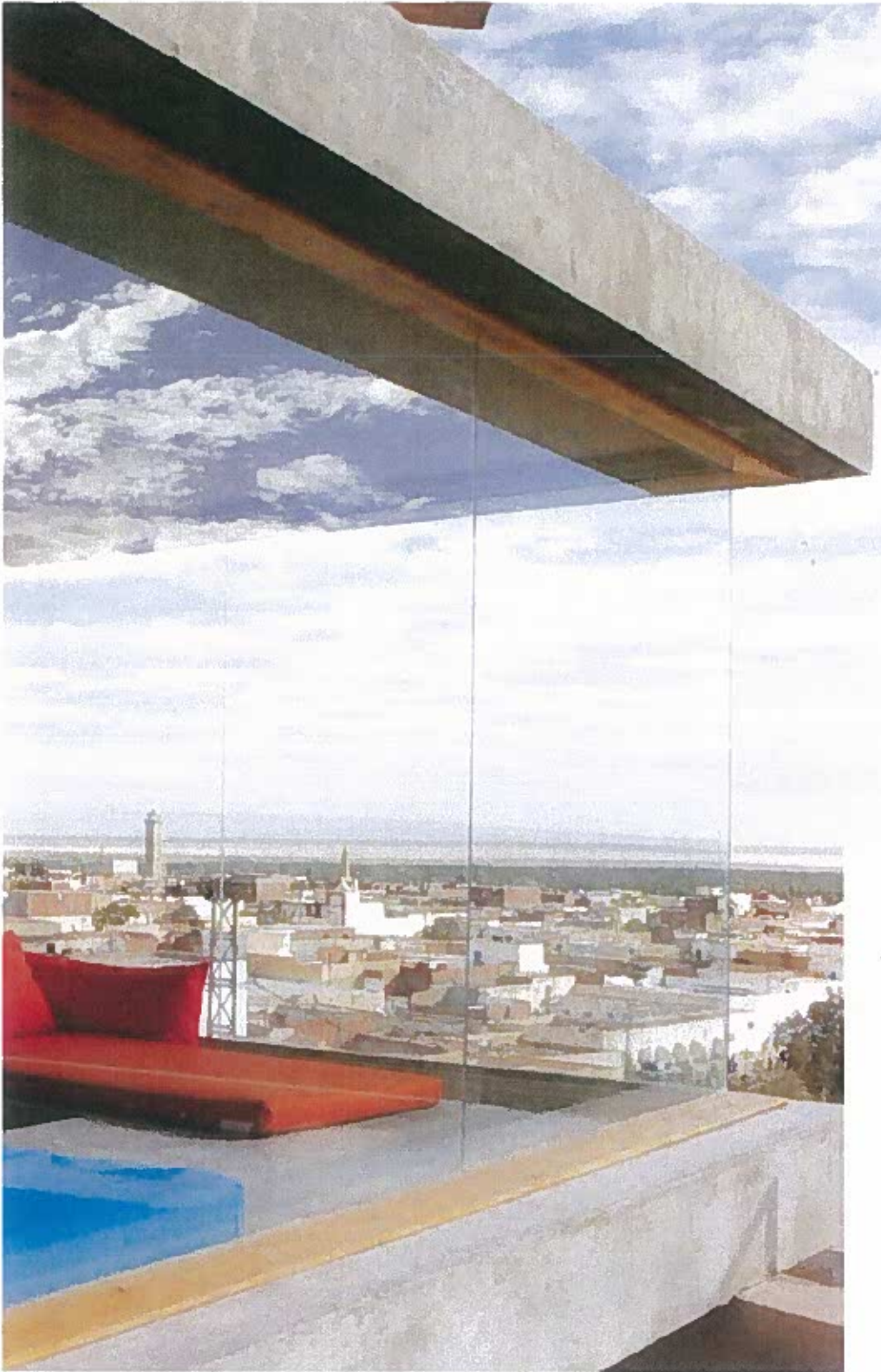


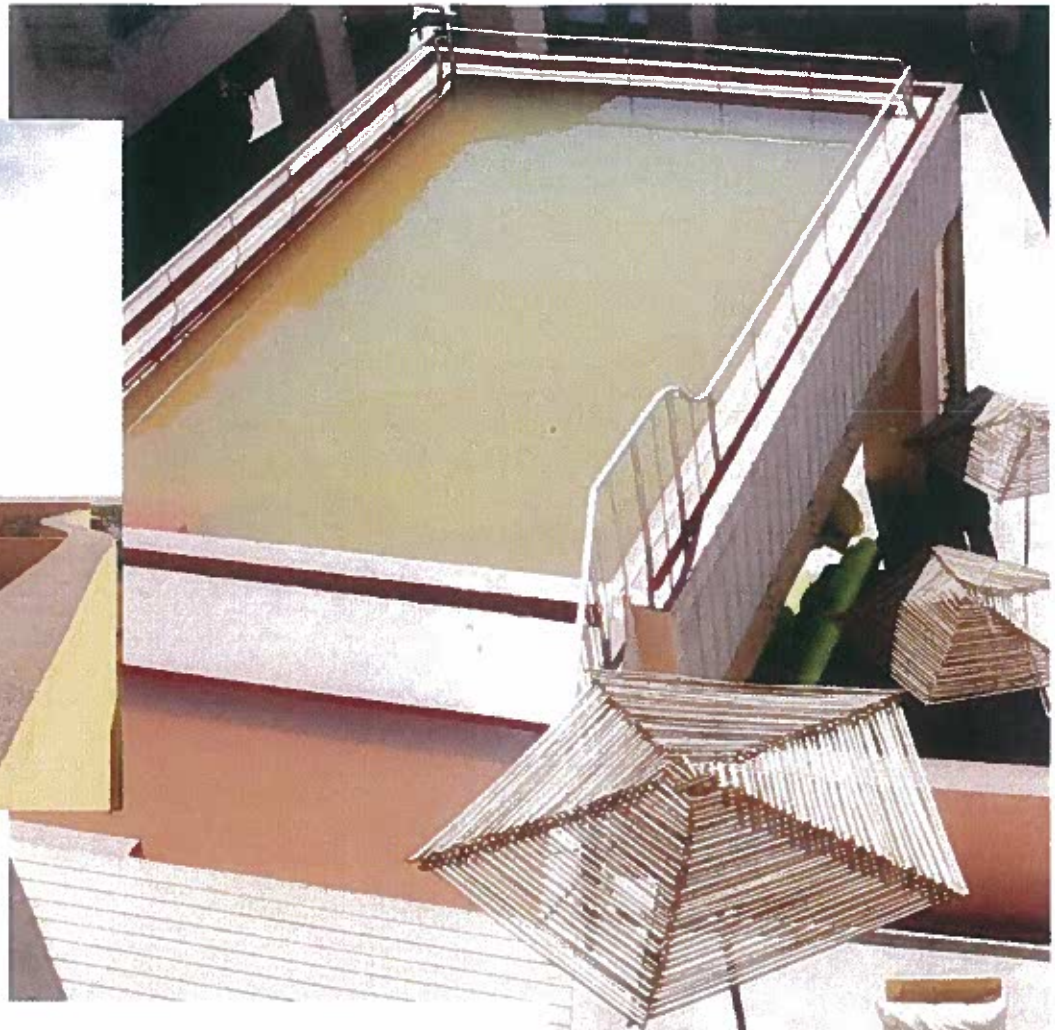
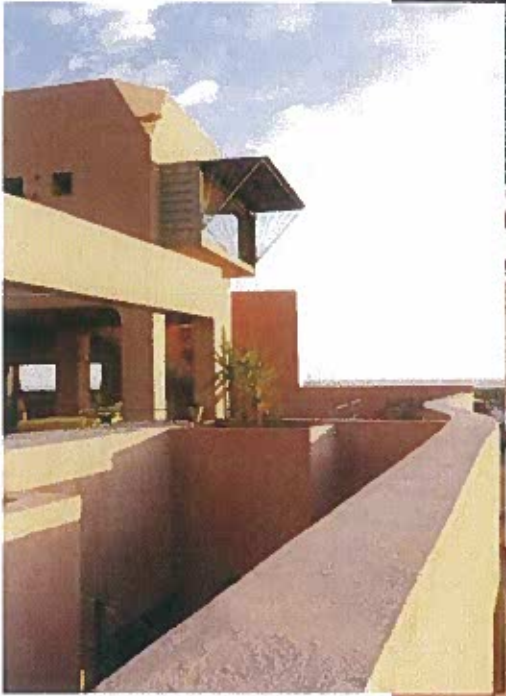
# DESERT ROSE



*French designer Matali Crasset's first architectural offering in the Tunisian desert combines local materials, sustainable processes and more than a hint of French elegance.*

