

THOUGHT FOR FOOD...

New F&B Design

It has been said before (and by us) that restaurants should be about the food, not the frou-frou. If the chow doesn't cut it, nothing in the world can save the place. But that tried-and-tested triumvirate of necessary ingredients for success – food, service, décor – remains as true today (and in Asia), as always and anywhere. There is no question about it: decoration can't make or break a restaurant or bar, but it can make it better. While some great food is available on sidewalk stools or from hole-in-the-wall dives, dining out – in the sense of a celebratory cultural staple – demands a little more. The experience is enriched by the space it takes place in. For this, our annual overview of Food and Beverage design, we round up some of the latest directions from far and near.

The relatively transient nature of the category keeps things evolving by force; few restaurants – even successful ones – last decades unchanged. There's something about the industry of feeding people that makes things pretty fluid. Local mom-and-pop eateries may survive the ages, but distinct dining tries to keep up with the times. If a serious restaurant lasts five years without a change of chef or

décor, it is considered aged. That necessitates a constantly fresh catalogue of ideas from the designers responsible – they tend to be a specialised bunch – and engenders a rapid turnover of trends. Ageless elegance may endure, but in this field, it's a minority class. Perhaps this is because people want to entertain their aesthetic senses when they splurge on pleasurable dining i.e. to feast their eyes as well as their palate. The social experience of sharing a meal with friends or family involves an aspect of celebration, at least to some degree. Eating out is not mandatory; it costs more than cooking at home. Therefore it's a treat. When we treat ourselves, we want to feel rewarded and pleased. A well-designed space; beautiful surroundings – this is all part of the reward.

It is said that Asians take dining more seriously than those in other parts of the world. Asians probably do eat out more often, but it is difficult to argue that in Manhattan or in Rome or in Barcelona, citizens value dining out any less. Eating out in New York is almost a competitive sport. Which is why there have been so many extraordinary restaurants in the city over the decades. Great cities anywhere produce great restaurants, clubs and bars.

Obviously this is because there is a market there that needs to be satisfied. It is a market that is not only hungry, but also sophisticated and well-heeled. Any sizeable modern city has enough people in it to support middle- and high-end restaurants. With modern travel habits, food quality has become one of the most important factors in appealing to tourist and even to business travellers. No matter how broad the selection of cuisine in our home base, we look forward to visiting other places, in part to enjoy theirs.

Has F&B design become internationalised? Does culture still infuse the character of these places as thoroughly as it does the cuisine? When we eat Shanghainese, do we demand red lanterns and lacquer cabinets? When we want risotto, do we expect ceramic tiles and timber beams? Does steak taste better with a backdrop of cowboy accessories? No. But these exaggerations aren't as ridiculous as they sound, even in this age of fusion food and cross-cultural canapés. Designers always start with the menu, looking for clues and updating clichés. In many cases, they work intimately with the chef as well as the owner, fashioning a spatial ambience particularly geared toward the themes or moods being reached for in

the food. But it is a balancing act, too. When a space too closely links to a special menu or sub-cuisine, it can seem too specific and limiting. In the end, what is restaurant design? Seating, lighting, sound control... providing a place for people in small groups to spend a couple of hours in the company of friends while allowing themselves one of life's most direct pleasures... filling their stomachs. Does it really need to get much more complicated than giving them a chair, a tabletop and enough light to find their forks, then getting out of their way?

Yes.

As any F&B designer will readily inform you: it is one of the toughest categories around. The circulation system has to work perfectly at peak hours, never causing traffic jams yet never wasting one precious square foot. The furniture has to be comfortable enough to support everyone from anorexics to the obese. Lighting has to be flattering, warm, practical and calming. Sound has to be carefully controlled, lest a cafeteria din arise. Materials have to take a horrendous beating, yet look elegant and luxurious and fresh. Colours have to make people seem healthy, without

fighting for attention with evening garb, by setting off jewellery, complementing skin tones and matching each other without seeming drab. Service access has to be planned like a military operation, so that food and drink and staff can move rapidly, but as invisibly as possible. It goes on and on. And it all typically has to be accomplished within a short time frame and in a constricted size of space. Rents are stratospheric, following only retail in value (or equalling it), and opening dates are usually pre-fixed. A shop has months to be tinkered with and perfected, mostly with evolving products for sale. A residence can be refined over years. A restaurant opens big, and first impressions can make or break its business model. It's not a field for the faint of heart.

The following examples, all opened within the last year, each do their best to enliven the experience of eating out. There's never anything better than a home-cooked meal. But you don't get spaces like this in your own flat. Dig in.

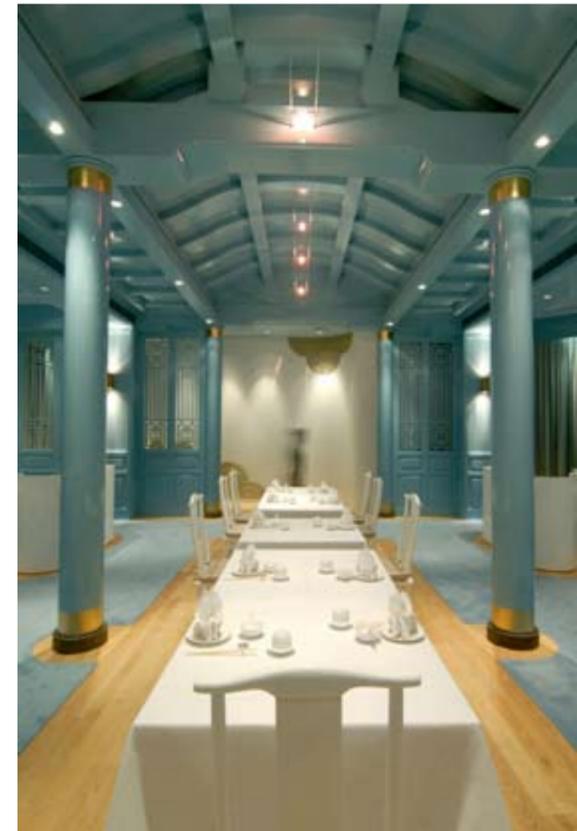
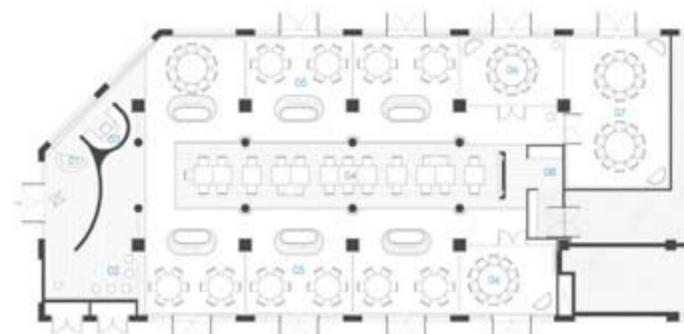
Royal China – Singapore



Bringing to Singapore a branch of the famed Royal China restaurant, London called for distinctive design that would live up to – or enhance – the brand's reputation. Singapore's white-hot Ministry of Design stepped in to transform these 350 square metres into a dining experience few would forget, even though little more than a singular sense of colour tone and editing was actually used. Designing within an architectural icon, in this case the city's Raffles Hotel, can be intimidating, but not to MOD, which took the eatery's wave logo and evolved it into a motif that could be abstracted throughout the project, beginning with the six-metre-high vaulted ceiling overhead. That created a central axis for a line of white tables that give rise to a dramatic, almost ritualistic atmosphere in the space. Dining nooks to the sides offer more intimate places featuring quilted artwork inspired by Chinese brocade as well as wood panelling and curtains.

