

Design-Fed... New F & B

By Estella Hung

Discovering what’s new in restaurant and bar design has always been a favourite pastime at *hinge*. That’s because hospitality design, like retail design, offers creatives a canvas to shift boundaries in even the most outlandish ways without the same practical concerns that come with designing hospitals, town halls or museums. In the case of the latter, where many an architect has taken liberties to fashion daring edifices, there is the temptation for the building to detract from the works on display. But for bars and restaurants, the ambience inspired is just as important as, if not more so than, the menu itself.

Designers who once created environments that amplified the joys of eating and quaffing are now dishing out entire lifestyle packages. This is seen at Arthur Casas’ KAA Restaurant, a joint smack in the middle of bustling Sao Paolo, that offers its patrons the equivalent of a trip to Thailand. The architect crafted a space walled off from the lively surrounds, promising the feel of not only a tropical resort but also one that’s friendly and homey, peppered with books, local artworks and other collectables. The new face of Witteveen in Amsterdam by Concrete Architectural Associates similarly offers its customers an excuse to stay the entire day. Not only are its no-fuss bar, cafe and restaurant – decked out in vintage furniture and smelling a little like a quaint Dutch pub – more than inviting to those with oodles of time, but Witteveen also provides a reading room with an open fire and a funky playroom for kids. The idea with these restaurants is to offer the consumer something high-end sans the pretentiousness.

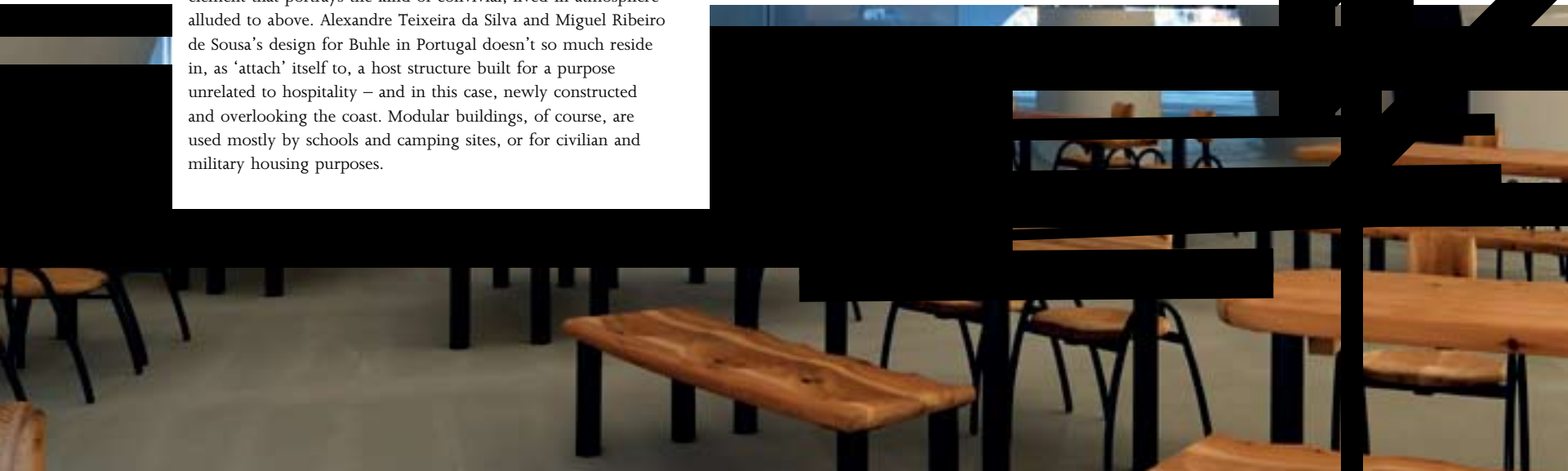
If they’re not selling a lifestyle, then restaurants are flogging the exotic history of the space they inhabit. It’s not restaurants just rejuvenating old factory buildings – although there’s that, too (see Lemaymichaud Architecture Design’s Le Local). MacKenzie Wheeler Architects recently converted a protected chapel in Somerset into a pizza house and bakery, while Hong Kong entrepreneur Gilbert Yeung, together with Parisian design duo Gillless & Boissier, transformed a 19th-century lighthouse into a robatayaki restaurant and bar. In each case, the architects and designers opted to co-opt and highlight the building’s original features – arched windows, arched ceilings, ceiling beams or brick work – for a look that’s thoroughly modern. For MacKenzie Wheeler’s design, there is also an added rustic element that portrays the kind of convivial, lived-in atmosphere alluded to above. Alexandre Teixeira da Silva and Miguel Ribeiro de Sousa’s design for Buhle in Portugal doesn’t so much reside in, as ‘attach’ itself to, a host structure built for a purpose unrelated to hospitality – and in this case, newly constructed and overlooking the coast. Modular buildings, of course, are used mostly by schools and camping sites, or for civilian and military housing purposes.

But when it comes to site and building exoticism, Takeshi Hosaka trumps all. The Japanese architect’s latest work gives the humble noodle restaurant an igloo-shaped shell, with views of Mount Fuji to boot.

Casting an eye on the high end of hospitality design, inevitably one finds entries that are all about the polish. This is especially true of outfits that marry Eastern iconography with Western design sentiments. The Gilbert Yeung establishment Buzy Suzie is a prime example, with its tapestry of clean lines, nightclub-style dark palette and subtle Oriental accents. Hong Kong designer and architect Horace Pan went one step further with the latest addition to Made In Kitchen, a brand of restaurants serving contemporary Chinese cuisine. Almost every surface in this 4,000sq ft space is reflective. Themed private dining rooms are threaded into a greater “Chinese Garden” narrative carried out in common areas such as the lobby, corridors and main dining hall. Fortunately, the effect is more like a high-concept nightclub than Disneyland.

