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COMMERCIAL INTERIOR DESIGN INVITES YOU TO EXPERIENCE THE TRANQUILITY OF THE REFURBISHED BUDDHA-BAR DUBAI

THE NEW FACE OF **BUDDHA-BAR** DUBAI

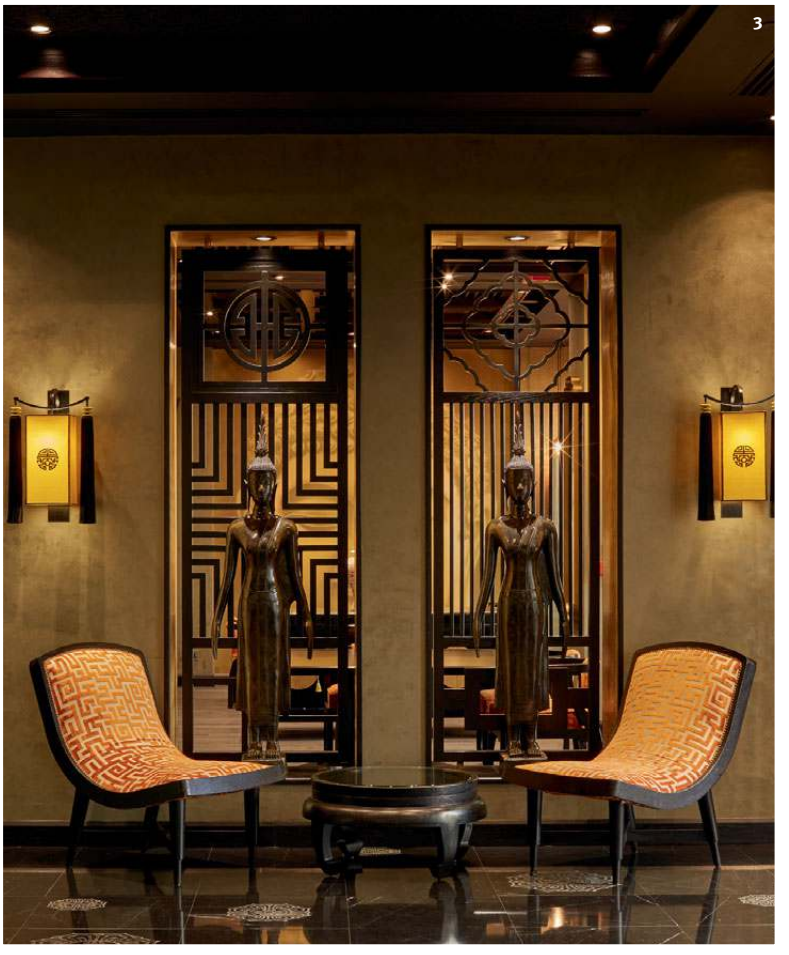
THE VENUE AT GROSVENOR HOUSE DUBAI MARINA GETS A COMPLETE MAKEOVER BY LW DESIGN, THE ORIGINAL INTERIOR DESIGNERS OF THE HIGH-END FINE DINING SPACE

1





2



3

Following a major refurbishment at the end of last year, the interiors of Buddha-Bar Dubai by LW Design offer a fresh take on its previous design, yet staying true to its original concept of fusing influences from China, Tibet and the Ottoman era.

Originally envisioned by restaurateur Raymond Visan back in 1996, the Buddha-Bar brand is now present in Beirut, Budapest, London, Manila, Kiev, Moscow, Milan, Mexico City, Monte Carlo, Prague and Dubai. The three-storied venue in Grosvenor House Dubai Marina is among the largest of the Buddha-Bars worldwide.

Pia Sen, associate at LW Design, was part of the design team who worked on the original Dubai Buddha-Bar concept, which opened its doors in 2005. To get inspired, Visan advised her team to watch the film "Seven years in Tibet". That's how her design journey with the brand started. Last year, she was tasked with the same space for the recent refurb.

1
Buddha Bar Dubai. Photo: Richard Hall, ITP Media Group.

2
A signature two-storey high statue of a Buddhist monk was given a fresh coat of gold paint.

3
The lounge area near the entrance has seen a minor makeover.



Black stone flooring with effective stencil artwork.



Reminiscent of Ottoman Empire era, silk tassels are frequently used as a decorative element.



