

LOVELY AMONG THE RUINS

In Valencia, Francesc Rifé Studio carves out a magnificently minimalist restaurant within the remains of the city's medieval walls

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Valencia is a booming city with a strong design tradition: Many of the best Spanish studios are located here, while the excellence of local craftsmanship is recognized internationally. At the same time, the city has a long and rich history and a beautiful historic centre: the Barrio del Carmen, where buildings that date back to the 13th and 14th centuries still stand. Today the district is a charming and lively neighbourhood situated along the footprint of Valencia's medieval Arabic wall, traces of which can be found all over the area. Restaurante Sucedé, a contemporary Michelin-starred eatery designed by Barcelona-based Francesc Rifé Studio, is among the latest projects to be woven into this tapestry, a densely layered milieu that it settles into both sensitively and with great aplomb.

The 412-square-metre restaurant is located under a hotel also designed by Rifé, but has an independent entrance and a personality of its own. An interior and industrial designer by training, Rifé aimed to communicate the heritage of Sucedé's location through the disposition of the space, embracing the remains of the wall and incorporating elements that reference the region's illustrious ceramic-making tradition.

To that end, the partially underground space has been split into two levels (with only three discreet steps separating them) and organized through a consistent yet subtle tone of green (a colour found in

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many of the ceramics made in Valencia) that changes in vibrancy and depth as visitors progress through Sucedé.

The shifting greens also lend an air of serenity to the restaurant, into which natural light pours via a glass ceiling. The walls, however, have been left raw, as they were found, in order to highlight their age, beauty and uniqueness to the site.

As both a contrast and a complement to the walls, major elements such as the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: At Sucedé, the semi-underground restaurant designed by Francesc Rifé Studio in Valencia, light floods into the reception area through a glass ceiling accoutred with oak slats. Three steps separate the two main sections of the space, configured around the remnants of the city's old Arabic wall. Tiles excavated during construction now form wall art. A Peak lamp by Milan Iluminación provides romantic spot lighting.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A reflective ceiling visually extends the height of the wall, which was left raw. Wishbone chairs by Carl Hansen & Søn are used throughout the space. Milan Iluminación's Half lamps float over an area framed by a Gothic arch. Various shades of green inform the colour scheme.

restaurant's boxy reception counter and the wood slats that run across the skylight were crafted out of black-stained oak. A kind of wall sculpture hanging near the entrance is reflective of the minimalist decorative flourishes at Sucedé: It's fashioned out of small pieces of ceramic tile dating from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, shards unearthed by the crews who excavated the site. (Perhaps the most exciting discovery made during the building's construction: a mosaic from the 2nd century BCE, when the Romans occupied Valencia. It has been incorporated into the lobby of the hotel above.)

One of the few cozy exceptions amid all of Rifé's largely stark choices is the furniture: A couple of the designer's uphol-

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stered Easy armchairs for Blasco&Vila adorn a welcoming nook, while round wood-topped tables paired with Carl Hansen & Søn's Wishbone chairs add another degree of warmth. According to Rifé, the tables and chairs have been positioned mostly along the periphery of the space both to ensure comfortable acoustics and to provide Sucedé's chef, Miguel Ángel Mayor, with a central position from which to connect with his guests.

At Sucedé, the dining experience is a two-pronged affair. Upon entry, guests are seated at tables facing a counter where the first part of their meal is prepared. The second installment is served in the dining room, where Mayor choreographs the rest of the experience. A glass opening on one side of the room allows diners to spy on what's happening in the kitchen. It's cutting-edge culinary theatre performed on a truly historic stage.

"Design done through the eyes of history is the most honest form of design," says Rifé. If that's the case, it doesn't get more real or more down to earth than Sucedé. **AZ** rife-design.com, sucedé.com