The dominant aesthetic feature, however, isn't a 'thing', but a hue: the distinctive light blue that MOD draped the room in, is set off with white furnishings. With infrequent touches of gold and other colours to contrast, the blue-and-white combination works wonderfully to inject an old-and-brand-new sensibility into the restaurant. It also enhances the cinematic undertones, as if one had entered a fabulous film set minutes before Jiang Yimou were to begin directing a scene. With a hand in the design of everything down to the menus and staff uniforms (pewter-toned), MOD has created not just a room for consuming food, but a holistic experience lasting the duration of the meal. Design Director Colin Seah sought to couch invention within tradition, "I really wanted to transform this great Cantonese restaurant with its traditional interiors to feel modern and uplifting... the experience is holistic. We were inspired by a brilliant blue cheongsam brocade I came across in Beijing. To translate it into the perfect blue hue for our space, we had to experiment with countless shades. I was trying to make the local Chinese dining scene more accessible to the younger set, whilst not ostracising the traditional family and business crowd."

The only ones ostracised here will be those unable to get a reservation for the crowds. MOD has done it again.





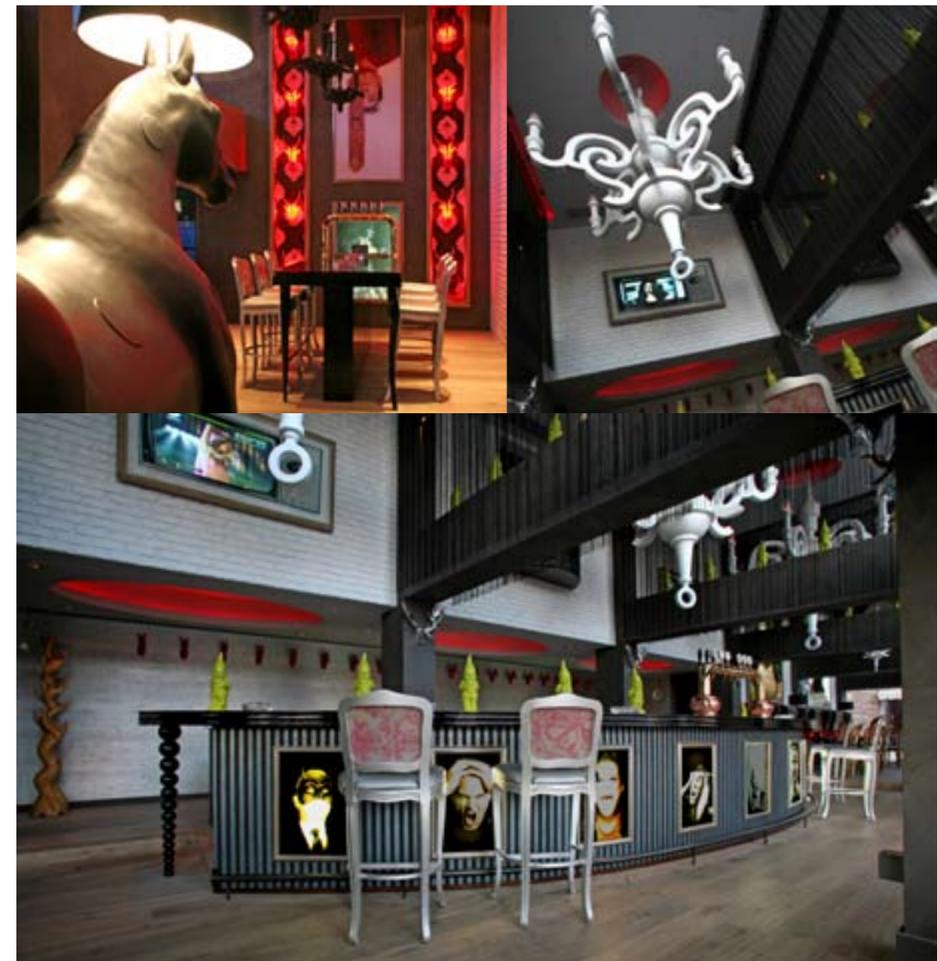
Tapping the creative impulses of Pericles Liatsos for this transformation of a former furniture salon, the clients also added a complicated programme. This pub was to be a café until noon, then serve more serious lunch and dinner until late evening when it changes again, into a club that stays open until the wee hours. The strategy may have upped the return on table traffic, but it also made for some extra design headaches. Liatsos clearly decided that having some design fun was the way to solve things (or simply avoid them), and created a lively, lighthearted space that uses the firm's signature creative eclecticism as a formal strategy. From the entry zone to the men's urinals, Brewery states its cheeky tone, mixing designer furniture, kaleidoscopic lighting and super-sized graphic art into a visual feast (and general party atmosphere). The whole thing is saved from chaos in part by the ample vertical proportions of the



Brewery – Nicosia

Pericles Liatsos Designers Ltd

space, and by the fact that Liatsos is careful to keep everything in its place, with plenty of breathing room between the collaged components. The extra dimensions mean the process of juxtaposition remains clean and controlled as opposed to messy. This is not a jumbled flea market of quotations, but a well-rehearsed stage show, with patrons in the lead parts. A sandy-toned timber floor almost underlines the theatrical atmosphere, making the 'props' share a common, simple surface. Brewery may never get serious enough for a power-lunch, but it will definitely attract the 'in' crowds and celebrities, and that's powerful enough. Liatsos proves that serious fun offers serious rewards.





Peter Restaurant — Tokyo

Yabu Pushelberg



This design duo needs little introduction to followers of high-design retail, commercial and hospitality space. Yabu Pushelberg went to Tokyo at the behest of the Peninsula Hotel to create its 9800sq-ft, 24th-floor eatery, which boasts views out over the city and the Imperial Gardens. Occupying the entire floor gave the designers plenty of leeway to accommodate a programme of open dining, two semi-private dining areas, one separate dining room and a banqueting room that accommodates up to 60 patrons.

Yabu Pushelberg chose to back the views up with visual drama and a theatrical approach to colour, lighting and materials. Various artists, including Marc Littlejohn, Hirotochi Sawada and Hong Kong-based D'Art, were invited to add their touch. The fun starts at the entryway, with sculpted metal walls folded at divergent angles (D'Art). A long bar further inside echoes origami facets in its metal face, with wood bar stools in dark brown. Bronze, curved chairs huddle nearby at the windows, shaded by chrome tree sculptures by Sawada. The windows are interspersed by Littlejohn's work with acrylic panels that use embedded strips of mirror in an abstract pattern capturing the city's nocturnal glitter.

