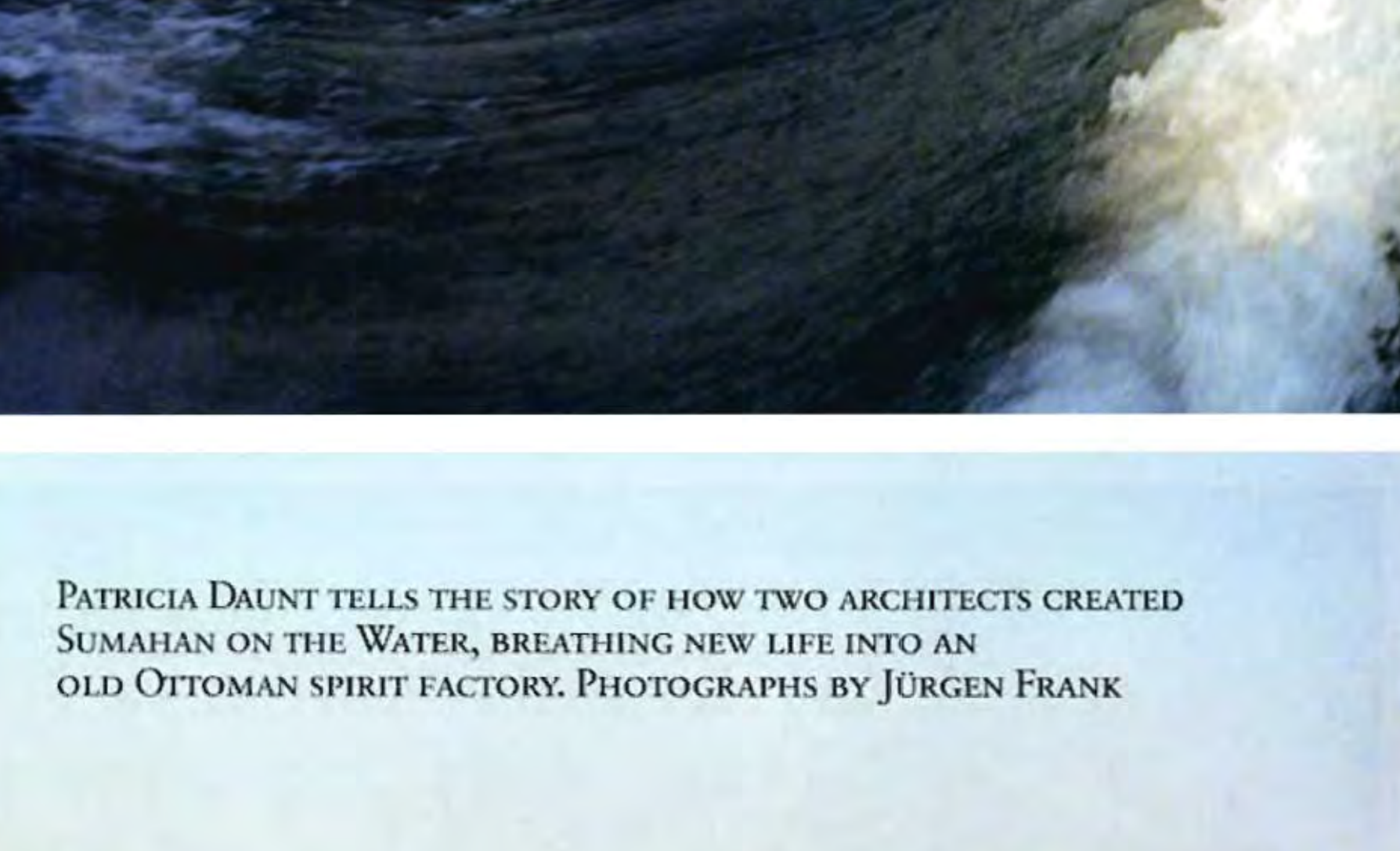


COSTUME DRAMA
GOLDEN AGE OF
THE OTTOMAN KAFTAN

ROUGH DIAMONDS
BLACK SEA
COUNTRY HOUSES

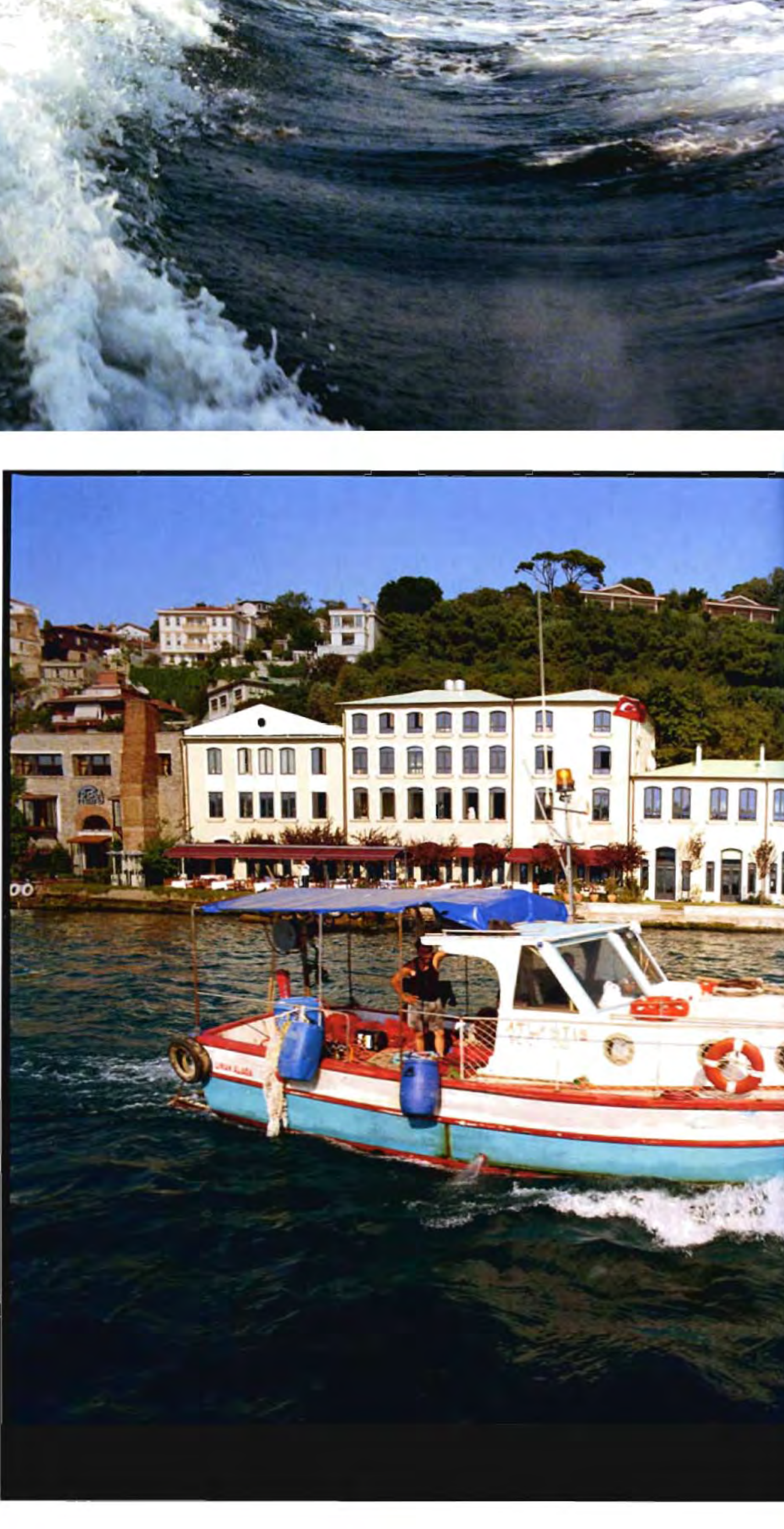
PRIVATE VIEWS
THE LEGACY
OF THE LAST CALIPH

LITTLE BEAUTIES
OKRA COOKED
TO PERFECTION



AT LAST THERE NEED BE NOTHING BETWEEN YOU AND THE BOSPHORUS. THE LAUNCH SPEEDING GUESTS ACROSS THE STRAITS FROM THE ASIAN SHORE IS HEADING DOWNSTREAM FROM ISTANBUL'S CHIC NEW WATERSIDE HOTEL.

IN THE SPIRITS' WAKE



PATRICIA DAUNT TELLS THE STORY OF HOW TWO ARCHITECTS CREATED SUMAHAN ON THE WATER, BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO AN OLD OTTOMAN SPIRIT FACTORY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JÜRGEN FRANK



THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY DISTILLERY IS THE REALISATION OF A COUPLE'S DREAM, ACHIEVED OVER TWO DECADES OF PAINSTAKING NEGOTIATION



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THE Bosphorus, sinuously beautiful ribbon of deep water dividing Europe from Asia, has over the past twenty years been the victim of unprecedented urbanisation. In contrast to the developments that have sprung up around it, the Sumahan (literally spirit-house) is, like the two bridges halfway between which it stands, both aesthetically and functionally right.

