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HOUSE style

Interior designer Ed Ng's hotel and restaurant designs – from Beijing to Ten Trinity Square – bring new meaning to 'taking a global view'

WORDS: ELLEN MILLARD



FROM ABOVE LEFT: FOUNDERS OF AB CONCEPT TERENCE NGAN AND ED NG; CÉ LA VI, HONG KONG, IMAGE CREDIT: EDMON LEONG







Should you have been wandering around Belgravia's Pimlico Road on a Monday afternoon in November, you may have passed an inconspicuous gentleman browsing the shelves of the area's myriad design shops. On closer inspection, you may have noticed a small "EN" embroidered on the cuff of his shirt sleeve. The monogram – stitched by a tailor at Tom Ford – stands for Ed Ng, co-founder of Hong Kong-based interior design firm AB Concept and the brains behind some of the world's most beautiful hotels and restaurants: the W Beijing, the Shangri-La Qufu in China and Mei Ume at the Four Seasons Ten Trinity Square, to name a few.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT: W BEIJING;
CÉ LA VI, HONG KONG;
IMAGE CREDIT: EDMON
LEONG; MEI UME AT
THE FOUR SEASONS
TEN TRINITY SQUARE;
SHANGRI-LA QUFU

It's at the latter that we meet the following day, the towering Corinthian columns of the former Port of London Authority headquarters a stark contrast to the Shard and the Walkie Talkie that you can see from the square. The hotel's restaurant, designed by Ng and his business partner Terence Ngan, opened at the beginning of 2017. It was the firm's first project in the UK and, Ng admits, one of their more challenging.

"It's a Grade II-listed building, so we weren't allowed to touch most of the things in here," he begins as he shows me around.

"It's all beautiful Corinthian columns that are 100 per cent, unmistakably, Western, and I had to design an Asian restaurant that looks like it belongs here. It's like working on a spectrum, and you're trying to push two polar ideas – East and West – together."

The result is an Asian fusion eatery, which he says is 30 per cent Japanese, 70 per cent Chinese. Even the name, Mei Ume, is a blend of Mandarin and Japanese (both words mean 'plum blossom' in their respective languages). The link to London comes in the floor-to-ceiling artworks of traditional Japanese and Chinese fishing ports, a nod to nearby Tower Bridge and its trading heritage.

Such a project is the stuff that Ng's dreams were made of as a budding interior designer. He met his business partner, an architect, through mutual friends. A shared interest in being their own bosses sparked the idea for AB Concept. It was founded in 1999 and began with small-scale residential projects.

"My ambition has always been international hospitality, but you have to have a very strong track record. You can't start on day one and expect the Four Seasons to come to you," Ng laughs.

Since then, the pair have worked on projects across the globe, fashioning hotels in Malaysia, Thailand and India, restaurants in Hong Kong





and Taiwan and wellness retreats in Singapore. His travels fuel his inspiration, and he admits he has a particular soft spot for London.

“I think London is very embracing when it comes to design. Unlike a lot of the neighbouring European cities, you’re very receptive to different ideas and different cultures,” he says. “I like things that are more of a discovery, things that don’t have to be sparkly or flashy.

I enjoy London,” he says. “The problem is shipping it back, because I still have to go to New York and Tokyo before I go home.”

Ng’s upcoming projects include a W Hotel in the Algarve – the brand’s first in Europe – and a restaurant, Paper Moon Jardino, in Milan. But the one he’s most excited about is happening back in China: The Beijing Hotel, a 100-year-old establishment on the edge of

“London is very embracing when it comes to design”

“You want to take your time and find some hidden jewels, and Pimlico is definitely the area where I’ve found this quality in London. There’s a very old antiques store called Gallery 25 on Pimlico Road, where there are so many things just piled up.

“Another shop I like is the British fabric company de Le Cuona. It specialises in linens, velvet, cotton, all these natural materials. Everything is so inviting.”

Ng makes a habit of timing his trips to the UK with the Adams Antiques Fair that takes place every month in Victoria. On this occasion, he snapped up a glassware set from the Napoleonic period. “It’s nothing expensive, but it’s the reason

the Forbidden City, has tasked AB Concept with redesigning its restaurants, with a view to opening more across the globe.

“They want to make it into a flagship, because it’s very important that China starts to develop its own brand of hospitality. America has an abundance of Hiltons and Marriotts, but so many Chinese people are travelling now that they want their own brands,” he explains, before sheepishly adding: “I feel like I have 1.3 billion people looking over my shoulder, waiting to see what I will do with this hotel.” No pressure then... ■

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