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Dominic Walsh: At leisure with Rocco Forte

## *Abstract form the interview with Sir Rocco Forte*

### **Case study: The Augustine**

Since he launched his own company 13 years ago, Sir Rocco Forte has restored the fortunes of a host of once-famous *grande dame* hotels. The Rocco Forte Collection, which is about to open its thirteenth hotel in Sicily, its first resort, includes such names as The Balmoral in Edinburgh, the Amigo in Brussels and the Astoria in St Petersburg.

But he believes that his most recent addition, The Augustine in Prague, is “the most charming”. The 101-room hotel is set in five buildings dating from the 13th to 15th centuries around the cloistered terraces and vaults of St Thomas’s monastery. The €65 million conversion project includes an interior design that blends the old and the new, including many accessories inspired by 1930s Czech cubist movement.

Yet with half a dozen monks still inhabiting part of the site, it is the monastic feel that holds sway. The hotel has a cocktail bar that has been dubbed Tom’s Bar after the monastery’s patron saint. The separate Brewery Bar, situated in the cellar of the former St Thomas brewery, is where the monks once fermented their namesake beer.

Sir Rocco has resurrected brewing on the site, although he says that the traditional stout was a little strong and had to be adapted for modern tastes. It has even found favour with the resident monks. “I did a tour with two monks and I took them to the bar where we drew a pint. They rather enjoyed it.”