The transformation of the old distillery is the realisation of a couple's dream, achieved over two decades of painstaking negotiation with planning authorities and backers. Fitting perhaps, if small comfort to Nedrer and Mark Butler,

LEFTE: A FISHING BOAT CHUGS PAST THE SUMAHAN. EVERY GROUND-FLOOR SITE IN THE HOTEL HAS ACCESS TO THE WATERSIDE TERRACE AND ITS OWN FIREPLACE. THE HOTEL'S NEW ACCESS ROAD IS ALMOST LEVEL WITH THE COAST ROAD BEHIND. ON THE LEFT IS

THE QUANTRY WITH THE OLD FACTORY'S BRICK CHIMNEY IN FRONT OF IT. ABOVE: A 1940S PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS THE COMPLEX AT ITS LOW POINT OF CONSTRUCTION. TODAY A NEW WING SEAMLESSLY FILLS THE GAP.

THE HISTORY OF THE SUMAHAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN COMPLICATED AND ROMANTIC

the architects whose dream it was, since the history of the Sumahan has always been complicated and romantic. The original building dates from the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, when royal distilleries were well-constructed factory complexes built in local stone on prime sites. The distillery produced *sumra*, or *sumra*, a clear, pungent liquid that can be made from almost any staple, from grain to grape – the Gengölköy factory used figs to distil its *sumra*.

On Mahmud II's demise in 1839 the waterside factory passed to his wife, the beautiful Bezm-i Alem Valide Sultan, mother of his two sons and successors, Abdülmejid I and Abdülaziz. She was renowned as a benefactress to the poor and to the women of Istanbul, though her reputation owed nothing to her liberality in dispensing *sumra*. She was vehemently tectonic, even destroying the palace's precious collection of crystal drinking vessels. Following her death, ownership of the complex becomes unclear. It has been suggested that the factory was acquired by an Armenian businessman, and there may be truth in the story that an Englishman ran it during the Allied occupation of Istanbul at the end of the First World War. At all events, it continued to produce raw spirit. By 1921 it was evidently making the traditional aniseed-flavoured spirit

drunk throughout the Mediterranean region: the smell of rakı issuing from the village's twenty-two taverns was so strong that respectable citizens were obliged to walk down the street to the ferry station with handkerchiefs dipped in cologne held to their noses.

In the early 1930s the distillery changed hands for the last time. The whole complex of buildings either side of the Kuleli coastal road was acquired by Tevfik Cemal, an industrialist who had come from Ottoman Bulgaria and made good. No stranger to Gengölköy, in the mid-1920s, to escape the summer heat of his *evlik*, he had bought the nearby wooden *evlik* previously owned by the Ottoman ambassador to Vienna, Mahmud Nedim Paşa. Set like a jewel on a site above the village, its interior painted with curious Russian murals, it was the ideal summer house for his unmarried sister, his wife and later their adopted son, the child of a close relative.

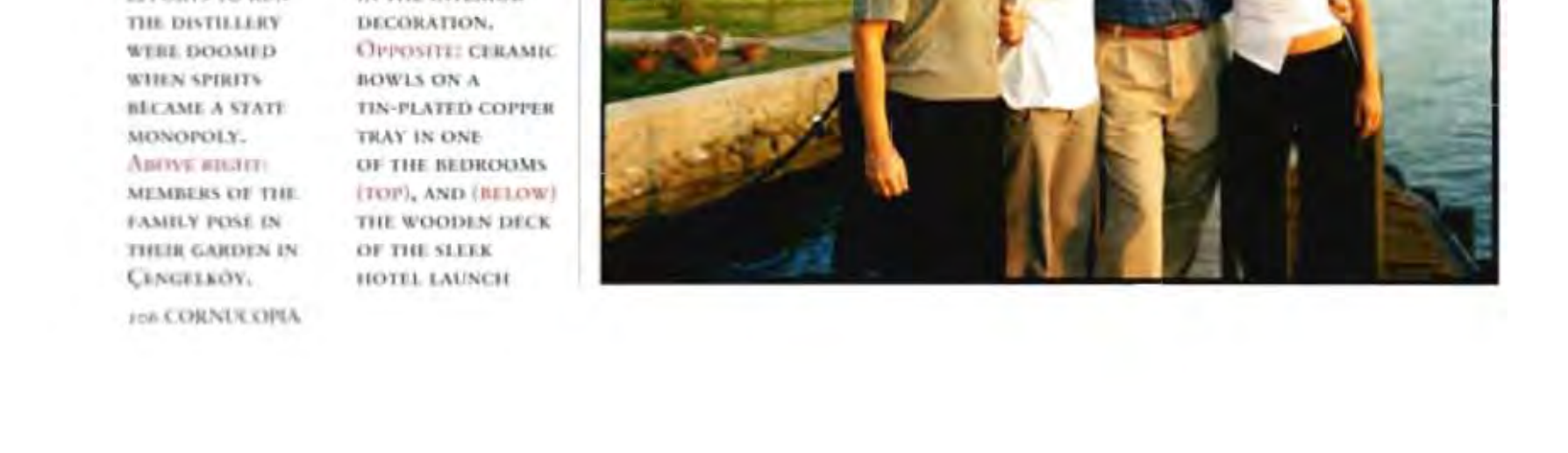
Born in Burgaz in 1887, Tevfik Cemal had arrived in Turkey in 1912, probably among the hundreds of thousands of Muslims fleeing before the various Balkan armies. At the close of the Ottoman Empire he worked producing aviation fuel for the infant Turkish Air Force, and owned an olive-processing factory and a freighter on the coast. He had bought the factory and most to turn into a restaurant.

