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Bar, Mei Ume, Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square

WHERE HEAVEN MEETS EARTH AND EAST MEETS WEST

Spaces designed by Ed Ng and Terence Ngan are fully immersive experiences of light, glass and the space they contain. Their particular brand of magic is to appear to be transparent, while making the simplest of materials appear as another form of matter altogether. Marble is a deep pool of water, glass is pouring rain, metal is the inky night sky, a cool smooth surface appears to be molten liquid.

Rub your eyes and look again. It isn't rain falling, it's an optical impression of vertical light on the floor-to-roof-high wall of glass panes, lending the impression of trying to see through the waterfall setting on a power shower.

The window walls of a building Ed and Terence have 'concepted', are sheer glass, bare of any fabric, but light bounces off the angles of blocks of internal glass staircases or the oblong forms of floors and upper levels, blurring the apparent transparency of an utterly see-through façade. Never has such simple transparent material had the artful appearance of another form. It confounds expectations.

The collaborative duo who steer the vision of the Hong Kong based architectural consultancy AB Concept, with offices in Hong Kong and Bangkok, have created landmark architectural projects throughout the Far East. Terence Ngan is the architect with an innate understanding of space, order and proportion, Ed Ng is the intuitive designer who uses materials, ornament and texture to create a narrative within a space — in synergy the aesthetic is vast, seamless, timeless and in tune with the philosophical and spatial context of the setting.

A wall of colourful blossom enamel-painted on glass screens welcomes you to Mei Ume at the Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square and sets the landscape (Mei Ume are the Chinese and Japanese words for "plum blossom").

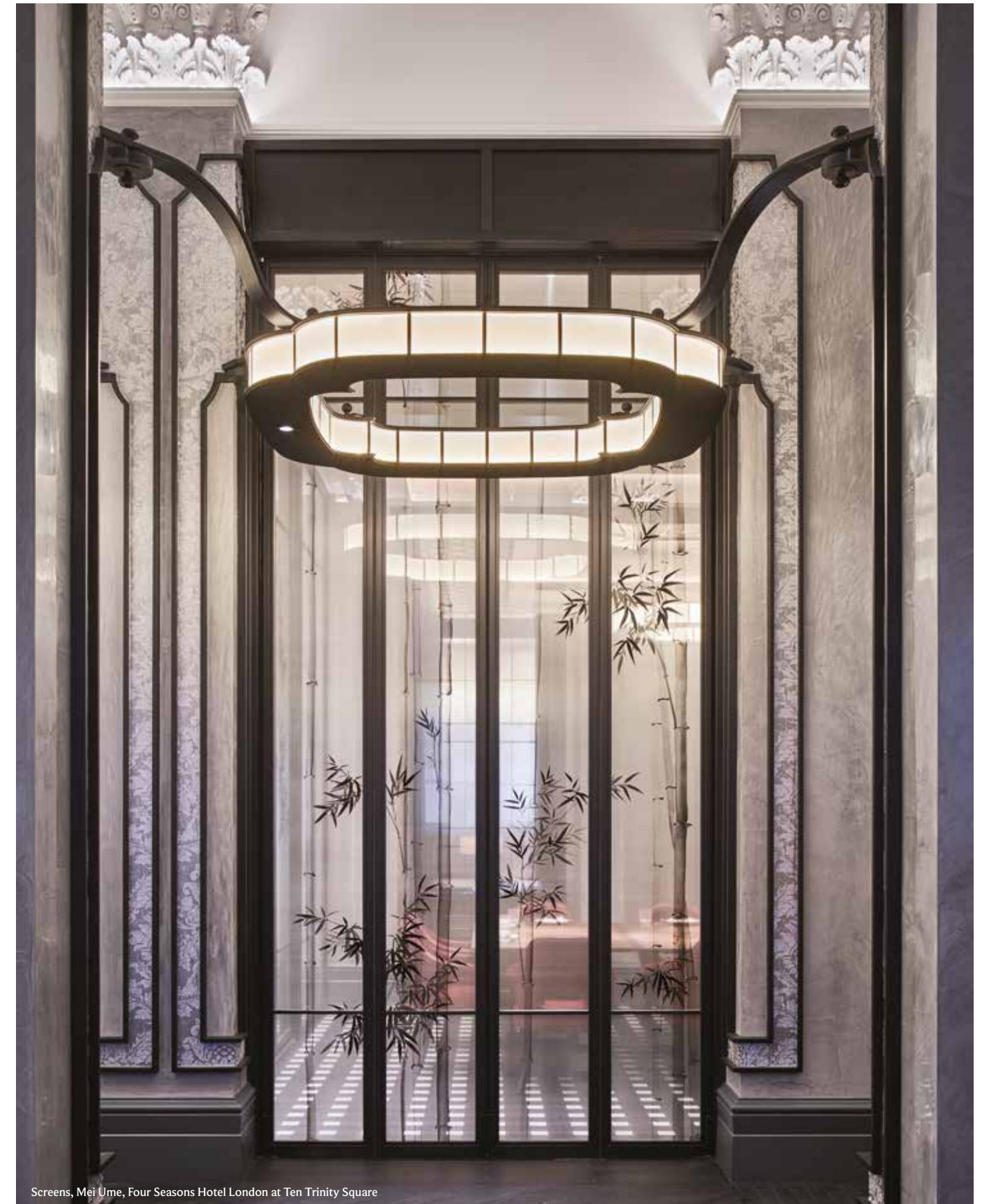
Hand painted silk embroidered panels designed to look like black and white brushstrokes of bamboo forest separate the private dining areas, and a red lacquer frame in the restaurant dining room holds an ornate gilded triptych, showcasing the layer painting technique of the Song Dynasty of China that dates back to 960AD.