Philip Michael Wolfson, a Philadelphian architect and designer, also brandishes the gloss banner with his recent intervention in the Museum of Art and Design (MAD) in New York. His highly sculpted furniture pieces, part of an ongoing re-examination of 20th-century art movements such as Futurism, can be found lining MAD’s newest restaurant, Robert. They stand among Vladimir Kagan’s mid-century modernist furnishings and Johanna Grawunder’s mobile-like Lucite chandeliers lit in pink LED. Robert is an intriguing exercise in postmodernism.

In this age where hospitality design is headed for “anything goes”, where there are as many minimalist designs and “industrial” designs as there are designs cluttered with finds from the past, trends are difficult to detect and parse. That the collection of restaurants surveyed here is a bit of a grab bag testifies to this. But then the lack of discernible trends is a healthy development for hospitality design, for creativity is thus not held hostage to preconceived notions that refuse to die or renew themselves. That’s what keeps the field so exciting.



A La Mode The French Window, Hong Kong AB Concept

Tucked inside one of Hong Kong's most exclusive shopping malls, with a panoramic harbour view to boast, this French restaurant has AB Concept at new levels of loftiness. Yet it is just what you'd expect from this homegrown design company, which has garnered assorted accolades for a style that has been by turns jaw-droppingly sophisticated and quietly edgy. AB Concept has also been a boon for a tourist-hungry destination like Hong Kong, as its work has consisted mainly of hospitality and F&B facilities.

The French Window has the firm turning its chic dial onto maximum as it neatly folds Gallic cultural references into a modern blueprint. This is something the firm has become rather practised at, having previously bestowed classical Chinese visual references with contemporary guises in such projects as Jen's Cafe and Green T House. Here, the designers used a few recurring motifs, colours and interior objects to translate the Gallic theme into something nostalgic yet unquestioningly modern, concept-driven yet minimally decorative. Grandeur was sewn into the scheme thanks to a space spanning 500sq m, and one that runs along IFC Mall's sea-facing front. A double-height ceiling helped, too.

AB Concept wanted patrons to conjure a vision of themselves embarking down a long driveway to a stately French chateau from the moment they entered the restaurant's long and snaking corridor, which connects it to the rest of the mall. To this end, glass lanterns with wrought-iron trim were installed, spaced regularly down one side of the passageway, and a wall of lush greenery on the other. Because of the corridor's vast length, AB Concept instilled some variety by inserting an impressive wine cellar deep inside. Before hitting the restaurant proper, the visitor is met with the restaurant's oversized motif, rendered in dramatic wood louvres and a signature palette of olive green, grey, cream and taupe. It serves as an enticing preview of what's to come.

The restaurant wears the signature palette with grace and subtlety, its tranquillity carried through by the light streaming in through the double-height fenestration along the outer elevation. Pieces of wrought-iron-rimmed textured glass, inspired by antique French windows, are yoked together to form giant, flexible screens that create loose cubicles as well as shield the VIP area and service areas from the main dining area. The Gallic touch is also to be found in the details, such as the mosaic tiling in the "loggia", or mock patio running along the outer wall; trompe l'oeil mirrors; chandeliers fabricated from stainless steel pans; and oversized lanterns.

AB Concept did much to convey a sense of cosiness in the main dining area with swanky U-shaped banquettes and tightly clustered tables. Wine, as a quintessential French visual symbol, naturally completes the image, with elaborate wine display tables dotted here and there. No doubt AB Concept's principal achievement with The French Window is its ability to realise a vision with the subtlest of touches.

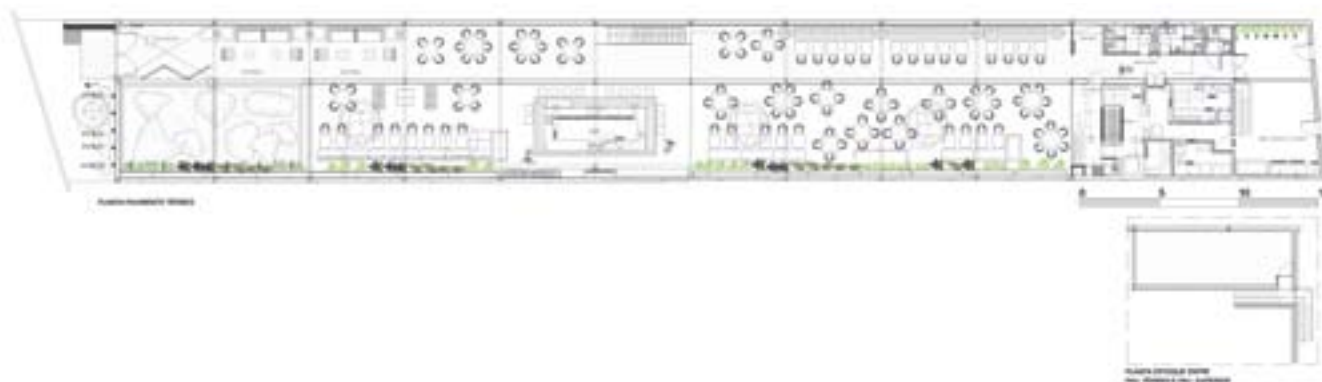


Emerald City KAA Restaurant, Sao Paulo Arthur Casas

Fashioning idyllic surrounds is Arthur Casas' forte. The Brazilian architect has created many a villa and home that fuses mid-century modernist ideals and his love for geometric structures with the spice of life that froths up from his balmy hometown, Sao Paulo. Sites are often situated in pastoral or forested surrounds, which allows Casas to make the work of nature a mark of his design. With the KAA, the architect returned to familiar territory. In fact, the restaurant recalls some of his residential work, most notably Casas' own home in Iporanga, Sao Paulo, which invites the surrounding forest into its grand open plan via lofty floor-to-ceiling windows.