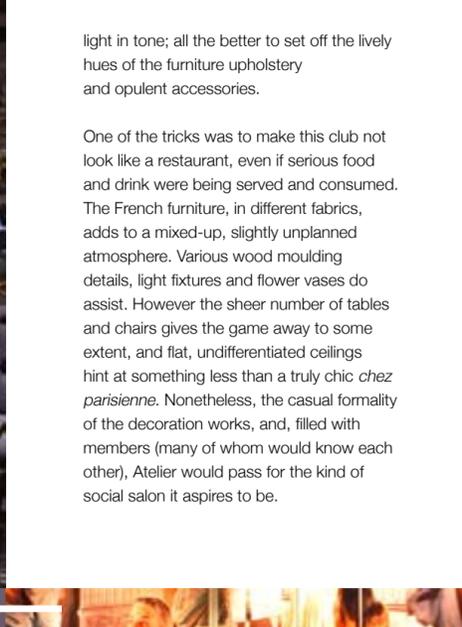
The dining room palette adheres to aubergine, lavender and silver. Glass tables are uplit so that they glow, and a wall hosts video images above a raised platform. As the designers describe it, "We wanted Peter to be engaging and interesting, with an element of surprise and illusion, so that you don't get the entire experience right away, like a play unfolding on stage." Diners will be looking forward to the encore.

For this private members club, the designers took their inspiration from Paris. Eclectic objects gathered from travels far and wide are arranged as if we're in a modern version of a collector's residence from the age of Enlightenment. There is little academic organisation but maximum aesthetic impact. Considerable effort was made to source the appropriate props (some from the US and Europe), which were then occasionally refinished or altered in Canada. Materials include crystal, damask wallpaper, metal alloys, antique lace, stainless steel, glass, tin panelling and wood veneer. Tufted upholstery, antique doors from Paris, Coco Chanel references and French lace were added in the interests of French authenticity. The style of the seating furniture is contemporary classic. The space PDLab had to start with was rather constricted, so the designers needed to maximise usage. In the restrooms, large figurative graphics liven up the walls and stalls and oversized, framed mirrors suggest a private boudoir. Hard surfaces are kept mostly



Atelier Club — Toronto

PDLab



light in tone; all the better to set off the lively hues of the furniture upholstery and opulent accessories.

One of the tricks was to make this club not look like a restaurant, even if serious food and drink were being served and consumed. The French furniture, in different fabrics, adds to a mixed-up, slightly unplanned atmosphere. Various wood moulding details, light fixtures and flower vases do assist. However the sheer number of tables and chairs gives the game away to some extent, and flat, undifferentiated ceilings hint at something less than a truly chic *chez parisienne*. Nonetheless, the casual formality of the decoration works, and, filled with members (many of whom would know each other), Atelier would pass for the kind of social salon it aspires to be.





There's something about dining and views that makes them go together naturally, and Lucier, with its wonderful panoramas of the city's Willamette River, is proof. In fact, the view was the jumping-off point for the restaurant's designers, who loved the conjunction of nature and urban environment visible from the space. Diners enter a low-slung vestibule which is clad in black leather panels. The eye is then lead on into the main dining space by abstract swimmers etched on to the surface of a limestone wall at the end of the passage. A 30cm-deep 'graffiti' mural wall, handcrafted and carved in Corian, separates the lounge from the dining room. The lounge area is in darker tones compared with the dining room, and has black-and-red leather club seating and a 10m-long communal table for socialising before, or after dinner. Always present is the spectacular view of Mount Hood on a clear day.

Miniature glass bridges lead to the dining areas, where the scale ramps up. Tones shift to amber, bronze and beige across materials such as silk, wood, leather and mohair. Local artworks are displayed in glass vitrines. Circling the dining room is an illuminated canal lined in mosaic tiles, while overhead a flock of dramatic, custom-designed lighting fixtures roam across the ceiling like sheep. These are fashioned from bronze rods of various sizes, simulating the forms and shapes of the water outside. The reference (like the canal) might seem too literal, but the lamps actually achieve sufficient abstraction to work on their own. Lucier states its own sophistication from the get-go, but it flirts with the edge of 'too much'. There are moments, such as with the green glass bridges, when materials seem to want a bit more breathing room. But overall the large scale of the spaces rescues it, producing a kind of indulgent celebration.

Lucier – Portland

Alvarez + Brock Design



Photography by William Vazquez (Visual Waves Inc.)



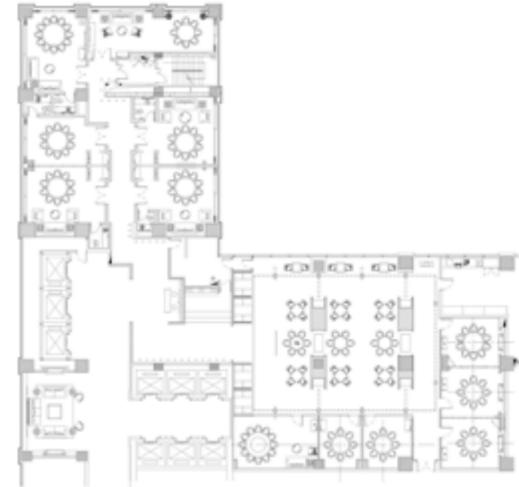
One of the fundamental principles of Taoism neatly sums up the endeavour and purpose of a restaurant: 'Yang' is the tendency to gather and 'Yin', the tendency to disperse. It is fitting then that PAL Design opted to base their design for the Sui Yuan restaurant on Taoist precepts. Looking at the completed interior, 'balanced' is the first adjective that comes to mind, but likewise 'unsurprising'.

The phrase 'sui yuan' itself is from classical Chinese poetry – a Buddhist term signifying passivity and acceptance of one's karma. Sui Yuan means "following the path", and was chosen by Hilton management after they viewed architect Patrick Leung's designs. Ultimately, marrying the conservative with the traditional seems to have been the overriding concern here.

Not overdosing on any one extreme to attain perfect balance is a guiding Taoist principle – not only in terms of hot/cold, spicy/mild, sweet/sour, etcetera, but also in terms of an equilibrium between the north and south hemispheres of the planet when sourcing ingredients, and the balance between rooting and shooting vegetables (ie between downwardly and upwardly growing plants). The menu at the Sui Yuan restaurant also aims at a harmonious balance of Sichuan, Beijing and Cantonese flavours.

