

HOTEL REVIEW: ICARO HOTEL, SOUTH TYROL, ITALY

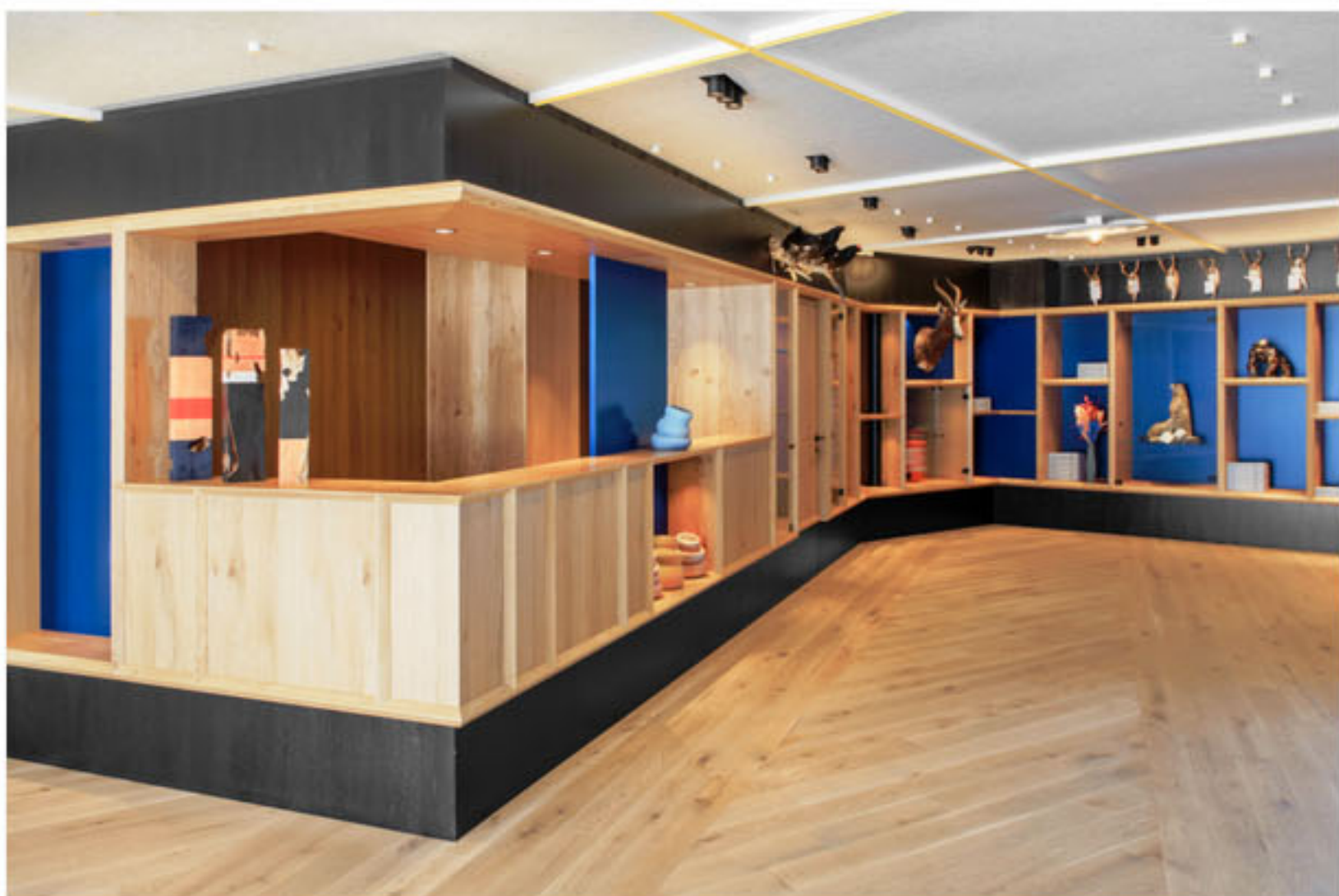
03/10/2022 by **Andy Mossack**.



