textured, mixed-media works by local artist Jorge Cuval. At the bottom is a bar and bistro with ceiling fans and little ceramic dishes for just about everything. This feels like a private house with drawing-room hush and broad horizons. It's just a short walk down to the river, where those voyages began, the reflected neon of the port houses trembling on the water. RICK JORDAN

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