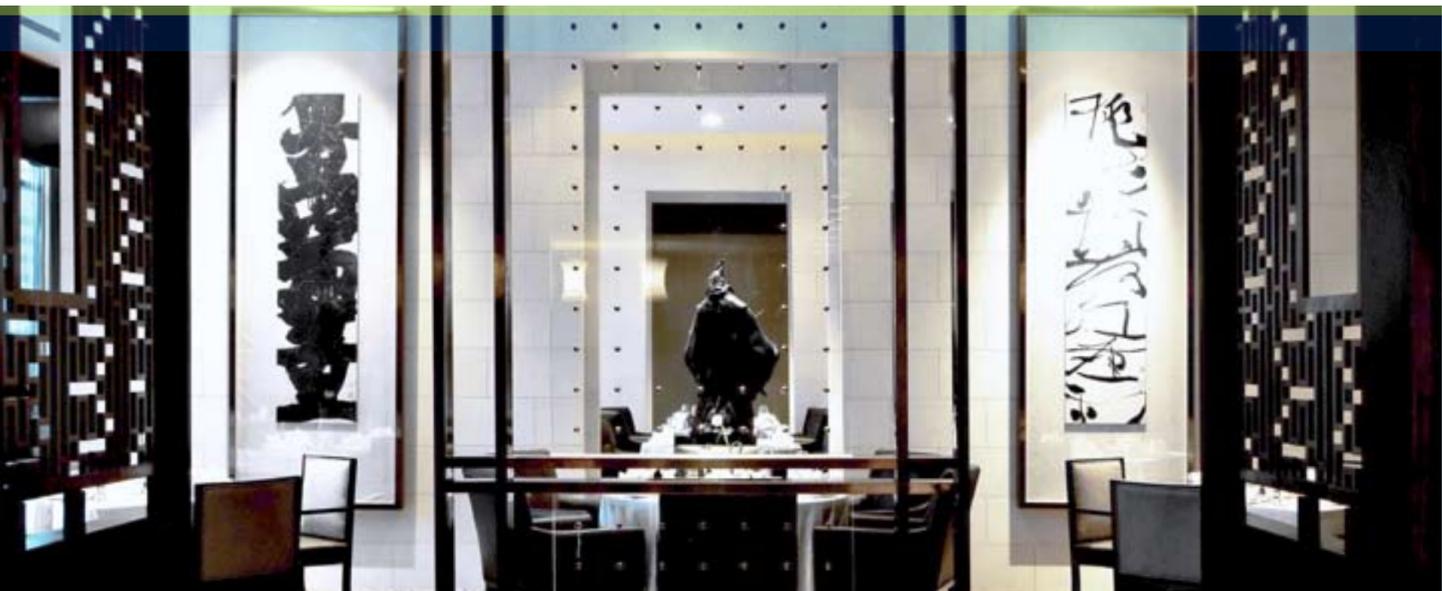
Fighting the tendency towards ostentation in F&B design, the designer's work for Sui Yuan pares the essentials down to a similarly balanced, simple, symmetrical exercise in understatement. The use of bilateral symmetry throughout, from the fenestration to the door frames, echoes the design of the traditional Chinese courtyard house without resorting to the kind of pastiche that befalls so many examples of Chinese restaurant design.

Lightly honed limestone cladding against dark hardwood columns and beams and even literal black-on-white throughout, have been employed to strive, stately, for a "museum-like space". Only one of the F&B outlets in the Beijing flagship Doubletree Hilton Hotel, the restaurant displays several new commissions in oriental art, as do all the public areas (also by PAL Design). The hotel opened two weeks before the Olympic Games inauguration ceremony with the advertised aim of promoting Chinese contemporary art – mirroring the concerns of the ceremony itself. 'Museum like' and good eating may not be a natural mix, but Sui Yuan lets the food be the main attraction.



Sui Yuan, Hilton Hotel – Beijing

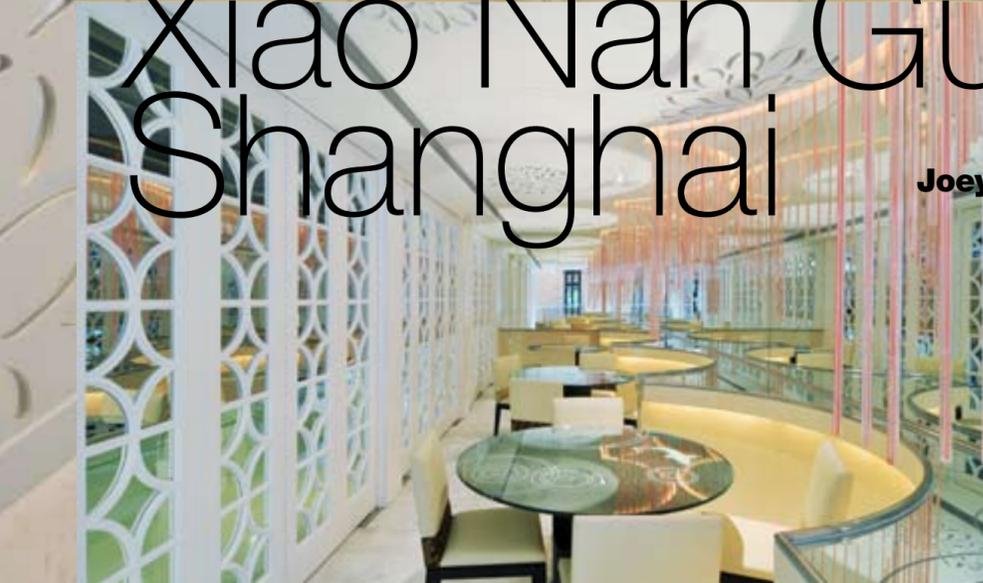
PAL Design





Xiao Nan Guo — Shanghai

Joey Ho Design



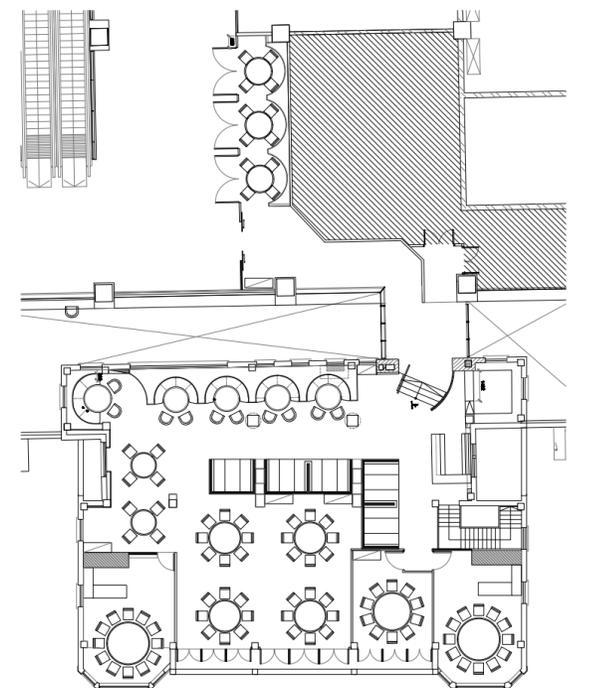
Shanghai's dining and entertainment hotspot Xintiandi has evolved into a thriving destination since Shui On redeveloped the neighbourhood nearly a decade ago. The latest addition to the district's offerings is a branch of Xiao Nan Guo, a restaurant brand known for dishing up authentic Shanghai cuisine within darkly formal settings. The owner liked Joey Ho Design's work and invited the firm to create a space that would update the traditional image of the franchise. The site had already been selected: a second-storey, 436sq-m space in a historic red brick building known as a "shikumen", connected to a major shopping mall that also boasts a cinema. As most customers accessed the restaurant through the mall, the challenge was to create a transition – to perceive the restaurant as a separate entity prior to entering. Ho turned that challenge into an opportunity to create a contemporary space using cues from the colonial building's existing architectural elements.

