



Villa Nubia, one of the new additions to the hotel, is furnished with antique furniture and tiles and features hand-painted frescoes. Opposite page: the private villas also have tranquil pools

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PARADISE FOUND

Part palace, part eco retreat, the serene Al Moudira hotel is one of Egypt's best-kept secrets. Its new expansion project promises many more reasons to visit



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any years ago, Italian-Lebanese tastemaker Zeina Aboukheir was staying in a small guest house on the Mediterranean coast. It was the start of a dream: to create a hotel of her own with “the same beauty, the same atmosphere, where people would feel like guests in a private home”. Eventually, she found the ideal spot in Egypt, while travelling down the Nile on a traditional felucca boat. On the advice of local farmers, she planted date seeds on her plot of land on the outskirts of Luxor, hoping to transform it into a desert paradise.

Aboukheir gathered round her a network of artisans, farmers and gardeners, and with the help of Egyptian architects Olivier Sednaoui and Dina Abou Alia and Swiss landscape designer Tobias Bucher, built a sustainable hotel that’s part palace, part intimate home-from-home, surrounded by rambling gardens of jasmine, hibiscus and palm trees. Opened in 2001, Al Moudira was an immediate success – thanks, in part, to the community’s enthusiastic embrace of the project. “The local people collaborated on the building and many of them still work here, as chefs, gardeners and so on,” says Aboukheir. The Arabic-style architecture, with its sandy-hued domes and *mashrabiya*-inspired details, is like a village in miniature, she adds; arranged around courtyards and tinkling fountains, it’s a source of much local pride.

Today, Al Moudira is entering a new chapter. It’s the first Egyptian hotel to become a member of the renowned Relais & Chateaux group, whose mission to preserve local traditions, crafts and culinary skills aligns closely with its own. A major expansion project has seen six new private villas added to the property – one of which, Villa Zeina, was Aboukheir’s home for 22 years, and boasts the hand-painted frescoes that make so many of the hotel’s rooms charmingly unique. Constructed using locally made terracotta and sandstone bricks, and designed in the same style as the original buildings, the villas blend seamlessly into their surroundings. Each one



From top: Al Moudira’s Arabic-style architecture feels centuries old, and is arranged around a series of courtyards; antique doors are among the many old building

materials reused in the hotel. Opposite, page, clockwise from top: one of the hotel’s luxury suites; a bathroom in Villa Nubia; the main pool, surrounded by palm trees



Clockwise from far left: gardens are a vital part of the Al Moudira experience, growing fruit and vegetables as well as flowers; many local families work at Al Moudira, which is a source of much community pride

is different, but all feature vintage furniture, the hotel's signature Egyptian cotton bedding (by Cairo brand Malaika), and antique textiles unearthed by Aboukheir on her travels. "When the hotel was first built, I collected all the furniture myself, mostly in Cairo and Alexandria," she remembers. "It took a long time, and a lot of storage space. Over the past two years, we've bought a large quantity of additional pieces, and have reused many old, local materials, including marble, tiles, doors and wooden elements."

More land has also been bought, allowing expansion of the sustainable farming practices that spurred Aboukheir's vision from the start. Orchards, vegetable gardens and olive groves are cultivated in the grounds, and the hotel has always produced much of what it needs for its restaurants: eggs, butter, milk, wheat and meat all come from its own land.

"Al Moudira is a Nubian village. It is the place of my dreams, and as you know, dreams have no time or place. That's why when you come here, you feel transported"



Now, new crops can be sown, and solar panels have been installed. "Our aim is to be self-sufficient in food and energy by 2027," says Aboukheir.

A stay here is imbued with all the romance of Aboukheir's transformative journey down the Nile. Echoing the river's gentle pace, this a refuge where life slows down, and guests can either relax in the bougainvillea-shaded courtyard, or experience Middle Eastern dining opulence in the Ottoman Hall restaurant (inspired by Ottoman palaces) and the new Khan Al Moudira café (furnished with antiques from Cairo's old coffee houses). They can also recreate Aboukheir's past voyage with a sunset felucca trip. "Al Moudira is a Nubian village; its essence is nature, the repurposing of materials, and local design," Aboukheir reflects. "It's the place of my dreams, and as you know, dreams have no time or place. That's why when you come here, you feel transported." [moudira.com](https://www.moudira.com)

Pigeon towers on the Al Moudira farm – which includes orchards and olive groves – where produce is grown for the hotel's restaurants





Echoing the gentle pace of the Nile, this a refuge where life slows down. Guests can relax in the bougainvillea-shaded courtyard or the opulent Ottoman Hall



Al Moudira's Eastern Bar, where classic cocktails are served against a soundtrack of jazz and blues music that harks back to the 1930s. Opposite page: local materials and time-honoured techniques create a feeling of authenticity