

Harper's BAZAAR

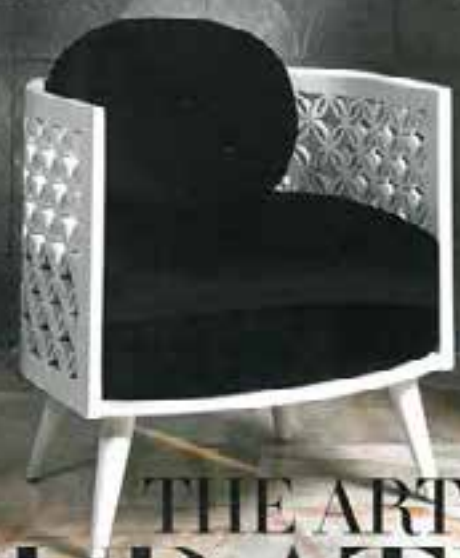
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Weekend whirl O Monot Hotel, Beirut

JULIA MAILE discovers a charming village atmosphere in the heart of bustling Beirut



Every metropolitan city seems to have one; a neighbourhood with a village feel, where designers, artists and foodies congregate, offering an irresistible mix of boutique, pop-up restaurants and art installations all within an easy walk of each other. In London, it's Marylebone; despite being in the thick of the action, it still retains a cosy vibe with independent restaurants and shops such as Chiltern House and La Fromagerie drawing us back time and again. In Paris, we can lose hours strolling around Le Marais, exploring the area's many vintage boutiques and concept zones.

And as we discovered on our recent weekend jaunt to Lebanon, Beirut has such a neighbourhood of its own. Situated in the classic Achrafieh, Soif Village shares the same vibe as Marylebone and Le Marais, with design lovers and foodies staking claim to the pedestrianised alleys.

Eager to explore the area, we took into the city's hottest new boutique hotel, O Monot. Located a short five-minute walk from the village on the distinctly French-flavoured Mount Sannayeh, the independent property opened in 2014 after being brought up-to-date minute with a sensational renovation. The result is 41 superbly styled rooms and suites. Don't expect any over-the-top Middle Eastern bling here; instead of the usual trappings of marble, the look is chic and understated. The rooms are light and airy, with grey



and white furniture complemented by bold art work and mood lighting. The chic bathroom features a walk-in power shower and Jacuzzi separated from the bedroom by a glass wall with an electronic blind.

After devouring the welcome plate of macarons and truffles we find in our room on arrival, we head up to the hotel's best kept secret; its rooftop. Featuring stunning views of the sea and Beirut skyline, it's better to a hot private dining cabaret and swimming pool. We spend a lazy couple of hours chilling outside, before dining afterwards on a light lunch of pan-fried salmon with asparagus from the short list menu.

Then it's time for a stroll around the cobbled streets of Soif Village. The Quartier des Arts is home to more than 30 boutiques and restaurants, and highlights include *Basma* (Lebanese cover star Nada Elahi's furniture gallery and Lebanese vintage store), which stocks hand-knotted tapestries and colourful vintage home accessories that owner Nadine Makrabi collects during her travels.

Bumbling onwards take us to upscale *Saif* restaurant *GH*, which is the latest creation from renowned restaurateur, Marwan Kayroun. Designed by architect Islem Barhouh, the restored historic building has been given an elegant makeover including an impressive vintage chair installation dominating the foyer, and lighting by PSLAB. We perch at the bar and are instantly transfixed by the famed Lebanese hospitality, with local musicians giving us tips on the hottest new nightlife spots. Offering a fusion of Mediterranean, Asian and Peruvian flavours, we dine on over-sized smoked salmon bilbius, sesame-crusted goats cheese medallions and Greek quinoa salad, all made with the freshest ingredients.

On the advice of our new Lebanese friends, we head to nearby Harry's Bar, where the newly opened outpost of the legendary Venetian bar serves classic cocktails and a decadent Italian menu in lush surroundings. Strolling back to O Monot later in the evening, we're impressed that despite its hipster vibe, Soif Village certainly packs a powerful punch. *From Dhs 1,000 per night. Omonot.com*



FROM TOP: THE GRAND HOTEL AT O MONOT HOTEL; THE ROOFTOP WITH SWIMMING POOL, PRIVATE DINE-UP AND GRILLS (PHOTO: PRODUCTION BY ELO); THE LIVING OF G&H