

“...The result is a property that redefines what a heritage hotel in India can be, neither suffocatingly traditional nor drearily contemporary but something else entirely: a royal fantasy updated for the modern age, and one you get to share.”

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The SUJÁN Rajmahal Palace: A Jaipur Hotel Fit for a King

Written by Hanya Yanagihara · November 15, 2014



The semi-enclosed dining veranda at the SUJÁN Rajmahal Palace.

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A former royal guesthouse in the heart of Jaipur has been transformed into a one-of-a-kind fantasyland of color, wit, and whimsy.

The entryway to the [SUJÁN Rajmahal Palace](#) hotel in Jaipur is wallpapered. The pattern is a series of multicolored striped umbrellas, as bright and graphic as a beach towel, at the center of which is the Jaipur royal family's seal: a lion and a horse on their hind legs, under a stern but beneficent sun.

Then you walk into the drawing room. It's wallpapered too, this time in a pattern of stylized cypress trees, dusty green against cream, with a fuchsia-colored trim of peonies and diamonds. The chairs, which are velveteen and plush, are the same fuchsia, piped with indigo.

Then you walk into one of the 14 suites... and guess what. It too is wallpapered, this time in a seafoam shade that's not quite blue and not quite green, with a pattern of climbing roses in alternating hues of white and hot pink. This is the Jackie Kennedy Suite, named for its former guest, whose famous trip here in 1962 was documented in a blizzard of photographs.

As you walk through the rest of the hotel—its indoor restaurant, its enclosed veranda restaurant, its smoking lounge cum bar, up its marble staircase, wide and grand enough for an elephant to rumble—you count the different kinds of wallpapers, the various chandeliers. But eventually you give up, because there are too many. It looks like something Wes Anderson might have imagined had he been let loose in Mogul-era Jaipur: a celebration of Indian design at once whimsical and utterly sincere.

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Even for Jaipur, the SUJÁN Rajmahal Palace, which opens next month after a little more than a year's worth of renovations, is extravagant. And this is in a city known for its extravagance: In the eighteenth century, when the surrounding area (now known as Rajasthan) was ruled by royalty, Jaipur began its reign as the kingdom of jewelry. Today, it remains the lapidary capital of the world, with thousands of stones passing through its workshops to be cut and polished.

It was during these years that the Rajmahal was built. The royal family's main residence has always been the eighteenth-century City Palace, a peach-pink stucco confection in the center of the city, part of which is now a museum housing the family's portraits and weaponry. But in 1729, they added the Rajmahal, their second palace. In 1821, it transferred hands to the British, and in 1958 was returned to the family, who used it as a guesthouse for friends and visiting dignitaries (including Queen Elizabeth and Lord Mountbatten, who now have suites named in their honor) before converting it to a hotel in 1979.

And although the Rajmahal could have gone on as it was—a sleepy, shabbily genteel property, its ten splendid acres of grounds shielded from downtown Jaipur by high stone walls—a few years ago Princess Diya Kumari, whose 16-year-old son is the future maharaja, decided she wanted a change. She approached Jaisal Singh, a family friend and first-generation hotelier who owns SUJÁN, which has a small portfolio of luxurious tented camps in India and Africa.



The drawing room, with its plush velvet chairs.

The princess then asked Singh's friend and designer Adil Ahmad to reimagine Rajmahal. And reimagine it he did, from flatware to textiles to furniture to, yes, those wallpapers (there are 48 in all). Ahmad was also given full access to the City Palace's archives, which inspired his designs (many are riffs on traditional Mogul motifs and decorations), and to objects from the family's personal holdings, including paintings, Art Deco-era furniture, and silver polo trophies, which are scattered about the hotel's rooms and public spaces. The overall effect is respectful but irreverent, honoring the property's past without being imprisoned by it.

The result is a property that redefines what a heritage hotel in India can be, neither suffocatingly traditional nor drearily contemporary but something else entirely: a royal fantasy updated for the modern age, and one you get to share (91-11-4617-2700; [sujanluxury.com](#); doubles from \$330).