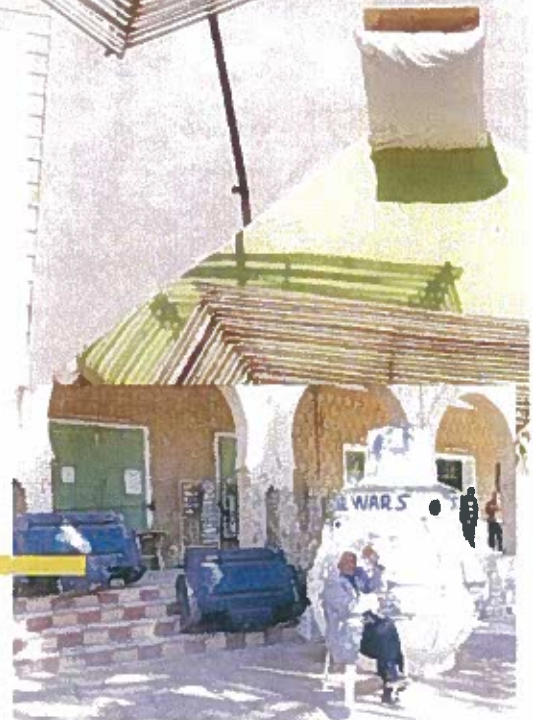
On the edge of the Sahara desert, where palm trees gather together in shady solace, designer Matali Crasset's first architectural venture rises like a citadel from the beige sand dunes.

Text By Chryselles D'Silva Dias  
Photographs Courtesy Jérôme Spriet



The Dar HI hotel is located in Nefta, an oasis town in Southern Tunisia close to the Algerian border. Nefta is only about three hours away from Paris, Nice or Milan, but it is isolated enough to be a real getaway. It is also a pilgrimage town, revered as the spiritual home of Sufism. Parts of the epic Star Wars movie were also filmed nearby and the sets are still available for a viewing for visitors.

The Dar HI is the brainchild of Philippe Chapelet, Patrick Elouarghi and Matali Crasset. Chapelet and Elouarghi own several other HI hotels including the ones in Nice and Paris.

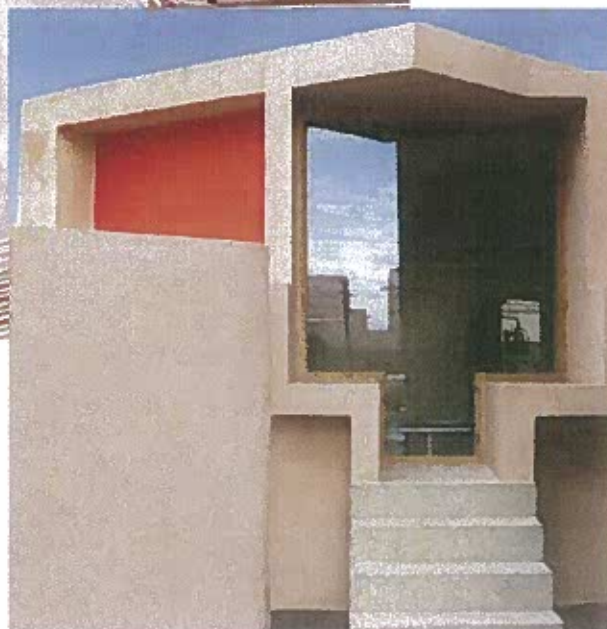




The collaborations with Crasset began in 2005 and her brief was to 'push the contemporary experience a bit further with Dar HI and evolve a new concept of hospitality and serenity.'

The hotel itself is a marvel of indigenous architecture. In order to develop a space true to the land, Crasset collaborated with Tunisian architect Mohamed Nasr on the hotel. Local artisans were consulted at every step. Crasset observed their construction methods and used the same traditional processes in the hotel. Materials for the project like the palm wood and clay bricks were sourced locally. Because of its marked departure from popular construction and tourism norms in Tunisia, the Dar HI is now becoming a model for an environmentally sustainable tourism in the country.

