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Riad and Wonderful

Although billed as “The Secret”, this revamped Moroccan mansion—or *riad*—has got everyone talking

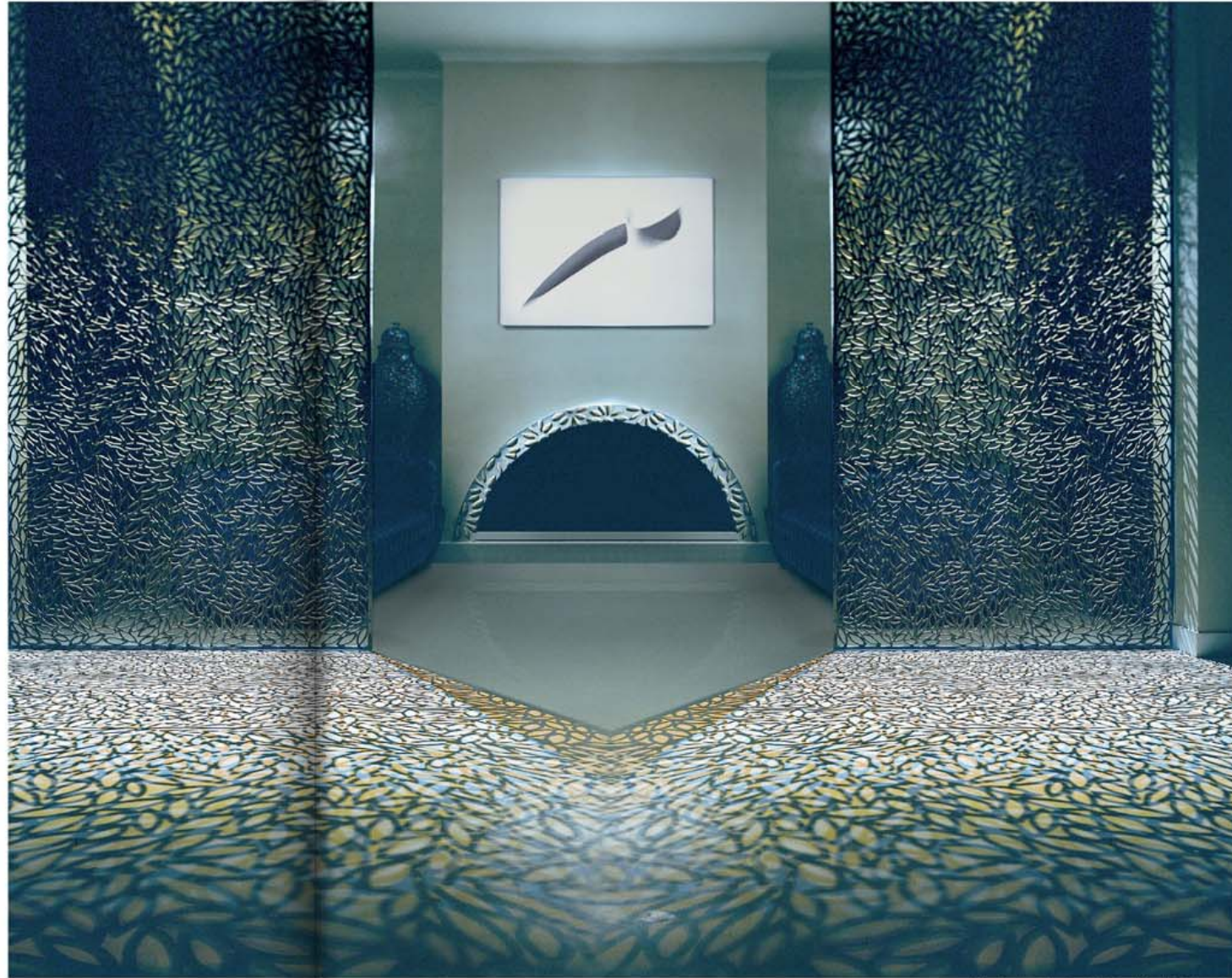
There is one secret that has set many in Marrakech talking. It is not some latter-day scandal or mystical occurrence that has rocked Moroccan architectural circles. Rather it is a meticulously refurbished and updated *riad*—a traditional Moroccan style palace with an indoor garden—that has been ubiquitously dubbed “The Secret”.

This extensively refurbished Moroccan marvel harks back to the historic *riad*-style palaces of the seventh century. These multi-storey buildings are distinguished by sophisticated inner courtyards and magnificent gardens and first flourished at the time of the great Idrisid Dynasty of the North African Maghreb. Across this swath of Morocco, original *riads* are making a comeback after decades, if not centuries, of dilapidation, with many providing antique homes for luxury hotels or restaurants. Increasingly, though, many are now being sought after for potential conversion into palatial private homes by a number of extremely wealthy purchasers. Few, if

any, however, can match the splendour of The Secret—except, perhaps, for the palace of Mohammed VI, the King of Morocco himself.

Nestled in the exclusive Dar el Bacha neighbourhood in the heart of the old fortified area (or “the Medina”) of Marrakech, the three-storey Secret is a prized property covering some 29,000 square metres and with a current market value of €10 million (HK\$96.6 million). In line with the true *riad* style, one of this palace’s central focal points is a tranquil inner courtyard with a giant pool the colour of sapphires. Branching off from here, the home is honeycombed with layers of spacious rooms and traditional baths (or *hammams*—three major *hammams* to be precise). In fact, there are four private bathrooms, as well as ten en suite baths. There are also 12 fireplaces, three living rooms, a deluxe kitchen, a modern gym, an old boys’ billiard room, a richly stocked wine cellar, a bar, a library, a TV room, several small conversation rooms, a basement, three drive-in garages and a studio loft. The sleeping quarters consist of nine bedrooms and one master bedroom.

The property is currently managed by the Swiss firm, Wetag International, headed by Peter Rabitz. Speaking of the property, Rabitz says: “It is the second largest of its kind in Morocco. It is privately owned and one of the few not to have been converted into a hotel. Its owner sought to create



Marrakech modernism in this traditional riad mansion