Sitting in the pavilion structure around the bar, illuminated with lanterns, the cocktail menu is inspired by the four elements of Chinese astronomy. The menu is created by a team formerly from Dim Sum, Royal China and Sake no Hana.

Playing tricks on us again with their East-West positioning, Mei Ume is in the historic building of the 1922 Port of London Authority headquarters. “Mei Ume at the Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square marks a very important milestone for us,” says Ed. “As someone who grew up in Hong Kong, a melting pot of Eastern and Western cultures, I found this project particularly interesting as it presented us with the challenge of how to represent this delicately and sensitively. We have been honoured to be trusted with a project that is rich with history and heritage and we have thoroughly enjoyed working on keeping a legacy alive.”



Mei Ume, Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square



Screens, Mei Ume, Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square

Inside the atrium of the W Beijing Chang'an, in Beijing, China, is surround-sound magnificence. Height, repetition, uniformity, a palette of inky midnight shadow dimly lit by moonlight-white, a powerful chiaroscuro of light and shadow.

The reception of this contemporary hotel evokes the awe of a gothic cathedral; vastly high-ceilinged, the reception desk sits as an altar with the overlighting centrepiece of an ethereal glass chandelier of water-droplet beads of light, created by 26,000 LEDs, falling into a pool of reflective polished marble floor. Ultimately simple, uniform materials are transmuted by lighting into the alchemy of opulence.

Taking the traditional Chinese philosophical tenet of 'round Heaven' and 'square Earth' (turning ancient and modern concepts about the planet earth, spirituality and astrophysical science on their head), the empyrean pattern of circles within squares stretches as far as the eye can see, along the immense corridor of the lounge bar of the W. A phlegethon stream of fiery light, beamed from behind the wrought circles within squares, turns the shiny floor of the corridor into a molten liquid lava.

A graduate from the University of Toronto, Terence Ngan is AB Concept's lead architect, thanks to his innate ability to find solutions to complicated architectural problems and his incredible skill for planning and visualising a space. His passion for iconic art and functional designs is evident in the work he produces, which is sleek, sophisticated and timeless.



Shangri-La, Qufu, China

The Shangri-La hotel in Qufu, China is a landmark near the Temple of Confucius that takes the form of a Chinese pagoda with imposing pillars, interlocking beams and an upturned corne-hat roof.

Symmetry is used in the lobby on a vast scale to impose a dynastic sense of timeless power. Columns of light among a latticework of lightly-wrought metal in Confucian motifs symbolically invokes the wisdom and power of a many-thousand-year-old tradition. 'Texture' is invoked as a visual attribute of shaped metal forms rather than plush tactile surfaces.