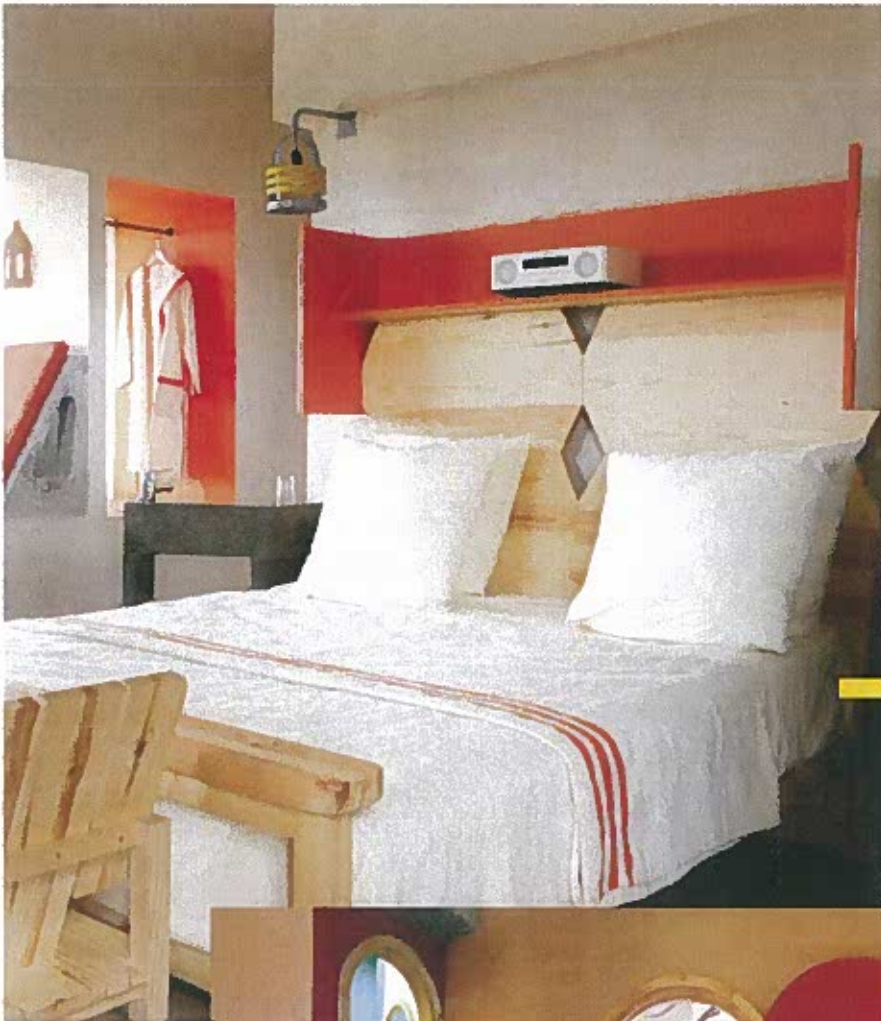
Dar HI is built as a village with a traditional boundary wall around it. The wall follows the movement of the land; its geography determines the site of construction.



From the parking area, Dar HI is approached by foot, as you would do in a house. At the entrance, guests take off their shoes and wear traditional Tunisian slippers called 'babouches'. This is part of the 'feeling at home' experience that Dar HI is striving to create.

The hotel has private and public spaces including a thermal pool, spa, reading area and a restaurant. Guests are free to live as they wish, in solitude or seeking the company of other visitors. The houses are designed to ensure the privacy of the reticent travellers.





Crasset built three different kinds of houses - pilotis (elevated pill houses), troglodytes and the dunes at sand level.

The pilotis have exceptional views - some look out over the expanse of the old Chott-El-Djerid salted lake, others touch the horizon and the rest have a view over the lush green oasis below. The houses on higher ground are structured around a bow window. The rooms are simple - a little table for writing or snacking perched in a corner, a large bed placed next to the windows and a shower and toilet.



The troglodytes are three areas built with traditional clay bricks from Nefta. These spaces are completely independent residences but linked together with a circular terrace. A fountain and an oven encourage communal gatherings here.

At sand level are the Dunes. To experience living in the desert, the dunes provide a simple yet comfortable accommodation. Lots of natural light and views over the date grove are its most striking features.

Sun lounges and cane windows and umbrellas provide shade. With the elegant and chic furniture in wood and concrete designed by Crasset herself.

The 24-hour restaurant kitchen is planned like a laboratory. Glass walls give diners a peek into the bustle of the place. Local cooks trained by world-renowned chefs create traditional Tunisian cuisine with a hint of international flavour. Organic produce sourced locally forms the mainstay of the menu. No imported stuff here.





*With an emphasis on good living, relaxation and recuperation at a minimal cost to the local environment, Dar HI is a magical site in the desert - a citadel to wellbeing.*

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