Casas' love of wood is exercised rigorously in this whopping 798sq m space, which is divided over two long and narrow floors, with both offering indoor and patio seating. As a veritable inner city oasis, the entire complex is ringed off behind a tall, imposing white stucco wall – its discreet, sheltered brown door entrance belying the idyllic promise offered inside. In keeping with the wood leitmotif, Casas' colour palette comprises mouthwatering chocolate browns, caramels and creams. For the glass-covered patio – the crux of the establishment that extends the entire length of the floorplan – Casas whipped up a setting straight out of

a tropical isle. Luxuriant greenery from the Atlantic forest runs up the inner face of the stucco wall in dense thickets while a reflection pool mirrors this visual delight at patrons. Seating ranges from plush banquettes to sunbeds to Barcelona chairs; and tables are tastefully lit by lamps with simple lampshades. The piece de resistance, though, is the wood bar, which doubles as a preparation area. A sight to behold, it brims with colour thanks to the liquors, wines, books, indigenous works of art and other trinkets that line its back panel. Casas effectively conveys KAA as a lifestyle statement, not just a restaurant.



Dutch Courage Brasserie Witteveen, Amsterdam Concrete Architectural Associates

Photography by Ewout Huibers



Think back to Amsterdam circa 1970s and 80s when people, young and old, would gather at Witteveen, a gastropub on the Ceintuurbaan that was loved by all. The place exuded warmth with its Persian rugs on tables and traditional Dutch cuisine. It was also a place for popular – though notorious – billiard tournaments.

Concrete Architectural Associates, a dynamic studio crowned “Best Architecture Firm 2009” by Time Out Amsterdam, has offered some comfort to those nostalgic for the old Witteveen and sown excitement among hip young diners with a remodelled version of the premises in the original building. The aim of the game was to create a cosy atmosphere that drew on elements of the original establishment while remaining thoroughly up-to-the-minute. One of these elements had to be the Persian carpet – a common feature of traditional Dutch pubs, as it turns out. Instead of installing an actual woven rug, though, Concrete laid down handmade cement tiles over the entire floor space, their 20-odd colours forming a mosaic reminiscent of a classic Persian motif.

A cafe runs down one side of the space’s centrepiece – an island bar with an oak top and white metro tiles on its sides – and features a 15-metre-long vintage brown leather Chesterfield plus Eames-style DAR Bucket chairs in an assortment of colours to match the tiled floor. To further engender an ambience along the lines of “Make yourself at home”, the design team fitted reading lamps over the couch as well as on the bar top. But to also strike a distinctly modern feel, Concrete went industrial by exposing the building’s piping and keeping much of the programme in open plan.

Over on the other side of the bar is the dining section, a polished cousin of the cafe. White metro tiles grip the walls while oak wood tables run four metres down the space with original Eames’ Dowel Side chairs providing seating.

Nestled at the back of the brasserie are three private rooms sealed off from the main area by large glass pivot doors. These include a reading room containing an open fire ensconced in a wall of chopped wood, an authentic Persian carpet, and spider-legged lighting installation; a wine bar and impressive wine stack; and a play area for children with a giant blackboard wall and Crayola-coloured beanbags. As with so many upscale hospitality service providers, Witteveen clearly offers its diners an entire (and enticing) lifestyle choice.

The cosy atmosphere of the brasserie extends to the terrace, which is sheltered by three grey canvas awnings all year round. Scaffolding wood tables meet terrace chairs dressed in the colours of the floor mosaic indoors, while Chesterfield sofas are brought out during the summer for extra lounging comfort.

Considering Manhattan was originally settled by the Dutch, who christened the island “New Amsterdam”, it’s no wonder Concrete’s design references the Big Apple. The building’s former owner installed two dormers with side windows in the ceiling between the bar and the pivot glass doors. No light filters through the dormers while only limited quantities stream through the regular windows, so the designers decided to heighten perceptions of depth in the immediate vicinity by plastering over the part of the ceiling in question with matte black-and-white photographs of the New York skyline. The effect is not unlike that of a trompe l’oeil.

Witteveen is a successful exercise in balancing modern with retro while giving off a comfy vibe that’s also sophisticated. Old-timers will agree Concrete has convincingly recreated the ambience of an original, and then some.



Stripped Zama, Philadelphia Crème Design



Going for that light, ethereal look straight out of a Japanese onsen has remained de rigueur for designers of Japanese restaurants. Jun Aizaki of Crème Design, a Brooklyn-based collective of creative talent, is no exception. He digested the diaphanous appearance of upscale Japanese eateries like Zuma and gave Philadelphians Zama, a restaurant opened in Pennsylvania's largest city by Hiroyuki "Zama" Tanaka.

Japanese cuisine's vaunted simplicity rests on its few ingredients. Aizaki's outfit for Zama also bears an incredible simplicity, which stems from the use of lighting and lots of maple. The designer's main aim was to open up the restaurant's elongated rectangular space, which is divided into a bar/sushi bar near the entrance, two public dining areas and one private dining quarter. So the height of the space was emphasised by hundreds of vertical maple slats – lit for effect, dressing walls and forming partitions. Creative uses of lighting form patterns on the wood slats like sunbursts. To add to the "eye-opening" effect, Aizaki installed a curved ceiling etched with koi and ripple patterns, while the Japanese love for marine life is further iterated by a handmade ricepaper lantern in the shape of a fish that hangs over the sushi bar. So simple and so effective.



