

SLEEPER

GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

JULY | AUGUST 2017



Hotel Mono

Singapore's traditional shophouses transform into a minimalist's dream

The Ned

Soho House and Sydel Group breathe new life into Lutyens' Midland Bank masterpiece

The Oberoi Beach Resort

Piero Lissoni works his magic in the coastal wetlands of Ajman

Guest Book

044

**WILLIAM CHAN**

William Chan founded Spacedge Designs in 1999 with the aim of pushing the boundaries of functional space through simplicity and innovation. As the creative force behind Hotel Mono, a new boutique property in Singapore's Chinatown, Chan has transformed a row of traditional shophouses into a minimalist haven, where a strict monochrome colour palette defines the scheme.

061

**AB CONCEPT**

Long-time collaborators Ed Ng and Terence Ngan head up Hong Kong-based design studio AB Concept. The confluence of their individual skills – Ng an interior designer and Ngan an architect – sees bespoke craftsmanship meet architectural precision. The duo has recently completed their first UK project – Mei Ume, an Asian restaurant at Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square.

068



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PIERO LISSONI

"I believe that creating the magic is the key to designing good hotels," says Italian architect Piero Lissoni. For his latest project – The Oberoi Beach Resort Al Zorah – the magic is inspired by the hotel's surroundings. "I have designed the buildings to emphasise the natural beauty of the environment and capture the perfumes of the Arabian Gulf, blending with the habitat of the mangrove forest."

093



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JAIME BERIESTAIN

Born in Santiago de Chile, Jaime Beriestain moved to Barcelona in 2000 to study interior design, and has since made the city his home. In 2002, he opened his own design studio, working with a team on international projects including luxury hotels, restaurants and private homes. Most recently, Beriestain has completed The One Barcelona, a new flagship from H10 Hotels marking its entry into the luxury sector.



Four Seasons Hotel at Ten Trinity Square

LONDON

Seven years in the making, the former headquarters of the Port of London Authority reopens as a luxury hotel, creating a new showpiece for owners Reignwood Group.

Words: Catherine Martin | Photography: Courtesy of Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts (unless otherwise stated)

In its heyday, Ten Trinity Square was one of the most important buildings in London. As the headquarters for the Port of London Authority, it was the first stop for seafaring traders, lining up in their hundreds to pay taxes on the goods they imported from the Far East.

Built in 1922 to the design of Sir Edwin Cooper, the Grade II*-listed landmark is a fine example of Beaux-Arts architecture. A grand portico of Corinthian columns marks the entrance, while the Portland stone façade is adorned with statues representing transportation, navigation and commerce. Perched atop, Father Thames, London's river god, points out to sea, keeping watch for those who sail his way.

Located just steps from the river and occupying an entire block on the north-western corner of Trinity Square, the building takes the form of a chamfered square with a rotunda at the centre. The original glass dome emulated that of nearby St. Paul's Cathedral, but was destroyed in World War II, before being filled in and the building repurposed as offices. It wasn't until 2010, having lain vacant for a number of years, that Reignwood Group acquired the property and began the arduous task of converting it to a luxury hotel.

It took six months to secure planning permission, followed by deep excavations to support the original foundations – during which



Above & Opposite: Public spaces and guestrooms feature high-end finishes and furnishings, including furniture from Interdecor, bespoke lighting from Chelsom, and bathroom fittings from Lefroy Brooks

significant Roman archaeological finds were made – before any real restoration could begin. And restoration was the name of the game for Reignwood, opting to preserve and refurbish as many surviving features as possible: a team of experts spent years on the exterior stonework and carvings, while specialist restorers have brought new life to the original plasterwork, marble floors and grand staircase.

Aukett Swanke was appointed to take the lead on the architectural interventions, co-ordinating with historic building consultants Donald Insall Associates, as well as three different interior design practices. Their approach was based on the fundamental core values of restoration, repurposing and remembrance, and involved the insertion of a contemporary glazed rotunda into the central courtyard; unobtrusive integration of new lighting and technology; and the addition of a rooftop extension to house the private residences – all completed with great respect for the original building.

With Ardmore Construction on board as main contractor, Belfast-based McCue – a specialist that counts The Savoy and Claridge's amongst its clients – was responsible for the fit-out of the public spaces, a complex task owing to the listed status of the building. With the existing features to be preserved, the project demanded the highest level of detail, particularly in the Rotunda, the hotel's central bar and the starting point for the entire design concept. It was here,

at the former rates office, that acted as the gateway for merchants from the east to trade with those from the west.

Taking the lead on interiors was 4BI & Associés, the Parisian agency headed up by Bruno Moinard and Partner Director Claire Bétaillé. Initially brought in to design the private members club – an independent enterprise between Reignwood Group and Médoc winemaker Château Latour – the pair impressed, and were appointed to devise a scheme for the public spaces and 100 guestrooms too. Looking to the history of the site, 4BI & Associés focused on the confluence of east and west. “The building was once a dynamic trading place so the idea of exchanges was thus pursued, strongly connected to the main themes of travel, sailing and exoticism,” say Moinard and Bétaillé. “Everywhere in the building, there are evocations of the nautical world and of the countries discovered.”