Exploiting the alley between the mall and the restaurant, Ho created an approach that allowed the shikumen's charming facade to be glimpsed from within the mall. A glass-and-metal balustrade allows for open views across the alley's void, contrasting with white marble flooring and white doors with sidelight patterns that mimic the traditional windows of the historic building. Oversized laser cut lotus blossoms on the walls and ceilings lead customers across a bridge connecting the two buildings. Guests are then welcomed into the lofty three-metre-high space by a central hostess station that also services those who enter from the ground floor via an internal staircase.

Due to the limited size as well as the contemporary neighbourhood, Ho designed the space to be completely open, allowing for views across to the leafy park on the opposite side of the shopping mall. "There is a minimal emphasis on private dining," explains Ho. "The eclectic western and Chinese concept reflects the (sense of) community." In contrast to the vast majority of Chinese restaurants with self-contained rooms for entertaining, Xiao Nan Guo is conceived as a transparent volume with a series of layers. Mirrors are used generously throughout: on tabletops etched with the form of a stylised carp pond, underneath glazing, on columns and on the ceiling in some areas. Ho took the existing geometric pattern of the wooden window shutters and repeated the arcs internally in screens and in the shape of banquettes along the wall adjacent to the alley.

As the space was restricted by a number of structural columns in inconvenient places, Ho used these as markers to divide the restaurant into different sections. Tom Dixon pendant lamps define a series of five circular banquette clusters, outfitted with custom-designed chairs featuring soft petal-shaped backs alluding to the restaurant's lotus motif. In the middle, low rectangular banquettes accommodate small groups of two to four guests, while round tables both in the open dining beyond and in three private dining rooms seat from eight to twelve persons. In the dining alcove on the other side of the bridge, another small niche allows for small groups to have privacy. In total, the restaurant can seat about 160 people.

To differentiate the variety of areas, Ho used a dark carpet with a pink lotus motif in the private dining rooms and large round tables. Rooms are highlighted with mirrors and a feature wall with an abstracted plum blossom branch. The rest of the dining area includes a number of circular mirrors in the ceiling, while mirrored columns are softened with sheers. The dining alcove is enlarged with a mirrored backdrop and doors that open onto the corridor, with the carp pond tabletop reflected subtly on the ceiling. "I was after a blend of contemporary and traditional elements," says Ho. "It took a while to convince my client that white marble floors would be fine!"





Subu – Beijing

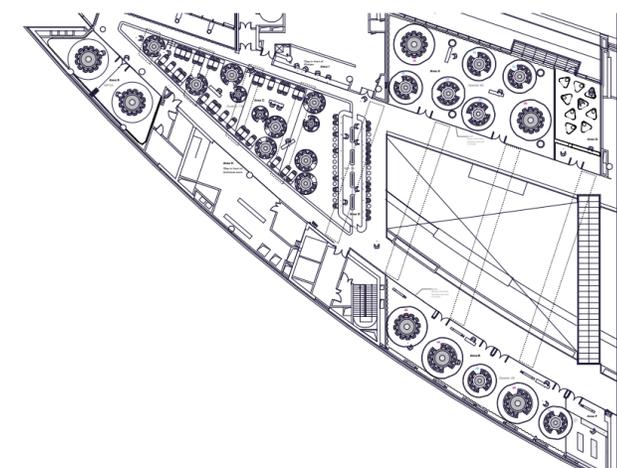
Johannes Torpe Studio



Would food taste better if you could eat it on a spaceship? Danish designer Johannes Torpe styled Subu with Stanley Kubrick's iconic movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* in mind, so he must have thought so. The simpler and edgier cousin of its South Beauty stable mate, the Philippe Starck-designed LAN Club, is located on Financial Street in Beijing. Torpe admits to an initial reluctance to work in China: "We thought, China, no way! They will just copy our ideas and feed us dim sum..."

This über posh fusion restaurant, hovering above one part of the immense atrium of Season's Place shopping mall, consists of an open triangular dining room flanked by pod-like private rooms sequestered from the main dining room by a wall of clear glass. Diners arriving at Subu cannot miss the curvaceous fuchsia logo. To counter the high ceilings, Torpe added white arches stretching across the full width of the atrium, spanning the open dining area and bar and occupying almost 150sq m, to create a more intimate feeling. The colour changes to orange when the lights are switched on. Subu's private rooms resemble space capsules: a series of round dining rooms – basically glossy white cocoons furnished in trendy colours – on either side of the atrium. Most feature a table embraced by largely white semicircular sofas or chairs. "[The latter] are for public servants," chuckles Torpe. "It seems that Chinese officials prefer not to sit on sofas while eating."

Subu's retro sci-fi atmosphere is enhanced by its clean, simple design. The cursive logo repeated here and there softens the otherwise austere interior. Torpe designed not only the overall concept, but also the furniture, music, lighting, utensils and uniforms... and even the waiters' service style. Torpe thinks one problem with Chinese restaurants is that they employ too many staff; at Subu, waiters will maintain a suitable distance from patrons until called upon. Patrons will dine to a soundtrack composed by Torpe and his brother, DJ and producer Rune Reilly Kolsch, exclusively for the restaurant. For that matter, each private room or 'cocoon' has its own sound and lighting systems, with patrons free to select their own playlist. Just as any space traveller would expect.



Pleasant Bar – Stockholm

Electric Dreams

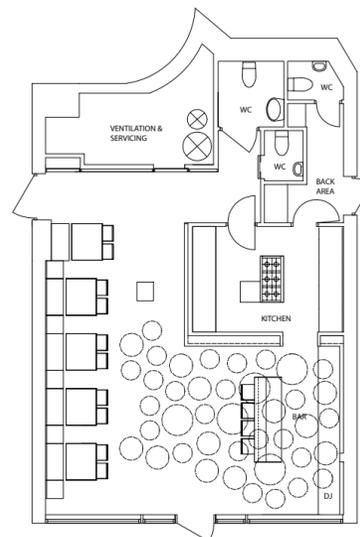


Hip as you like, the team of architect Catharina Frankander and product designer Joel Degermark is responsible for a sequence of extremely edgy projects in their native Sweden. At Electric Dreams, Degermark and Frankander favour elements that are, "too colourful, too weird, too beautiful, too dark, too many...". Their Sweden projects Weekday (retail), Monki (retail), Pleasant (bar), Kulturhuset (a public bathroom for an arts centre) and a dental office were designed in a unified thematic sequence describing a gradual 'march of forest animals' towards the city and vice-versa.

The structure of Weekday is based on an abstract tree in which the interior walls are angular branches forking out towards the street like Tex Avery lightning bolts. According to Frankander, Electric Dreams "likes to think of interiors as landscapes and/or structures. Our inspiration comes from the two extremes – the natural, organic world and the built man-made world, and clashes between the two." Their choice of materials and interior decoration in the Pleasant Bar certainly follows this mission statement closely.

With just 65sq m to play with (literally), Electric Dreams has created a space that gives the Moloko milk bar in *A Clockwork Orange* a run for its money in the surreality stakes. Transposed from their usual context as security mirrors, several semi-circular reflective orbs have been wedged into the roof, allowing the bar's occupants to check each other out from a distance with some impunity. Arranged close together enough to reflect infinite images of each other, these clustered acrylic hemispheres create the effect of a sea of glitter balls overhead – something that is bound to appeal to the dancing public (if they can find a rug-cutting spot on the thick, dark purple carpet or the white Carrera marble by the bar). Light from fiber optic strings made by Danish firm Roblon A/S is bounced off the bathroom walls and ceilings, creating similarly endless fields of white, luminescent cilia or grass, as per the country-city clash aimed for in the design brief.