Viva Italia BICE Restaurant, San Diego Federico Delrosso



The restaurant group BICE has come full circle since its beginnings in 1920s Milan. Well, almost. The latest addition to this choice brand, situated in San Diego, is the work of Federico Delrosso. Here the Italian architect has steered clear of the stereotypical references to Italian culture which pervade most other BICE outlets. In fact, he had already done the same with his first BICE outfit, which he completed in Istanbul in 2008. This sentiment is reflective of Delrosso's own philosophy of creating a formal elegance that eschews visual clutter but is open to experimentation with various material combinations such as Corian and stone. Like BICE in Istanbul, the San Diego eatery communicates an ideal of modern Italy as a place to wine and dine in a relaxed, cosy atmosphere (ah, those three-hour lunches!). But the US version is more classically defined than its trendy Turkish counterpart.

The restaurant spans 400sq m and is tastefully attired in dark brown wenge panelling. Furniture and fittings bear minimal fuss in either chocolate brown or cream. With the benefit of two large dining spaces that are ringed by floor-to-ceiling fenestration, the restaurant is as open and airy as many of Delrosso's other works. In keeping with the chilled atmosphere, the architect installed a cocktail bar and sofa area for casual mingling in the space adjoining the two dining areas. If there are any overt references to Italian culture then they are to be found here, as black-and-white images of Italian life printed on the set of doors leading to one of the dining rooms. Colour also makes its presence felt here with a bookshelf of rose-coloured vases.

Delivering a crisp yet fluid space that doesn't overpower the senses, Delrosso has done the proprietors of BICE a huge favour, as patrons will definitely have room to enjoy the food more!



Grilled to Perfection Busy Suzie, Hong Kong Gilles & Boissier

It seems only natural that the creator of Dragon-i, Hong Kong's coolest nightclub, should also bring to the city's upscale eaters a dining concept that has fanned out from Tokyo to New York. The entrepreneur in question is Gilbert Yeung and the dining concept on elite tongues around the world is "robatayaki" or open Japanese grill. Not one for modesty, Yeung chose as his location the lighthouse of what used to be the Marine Police headquarters, found on one of the city's prized historical sites, which has now been redeveloped into the Heritage 1881 complex, Hong Kong's hottest destination chock-full of designer boutiques and elegant eateries.

Like Dragon-i, the interior of Busy Suzie is pure fusion delight – contemporary to the hilt but with Chinese accents. To realise his vision, Yeung enlisted Parisian design duo Patrick Gilles and Dorothy Boissier, the names behind other well-known fusion eateries, including Cha Cha Moon in London and Hakkasan in Miami. As the essence of robatayaki lies in specialised chefs shouting orders at each other and using wooden paddles to pass food directly to customers, Gilles & Boissier tempered this theatricality with the mellowness of an upscale bar. ("Busy Suzie" is a play on "Lazy Susan", the circular, rotating tabletop tray; the robatayaki chefs presumably act as the "busy suzies".)

The restaurant takes on the circular profile of the original lighthouse, and is divided into a dining section with a semi-circular robatayaki bar that incorporates seating for patrons, a cocktail bar area with more casual seating, and an outdoor patio.

