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SPAIN

THE SERRAS HOTEL, BARCELONA

Designer Eva Martínez went all out for New York loft-style appeal here, with soaring ceilings, huge plate-glass windows and solid wood floors, while also working with traditional elements of Catalan design such as a monochromatic riff on the Modernisme hydraulic tiles that line so many Barcelona apartments. Wedged between the narrow lanes of the Barri Gòtic and the glitzy, newly revived Port Vell, the building itself was conceived by 19th-century architect Francesc Daniel Molina (he also created the city's Plaça Reial) and Picasso is thought to have had his first studio here. The hotel is seriously comfortable with plenty of unexpected treats, including Le 9, a classy little nook tucked into a mezzanine floor above the lobby where Ruben Ubric mixes killer classic Martinis and Ibiza DJs gently jazz up the tunes. The bedrooms all have gorgeous Art Deco-inspired marble bathrooms with top-lit rain showers that fool you into thinking you're bathing in sunlight. Star chef Marc Gascons heads Informal, a lively restaurant showcasing updated Catalan classics such as artichokes with truffles and boat-fresh fish cooked over coconut coals, as well as a mean tortilla at breakfast. Up on the roof terrace there's an outdoor fire for the cooler months and a pool with views for a summer splash.

FLASH POINT For somewhere relaxed, sexy and stylish without being self-consciously cool, this place is spot-on. +34 93 169 1868; www.hoteltheserrasbarcelona.com. Doubles from about £160