The acquisition of the spirit distillery at Gengölköy was one of his few big investments. Mustafa Kemal's determination to nationalise key sectors of the new Republic's faltering economy saw the Turkish state take over the *evlik*, the French-run tobacco monopoly, in 1925. Similarly, alcohol production was taken over the following year, seriously affecting the viability of private distillers.

To stem mounting losses, Tevfik Cemal sold the factory to Nedrer and Mark Butler, his future husband and

and he took on the buildings across the road from the distillery, together with the earlier stone portion of the complex, which incorporated the chimney. Part of this has now been turned into a restaurant.

Nedrer's share, apart from the *evlik* in which she and Mark now live, was the long row of buildings downstream of the central chimney and the slipway to the water alongside it. With the scale of the project no longer so ambitious, or so expensive, the Butlers' determination to nationalise key sectors and to lose its spare but warm industrial feel. Where there is the least clue as to how the original was arranged, it has been echoed. It is fortunate that the lie of the land, as well as restrictions on redevelopment of historic buildings, dictated one floor – the third and top one giving on to the road, with a further two giving onto the water. The resulting privacy of the lower two storeys, meticulously designed around the factory's series of arches, is a major bonus. The arches allowed a choice format for many of



more zen than orientalist, the Sumahan is unashamedly modern. The library (above) is shrouded with Persiansure design classics as well as excellent books about Turkey. Right: a spacious, light-filled bedroom has an understated patchwork kilim on the floor, and a free-hand steel ceiling that pays homage to the building's industrial origins. Opposite: the bathroom is a luxurious modern take on the old-fashioned hammam

Happy families: few homes along the Bosphorus have stayed in the same family, but Nedrer Butler has hung on to the legacy she inherited from her grandparents Tevfik and Nadire Cemal (above left). Tevfik's efforts to run the distillery when doomed were spiritedly became a state monopoly. Above right: members of the family pose in their garden in Çengelköy. Right: the architects Nedrer and Mark Butler on the quayside with their daughters Yasa and Eren (to Mark's right). The whole family was involved in the restoration, and Yasa was given a free hand in the interior decoration. Opposite: ceramic bowls on a tin-plated copper tray in one of the bedrooms (top), and (below) the wooden deck of the sleek hotel launch.

Cemal – now known as Tevfik Cemal – and his wife Nadire Cemal – tried their hand at the canning business and the production of briquettes for the Coal Board. On his death in 1949, the entire low-making complex was leased to the nationalised TMO, the Soil Products Office, which was searching for a depot on the Bosphorus. When his widow, Nadire, died in 1958, the doors of the wooden *evlik* where the family lived were also closed, and for a decade they turned their backs on Çengelköy. It was not until 1971 that Tevfik Cemal's descendants decided to reopen the *evlik*. His granddaughter, the young Yasibe Nedrer, then in her sixth year as an architectural student at the University of Minnesota, visited Gengölköy on the hunt for a Turkish subject for her thesis. Only then did she realise that her family owned the extensive run of the old spirit factory straddling the shore and the coastal road. And that was the genesis of the dream that eventually resulted in Sumahan on the Water. At that time part of the factory, with its central chimney, was still used to

make coal briquettes. The TMO's sand and gravel were everywhere, and the dilapidated complex was very much in public use. Huts were spread over a make-shift sandy beach; an outdoor cinema had been set up against one wall, and village boys had colonised the recreation ground, tying their boats to it, and fishing and diving from it. But Nedrer could not see the beauty of the incompatible waterside location and the potential in the masonry walls, arched windows and the chimney. Encouraged by the enthusiasm of Mark Butler, her future husband and

a fellow architectural student, her thesis envisaged an ambitious complex of two buildings, one on either side of the

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