Sharing similar ideas, Terence Ngan and Ed Ng work together to create breathtaking designs with a seamless sense of flow connecting the space. "Ed and I are both on the same wavelength," says Terence. "We each bring something different to every project."

"When we are designing for private homeowners, residential, or yachts and jets, where the project doesn't have a commercial consideration and remains ultra discreet, all the decisions are subjective and we cooperate with fine artisans and materials," says Ed. "In hotels and restaurant design, the decision-making involves multiple parties, and decisions are much more commercially driven. Financial considerations are crucial in the final decisions and our role as interior designers is to use our creativity to meet these requirements, maintaining a level of integrity for the functionality and aesthetic appeal of our design."

"While Terence focuses on spaces and solving technical issues, I work on a more abstract level." For each design, Ed Ng introduces an intriguing element, an unexpected use of colour, or a modern twist on a classic form. "It starts with an overarching theme that serves as the foundation. From this basis a story and design concept evolve into a strong narrative."



W Beijing, China



W Beijing, China



My Tai Tai, Central, Hong Kong

With a portfolio of some of the best high specification hotel chains in the world, are there any restaurants or bars that stand out as a watershed project? “In 2010, we designed our first restaurant called The French Window, in Hong Kong’s International Finance Center,” Terence Ngan recalls. “That’s a project that gained international exposure and received various international hospitality awards, which led to opportunities.

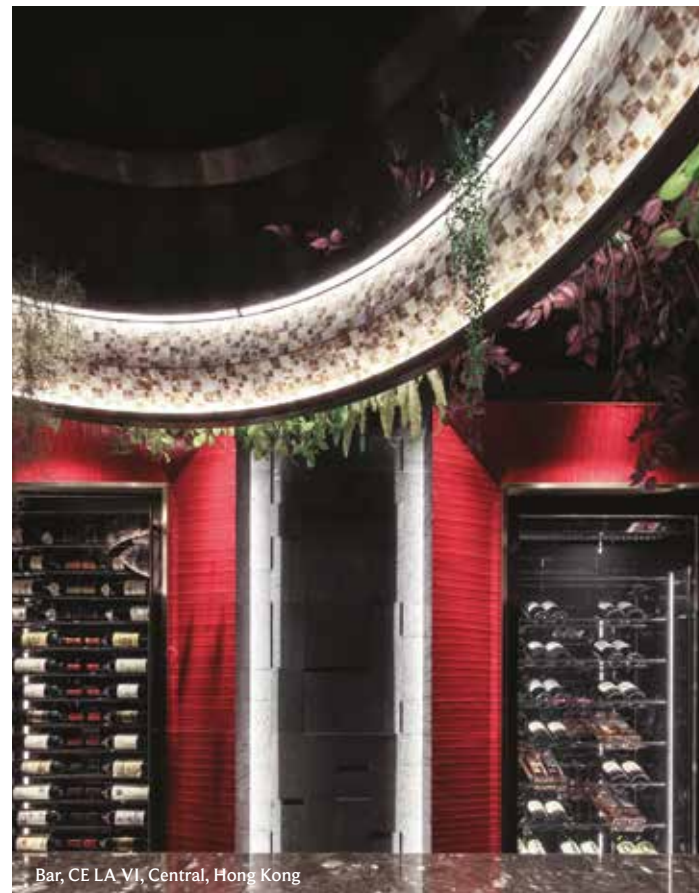
“We’ve maintained a very close relationship with the Four Seasons; they hired us to design signature restaurants, Shang-Xi in Shanghai, Mei Ume at Ten Trinity Square in London, and F&B in Chengdu and Kuala Lumpur. We really enjoy designing F&B projects as they are places filled with energy and happiness, often a destination of their own.”

AB Concept has been behind a new wave of restaurants in Hong Kong. Ed and Terence’s Asian and European influences reflect the cultural diversity of Hong Kong and its culinary scene.