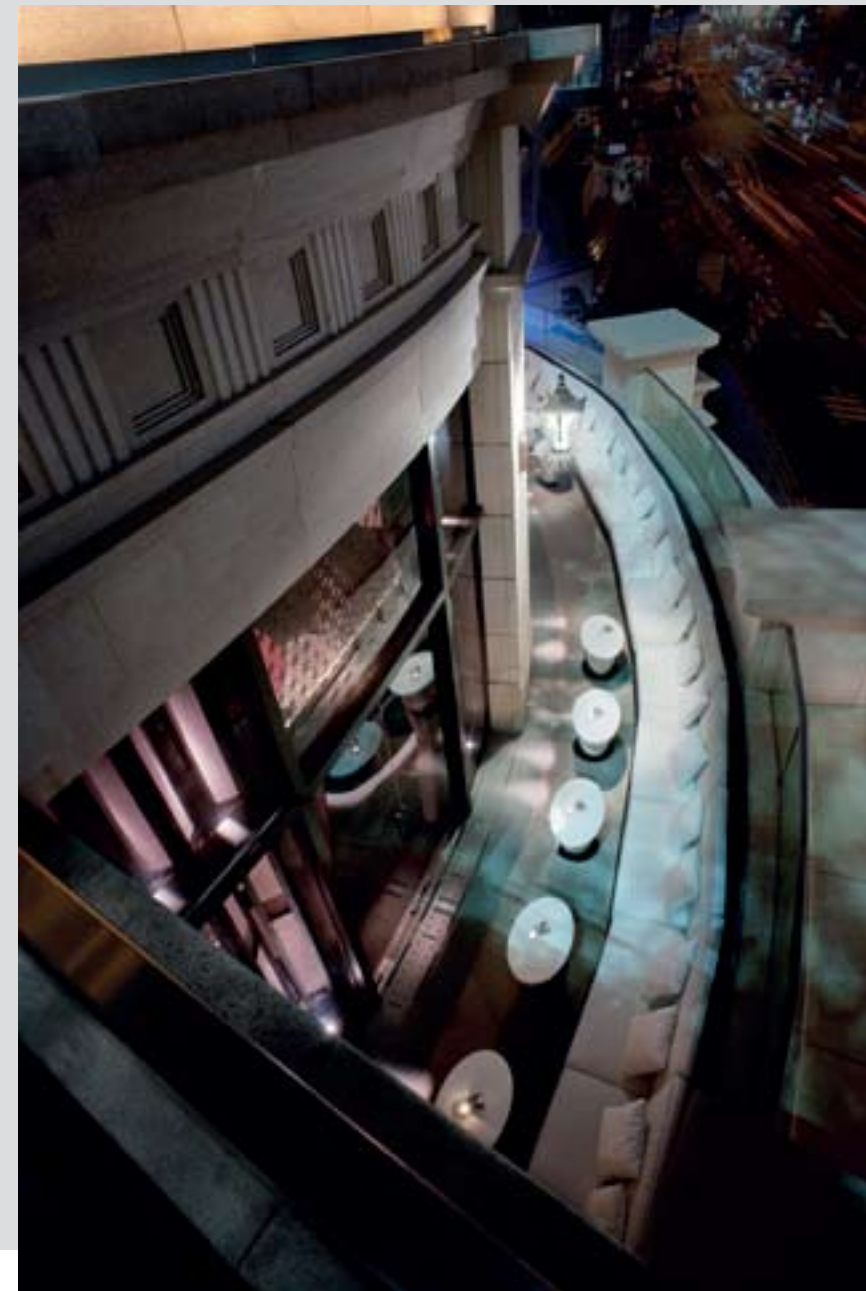
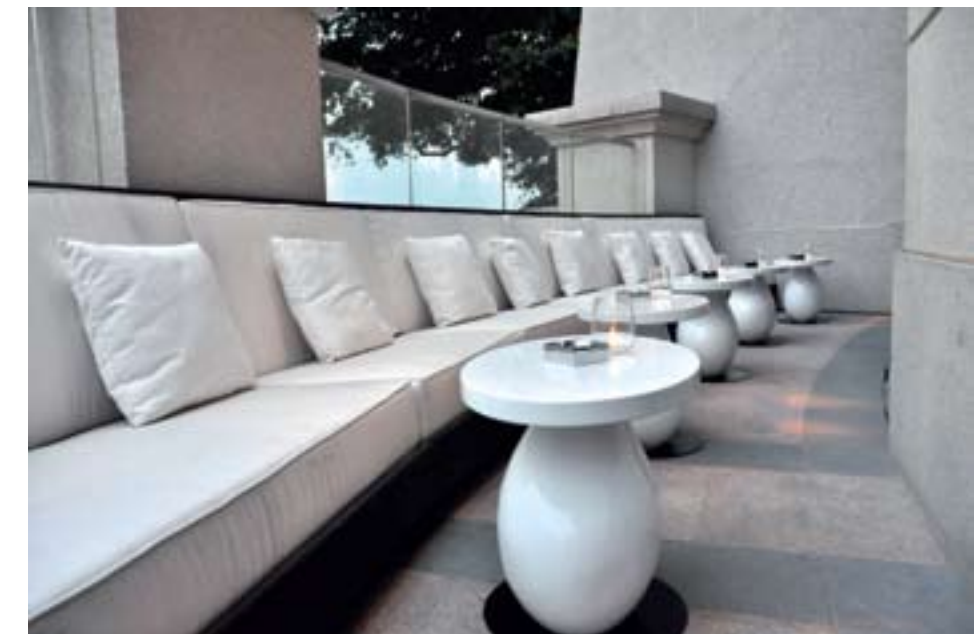
Like a traditional Chinese monochrome painting with calculated dabs of colour, the dining area backdrop is grey and black, with the slightest sprinkling of colour in the blue seats arranged along the bar. Because of this, emphasis is placed on the choreography of the lighting to draw interest. The illumination is kept subdued for ambience but at the same time used to induce patterns on the beige feature walls. The actual 19th-century ceiling of the lighthouse is also brought into relief through the lighting.

A common feature that crops up throughout the restaurant is bamboo. One bamboo installation hovers over the robatayaki bar in a less-than-imposing but still impressive fashion, while another forms the backdrop of the cocktail bar.

Colour and decoration are again used sparingly in the casual mingling area by the bar. As at Dragon-i, the signature colour is red, and aptly rendered on Chinese lanterns. Oriental visual cues are also found in the wood-rimmed screens that conceal the view onto the patio. The space, otherwise, is Italian-modern, with sinuous sofas in chocolate brown, egg-shaped marble coffee tables and dark wood stools.

For those who enjoy the great outdoors or just require a cigarette with their drink, the circular patio is the place to be in. With its bold white banquettes and wood slat flooring, it unequivocally evokes a bar in a tropical destination, doused in the latest chill-out sounds. Which can't be a bad thing.

As if it weren't cosmopolitan enough, Busy Suzie overlooks two bustling arteries below as well as the Hong Kong skyline in the distance. Given that Yeung was the brains behind it, that much hype surrounded the restaurant's opening in March came as no surprise to anyone. But even if the buzz was on account of the establishment's interiors alone, it would still be justified.



Supper Club

Le Local Restaurant, Montreal

Lemaymichaud Architecture Design



Transform your old office into a restaurant? Why not? Lemaymichaud Architecture Design has done exactly that. The Canadian firm once operated out of a factory building in the CBD of Montreal, but due to the structure's status as a protected historical edifice, the architects weren't certified to tamper with it. This amounted to being a bit of a blessing anyway, given that "industrial chic" is still the new black of interior design. The original building certainly has plenty of red brick and grey concrete for the look.

A great industrial canvas notwithstanding, the firm faced the immediate challenges of installing an open kitchen, bar, wine cellar and terrace. The last understandably proved the easiest: the architects simply converted the building's former parking lot into a lovely sheltered al fresco dining zone, outfitted by Jardin de Ville. As it sits by the entrance, the terrace presents a tantalising prelude to the restaurant itself.

Guests enter through a bar area adorned with skylights and featuring an impressive wine cellar made entirely of glass, before they arrive at a chic lounge with assorted furniture, including Kettler-style armchairs. A mezzanine was demolished specifically for this purpose, giving the space the benefit of the building's elevated ceilings.

As with most industrial spaces that are retrofitted, the firm's interior additions serve to highlight the building's heritage. Generous use of metals, greys and wood keeps the ambience suitably raw while metallic ceiling lights and naked bulbs blend well with the building's original metal beams and accentuated grey ceilings. The bar's countertop is ingeniously composed of hand-hewn beams once used to reinforce the structure. These were recovered from the building's basement.