The copper bar counter for example is inspired by its use on boats, while the Solomonic columns are reminiscent of the twisted rope used for mooring up. Rotunda's most impressive feature is a plaster relief that wraps around the entire space, telling the tales of those who travelled here. Its installation was an operation in itself, involving careful handling of the individual panels, which were mounted and joined to produce a seamless story-wall.

In La Dame de Pic – featuring the unique culinary delights of





Above & Opposite: in Mei Ume, designed by AB Concept, a series of lighting halos are suspended between the original columns

acclaimed French chef Anne-Sophie Pic – 4BI & Associés have let the architecture do the talking, accentuating the high ceilings with recess lighting and employing a simple palette of tan leathers against a white backdrop. Worth a mention are the cut-out paper chandeliers by Marianne Guély, a Parisian artist who has also created a series of framed peonies for the space.

Elsewhere, Moinard and Bétaille were inspired by the tales of Reignwood's chairman, Chanchai Ruayrungruan: "We combined his worldwide travel stories and memories of England to create a new journey in a timeless spirit, playing contrasts between the ancient and modern styles, English and Chinese design, to offer a stay punctuated with surprises and discoveries."

The public spaces are home to a number of spectacular chandeliers forming part of a scheme by DPA Lighting Consultants. In the entry lobby, Welsh artist Cerith Wyn Evans – currently displaying at Tate Britain – has created a striking piece using neon tubing, while in the ballroom, a four-metre lighting sculpture by Lasvit takes centre stage. In a nod to the building's history, designer Linda Sormova Melichova drew inspiration from antique nautical navigation instruments to produce a work of art with handblown glass. Other chandeliers date back to the building's inception and have been refurbished by Dernier & Hamlyn in an operation that involved cleaning the crystal and upgrading the light source to LED.

In Mei Ume, a contemporary Asian eatery serving both Chinese and Japanese cuisine, illumination comes in the form of hanging lanterns framed in black metal with patterned glass. Interiors here are the creation of AB Concept, a Hong Kong-based studio headed up by Ed Ng and Terence Ngan, who came to the project through Grace Leo, the former Vice President of Reignwood Group. "I've known Grace for a long time and we've always admired each other's work," explains Ng. "We've been trying to find an opportunity to work together so when the owner decided on an Asian restaurant, it was a natural fit."

In line with the hotel's principal design theme, Mei Ume fuses eastern and western heritage, effectively introducing an Asian context to classical western architecture. "We come from Hong Kong, where the Chinese and British cultures meet, so the story came naturally to us," continues Ng, adding that an innate understanding of both cultures was key. That said, with this being the duo's first project in the UK, working within the confines of a listed building was something of a challenge. "It was an exciting learning experience for us – finding ways to maintain the heritage and sensitively harmonise with the Asian features," says Ng. The first of those Asian features is a beautiful glass screen, strategically placed at the entrance and depicting the flowering plum blossoms that give the restaurant its name. Another is the gilded triptychs at both ends of the main dining





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Above: In the spa, marble columns inset with silver mosaic emerge from the water to frame the swimming pool

room, each portraying daily life from a different era of Chinese history. Bamboo panels, antique porcelain trinkets, and bold accents of red – symbolising luck in Chinese culture – also make an appearance.

Perhaps the most striking feature is a series of lighting halos suspended between the original columns; particular care was taken to attach the structures without detriment to the fabric of the building. The lighting scheme in general was something of a challenge, with authorities advising against the use of downlights. AB Concept's solution was to develop a three-poster u-shaped banquette, in which the underside of the bronze frame is fitted with angled spotlights – a classic example how constraints can become a design feature.

Completing the line-up of international talent, Italian designer Joseph Caspari was tasked with creating the spa, a true sanctuary in the heart of the city. A firm believer that first impressions count, Caspari has invested heavily in the arrival experience, opting for indulgent gold mosaic to line the entire space. With its low ceilings and curved walls, the reception is immediately cocooning, setting the tone for the eight treatment rooms and domed hammam.

Inspired by the original Roman baths, Caspari's scheme is a contemporary take on the architecture and materials of that time. Marble, stone and wood are present throughout, while classical columns emerge from the water to frame the swimming pool. The more luxurious finishes, such as the silver set into the marble in the pool area, reference the materials mined during Roman Britain, and even make an appearance in the treatments in the form of an anti-ageing jewel facial from Swiss specialist Dr Burgener.

Rounding out the facilities are the meeting rooms and events spaces, including the beautifully restored UN Ballroom, the setting for the inaugural reception of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946. The hotel will also introduce nine Heritage Suites and a Presidential Suite in the coming months.

The sheer scale of the site – fronting five different streets – meant its transformation into a luxury hotel was no easy feat. Changes in ownership and design teams, not to mention complex restoration works, resulted in lengthy delays, but after several years and millions of pounds, Ten Trinity Square can stand proud once again.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT: 100 guestrooms | 2 restaurants | 1 bar | Ballroom, 4 meeting rooms | Spa, gym, swimming pool | www.fourseasons.com
Owner: Reignwood Group | **Operator:** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts | **Architecture:** Edwin Cooper (original); Aukett Swanke (restoration)
Interior Design: 4BI & Associés; AB Concept (Mei Ume); Joseph Caspari (spa) | **Main Contractor:** Ardmore Construction | **Fitout:** McCue