While many European cities may be in the spotlight now, Vienna is blossoming as a burgeoning star in Western Europe. A development boom in the city of approximately 1.7 million is taking place, and as of December 2013, there were 431 hotels with more than 31,000 rooms in Vienna. That accommodation number is set to increase over the next several years, with 15 hotels projected or planned to open by the end of 2017, according to the Vienna Tourist Board—six of which are currently under construction. Last year alone, a number of design hotels were unveiled in Austria’s capital city—most set in historical buildings in or near Vienna’s first district.

Meliá Vienna
Projects such as Meliá Vienna, which opened last May, take the focus off the city center and across the river to a developing area of town. The hotel, Meliá Group’s first in the country, is located in Austria’s tallest building—the modern, mixed-use Danube City Tower. Designed by French architect Dominique Perrault, the 58-story skyscraper ripples toward the heavens, reflecting the flow of the Danube River beside it. The property occupies 18 floors of the building, including the top two levels where is a 57 restaurant and open-air bar are located.

Designer Christian Jabornegg o’locally based Jabornegg & Palffy Architects took over when it came time to fit out the hotel’s communal spaces, where he accentuated Perrault’s design concept with “our interventions,” he says.

Meliá’s first four floors house the lobby, conference rooms, and the Flow Bar and Restaurant, all connected by a hanging stainless steel staircase. This massive, shimmering cork screw is complemented by a series of glittering chains behind the stairs

in the lobby, which were proposed by United Design Partnership, the London studio in charge of the guest room design, “to create a reflecting surface with a deep view effect in the windowless walls of the ground level,” Jabornegg explains.

Park Hyatt Vienna
For a stark contrast to Meliá, one needs only to cross the river and check into the Park Hyatt, which opened last June. Overlooking Am Hof square, Park Hyatt occupies a 100-year-old former bank, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Vienna’s first district. Colin Finnegan of Amsterdam-based FG stijl was brought in to develop the hotel’s sumptuous interiors and 143 guestrooms. “They wanted a hotel that would not be just for now but would be one of the best hotels for the next 100 years,” Finnegan says. “What we tried to do in the old bank was create the feeling that this hotel was created 100 years ago for the future.”

Some areas of the structure were left nearly original, including the former central banking hall, which now houses all-day restaurant the Bank, where guests dine under restored stained glass windows in a grand, marble-clad space enhanced by four glittering standing lamps. “When you think of Vienna, you think crystal, ballrooms, and chandeliers, but in a bank building you can’t just hang chandeliers,” Finnegan explains. “We decided to create these four elements on marble bases that are inspired by Vienna’s Secession Building.”

New layouts were designed for the Park Hyatt’s rooms, with the exception of the presidential suite, which was built in one of the few remaining original rooms and features four bookmarked slabs of lapis lazuli covering an entire wall. “They only find about eight of these slabs a year,” says Finnegan of the semi-precious stone.

Ruby Sofie
Ruby Sofie opened last spring in Sofensalle—a 150-year-old renovated concert hall—and veers away from traditional 5-Star perks, offering guests an innovative concept. “Lean luxury, in a nutshell, is that we have small, well-equipped, and hopefully nicely designed rooms that we offer at a surprisingly low price point,” says owner and designer Michael Patrick Struck. The hotelier cut costs by foregoing formal dining, parking, or a fitness space, but what Ruby lacks in typical amenities, it makes up for in creative and quirky style.

Struck incorporated Sofen’s theatrical and musical past into the hotel’s design by painting many walls black.
design by painting many walls black, hanging stage lights in communal areas, and displaying vintage instruments all over the property, including half of a piano affixed in the main entryway. The crown's nest mezzanine over the bar, which is used as a computer workspace, makes guests feel as though they are backstage at a rock concert.

Black corridors and carpets lead to 77 white-toned guestrooms, where Struck used real oak on the floors in the hope that it will reflect natural wear and tear, adding character to rooms over time.

**Schloss Schönbrunn Suite**

One of the most unusual hotels in Vienna launched last June and is just one suite. Situated within the Schönbrunn Palace—Emperor Franz Joseph and wife Elisabeth's former home—these once-royal lodgings offer guests two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a salon, living room, kitchenette, and privileged views over the palace's nearly 400-acre garden. Austria Trend Hotels asked architect and designer Gaby Bachhuber-Geissinger to appoint the 1,785-square-foot apartment with furnishings harking back to the mid-1800s, the time of much-adored Empress Elisabeth "Sisi" of Austria's reign.

In the suite's smaller bedroom, Bachhuber-Geissinger employed a rich red pineapple damask, once used exclusively for the Viennese Court on the walls. The same fabric covers chairs in the dining room, which is further decorated with intricate stuccowork and chandeliers. A corridor adorned with moiré wallpaper leads to the master bedroom, where a white four-poster bed enrobed in gauzy curtains takes center stage. The extravagant bed is embellished with detailing that mirrors the ornate gold wallpaper sheathing the whole of the room. "The suite should feel like it's a part of the castle," says Bachhuber-Geissinger "and guests should feel the spirit of Schönbrunn and that they are living like an emperor."