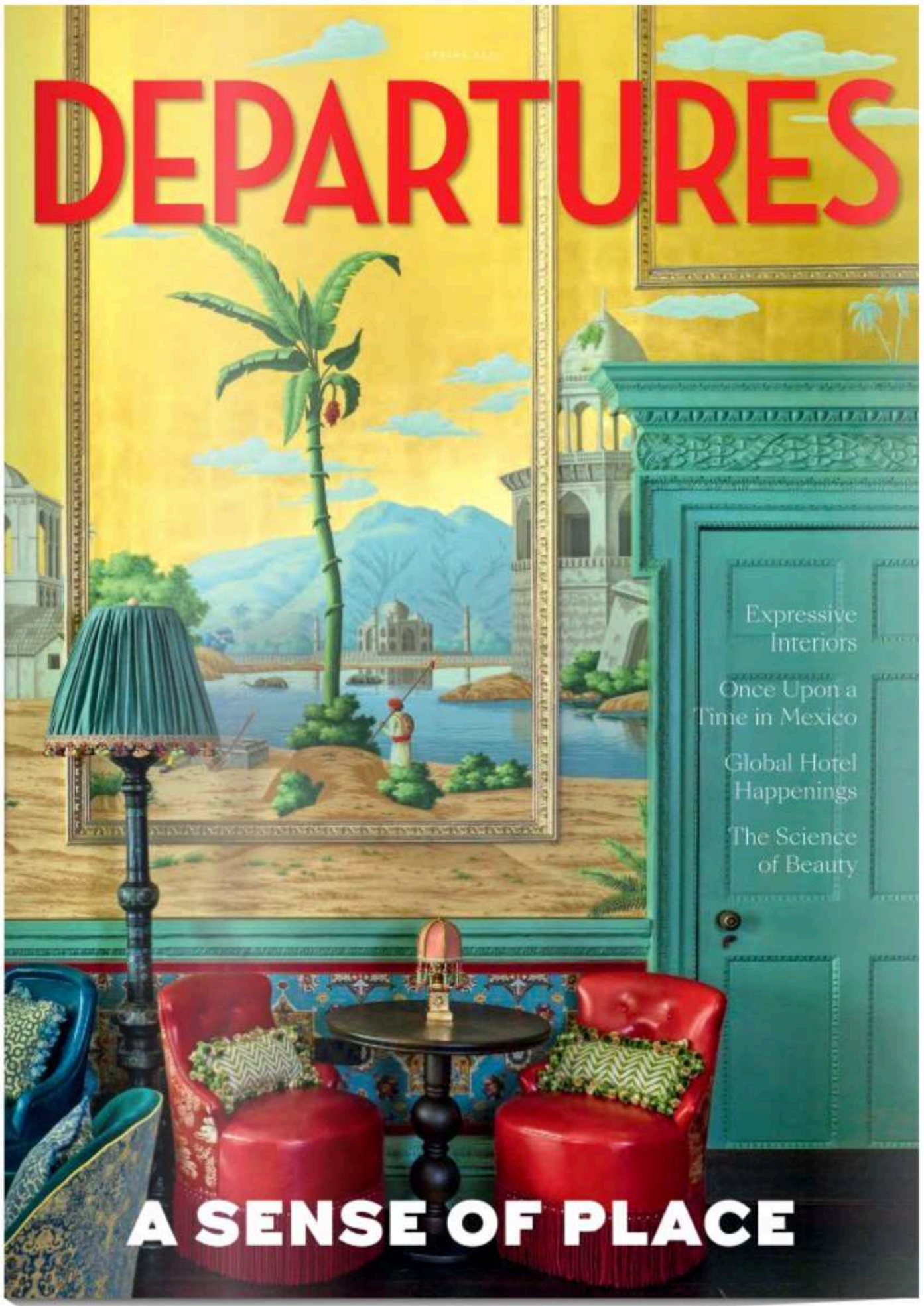


DEPARTURES



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of Beauty

A SENSE OF PLACE



The Place To Be

Owner Carlo Babini Merlo and general manager Claudio Meli discuss their new Florence hotel, The Place Firenze.

How did you make JK Place an instant classic – and a new model of Italian hospitality – in 2003?

CB: We acquired JK Place just three months after its doors opened, having fallen in love with the design concept, the ambience, and the level of service and detail, the kind that only a very small structure can give. What most impressed me, however, was how it felt like you were entering the Florentine house of a well-travelled host – and the credit for this goes entirely to Claudio Meli: he's the smith who forged a new model of hospitality.

What is your concept for The Place Firenze?

CM: The Place Firenze is a natural evolution of our close relationship with Florence and Tuscany, and our mission to share transformative connections where others are just selling rooms. We're going to bring this up a few notches so that The Place Firenze becomes a kind of clubhouse, a portal on Florence, its people, personalities, private homes, craftsmanship – and I'm not talking about pre-packaged "experiences" but real encounters that are tailored to our guests' passions and interests. The Place Firenze is your backstage pass to a Florence very few outsiders get to see, a contemporary city with a Renaissance soul, where an aristocrat with a vast wine estate and an artisanal shoemaker working in a tiny bottega are both part of the same proud tradition – and both speak with the same Florentine accent!

How do you hope guests will remember their stay?

CM: Alongside that great feeling of having found their home in Florence, we will add to the welcome a sprinkle of eccentricity, a pinch of surprise and a giant serving of love for this beautiful land. theplacefirenze.com

– As told to Thomas Midulla