Adjacent to the bar, and divided from it by a giant ebony curtain, is the main dining area and open kitchen. Furnishings are kept as 'unfinished' as is comfortable, with the odd frill provided by coloured cushions that pepper an elongated banquette.

For those less fond of 'raw sophistication', there's the option of a lush dining room, accessed through a hallway that stands between the open kitchen and pastry counter. Here the ceilings are low and the furnishings white and plump. But a handful of windows bring in sufficient amounts of light to this small space, to stave off any unnecessary use of candlelight.



Venerable Offerings At the Chapel, Somerset MacKenzie Wheeler Architects



Speaking of unusual conversions, how about a chapel-turned-pizza-kitchen-and-bakery? MacKenzie Wheeler, the British architectural practice renowned for outfitting some of the UK's most exciting restaurants in recent years, had the good fortune of exploiting an 18th-century Grade II chapel in the ancient town of Bruton, Somerset, and turning it into a chic dining facility.

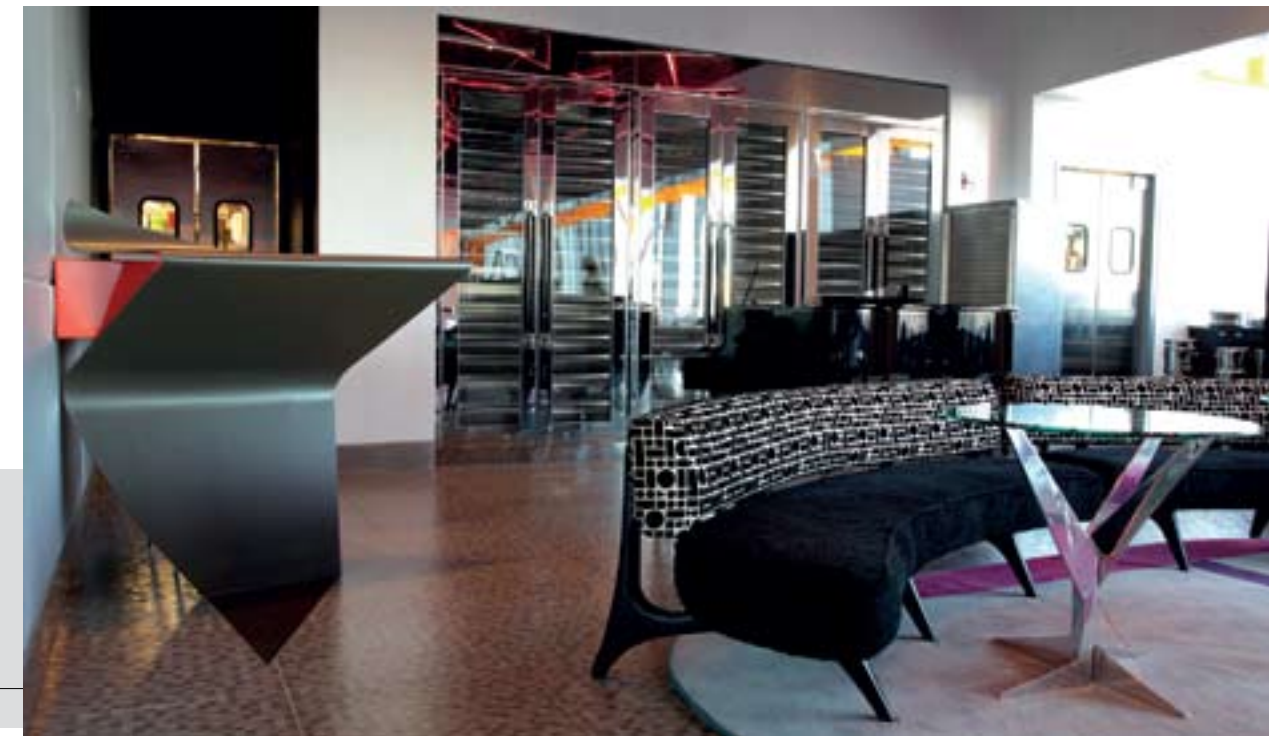
The building's robust structure was, of course, dutifully repaired and maintained, and the main hall's expansive arched windows were utilised to full effect. The architects did well to keep the main hall sparsely decorated; given its austere history, rarefied ceiling and abundant natural light, it doesn't take much to maintain its elevated aura. Any additional interior elements – such as wrought-iron fittings, candelabras and the refectory-style dining tables – function to bring out the original structure's uniqueness and history. Of course, this is with the exception of the quirky cowhide seats and the altar-turned-bar with a beatific female form suspended above it.

A spiral staircase, a common hallmark of churches, was installed to the right of the former altar and leads to an art gallery, while a large open and raised kitchen preparation area stands at the foot of the hall. From here staff can access the former room next to the chapel entrance, which now houses a bakery and a showstopping rotund pizza oven. Bringing a special flourish to the upmarket pizza restaurant is an extensive wine shop tucked in an area past the restrooms on the erstwhile chapel's left wing.

MacKenzie Wheeler couldn't have done a better job of giving an abandoned house of worship a second life. We just hope the holy powers that be will approve of this invitation to gluttony being issued from one of their former strongholds.



Back to the Future Robert, MAD, New York Philip Michael Wolfson and Johanna Grawunder



For Philip Michael Wolfson, design and art are two sides of the same coin. Maybe his early career stint with master architectural-sculpturist Zaha Hadid had something to do with this thinking. Ever since he set up his own practice nearly 20 years ago, Wolfson has stood out from the crowd for his re-examinations of 20th-century art movements, including Constructivism and Futurism, through design. It seems highly appropriate, then, that his latest project is with the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York.

