

# GINA MAMIDAKIS

CEO, BLUEGR HOTELS AND RESORTS

As bluegr Hotels and Resorts reaches its 60th year in business, Gina Mamidakis shows SPACE the magnetism of Cretan hospitality, and reveals how to create luxury hotels with authentic cultural essence

Words: Jess Miles | Images: Courtesy of bluegr Hotels & Resorts



## AT A GLANCE

5 hotels and resorts  
100% local suppliers  
80% local employees  
>100k towards the support and promotion  
of contemporary art and culture  
9 new awards and certifications in 2022

[bluegr.com](https://www.bluegr.com)

Ever since Minos Beach Art Hotel first opened on the still-spectacular Mirabello Bay in 1963, it's been the talk of the town – or rather, the whole island.

Perfectly poised on a landscape of sandy shores, craggy rocks, and succulent Mediterranean greenery, the hotel's whitewashed bungalows, villas, and terraces embody the traditional architectural style of Eastern Crete's fishing villages. Originally designed by architect Eleni Soufli, one of the first female graduates of the post-war generation of the National Technical University of Athens, the distinctive waterfront position is a rare sight today, as modern Greek development restrictions push buildings further and further from the crystal coastline. Offering a historical design narrative and homegrown Cretan hospitality, Minos Beach art hotel (back then just named Minos Beach Hotel) became one of the first deluxe hotels in Greece. Now in its 60th year, it's not only stood the test of time, but is now accompanied by bluegr's portfolio of landmark hotels across Greece that the Mamidakis family have tirelessly created out of a deep love for their homeland.

"Long-term vision, passion for creation, hard work, discipline, a big soul, and a sharp mind," says Gina Mamidakis, CEO and owner of bluegr Hotels and Resorts, on what it takes to achieve long-lasting success in the hospitality industry. "All of these combined have been my weapons in a career

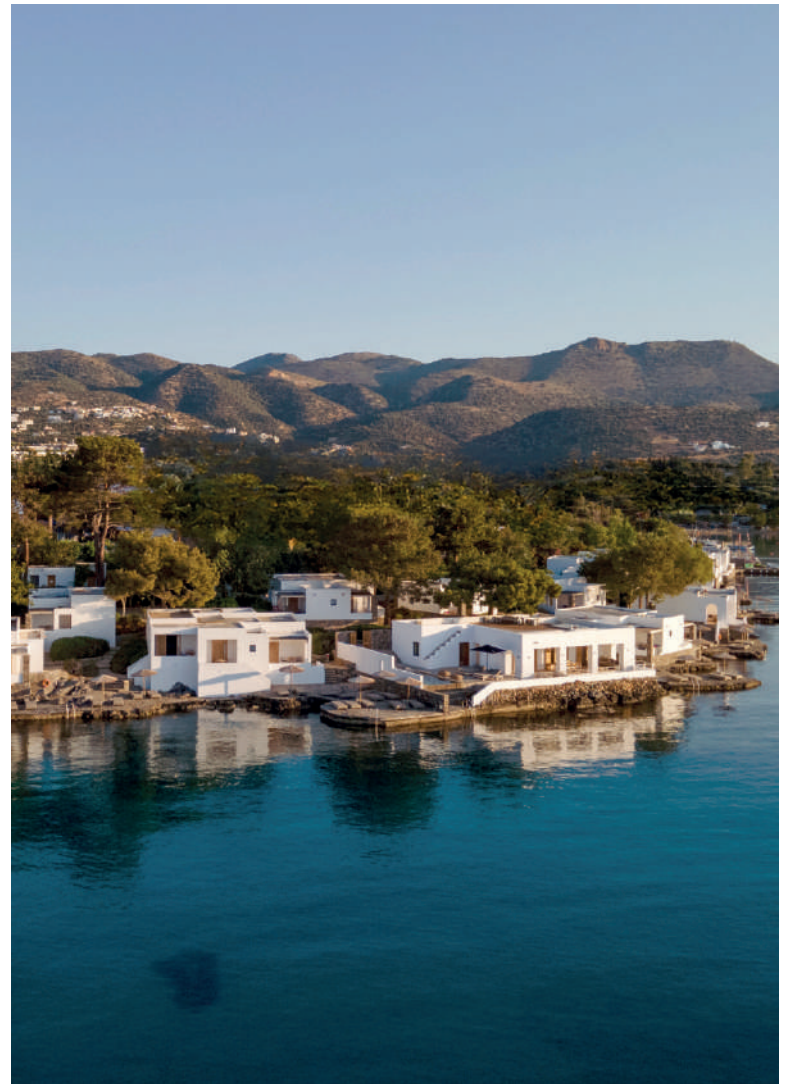
spanning some 40 years in the business arena of the hospitality industry. You can't reach great heights if you are tolerant of mediocrity," she tells me.

