

Check-In

Greek-born Maria Vafiadis founded MKV Design in London in 2000. Her fantasy hotel stay sees her setting up camp with local tribesmen in the North American desert and sharing some of her own native traditions.

Name: Maria Vafiadis

Position/Company: Founder and Managing Director, MKV Design

Notable hotel projects: Hotel Schweizerhof, Bern; Hotel Metropol Palace, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Belgrade; Hotel Kempinski Corvinus, Budapest; The Romanos Luxury Collection and Westin, Costa Navarino; The Regent Esplanade Zagreb; Style Hotel Vienna; Nafplia Palace Hotel & Villas, Greece

www.mkvdesign.com



Where are we?

In the heart of one of America's great national parks, surrounded by a desert landscape as far as the eye can see.

How did you get here?

We drove in a Maserati GranCabrio through miles and miles of raw, untouched wilderness that slowly changed from mountain to forest and then desert.

Who's at the concierge desk?

The elderly Chief of the local Native American tribe. His wisdom would embrace everything I could ever ask and his instinctive kindness makes me feel as if I am home as soon as I arrive.

Is there anything you would like waiting for you in your room on arrival?

A refreshing herbal tea, the aroma of which fills the room.

Who are you sharing your room with?

My husband.

Describe the hotel building, your room and the view...

We are in a modern interpretation of a camp where the experience is about complete connection with the natural world. It is luxurious and this comes from beautifully crafted materials, little local details, the quality of the fabrics and fittings, and the views.

All the senses are engaged. The design itself is pared back and the architectural form of the buildings morphs into the landscape.

Everything is very discreet – no signage, no luggage trolleys, no reception desk; instead

a personal welcome on arrival and an immediate escort to my room, one of just twenty guestrooms scattered around the site. My room is simply decorated yet oozes luxury. A combination of polished concrete, American walnut and slate with tone-on-tone fabrics creates a comfortable and sophisticated ambience. It flows onto a large terrace with a fire pit where I sit to watch the sun set behind the prehistoric desert crags. The hotel has a large lounge which is like a library in a private home with oversized fireplaces and seating groups outside and in. The owner has thought of everything. There are walking sticks, rucksacks and umbrellas to stave off the sun and there are torches for when we walk back to our room at night. It makes such a difference!

Who designed it?

An architect, originally from the nearest city who has since travelled the world together with the granddaughter of the Native American Chief. She brings feminine touches and a narrative of ancient magic.

What's the restaurant / bar like?

The restaurant is homely with an open-plan kitchen, a wood-burning stove and a counter completely covered with fresh vegetables and herbs. To one side there is a wine cellar with the most amazing collection of wines from across the world.

Who are you dining with this evening?

Close family and friends who have come from around the world to celebrate a special occasion.

And what's on the menu?

I come from Greece so I would expect at least four courses!

Appetiser: A raw fish and seafood platter from Trattoria Aurora in Capri

Starter: Fresh pasta with crab cooked by Don Alfonso from Sorrento

Main: Kid roasted in wild herbs with vegetables, all extravagantly flown in for us from my family farm in Greece and prepared by my Mother

Dessert: We all have a sweet tooth so there are two desserts: Champagne Zabaglione, again prepared by Don Alfonso, and Chocolate Truffle cake from Sprungli in Zurich with a coulis of fresh berries

Post prandial: Chocolates from Patrick Roger.

Would you like something to drink with that? An aperitif of Ruinart Champagne followed by Chablis and Amarone Riserva Masi.

What music is on the iPod on your in-room docking station?

1. Classical opera to begin the evening
2. Followed by jazz
3. Then our favourite Greek music in the late evening hours

What's on the movie channel?

No idea.

And a book at bedtime?

Not tonight. We talk, argue, laugh and reflect until we collapse into our beds.

What's in the mini-bar for a night cap?

Ruinart Champagne.