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# Lifestyle

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# Mei Ume: Honouring a legacy

By Jane Walker



Combining Eastern and Western heritage, Mei Ume - the latest flagship restaurant to join the Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square - is a fusion of cultures designed to honour the colourful history and legacy of 20th Century world trading.

Located within the former Port of London Authority, a 1920's Grade II listed building in the heart of Tower Hill, Mei Ume is an immersive and luxurious dining experience at one of the City of London's most iconic landmarks. Once a gateway for Eastern and Western traders to exchange traditional commodities, the restaurant now seamlessly bridges the gap between two distinctive cultures.

## A trade of design cultures

Designed by Hong Kong-based design studio, AB Concept, duo Ed Ng and Terence Ngan effortlessly translate the trading history between British and the Orient. The creative 'story-tellers of space' honour a vibrant and cross-continental legacy within an intimately scaled space for their first UK-based project.

Taking cultural inspiration from the restaurant's name, a Chinese-Japanese hybrid translation for 'plum blossom' - interiors at Mei Ume signify happiness and are a celebration of the Chinese culture through thoughtful and elegant design.

Embellished with red accents, the restaurant is a fusion of Asian design set within the foundations of British architecture. Preserving the building's history, original mouldings and columns of the former trade building create a subtle division between the bar, lounge and dining areas. Ornate pillars, detailed with elaborate motifs, are entwined with contemporary design details and colour to create a modern, yet, authentic unification of the two distinctive cultures.



Upon entering Mei Ume, guests are first met with an impressive screen created by using an enamel paint technique on glass with colourful plum blossoms. Suspended from two metal columns, the screen encompasses the design of typical portholes that are repeatedly seen throughout the restaurant. Strategically placed at the reception, this piece fuses the two cultures into one.

Honouring Eastern and Oriental heritage, traditional materials, such as embroidered silk lace panels, are represented through various extravagant design details throughout the restaurant. Contributing to the oriental grandeur of the restaurant's design, three-layer gilded artworks are displayed to depict a traditional Chinese banquet scene. Supported by a red lacquer frame, the panels of this ornate piece, detail a story through a multi-layer painting technique. Through a multi-layer painting technique with glass overlays, each panel allows the viewer to see the work from a different perspective depending on the angle of viewing. Additionally, bamboo— a symbol for virtue in the Chinese culture – has been

used to partition a small and intimate space for guests. Creating a poetic dining experience, the panels serve to separate this semi-private dining area from the multipurpose bar, creating a notion of dining within a bamboo forest.

Mei Ume is a collection of oppositions that together form one distinct and unified interior. Alongside Chinoiserie influences, English heritage establishes itself with custom designed table lamps and use of brushed metal details - a nod to the history of the iconic Grade II listed property and its significant representation for international trade. Large bronze-framed windows overlook the hotel's traditional garden courtyard, flooding natural light into the restaurant space, conflicting the dark design features of the interiors.

A dining fusion of experiences Serving a modern take on classic Asian dishes, Mei Ume sources the finest gastronomic talents of Eastern cuisine. Headed by chef Tony Truong, formerly of Royal China, Mei Ume offers traditional Chinese and Japanese dishes with a modern approach - showcasing two of the greatest Asian



cuisines under one roof. Leading the kitchen team, Truong is supported by sushi chef Mun Seok Choi, from Sake no Hana, and Dim Sum Chef Derrick Chen, from Yauatcha.

With nearly 60 years of combined experience, the trio incorporate authentic recipes from both China and Japan with a contemporary approach and experience. Offering a unique experiential service, Mei Ume illustrates a creative and contemporary twist to traditional cooking methods and dining.

The Mei Ume Bar is a focal point both visually and for dining experiences. A pavilion-style design, the bar is illuminated with custom lanterns framed in black metal with patterned glass. Chefs will simultaneously interact with guests around the pavilion, with



Chef Mun Seok Choi taking the helm of the live sushi station. With a passion for customer service and keen interest in the collaboration of Chinese and Japanese cuisine, Chef Mun Seok Choi will offer a personal experience for guests to create innovative dishes each with their own creative touches.

Cocktails have been inspired by the four key elements of Chinese astronomy, incorporating a number of western classics, adapted with a touch of eastern spirit. An extensive selection of sake, shochu and both Taiwanese and Japanese whiskey is available, in addition to a wine list curated by Wine Director Jan Konetzki.

### When East meets West

Operating across Hong Kong, Bangkok and Taipei, the luxury hospitality and residential design powerhouse is best known for the architectural use of space.

Working with a number of renowned hotel operators in addition to select restaurants and private residences, the studio has accomplished a number of

projects. Seamlessly illustrating their nexus between two significant cultures, AB Concept has also curated interiors at projects, which include Rosewood Sanya, Su Yan at W Suzhou, Bo Innovation and Conrad Guangzhou.

At Mei Ume, Co-Founders and Principals Ed Ng and Terence Ngan, incorporate influences from their own cultural experiences to work harmoniously with the stunning architectural features of Ten Trinity Square.

*“We have been honoured to be trusted with a project that is rich with history and heritage. As our first project in the UK, Mei Ume at Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square marks a very important milestone for us and*

*we have thoroughly enjoyed working on keeping a legacy alive.” said Ed Ng of AB Concept. “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.”*

The duo continue to challenge, critique and reinforce each other’s work – Ed Ng as the intuitive designer who uses materials, ornament and texture to create a narrative within a space, and Terence Ngan, the architect who boasts an innate understanding of space, order and proportion. As a team, their individual skills together allow the studio to continually drive quality and incorporate a style that is unique to the location of their projects around the world. Mei Ume has provided the pair with an opportunity to honour the legacy of the former London Port of Authority, combined with their own cultural heritage, to deliver a contemporary and unique interior.