Whilst Gina might have been able to rest on her laurels as the daughter of businessman George Mamidakis, upon meeting her it's as clear as the waters of Mirabello Bay to see that she's not the type to quietly wander through life – and her parents weren't about to let her. Having inevitably been involved in the family business from a young age, hospitality became part and parcel of her nature. Guided by a constant thirst for knowledge and a fiery zest for life (which both still seem unmistakably characteristic of Gina to this day) she left home young and spent some time travelling – of which she attributes her passion for art and culture to. Not returning empty handed, Gina eventually came back to Crete, but not before studying Political and Economic Science at the University of Athens, receiving a master's degree at the University of Manchester in England, and completing special hotel programmes at Cornell University and Harvard Business School.

With a shrewd business mind from her studies, and stoic disposition from her Cretan heritage, Gina brought a unique blend of traditional and contemporary elements to the company and eventually took on the role of managing director, followed by her current standing as CEO. But her achievements don't stop there. Besides being a black belt in karate, a ballet and classic dance enthusiast, and a qualified sommelier, Gina is also founder of ►





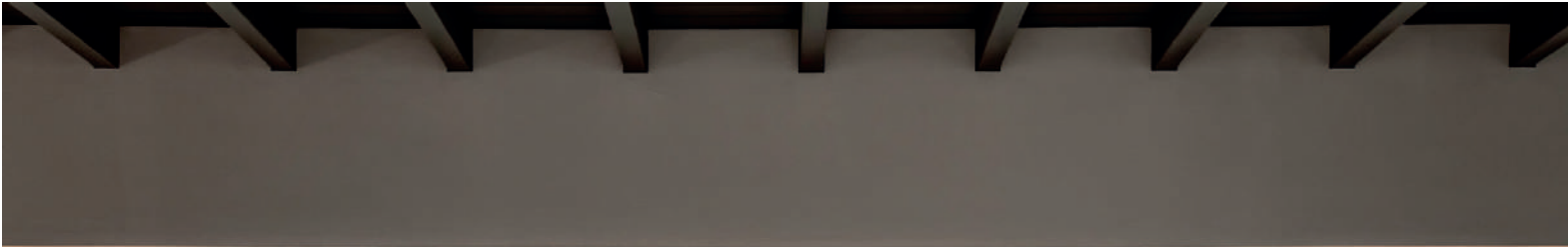


the George and Aristeia Mamidakis Foundation – which aims to make modern art much more accessible to Greeks and visitors from all over the world. Fuelled by her passion for art and the belief that culture and hospitality are inextricably intertwined, Gina organised the first Art Symposium at the Minos Beach art hotel in 1988. This event served as an international platform for contemporary sculpture, attracting 32 artists from around the world, along with five curators, who gathered at the hotel to create within its peaceful surroundings. The resounding success of the first Symposium paved the way for two subsequent editions in 1990 and 1993. The second Symposium brought together 16 renowned artists and six speakers from Mediterranean countries to delve into the concept of a New Mediterranean Cultural Identity. Three years later, the official establishment of the G. & A. Mamidakis Foundation coincided with the organisation of the third Art Symposium, which explored the intricate relationship between art and politics in the wake of the Cold War.