The paucity of space is utilised expertly to comfortably accommodate bar, restaurant, kitchen, toilets, storage space and dance floor. There's glossy black lacquer everywhere, setting off the fantasy forest wallpaper which references the client's life in Tobago. The designers were also asked to incorporate the celebration of the plants and animals of the southern Caribbean into their design – which fell to the custom wallpaper designers and fellow Swedes Dizel&Sate. Joel Degermark's own Cluster Lamps for Mooi – configured with different bulb types for each table – vary the light temperature thrown onto the wallpaper.



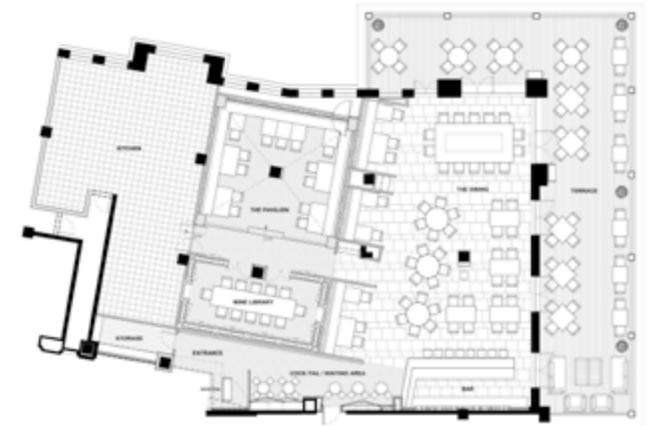


Mango Tree — Dubai

Steve Leung Designers Ltd



Photography by Ulso Tsang

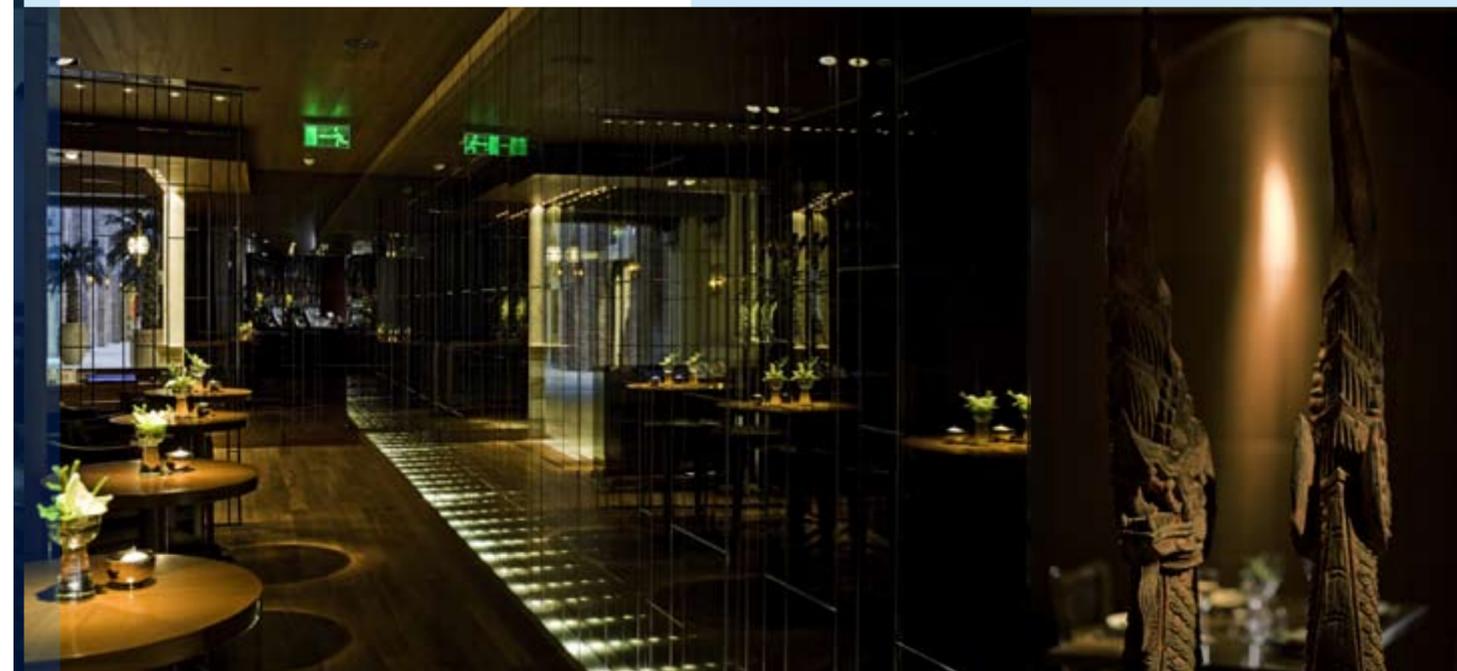
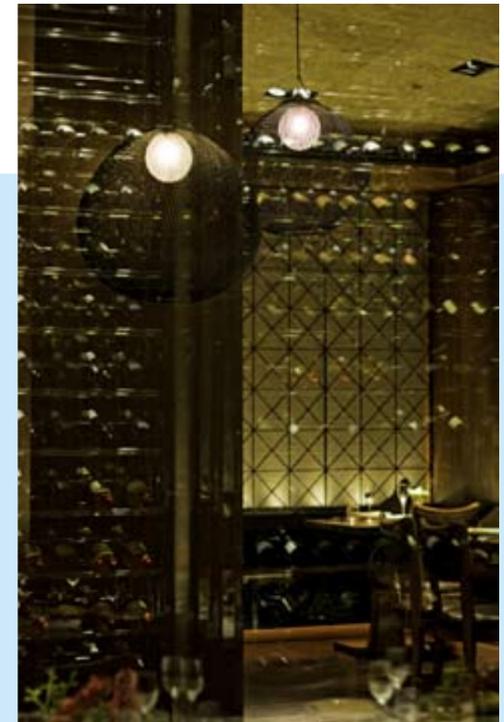