ANDY MOSSACK FINDS LUXURY AND NATURE BALANCED PERFECTLY AT THIS DESIGN HOTEL IN THE DOLOMITES, 1,900 METRES ABOVE SEA LEVEL.

Alpe di Siusi is a very special place. High up on *Seiser Alm*, a Dolomite plateau that's the largest high-altitude Alpine meadow in Europe, it's blissfully quiet, with just the occasional clanking of cowbells from a local herd. Up here vehicle traffic is banned, save for hotel guests issued with a specific permit. The only traffic you'll find around these parts are hikers strolling the rolling hills and mountain trails exploring this protected nature reserve.

This is of course Italy, and just a 30-minute drive to Bolzano, but you could be forgiven for thinking you've dropped into a parallel universe. Signposts are in both Italian and German, and Italians are speaking German while Germans might also speak Italian. Welcome to South Tyrol.



The ICARO hotel has been a feature of the landscape here for generations, but perhaps not quite as grand as it is today. Owner Angelica Sattler is the third-generation family member at the helm since 1937 when her grandmother worked here as a housekeeper. Back then it was a simple *refugio*, unrecognizable from its current visage, but nevertheless, an ever-present and welcomed part of this Alpine plateau community.

Today's version is a climate neutral, sustainable, sleek and stylish wooded retreat with contemporary art and design at its beating heart and rest and relaxation in its DNA. Not that surprising when you discover Angelica's husband is modern artist Hubert Kostner, who takes the art theme a step further by inviting international artists to the ICARO to exhibit their work.



There's a big clue as to what awaits you when you read the message waiting in your room, part of which reads "Welcome to the Icaro. Now you're here switch into more comfortable shoes and switch your mind off. Wander through the geometrical games of a reimagined architecture. Explore the art on and within the walls. From the pool plunge into calmness. From the bed dream of flying..."

There's thought and passion in every detail here, a culmination of the efforts of local craftsmen using larch wood for the exteriors and spruce oak and elm on the interiors. Each of its guestroom beds faces the jagged peaks of the nearby Schlern mountain range, the floor-to-ceiling glass framing giant slabs of UNESCO-protected Dolomite rock, permanently sculpted by nature. An awe-inspiring sight to wake up with each morning and, perhaps it does feel like flying!



