

## SURFACING



Poolside at the Four Season Bosphorus in Besiktas, a part of Istanbul that has gone from gritty to glamorous.

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# Newly Chic in Istanbul

By GISELA WILLIAMS

**T**HE old Istanbul neighborhood of Besiktas, which runs along the European side of the Bosphorus, has long betrayed a blue-collar state of mind. Its bustling markets, schools and ferry stations have been home to fishermen, off-duty cabdrivers, teenage students and Besiktas soccer fans.

But suddenly the area, pockets of it at least, are going seriously cosmopolitan, with names like Marc Jacobs, Jimmy Choo and Jean-Georges Vongerichten now near cramped vegetable stands and rickety tobacco shops.

At the heart of this metamorphosis is the historic Akaretler Row Houses, a two-block cluster of landmark town houses built by a 19th-century sultan to house his workers. As recently as a decade ago, it was a sinking eyesore. But in 2005, Serdar Bilgili, a developer and former Besiktas soccer club president, bought the complex and transformed it into one of Istanbul's trendiest areas, with upscale apartments, international boutiques and elegant cafes.

At its center is a shiny new **W Hotel** (Suleyman Seba Caddesi 22; 90-212-381-2121; [www.whotels.com/istanbul](http://www.whotels.com/istanbul)), the chain's first in Europe. The lobby, with its mirrored surfaces, billowing curtains and colored lighting, could serve as the fictional set of "Real World Istanbul." On the third floor is an outpost of Mr. Vongerichten's Spice Market.

Not far away, facing the picturesque

strait, is the long-anticipated **Four Seasons Bosphorus** (Ciragan Caddesi 28; 90-212-381-4000; [www.fourseasons.com/bosphorus](http://www.fourseasons.com/bosphorus)), a marble-rich, cabana-lined hotel where the rates range from merely expensive to stratospheric. Before the hotel's opening this June, Istanbul's engaged socialites had been vying to be the first to be married on the hotel's regal waterfront terrace. The honor went to Selim Hamamcioglu, scion to a construction fortune, who married the Brazilian heiress Marcella Batista before an international coterie and a flotilla of paparazzi.

Some of the guests undoubtedly

bought their designer clutches and heels in the area's fancy new boutiques. There is not one, but two new **Marc Jacobs** boutiques in Akaretler Row (Suleyman Seba Caddesi 16; 90-212-381-4969; and Sair Nedim Caddesi 14; 90-212-381-4979; [www.marcjacobs.com](http://www.marcjacobs.com)), where the season's high-end accessories are displayed as if they were the crown jewels of the Ottoman Empire.

Down the block, in another camel-colored town house, is an outpost of Jimmy Choo (Sair Nedim Caddesi 8; 90-212-381-4959; [www.jimmychoo.com](http://www.jimmychoo.com)), where a simple black stiletto easily commands 400 euros.

There are stylish restaurants to match. One of the trendiest is **1897 Konyali** (Suleyman Seba Caddesi 46; 90-212-227-4243; [www.1897konyali.com](http://www.1897konyali.com)), which serves modern, artfully presented versions of classic Turkish dishes. Offerings include quail salad with raspberry sauce and lamb simmered with dried and fresh fruit.

Not everyone is entranced with the flashy newcomers. "To me Besiktas is still one big and delicious marketplace with a very old fashioned attitude," said Defne Koryurek, a local food writer.

Ms. Koryurek prefers old-school hangouts like **Kaymakci Pando** (Besiktas Carsisi, near the market), a tiny hole-in-the-wall that serves kaymak, a clotted cream made from buffalo milk. It might not have a velvet rope, but it's often harder to get a table here than at Spice Market at the W. ■



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