Designs for CÉ LA VI were unveiled with a fanfare — a club, restaurant and rooftop bar on the top three floors of the new California Tower in Lan Kwai Fong in the heart of Hong Kong. CÉ LA VI is a play on words of the French term and this is a hedonistic tropical oasis filled with natural materials, lava stone, ships’ timbers, lush greenery, vertical gardens and growing chandeliers, to give the feel of the tropical rainforest in the concrete jungle.



Lounge, CÉ LA VI, Central, Hong Kong



Bar, CÉ LA VI, Central, Hong Kong



CÉ LA VI, Central, Hong Kong

“Restaurants must continually innovate and provide guests with an experience that extends far beyond their taste buds in order to survive, so it is imperative for the surroundings to set the scene for the cuisine, heightening the senses to their fullest,” says Ed.

He explains the scope of the thinking behind their concepts. “We seldom use the word ‘decorative’ amongst ourselves in the studio. Especially since Terence and I come from a rather architectural educational background. We feel that decorative elements are all about the mind-set, which eventually is naturally projected into our design work.

“If we walk into our sample library with an image or expectation how to ‘decorate’ the space, we may easily fall into the trap of decorating for the sake of decorating. We might end up putting colours, patterns and accessories together to simply fill up the space to make it feel rich and luxurious.”

Evidently, there is a precision to the abstract motifs that carries a narrative element through the building’s concept. Ed explains, “If we walk into the our sample library knowing the spatial experience we want to convey and the story we want to create through design, then any single piece of fabric, tile, stone or timber that we pick is a carefully curated design vocabulary where all elements are complementary of each other to form a coherent story.”



Washroom, Ee Da Le, Central, Hong Kong

Ed and Terence will take a Chinese myth or tale of heaven or a temple as the starting point for a design narrative for a secular space. Amplifying concepts of earthly power such as dynasties and imponderable sources of power such as heaven, they have employed the simplest of means to achieve an imperial opulence.

One of their tricks to heighten the senses is to flip the setting of East-West. Travelling extensively, Ed is constantly exposed to lifestyle trends, inspired by the cultures and customs he experiences.

For the Ee Da Le restaurant, Ed and Terence drew on the cultural heritage of Italy, observing the cobblestone alleyways of Tuscan hilltop towns, and the authenticity of rustic cuisine, as a counterpoint to Hong Kong.

In the bustling pulse of commerce in central Hong Kong, Ee Da Le sets the stage for Italy's baroque opera and theatre culture. Ee Da Le's ceiling is graced with elaborate oversized hanging crinoline table lamps, inspired by the iconic Italian opera skirt. The private dining areas are heavily draped in a rich red fabric like the heavy curtains at the opera, whilst antique mirrors and crinoline lampshades in the washrooms evoke backstage at the theatre.



Bar, Ee Da Le, Central, Hong Kong



Ee Da Le, Central, Hong Kong



Washroom, My Tai Tai, Central, Hong Kong



My Tai Tai, Central, Hong Kong

Another AB Concept to flip the East-West locale is the restaurant at No. 8 Lyndhurst Terrace — not a mews in London but a hotel in Hong Kong. My Tai Tai is a restaurant on the third floor, the second eatery designed by Ed and Terence. The concept for My Tai Tai is drawn from Thai culture and traditions. Ed and Terence incorporated symbolic elements of traditional ‘sak yant’ tattoos in designs in the floor tiles and intricate motifs on the bar.

The restaurant is inspired by a Thai woman named Baw, who was affectionately given the title of ‘tai tai’ (meaning ‘wife’ in Chinese) inspiring the name of the restaurant. The story in this restaurant design brings to life her love of food and adventure, with customised furnishings and materials showcasing Thai craftsmanship to convey the My Tai Tai story into the space. A playful nuance in the restaurant is the hawker stall concept conveying an old streetscape style of Thailand using traditional Thai fabrics covering the exposed ceiling pipes.

“Bar and restaurant designs these days are experience-driven,” says Ed. “It’s a very different field from a hotel’s guestroom or residential interiors. We are often given the freedom to narrate a space with more profound design elements, such as using a striking colour palette or including bolder design features, but not overbearing where they become visually overwhelming... they are much more of what we call “Instagram moments” than visual bombardments. Bars and restaurants are places where we spend relatively less time, but we accrue intense and memorable moments.”

www.abconcept.net