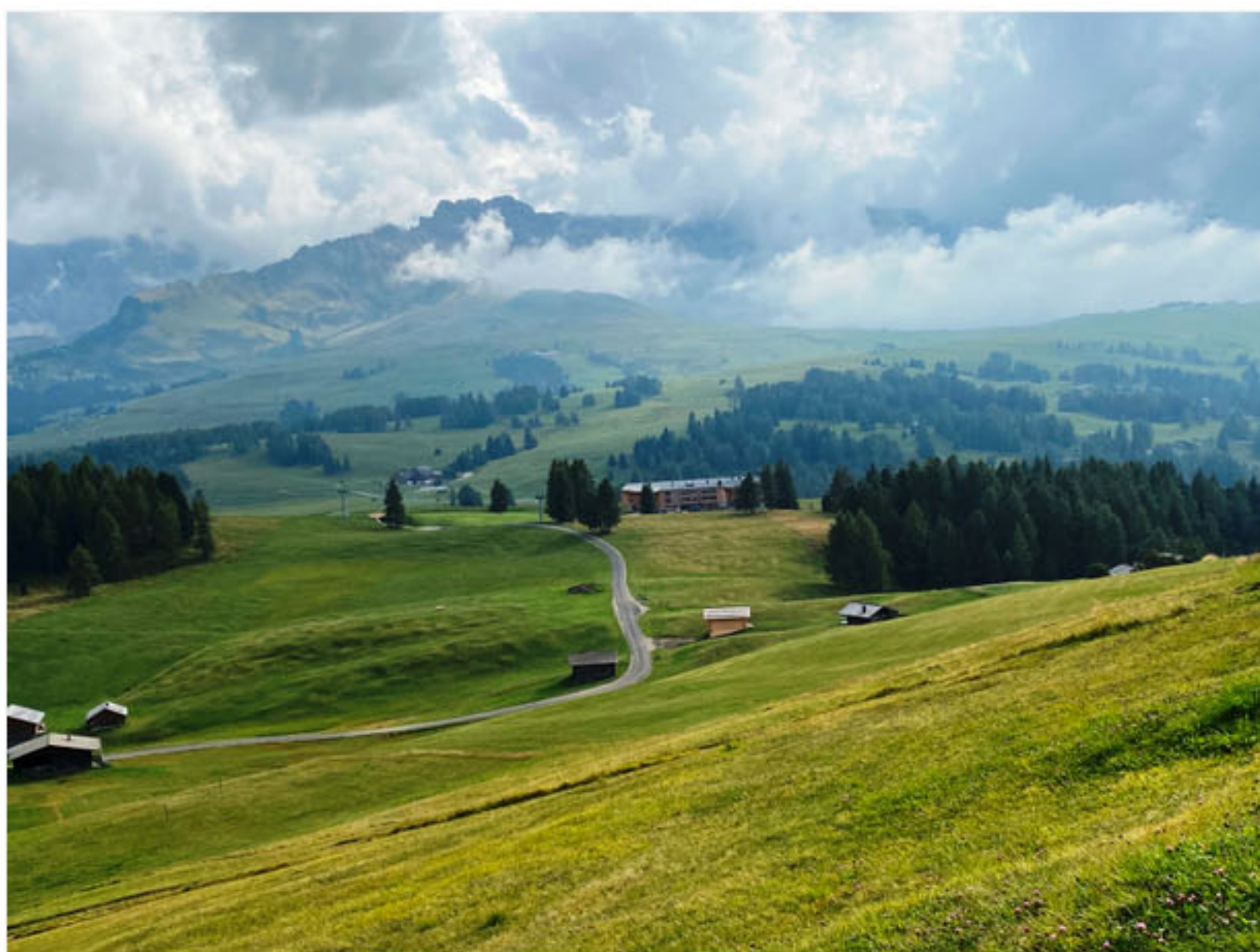
Each of the twenty-nine individually designed rooms and suites has a name befitting its unique interior. The newest rooms, Telescope and Monocular are a perfect example, shaped as stated. A tote bag for spa towels is a nice touch as is the rucksack for guests to use, containing a useful hiking trail map. Mountain bikes are also available free of charge as are guided tours four times a week. Fluffy robes have clothes pegs pinned to them inscribed with the room name so they can be reclaimed easily down in the spa.

Talking of which, a sizeable indoor pool awaits with submerged massage jets lining the pool sides. A swim-out hatch leads to a smaller but hotter outdoor version for hardy types who might wallow away time among jacuzzi-style bubbles. A bio sauna resides in a room leading off the pool together with steam room, infrared cabin and relaxation room. Although it's early September now, I can see this being the perfect *apres-ski* haven during the winter season.



Whilst contemporary design is the visual stimulus, the sense of family here is just as important. It is family-owned and run after all, and guests are made to feel they are in a family home when it comes to the food offering. The three-course Tyrolean-inspired dinner has multiple choices, yet guests are urged to indulge; ask for more if they enjoy a particular dish or go for the other choices if they want to taste them all. A large wooden table sits directly outside the kitchen adorned with salads and cold cuts at dinner and all kinds of freshly baked goodies at breakfast.

I found it particularly comforting to know that a long hike would be rewarded with a warm welcome back, and a home-cooked dinner to enjoy.



So, with our hotel-provided rucksack filled with snacks, and some borrowed walking poles, we take a round-trip hike around the high plateau nature reserve, along well-trodden paths up and around the reserve to the ski lift and a well-earned drink at the Monsouc Bar before returning to the ICARO.

The Sattler family should be applauded for providing warm and inviting hospitality for over 60 years, but the new version that is ICARO adds a whole new level of designer chic to the familiar face on the plateau. I'm pretty sure the locals will agree it was well worth the wait.

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Rooms start from €120 pp per night (depending on season) including breakfast and a four-course dinner. Most stays are for a minimum of two nights.