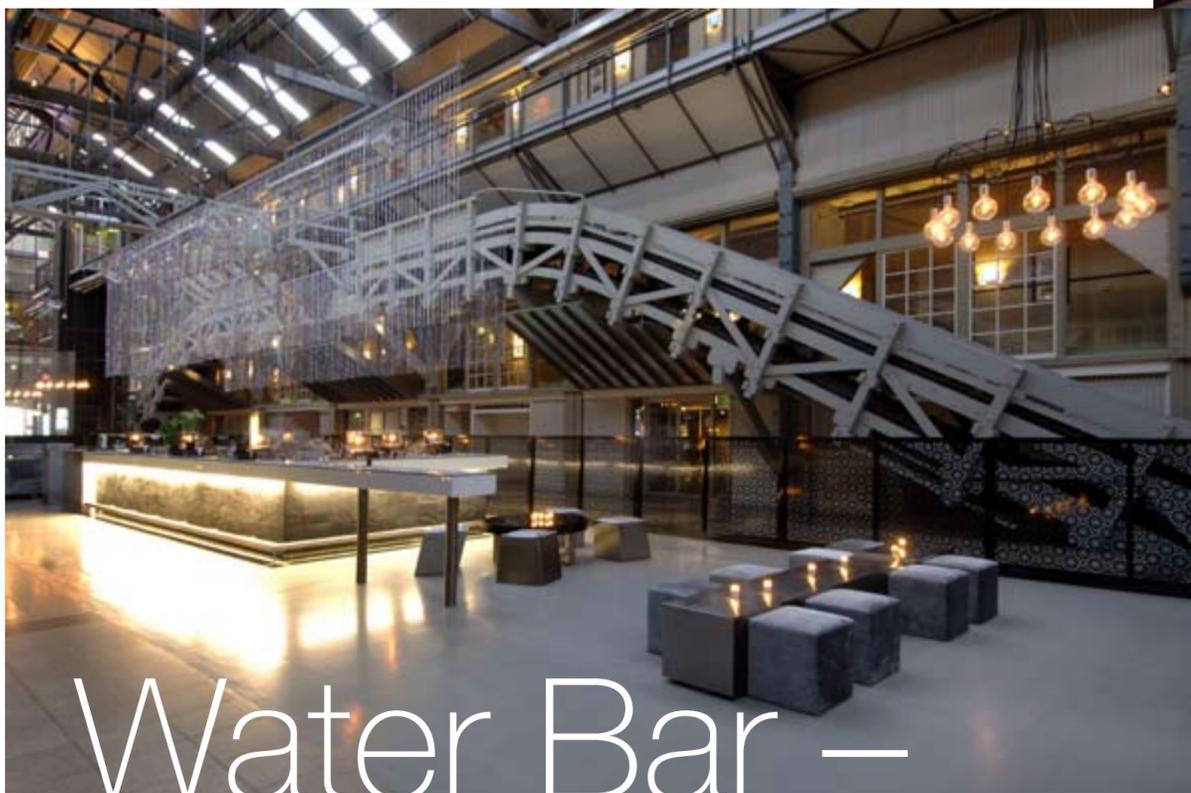
Dubai architecture is an outrageous mix of the historical and the ultra-modern (see our cover story next month). Amid this controversy, Hong Kong designer Steve Leung created the traditionally inspired, contemporary Mango Tree Thai restaurant. Located at the Souk Al Bahar shopping mall in the heart of downtown Dubai, surrounded by an artificial lake and taking in panoramic views of the iconic Burj Dubai, Mango Tree has the feeling of a Zen meditation room where diners can relish authentic Thai cuisine in a modern and stylish atmosphere. Aroy mak mak!

Part of parent company Coca Group in Thailand, the Mango Tree in Dubai is the group's latest offshoot. Leung created individual spaces by using contrasting floors. A traditional Thai teak wooden floor separates the entrance and cocktail space from the main dining area. The elongated space is enlarged by a wall-long bronze mirror. Metal screens with a rectangular pattern, derived from Thai architecture, extend to the unpretentious bar at the end of the corridor. On a marble floor, a huge dining table – emphasised by a woodbead-layered, rectangular chandelier – is the focal point of the restaurant. Made with teak wood and marble, the big table

is purposely designed for food sharing among guests. Paralleled with the metal screen pattern at the entrance and mirroring traditional Thai style with a modern twist, the walls are finished with chocolate wallpaper and wooden panels. The middle of the room houses a giant Buddha statue, augmenting the Thai notes.

Traversing the architecturally framed banquette seating area, a generous passage leads patrons to the pavilion and wine library, both distinguished by an African Panga Panga wood flooring. The pavilion's square-shaped seating arrangement with its gilded walls creates an elegant and intimate ambience. Leung's design enables multiple objectives for the area, from a quiet dining space to a room accommodating a lively private party without disturbing other guests, and even a gallery space. Opposite the pavilion, with floor-to-ceiling wine cases as walls, a "library" housing 1,000 bottles of wine and liquor surrounding a large marble table provides diners another enclosed and private setting. Contributing to the luxury is the covered terrace with lounge seating and stunning city views curving around one corner of the 5,500sq ft restaurant.



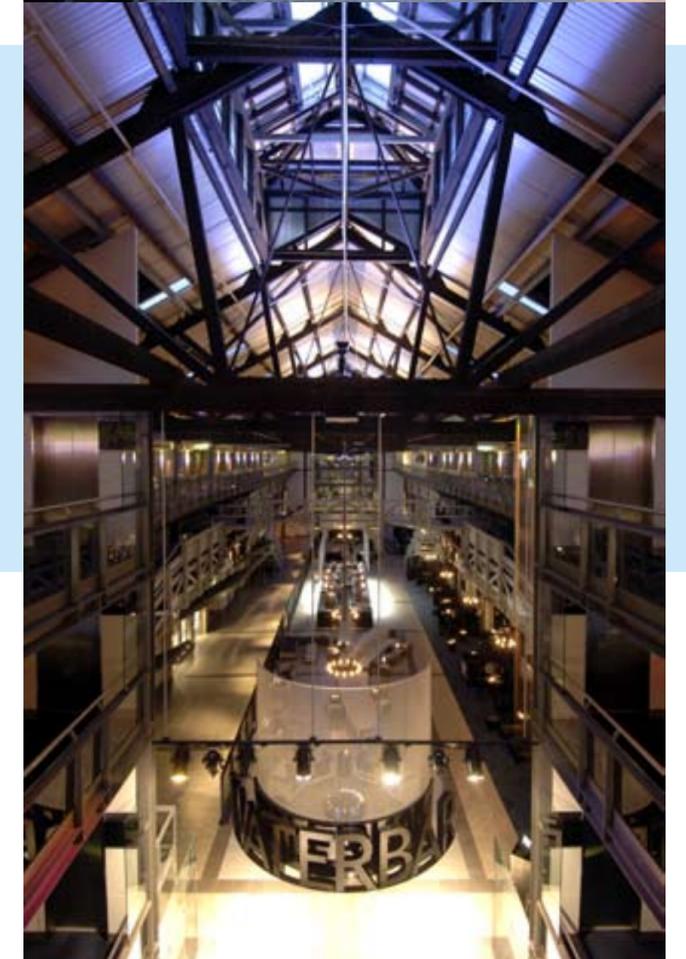
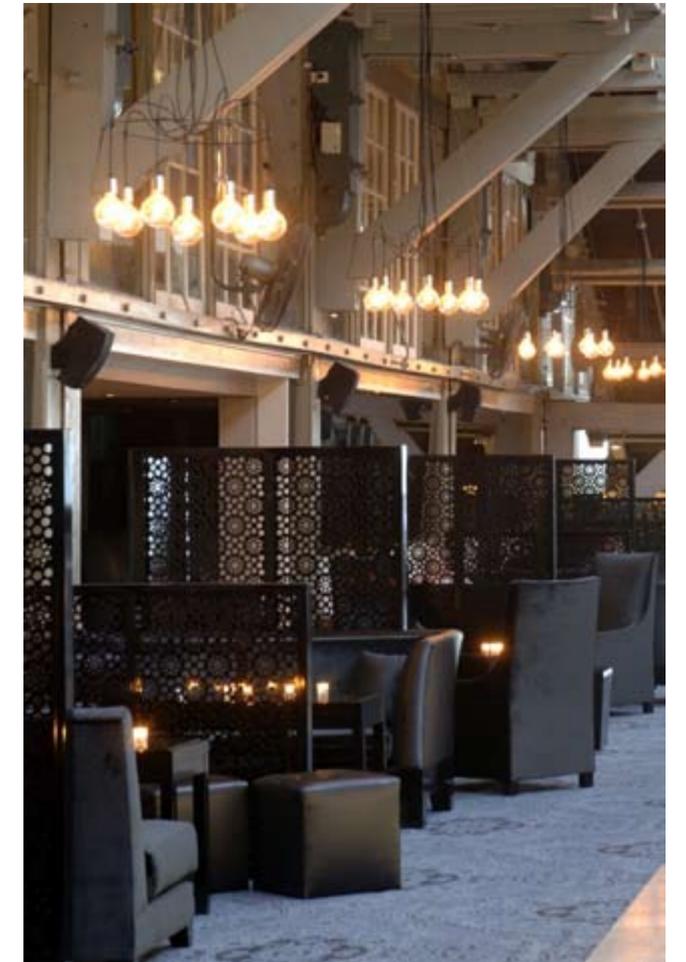