Wolfson stamped his working philosophy throughout MAD's new restaurant, Robert, which was put together by Schefer Design, and turned it into a living design museum in its own right. His highly sculpted pieces – in the form of two reception desks, a 15-foot-long steel communal table with a six-foot-tall central wave-like element, cocktail tables and bar stools – rigorously reinterpret Futuristic conceptions of movement and speed. The communal table, moulded from powder-coated aluminium, oozes dynamism as its abruptly jagged form is given a dash of flamboyance by a coat of fiery orange. Elsewhere, reflecting surfaces, which serve to multiply the colours of and movements within the lounge, constitute the material of choice. Bar stools conceal mirrors while cocktail tables are constructed from mirror-polished aluminium and glass for a suitably flashy look.

Like a reconstructed continuum of 20th-century art, Wolfson's pieces stand alongside Modernist designer Vladimir Kagan's iconic upholstered furniture, resplendent in fuschia, light grey, cream and black. The space also features the work of Johanna Grawunder, an esteemed designer-architect who spent much of her career working for Sottsass Associati. Her contributions comprise mobile-like Lucite chandeliers and sconces lit by hot pink LEDs, all of which chime well with the pop-tastic ambience.

Together, Wolfson, Kagan and Grawunder have made Robert the design equivalent of Fiorucci in the late 70s, early 80s. The fashion label was reputed for its showy, retro-forward-looking aesthetic, built on a host of pop cultural references. With its bright colour palette, shiny surfaces and simple forms meeting glitzy centrepieces, it's no wonder the restaurant was named for the late party designer Robert Isabell.



Tripping the Light Fantastic Made In Kitchen II, Wuhu Panorama International

When faced with the task of outfitting a contemporary Asian eatery, some designers opt for clean, streamlined settings with only a hint of Oriental iconography (think Alan Yau outlets such as Cha Cha Moon and Wagamama). Not Horace Pan. The head of Hong Kong design firm Panorama International chose to do up the latest iteration of Made In Kitchen, a high-end restaurant brand specialising in contemporary Chinese cuisine, like a nightclub. And not just any nightclub, but one meant to conjure in visitors' minds a Chinese garden with a massive lake.

This idea begins in the expansive lobby. It is clad in reflective granite surfaces and contains an elliptical "pool" from which metallic rectangular sculptures rise. Pan also included in the narrative the corridors leading to different parts of the programme. One boasts a reflective ceiling etched with water rings as well as a bronze-coloured wall inlaid with a LED-lit leaf-like motif. Another, leading to a "rock garden" of sculpted metallic furniture, is capped by a mirror ceiling patterned with butterflies.

The 4,000sq ft area is divided into two open dining spaces – one inclusive of a bar and the other centred on an open kitchen – and a surfeit of private dining rooms. Walking into the main dining hall, which is flanked on one side with a mezzanine and oriented toward the bar at the end, is like entering into a nightclub's main dance arena. A central zone for casual dining is squared off from the rest of the vicinity like a bona fide dance floor, and metallic "bubbles" in lieu of disco balls hang from the ceiling. The backlit bar stands in front of a cream wall branded with ripple marks and a colour-changing "moon" projecting images of fish swimming.

The Chinese love for themes is played out further in the private dining rooms. Each has ownership of a different season, flower and colour scheme, and each follows this blueprint: a photographic image of a flower makes up one wall while all other walls feature vertical slats depicting an abstract image. From the artificial ceiling drop glass "bubbles", accentuated by furnishings that are velvety rich.

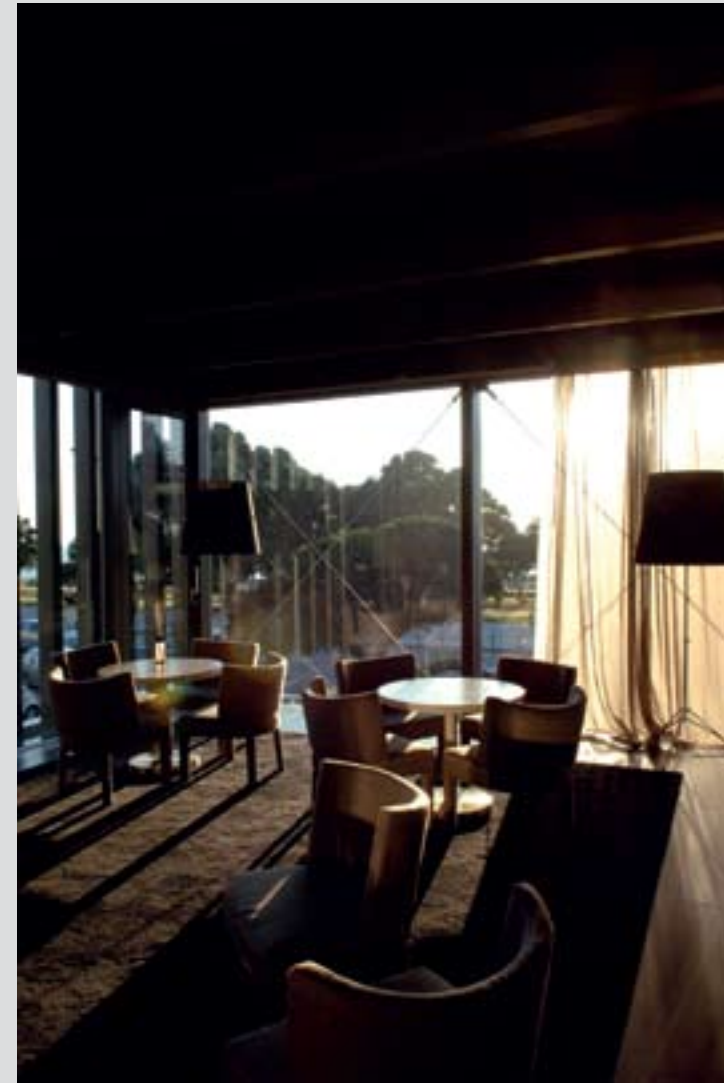
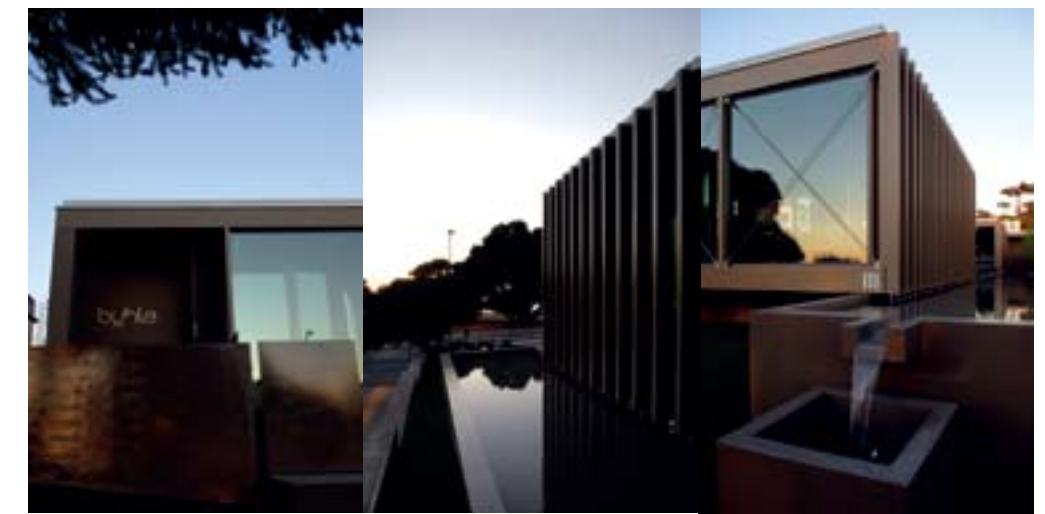
According to Pan, "'Unique dining experience' is the key phrase for any successful restaurant's business strategy." There's no denying he has given Made In Kitchen that uniqueness.



