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The Hoxton

Global expansion beckons for The Hoxton as it makes its Amsterdam debut

Tristan Auer

The award-winning designer on his new partnership with Wilson Associates

AHDA

Shortlist and judging panel announced for the second Asia Hotel Design Awards



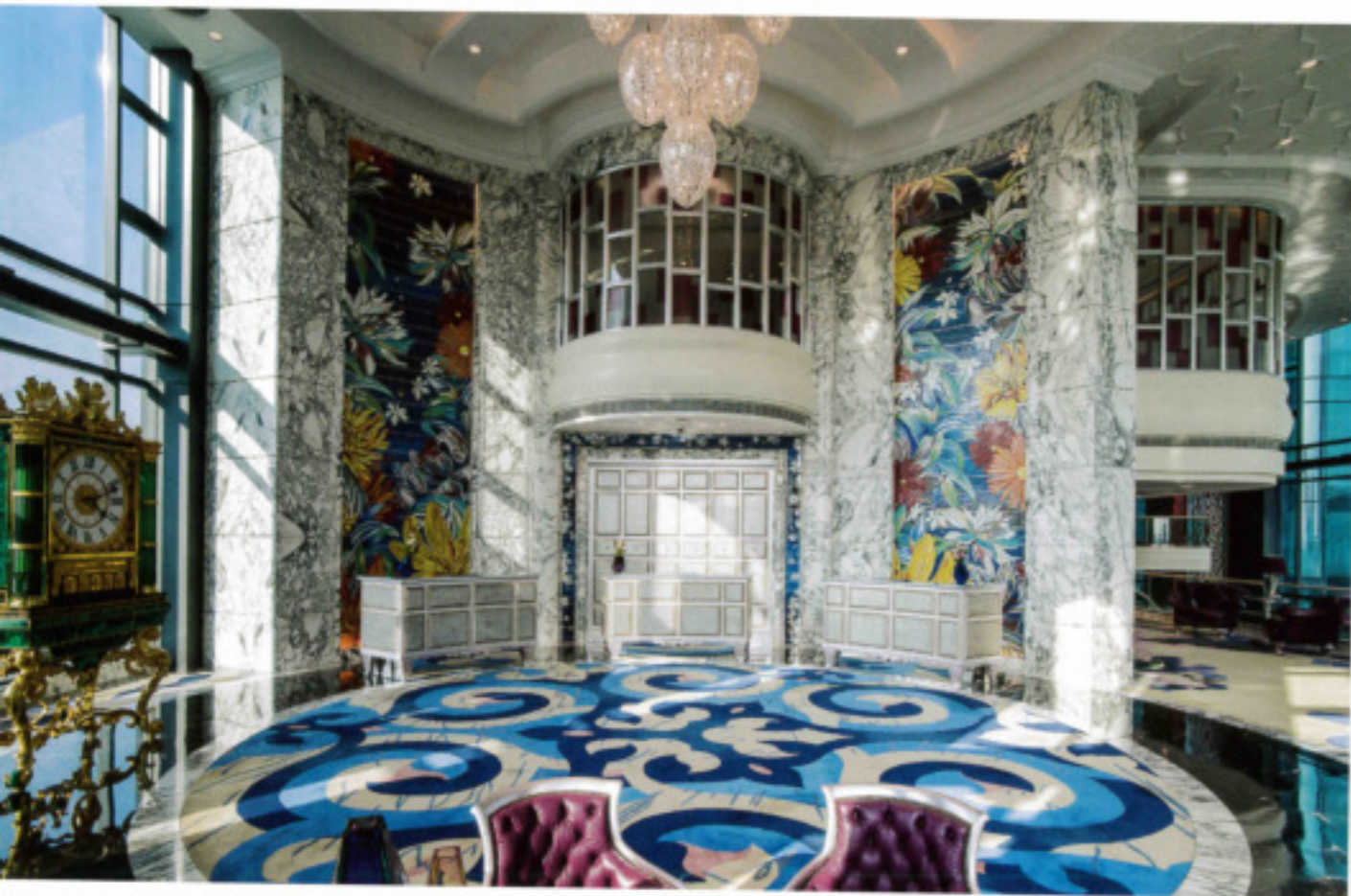


The Reverie Saigon

HO CHI MINH CITY

Flights of fancy abound in a hotel that draws on the impeccable craftsmanship of a long tradition of Italian design while embracing the Vietnamese love of colour.