Bathroom mirrors make space seem larger. Central wash units by Bagno Design.



The mosaic tile "rug" has been added at the entrace area.



Foo Dogs in Chinese red sit on both sides of the staircases.



Chinese dragons frame the mirror behind the bar at the upper level.



4
New dining area at the back of the restaurant features heron bird wall murals painted by artist Steve Chambers.



5

"I'm happy that I've been given a chance to do this design one more time," admits Sen. "It was my 'baby' from the very first moment. With so many details everywhere, this project was very challenging as you have to be very creative, but at the same time, you can play with it since it is almost a theatre stage setting.

"We talked to the client about putting new dining chairs in the main restaurant and refreshing the bar area, but it just grew from there. One of the things with the Buddha-Bar is that you can go on and on, so we tried to keep it down, but making sure that the old and new parts blend in well."

For the client and design team, the refurbishment was an opportunity to revise and improve the original concept by repurposing certain "quiet pockets" of the venue, such as private dining and tatami rooms in the back, which hadn't been used enough. A new open plan Robata Grill kitchen has been added to create a live cooking show experience for diners along with large bay windows that offer views of Dubai Marina.

"The back area hasn't been used enough, so the client's requirement was to open up this space and extend the restaurant area. We also took all the walls down but framed the windows with traditional lambrequins with dragon embroidery. In this area, the entire colour scheme is new and includes more vibrant shades of green and purple."

LW Design worked closely with 17A Art consultants and artist Steve Chambers who painted all the wall and ceiling murals. At the back of the restaurant, Heron birds are featured on walls.

The layout in the main restaurant stayed the same, featuring a two-storey high statue of a Buddhist monk, which was given a fresh coat of gold paint.

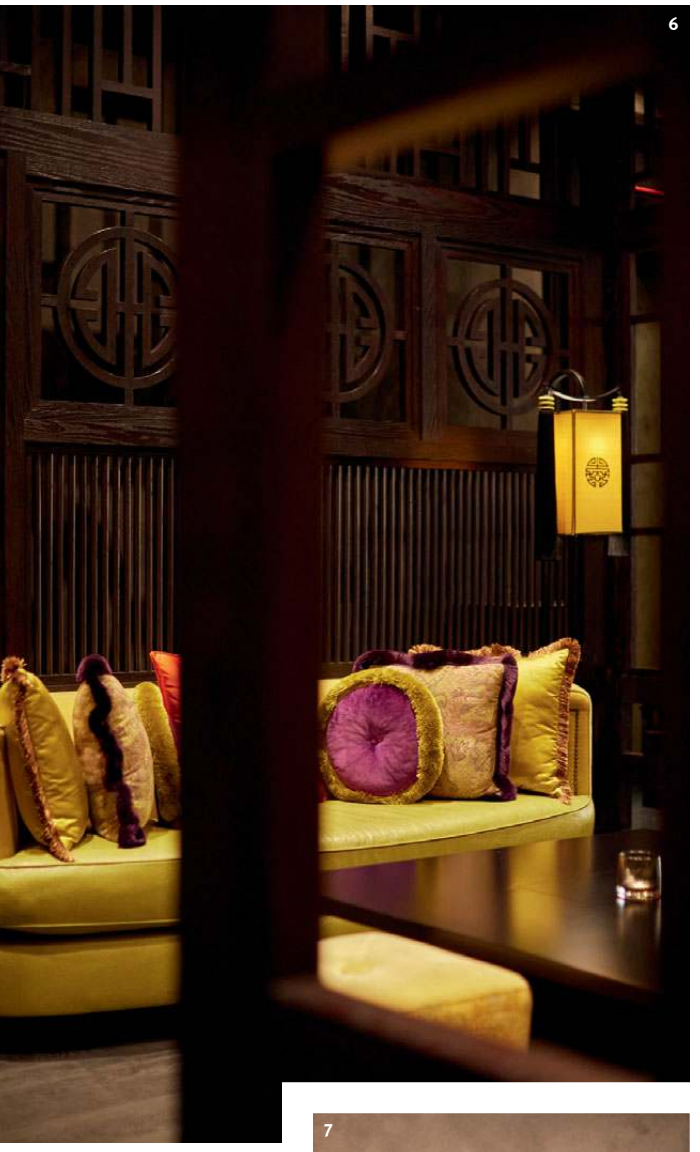
"We got new chairs and upholstery with dragon embroidery, which was specially woven for this project. The massive golden chandeliers with red shades in the main dining area have been cleaned up, and we added new black fabrics around the cords so in the evening it seems as they are floating in the air."

