Forbes

The Man Who Helped Invent Santorini Luxury Says It's Time For A Change

Twenty years after his cave suites became the island's luxury standard, Miltiadis Andronis says the next big thing in hotels is something you can't photograph

By David Hochman, Contributor. ⓘ David Hochman covers the worlds of luxury, travel, and entertainment.



Oia at sunset, Santorini
GETTY

Twenty years ago, Miltiadis Andronis was better known for cutting hair than for running hotels. He was one of Greece's most sought-after hairstylists when he visited Santorini in 2006 and decided the island could benefit from "cave suites" with private pools above the caldera in Oia. Those 13 original villas set the standard for Santorini luxury. They also set off a building boom that brought competition, and then crowds, to one of the most dramatic coastlines anywhere.

In Greece, Andronis Has More Stars Than Anyone

Two decades on, the Andronis hotel group is having what may be its biggest year yet. Last month, two of its hotel restaurants earned a combined three stars in the Michelin Guide Greece 2027, the first edition to include Santorini. Lycabettus at Andronis Luxury Suites received two stars, making it the only two-star restaurant in Greece. Lauda at Andronis Boutique Hotel received one. And next year, Andronis will open its first property outside Greece--a 56-room estate near San Gimignano in Tuscany that dates back nearly 800 years.

Big global names like Four Seasons, One&Only and Mandarin Oriental are now moving into Greece, but Andronis remains independent. I asked the founder over email what comes after the infinity pool, whether privacy is still possible on one of the world's most photographed islands, and why he has no interest in becoming a smaller version of those bigger brands. Here's what Miltiadis Andronis had to say.



Lycabettus restaurant at the Andronis Luxury Suites in Oia, Santorini, was awarded two Michelin stars in the first-ever Michelin guide to Santorini. It is the only restaurant in Greece to hold a two-star distinction.
ANDRONIS

David Hochman: You helped invent the Santorini luxury look: cave suites, private infinity pools. Now everyone has them. What's the next big thing in luxury hotels?

Miltiadis Andronis: Twenty years ago, we were not trying to create a trend. We were trying to create something that did not exist. Today, private pools and beautiful suites are no longer enough to differentiate a luxury hotel. They have become expectations.

I believe the next great innovation in luxury hospitality will not necessarily be something you can photograph. It will be how intelligently and personally we take care of our guests. Technology will certainly play a role, but I don't believe technology should ever replace the human connection. The real luxury is having someone understand what you need before you even ask.

David Hochman: What do you know about luxury travelers now that you didn't know five years ago?

Miltiadis Andronis: I believe guests are increasingly interested in how a hotel can make them feel. They are looking for meaning, authenticity and experiences that reflect their personal interests.

At Andronis, Time Is The Ultimate Luxury

This is why I have never believed that every Andronis property should be the same. A couple celebrating their honeymoon at Andronis Luxury Suites has different expectations from a family at Andronis Arcadia, or someone visiting Andronis Concept to focus on their well-being.

People are also becoming much more protective of their time. Time has become one of the greatest luxuries, and our job is to make every moment worthwhile.



Oia town in Santorini, Greece, draws crowds from around the world.
GETTY

David Hochman: Let's talk about the crowds. Santorini has become a poster child for overtourism. How do you sell exclusivity on an island that sometimes feels like a theme park?

Miltiadis Andronis: After Covid, cruise visitors did reach numbers that were difficult to manage. But the destination recognized it quickly and has decreased the daily cap by almost 60% since 2025, bringing it back to where it was in the previous decade, when Santorini was becoming famous for all the right reasons.

Santorini Beyond The Crowds

There is a big difference between visiting Santorini and truly experiencing Santorini. When guests enter one of our properties, I want them to feel that they have discovered their own private world within the island. That also comes from knowing when to leave guests alone. Sometimes, the greatest luxury is enjoying a quiet breakfast overlooking the caldera, with absolutely nothing demanding your attention.

We cannot make Santorini undiscovered again. But we can make every guest feel that they have discovered something of their own.

Dvaid Hochman: You're opening in Tuscany in 2027, your first hotel outside Greece. Why there, and why now?

Miltiadis Andronis: Andronis Villa del Monte, near San Gimignano, is part of a story that began almost eight centuries ago. The estate has been home to generations of people, including noble Tuscan families. That comes with a responsibility. We are there to respect what already exists and give it a future, with exceptional gastronomy, wellness and experiences rooted in the Tuscan countryside. What excites me most is the opportunity to prove that the spirit of Andronis can travel beyond Greece without losing its identity.

David Hochman: Four Seasons, One&Only and Mandarin Oriental are all moving into Greece. How does an independent compete with that kind of muscle?

Miltiadis Andronis: Andronis Villa del Monte, near San Gimignano, is part of a story that began almost eight centuries ago. The estate has been home to generations of people, including noble Tuscan families. That comes with a responsibility. We are there to respect what already exists and give it a future, with exceptional gastronomy, wellness and experiences rooted in the Tuscan countryside. What excites me most is the opportunity to prove that the spirit of Andronis can travel beyond Greece without losing its identity.

David Hochman: Four Seasons, One&Only and Mandarin Oriental are all moving into Greece. How does an independent compete with that kind of muscle?

Miltiadis Andronis: I have great respect for these brands, certainly. Their presence demonstrates the international confidence in Greek luxury tourism. But I've never believed that Andronis needs to become a larger version of somebody else to succeed.

Being independent gives us something extremely valuable, and that's freedom. We can make decisions quickly, take creative risks, invest in ideas we believe in. We don't have to follow a global formula. Of course, independence also means responsibility. Our reputation is our own, and every decision matters.

I've always believed that the people behind a business are more important than the name on the building. The recent Michelin recognition of our restaurants is a wonderful example of what talented people can achieve when you give them the right environment and the ambition to aim higher.

David Hochman: So how do you measure success, if not by size?

Miltiadis Andronis: Honestly, I don't measure our success by how many hotels we have in Santorini or elsewhere. I measure it by the quality of what we create, the people we develop and the reputation we leave behind. And I believe there will always be a place in luxury hospitality for an independent brand that knows exactly who it is.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.