



## Argini

### SYROS

A 19<sup>th</sup>-century mansion, once home to a Greek revolutionary, has been transformed into a boutique hotel that blends historic grandeur with modern luxury.

Words: Matt Turner • Photography: Courtesy of Argini Syros

Less well known internationally than its neighbour Mykonos, Syros is home to Hermoupolis, the capital of the Cyclades, and was once one of Greece's most vibrant and industrious trading ports. Founded during the 1820s, as the war for Greece's independence from Ottoman rule raged, Hermoupolis emerged as an extension of the earlier Venetian hilltop settlement of Ano Syros to accommodate refugees fleeing other Greek islands – Chios, Psara, Crete and beyond.

The town soon established itself as a leading maritime hub between Europe and the East. Most notably it was the shipbuilding powerhouse of the Greek economy, its yards building and repairing thousands of vessels. Wealthy shipowners and industrialists began to build themselves mansion houses in Vaporia – an aristocratic enclave overlooking the port named after the Greek word for 'steamships'. One of these beautiful mansions, originally built in 1853 by prominent businessman Grigorios Paikos, a noted member of the Filiki Eteria 'secret society' that opposed Ottoman rule, now houses Hermoupolis' latest luxury hotel Argini, following an extensive renovation by its new owners, the Polykretis family.

As with many of the grand public buildings in central Hermoupolis, such as the Town Hall and Apollo Theatre in central Miaouli Square, Paikos built his home in a grand Neoclassical style, employing Venetian painters to decorate its walls and ceilings with lush, ornate artworks. Following Paikos' death in 1879, the house passed through the hands of various prominent families through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gradually falling into disrepair. Today, Maria Polykretis

explains how her father Yiannis Polykretis was born and raised in the building next door, returning to his home island following a successful business career spanning civil engineering to seismology, to acquire the building that now houses Argini.

The resulting hotel offers a series of beautifully renovated guestrooms alongside a ground-floor lobby, lounges and courtyard restaurant, basement hammam and outdoor rooftop pool bar. It takes its name from a celebrated collector of ancient Greek art – Argini Belaki Salvago, sister of Antonios Benaki who founded his eponymous museum in Athens in 1931.

The project has been a seven-year, hands-on labour of love for the family. Its public areas retain a sense of grandeur in their Neoclassical proportions and delicately restored architectural features. Contemporary furnishings from the likes of Poltrona Frau, Gessi, Artemide and Flos have been introduced to create a hotel that blends 19<sup>th</sup>-century heritage with the trappings of modern luxury. Original elements such as double-leaf hardwood doors, 1.2m-thick stone masonry and a grand marble staircase have been meticulously restored under the watchful eye of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

The vaulted archways of the basement now accommodate a wellness area with a hammam and indoor plunge pool overseen by a classical marble sculpture. The rooftop Under The Sky bar meanwhile, offers impressive views of the Venetian settlement of Ano Syros in one direction, the Aegean Sea in the other.

The intervening floors house a series of 11 stunning suites,





each individually decorated, many with original ceiling and wall frescoes carefully repaired by Cleopatra Tsourakis. The original ballroom is now the signature 44m<sup>2</sup> Masterpiece Suite, its Renaissance-style ceiling artwork depicting heroes from Greek history, both ancient and modern. Arched French windows and a private balcony overlook the magnificent façade of the Agios Nikolaos Church. Lighting by Artemide was purposefully selected to illuminate the ceiling and landscape paintings on the walls whilst protecting them from high temperatures. Bathrooms are clad in striking Covelano Macchia Vecchia marble, and feature luxurious underfloor heating, walk-in rainshowers and a freestanding bathtub.

Other rooms are named after notable architects and builders who helped create Hermoupolis. Ernst Ziller – architect of the city hall and many other significant royal and municipal buildings across Greece – combines Silver Portoro and Hermes marble, oakwood flooring and Gessi bathroom fittings with Buster + Punch lighting.

The P.Sampo room, an homage to the architect of the town's Apollo Theatre, blends original exposed stone walls with the elegantly grooved lines of its bedside furnishings. The G.Paikos suite, named in honour of the building's original owner, features further frescoes and a double balcony. Another room dedicated to master builder Aristidis Vidalis features a striking central light by Italian firm Tooy.

The restaurant, Elexis, is a collaboration with Athens-based Trastelis Group. Breakfast features local specialities such as strapatsata and spanakopita, with homemade honeys and preserves, while the dinner menu, created by Head Chef Nikos Stamatis, blends cosmopolitan culinary flair with authentic Greek flavours.

Syros is increasingly on the radar of sophisticated travellers seeking alternatives to the better-known islands, and only a short ferry ride away from Mykonos, where many international airlines now fly directly to its new airport. Argini gives them another reason to visit its richly storied capital.



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 Owner: The Polykretis family  
[www.arginisyros.gr](http://www.arginisyros.gr)