

TALENT POOL

Renovated with a warm, homely atmosphere in mind, The Agora Hotel in Lefkara has quickly become a meeting point for talented locals and cultured tourists. The hope is that this new hub will draw attention to a village full of artisans who are keeping Cypriot craft traditions alive.

Photographer — Marco Arguello
Writer — Natalie Theodosi



1



“As soon as I started cycling around and visiting little villages, I could see the sense of warmth and hospitality that Cypriots have”



2

(Eng’s partner in business and life) recently completed a yoga-teaching course and designed an airy yoga studio. “There’s so much tradition here and the architecture is so different,” says Eng, pointing to the village’s stone-built houses.

The duo stayed true to those architectural traditions when reimagining The Agora Hotel, which has kept its original stone façade, arched doorways and outdoor courtyard. Novel then sprinkled a mix of mid-century modern furniture, solid oak floors – so that you can step out of bed and onto a warm, cosy surface – and sorbet-hued tiles with a storied, lived-in feel. “It should feel like visiting a well-travelled friend,” says Green Novel, who sourced pieces from Cypriot carpenters, antique markets in Athens, Moroccan craftsmen and Scandinavian furniture brands.

The couple’s home in Lefkara was a key reference point for the atmosphere that they wanted to create in the hotel. It’s a stone’s throw away, features the same elegant interiors and has an open-door policy. “We feel so safe here,” says Green Novel. “We don’t need to be scared when our daughter runs out onto the street; the whole village knows her name. Living in this small community is magical, almost like being in a movie.”

The locals have welcomed the young couple with open arms and are keen to see how The Agora Hotel can breathe new life into Lefkara. “This opening is great news for the entire village,” says Michalis Christou, one of the village’s oldest silversmiths who,

It was a late summer bike ride that planted the seed for Haakon Aleksander Eng’s hotel venture in the village of Lefkara, at the foot of the Troodos mountains on Cyprus’s southern flank. “As soon as I started cycling around and visiting little villages, I could see what this island really was,” says the Danish-born entrepreneur, who recalls his trip to Cyprus from New York to attend a friend’s wedding in 2015. “[I encountered] grandmothers who invited me in and offered me a piece of homemade cake – and that sense of warmth and hospitality that Cypriots have.”

The discovery of a forlorn, derelict yet beautiful building that had been converted into a hotel on Lefkara’s old *agora* (market-place) inspired him to adopt the island as a permanent home. Today, The Agora Hotel is an elegant 18-room establishment and place where both locals and tourists convene to discover the unique culture of Lefkara through a modern-day lens, from its craft to its open-hearted hospitality.

Here, cycle tours are on offer and a cosy New York-style bar serves sharp cocktails. Interior designer Emilie Green Novel



4

- 1. The Agora Hotel’s pool and main gathering spot
- 2. The hotel’s interiors were designed to resemble the home of a ‘well-travelled friend’
- 3. New owners Haakon Aleksander Eng and Emilie Green Novel
- 4. Drinks are served in the New York-style bar



2



3



1



4



6



5

“This is what Cyprus has to represent. We need to move past the clichéd perceptions of the all-inclusive beach resort”

intricate patterns and techniques may continue: the village’s craft school enrolls about a dozen new students a year. Young fashion labels such as Tradition Now by Cypriot art director Christina Socratous are using embroidery on contemporary clothing, like the cotton tunics and chic kaftans that soon will be available to purchase in The Agora Hotel’s boutique. “This is what Cyprus has to represent,” says Eng, referring to the wealth of entrepreneurial spirit, craft and tradition that the island has to offer. “We need to move past the clichéd perceptions of the all-inclusive beach resort.”

While many guests are happy sipping drinks by the pool, the couple encourage them to follow the roads less travelled in Cyprus. A short drive from Lefkara lie some of the island’s most scenic spots, including Kourion beach and ancient amphitheatre. It’s worth braving the heat and climbing the steep steps to admire both the architecture and the views, before a cool dip in the sea followed by a freshly-made lemonade – a local speciality – from the nearby beach stand. Continue a little further and you’ll discover Petra tou Romiou, a magical cove that’s known as the birthplace of Aphrodite. “I wonder if the legend is true and swimming here will keep me young and beautiful forever?” says one visitor before kicking off across the clear blue water. As the sun dips in the sky and golden light bathes the scene, there’s certainly no harm in trying. — K theagorahotel.com

aged 13, started training for more than a decade before opening his own shop selling jewellery and handmade objects. Next door, his wife, Nina, sells embroidered tablecloths and home decorations. She’s one of a handful of women with the skills and patience to still practise the art of hand embroidery that Lefkara is known for. One tablecloth can take up to a year to make, in between housework and childcare. “Embroidery has been ingrained in my life since I was a teenager,” she says. “It’s second nature to me.”

You can spot the local artisans sewing on their doorsteps in the village’s snaking, cobbled streets. Though the silver and lace handicrafts have been a dwindling trade in recent years, there are signs that these

1. One of the village’s oldest artisans with her traditional ‘lefkaritika’ hand-embroidered creations
2. Petra tou Romiou cove
3. Fresh coffee is always at the ready at Eng and Green Novel’s Lefkara home
4. The Agora Hotel bar welcomes locals and visitors
5. Michalis Christou, a skilled silversmith
6. Quiet corner in The Agora Hotel’s lounge