

ALTHOUGH HE STUDIED ECONOMICS at Rutgers and worked for two years as an investment banker, Istanbul native Tuncel Toprak approaches hotels with more art than science. “I wanted everything to be natural,” he says of his two-year-old Witt Istanbul Suites. “If the staff members are happy and love the place, they’ll treat guests nicely. And we’ll get good word of mouth.” Despite having no marketing budget or sales team, Toprak has managed to keep his 17 rooms in Istanbul’s up-and-coming neighborhood of Cihangir booked. What’s his secret? Besides that friendly staff, it’s the refreshing design by Istanbul firm Autobahn. The look avoids Orientalist clichés and stays simple, almost Scandinavian, but with a futurist twist: curved wooden headboards; mirrored subway tiles; Hans Wegner-meets-Mark Newsom chairs. The overall idea is to be the type of place where locals themselves would stay, and to help visitors, in turn, feel like locals. “The same comfortable bed I have at home, we put in the hotel,” he says. “We use the same satellite TV provider, because it has the channels I like to watch.” Though the Witt epitomizes the city’s forward-looking creative class, Toprak is an old-fashioned innkeeper at heart, with no plans to expand. “I want the Witt to be artisanship in a hotel.” +

TUNCAL TOPRAK
The Innkeeper
Hotel Vibe Live
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Tuncel Toprak, owner of Witt Istanbul Suites.

BONUS: SLIDE SHOW

*For a tour of all the properties in this story,
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