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MAGICAL MOVEMENTS

From the floor, Torési's contemporary sculptures, designed using water, ideas for the new Palladium Gallery in London





Dream location

The opulent and eclectic Reverie Saigon epitomises the rush to wealth in Vietnam. Its luxurious interior is mainly decked out with Italian design. Why?

NO TWO ROOMS in the new Reverie Saigon in Ho Chi Minh City are alike. Nor for that matter is the Italian-dominated decor of the hotel much like any other's, especially in Vietnam. The ultra-luxury property owned by Leading Hotels of the World is in Times Square, a 39-storey high-rise building near the Opera House. The glass-fronted complex cost some €2.3m (\$4.25m) to build, and as its centrepiece the hotel is unashamedly eccentric in its opulence. All 280 rooms are individually furnished by some of Italy's finest design houses. It has the city's longest bar, an 1895 Bechstein piano, a custom-made, 3m-tall Boffi clock and a fleet of vehicles that includes a limited-edition Rolls-Royce Phantom Dragon.

A stay in the most expensive suite will close to £10,000 a night - but the use of the 1,200 sq m spa is included.

What were they thinking? Chief architect Kent Lui of Hong Kong-based Kent Lui Tactics, says: 'In French, the verb *rêver* means to dream. The inspiration behind this project was to present travellers with an experience that they would have thought they could only dream of, by designing a sky-high palatial retreat in the increasingly vertical city that is ever-evolving Saigon, and have it rise far above everything else - in both height and quality.'

The dream took time to realise. 'The Times Square building was always intended to be a mixed-use development where premium office spaces, high-end retail, luxury apartments and the most extravagant hospitality experience in Vietnam would come together as a new landmark for the city - with The Reverie Saigon as the crowning achievement of a project which took nearly seven years to bring to life. The basement and superstructure alone took approximately three years to put in place, and then work on the interiors began in 2011, starting with a worldwide search for the best in furniture design and craftsmanship,' Lui explains.

He says the overarching design approach was to create spaces 'that would exude a contemporary luxury defined by unreserved grandeur - generous in splendour. The hotel really does possess a design experience like no other. This was very deliberate on our part, as from the very beginning we set out to be a trendsetter rather than a trend follower. Unlike conventional hotel blueprints, ours was never limited by >

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Above: The hotel's main lobby features a custom-made, 3m-tall clock by Boffi



preconceived designs and concepts. The idea was to deliver a delightfully outside-of-the-box experience. It's meant to be opulent and extravagant – and unapologetically so.'

Lui set out 'to give guests the opportunity to experience and enjoy some of the most interesting, most unique interior decor that they've ever come across', he says.

He cites the grandiose sofa in the seventh-floor lobby, from Colomboselli's Esmeralda line of masterpiece works. 'Ours is being outfitted in a regal purple ostrich leather with striking gold leaf trim. It's the only one of its kind in the world,' he says. 'There's also the one-of-a-kind Bechstein grand piano from IRES that has been reimaged and transformed by Baldi into an opulent piece of art, with a veneer of a mosaic of precious malachite stone and accented with gilded beanie. And then there's the backlit golden agate fossil stone that lines the guest elevators, flanked by sleek, stenciled steel. Nothing is ordinary here, and that was the idea.'

Lui has mainly turned to Italian design, and although a predominantly florid and extravagant strain permeates the decor, cleaner contemporary pieces are also to be found among the fixtures and furnishings and on sale. Tactics Kert Lui appointed a full-time representative based in Milan to handle the procurement. The hotel's seventh-floor retail spaces have their own lobby and include showrooms housing products from the likes of Cassina, Colomboselli, Visionnaire, B&B Italia and Georgetti, items from many also being in the rooms and public spaces. Guests 'desiring to have some the same pieces they come across in their guest rooms...can very easily choose their favourites without having to painstakingly source them like we did,' says Lui.

But Italian? 'It's true that the physical setting, at first glance, may not be apparently Vietnamese,' says Lui. But 'those familiar with the local culture will be quick to realise that the Vietnamese people's fondness for all things colourful, vibrant and lively, is very well represented throughout the hotel. From the colourful installation of individual pieces of Murano glass on the ceiling of the ground-floor lobby [which collectively form the geographic silhouette of Vietnam], to the equally exquisite chandeliers and vases by Venini in richly coloured, hand-blown glass; from the vibrant, hand-laid

mosaic art by Sicis to the hand-woven silks by Rubelli [one of the oldest fabric manufacturers in Italy], the Vietnamese people's naturally joyful character and their enthusiasm for colours are actually apparent throughout.'

He says that Asian symbolism can be found throughout the property, interpreted by European artistry and craftsmanship. In The Royal Pavilion restaurant, for example, the rich golden and vermilion colour palette speaks to many Asian cultures, particularly those who have been greatly influenced by China. 'The bringing together of seemingly contrasting yet complementary elements – and taking inspiration from the world outside of Vietnam – is, in many ways, illustrative of the country's storied past. That's why throughout the hotel you'll often come across an eclectic arrangement of furnishings, textiles and decorative pieces,' Lui says. 'Anywhere else, a hotel as eccentric as this would likely have a different effect, but its placement here is perfect. It is in so many ways quintessentially Vietnam.'

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Above Inside a grand Deluxe room at the Beverly Saigon

Below The bathroom of one of the hotel's Junior Suites