Water Bar – Sydney

CYD

This ultra-hip watering hole slipped into the dramatic space of the Finger Wharf in Sydney, built in 1915 as the largest timber-piled building in the world. Its history is long and colourful, including a tenure as the staging point for Australian forces heading to fight at Gallipoli, and the disembarking point for new immigrants arriving from abroad. Today it is a favoured and honoured part of the city; part of a residential and entertainment hub. The Water Bar took water itself as the generating metaphor, (fairly logical given a bar's role as social lubricant). Principal Cate Young loved the effects of night lighting on the dark water underneath the wharf and the reflections of moonlight on its black sheen: "With the Water Bar I realized I was designing volumes of light and darkness rather than simply designing a room," she says. A relatively limited palette was thus chosen, of fairly dark monotonous, with splashes of lighter tones, such as silver-grey upholstery and sparkling Swarovski crystal overhead. On one side, pockets of seating provide more intimate nooks within the huge space, many of the elements of which are stained in dusky white as background. Simple perforated screens divide the nooks, and supply one of the few softening elements in the space. Carpet with a subtle pattern runs underneath this area, which is lit by low hanging, industrial-inspired light-fixtures. Near the centre of the plan is a stone-fronted long bar, which takes full advantage of the building's extruded linearity. Low height stool seating clusters around small tables with candlelight; the feeling is casually elegant and warmly comfortable, as if you'd stumbled upon a large private gathering of family or friends that just happened to be in a remarkable location.

Perhaps it's easier designing for spaces that are already superb, such as this one, but the challenge with them is not to mess it up, especially by trying to 'compete' with the given attributes through what you add. Restraint is paramount; letting furniture, colours, materials and layout be quiet enough that they allow the extraordinary architecture to be appreciated. Yet what you do also has to be worthy of the whole, in this case elegant, well-proportioned, spaciouly arranged and pleasant on the eye. CYD seems to have absorbed this instinctively; the Water Bar is a strong addition to a great F & B city.



Delicious Elite – Beijing

Office for Flying Architecture



Not your typical high-class Chinese restaurant – a treasure chest of gold accents, floral motifs and baroque ornaments – Delicious Elite, located a few blocks from OMA's renowned CCTV Tower, is an exclusive Beijing nightclub for diners. The whole restaurant takes an all-boxes-structure, to emphasise a sense of domination and privacy, together with customised luxury. The ambience of a traditional Chinese garden is nowhere to be seen. "On the contrary," says architect Gustaf CK Kan of Office for Flying Architecture (OFA), "I wanted to reflect today's China and to give conventional Chinese icons a contemporary twist."

The artistic conception is based on a feeling of "Xian Shan Bu Lou Shui" – which can be roughly translated as 'revealing the appearance and concealing the essence'. Two methods for landscape-making of the Jiang Nan Classical Gardens, "Jie Jing" or 'borrowing' and "Kuang Jing" or 'enframing', are adopted by the restaurant through the use of modern-style metals and glass as materials. With the implication and delicacy of the classical style together with the resplendence of modern materials, OFA aims to inspire infinite imagination in a finite space.

Luminous arches, wood panelling and lighting above the tables refer to old traditions, and a wall of black-and-white stone symbolises Chinese calligraphy. Radiant arches illuminate dark corridors and the entrance to the dining areas, where one also finds the screened-off rooms that many Chinese people prefer when eating out. Delicious Elite – part of the Fuji chain – has nine private rooms, each with a large, round table and a lounge area. Arches shield these tables from the more open dining area. Colour in this dark and austere designed interior emerges from a lighting scheme conceived by Leslie Chen and developed by Kan. Mosaic art in the toilets, also by Chen, is appreciated by Chinese connoisseurs familiar with the old Mawangdui palaces. "We tried to rewrite oriental symbols with modern materials," says Kan. "We chose an irregular match of materials to show conflicting feelings."





Bei - Beijing

Neri and Hu Design and Research Office

Part of an ensemble of dining and partying spaces in the basement level of the newly opened Opposite House hotel in Beijing by Kengo Kuma, Neri and Hu's Bei makes much of a modestly scaled space that lacked natural light and occupied the 'back' corner of a fairly difficult plan. The hotel itself is a triumph, and has propelled the capital's hospitality offerings to a new level overnight. It also happens to be a flagship property of the Swire Group, aimed at establishing a collection of hip boutique hotels. Neri and Hu's downstairs work expertly amplifies the hip factor set at the street door, and transforms the somewhat hushed, sexily somber atmosphere of the lobby into a more lively, lighthearted socializing level below. Bei is presented within a group offered to visitors, along with Mediterranean fair at Sureno and the lounge-bar Punk.



Upon walking into Bei, which is planned fairly symmetrically with private rooms flanking a central space backed by a colourful sit up bar, one gets the sense this is a space for serious eating. The predominant material is wood, slatted into screen surfaces that give forest-like 'shelter' from people outside. The metaphor is continued in the main central space, as a ceiling of 'bird lights' seem to flit overhead; a whimsical touch offsetting the linearity of the timber. Behind the chefs on view at the rear of the space, a huge mirror reflects to all what is being cooked up, allowing a bit of theatre into the experience. Around the 'clearing' are five white boxes that contain the private dining rooms, conceptually 'carved out' of them. Inside, cut into or above the wood walls, are small openings that allow views into neighbours nests, or above to a frieze of city views, represented in photographic murals. As handsome as the private boxes are, patrons are likely to insist on sharing the main space, since the proportions, patterned timber surrounds, and charming overhead light treatment make it an alluring place to spend time with food. Bei manages serious and fun simultaneously, presenting a strong visual and spatial impact, but keeping matters uncomplicated enough to lighten the mood. It is bound to become a Beijing favourite.