For the bar area, the designers completely stripped the bar fronts and made a new finish by using 3D tiles from UK-based studio Giles Miller. They used five different tones of tiles to achieve the effect of dragon scales. They also added two golden columns with golden dragons on each side, wine displays, new high chairs and lights with long tassels.

Another client requirement was to create better connectivity between the two floors, so the design team extended the area and added a new bar on the mezzanine level, but also built an elevator for easier access.

"The question we asked ourselves

5 The long and curvy bar counter is clad in five different tones of 3D tiles to resemble dragon scales.





6
The design team introduced a more vibrant colour scheme for the upholstery in the lounge area.

7
New wall lighting is adorned with long silk tassels.

was 'how do you pull people upstairs?'. Before you had to book a table or otherwise, you were not allowed to come up here. It wasn't used as much while there was always a lot of people in the bar downstairs, so we built an additional bar that brought people up here as well. A big dragon mirror on the back wall has a major 'wow' effect."

Rich golds and reds were always signature shades for all of the Buddha-Bar venues, but this time Sen decided to introduce more vibrant shades of green, red and purple.

"When you look at the colours during the daytime, they may seem too sharp and almost neon, but when you have a really dark envelope and dimmed lights in the evening, you need to have these jewel colours that you can still see at night. The colours are very much representations of Asia. The purple has always been a royal colour and the gold has been part of Asian culture for centuries."

Each Buddha-Bar has its own signature stamp, and for the Dubai venue, Chinese dragons play an important role in the overall concept. They are incorporated into the walls, as an embroidery on the fabrics for the chairs, curtains and lighting as well as framing the mirrors.

"The original concept for the Buddha-Bar was that it had to be an Asian fusion of influences, but a lot of it has been taken from Tibet and Ottoman styles. The colour scheme also comes from the Ottoman era, as well as the tassels we incorporated on lighting fixtures, along with luxurious velvets and silks."

Right at the entrance on both sides of the staircases leading to a mezzanine floor, sit two Chinese guardian lions, also known as Foo Dogs, created by Four Seasons Ramesh Gallery. The statues are usually smaller and bronze, but Sen wanted them enlarged and in a bright Chinese red colour.

The lounge area near the entrance has seen a minor makeover. One of the features is embossed leather used on sofas by Edelman Leathers.

"We changed all the upholstery and the flooring. We added bright yellows, greens and purples and now it is much sharper and brighter. It is amazing what you can do when you just change the fabrics. Now, it is a bit more vibrant and contemporary than the original one."

One of the lounge areas on the ground floor has been repurposed and turned into a 20-seat private dining area with an option to be opened to the rest of the venue. The main features in this room are wall murals with oversized Buddha heads in golden tones, also painted by Steve Chambers.

He created ceiling murals in two rooms on each side of the entrance area where the Buddha-Bar and B/Attitude Spa shops are located. The main features in this area include the mosaic tile "rug" with Lilypond and Koi carp fish, a reception counter that resembles Chinese trunks and the back wall, which is adorned with large hanging lanterns.

The flooring throughout the venue has also been changed. Light timber flooring has been replaced with dark walnut wooden flooring. An interesting design detail is the stencil work that has been incorporated on to the stone flooring, which continues from the entrance throughout the corridors and into the bathrooms.

Bathrooms were completely refurbished with mirrors on both sides making space appear larger. The designers added a new seating and make-up area, and a central wash space unit, equipped by Bagno Design.

"I visited a temple in Shanghai a while ago and saw how they used stencils on the stones. I took a picture of it and thought 'I want to use this some day' and this was a perfect opportunity for that. With the black flooring, the stencil work looks quite effective."

Designing a long and narrow space comes with many issues, and that was the major challenge.

"The shape of this room is a bit tricky since it is a long corridor. So we had to make sure that from the entrance to the back end there are new 'wow' factors happening, making sure it doesn't look like a long garage. The scale was another issue. Sometimes when you work with such heights, and this is a three-storey high outlet, it can be pretty difficult to envision what is it all going to look like and you have to go really big," says Sen, concluding that over the years she learned that 'the bigger, the better' concept always works. CID