Since then, “the Foundation has provided safe space for artistic experimentation, residencies, creative dialogue, and the production of new artworks. The Sculpture Garden now exhibits more than 50 site-specific sculptural installations on permanent display, by emerging and renowned Greek and international artists,” Gina explains. Whilst the Foundation clearly does a lot for the emerging artists it platforms, when asked what the

foundation means to her personally, “I founded the G. & A. Mamidakis Foundation to honour my parents,” she says. “It is a very personal project that I have tirelessly supported for some 30 years. In all these years, we have organised and hosted pioneering Art Symposia, group and solo exhibitions, we have produced catalogues, commissioned new artworks, established an annual Art Prize and a Research Residency Programme.” Continuing, “Art and beauty go hand in hand,” Gina says. “I believe very much in art, and I love artists. Artists have to speak; people have to see their work. I feel the obligation to provide a platform, help them really show their work to people. We don’t have so many opportunities for artists here in Greece. This is what we are trying to do with the Foundation.”

Gina’s love for art is evidently one of dedication, and one that carries through to the interior design of the bluegr hotels – which she envisions and maintains herself in collaboration with designers Dora Giakoumi and Maria Souliou, and landscape designer Karolos Chanikian. “I want guests to engage with the spaces, and essentially the art, by challenging what they might expect of hotel interiors,” she tells me. “When you walk into the lobby, architecturally it has the feel of a gallery, so you might linger a little while to appreciate the space and absorb the art pieces before you make your way to reception to check in,” and she’s right – I can’t deny that it’s exactly what I did as I arrived at Minos Beach. ▶





Inside, clean white cube minimalism meets the tactility of natural jute, raw concrete and exposed beams, as floor to ceiling glass panels reveal the whitewashed bungalows nestled between bright bushes of bougainvillea and fragrant pine trees. As you wander through the Sculpture Garden and meandering grounds that span along 2.5km of coastline (including two private beaches), it's hard to imagine that the hotel hosts 125 rooms. Serene and tranquil, at worst you will overhear the warming buzz of conversation emanating from one of the five restaurants and bars. At best, you'll fall asleep to the sound of gentle waves lapping up on the shore in front of your bungalow, and wake to the sound of birdsong.

"Inspired architecture in harmony with nature, combined with a passion for design and respect for natural beauty, are some of the elements that contribute to the quiet luxury of not only Minos Beach art, but of all bluegr hotels," Gina says. "By allowing the sounds and smells of nature to permeate all our properties, we create sanctuaries of wellbeing and inner peace. For 60 years, we have tried to express a journey of connection with the senses, authenticity, aesthetics, and cultural heritage," she adds.

Here, guests are introduced to a lifestyle that embraces a deep appreciation for nature and a passion for culinary delights. Respect for balance between the local surroundings and economy is reflected in the extensive use of products from Crete and throughout the country. All of the restaurants and bars here proudly serve locally sourced produce and wine, while the uniquely designed accommodations showcase Greek beds by Adorno and mattresses by Elite Strom, both renowned Greek companies.

What's more, every material used has been carefully selected to minimise its environmental impact.

"Minos Beach art hotel is the flagship of bluegr. It is a shining example of what sustainable management in combination with respect towards the simplicity of natural beauty can produce. We place great emphasis on highlighting the delicate balance between the landscape and our own human footprint. The hotel is a human-scale dream world." Gina says.

Besides Mino Beach art hotel, bluegr have two other properties on the island – Minos Palace hotel & suites, and Candia Park village – ideally nestled in the picturesque Mirabello Bay near the towns of Agios Nikolaos and Elounda, providing the same Cretan hospitality but catering to different audiences. Life Gallery Athens, the group's five-star boutique design hotel situated on the outskirts of the city, is a unique haven of style, sophistication, and tranquillity. Finally, the deluxe Sunprime Miramare Park suites & villas in Rhodes offers beachfront luxury and a range of wellness facilities.

When I ask Gina what her ambitions for the growth or expansion of bluegr are, she answers in a way I should have expected by now. "I don't see growth as physical expansion or looking for the next big thing to simply generate revenue. It's not true to our ethos," she says. "Staying true to my mantra: 'If we are what we repeatedly do, excellence is not an act but a habit', bluegr has become a pioneer in 'barefoot luxury', prioritizing sustainability, simplicity, innovation, and authentic guest experiences. I want to continue harnessing and refining that through our current portfolio." 🌱