Open For Business Buhle, Porto Arquiporto and Paulo Lobo

A side occupation of Alexandre Teixeira da Silva and Miguel Ribeiro de Sousa is modular building. In fact, they've built an entire company, alongside their architectural practice Arquiporto, specialising in modular homes. For the new face of Buhle, a 40-year dining establishment, the two architects put a modular system in action in the context of hospitality. Ensnared on a dramatic sloping site near the Porto coastline, the rectangular wood edifice recalls Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House as it draws in the miraculous setting with generous floor-to-ceiling fenestration while being fully integrated with the environs with its mud-coloured frame. Sets of steps on the grassy area at the foot of the building that zigzag up to the restaurant double as bits of landscaping. The building is a play on the public/private dichotomy: the street-facing facade is semi-closed off to curious passersby by shading grills, while the adjacent patio presents a friendly, public face.

This patio is lined on the outer limit with young bamboo plants hovering over an elongated reflection pool, and



spiced with glass-encircled flames emerging from the deck. All it needs to reach perfection is balmy weather. The space is also an effective showcase for Paulo Lobo's refined design aesthetic. In keeping with the architecture, the Portuguese interior designer kept the palette to earth colours and the furniture streamlined and pragmatic. Lobo applied this elegant, understated scheme throughout the interior to draw attention to the surroundings.

The interior itself is divided into a public dining area, private dining cubicles caged off from each other by sheer curtains, and a cocktail lounge with a bar. Each private dining space has its own window onto the patio and features Lobo's ceiling-suspended lighting installations composed of shaggy bunches of wood sticks. Apparently these are inspired by bird's nests. The wood installations can also be found filling the glass bar at the restaurant's entrance.

Buhle, which won the Best New Restaurant accolade at Wallpaper*'s 2010 Design Awards, is a triumph in sophistication and subtlety. Teixeira da Silva, Ribeiro de Sousa and Lobo have achieved what Mies van de Rohe failed to do: build a minimally attired restaurant that radiates warmth.



Selling Ice to Eskimos

Hoto Fudo, Mount Fuji

Takeshi Hosaka Architects

Eating noodles in Japan is usually about as big a deal as breathing oxygen. That is, until Takeshi Hosaka decided to erect a noodle restaurant in the shape of an igloo. As if that weren't enough to raise eyebrows, Hosaka chose as his location the foot of Mount Fuji.

According to the architect, the reinforced concrete shell of the restaurant adopts a form that is at one with mountains and clouds. Its slight, undulating silhouette, formed by digitally manipulating innumerable polygon mesh points, allows rainwater to run off the side. In fact, the edifice is not just a whacky face but a self-sufficient structure. Possessing no mod cons such as air conditioners, the restaurant is open to the elements most of the year, with air circulating through two large arched apertures. Come rain, wind or snow, the openings are sealed by curved acrylic sliding doors. Even so, the architect suggests that fog, birds and other animals ought to freely enter the building for a most exotic dining experience.

A 60mm-thick layer of urethane insulation applied to the shell keeps its temperature stable and prevents unsightly cracks from forming in the facade. Lighting is largely provided by the sun when it's out, but in the evenings, the interior is illuminated by spotlights that project onto the ceiling.

The shell forms a tri-headed dining area spanning 530sq m that envelops 140sq m of closed kitchen area. With an edifice that's bound to stop traffic, the architect wasn't pressured to pull out all the stops on dressing the interiors. So he went for a minimalist scheme of long rectangular and round wood tables plus wood chairs with curved metallic arms. Unlike so many noodle joints, there are no logos, advertisements or giant menu displays to be found in this pristine setting. Yet, the architect says "Hoto Fudo is traditional local noodle food."