Words: Neena Dhillon | Photography: © Frederik Wissink



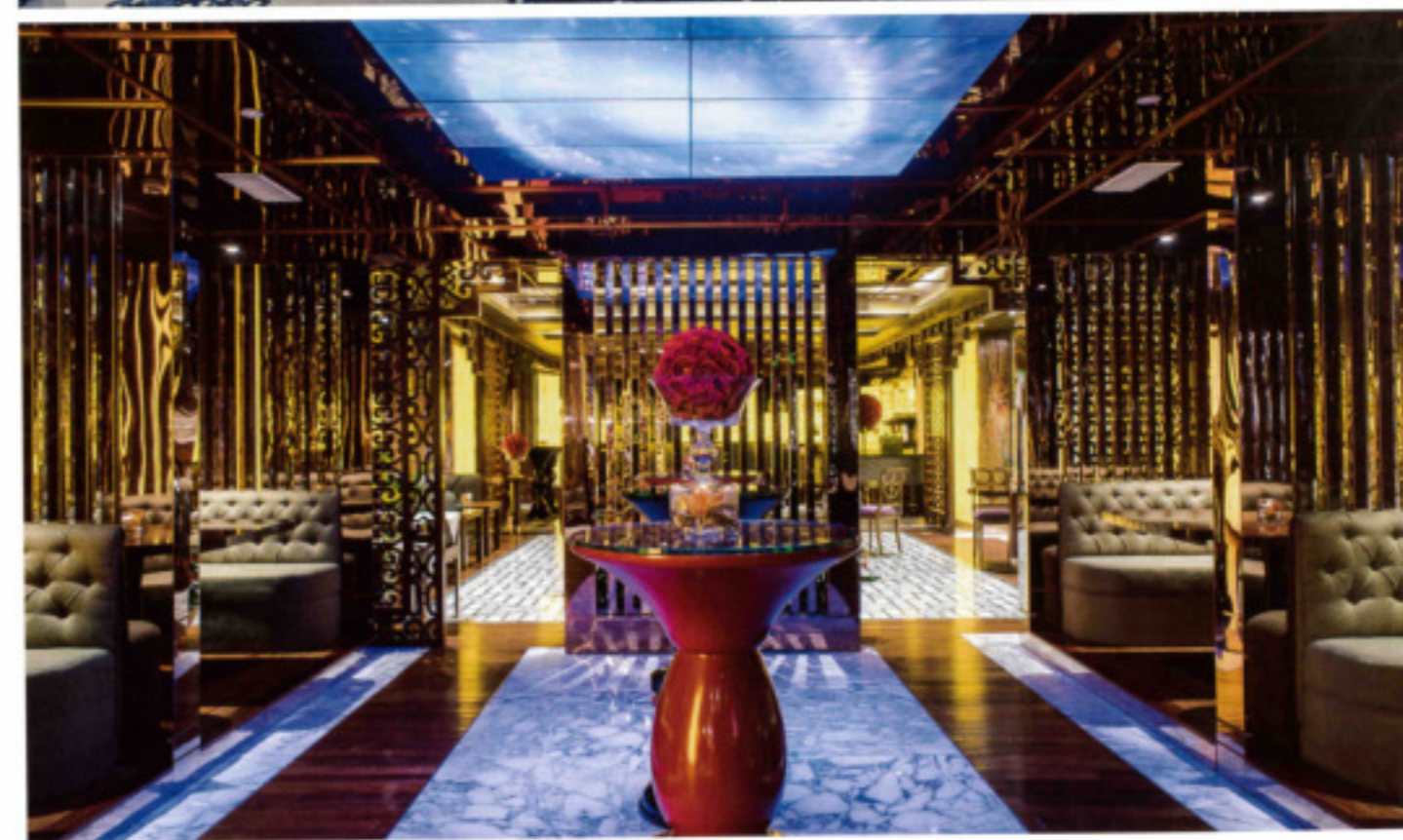
When Kent Lui was approached to create a groundbreaking landmark, one that would revitalise Ho Chi Minh City with a seamless integration of multiple uses while redefining luxury, the Hong Kong-born architect knew he had to think outside the box. Seven years in the making, soaring over 163 metres as the city's third-tallest building, Times Square is a testament to that ambition. Unifying a sky-high hotel, full-service apartments, office space, premium retail, plus food and beverage outlets, the contemporary, L-shaped tower rises from a prime location in District 1, flanked by two of its most popular thoroughfares. Featuring the biggest piece of double-glazed unit so far produced in China and a sophisticated LED lighting system that illuminates the façade in a show of colour at night, the 39-storey multi-purpose development has raised the bar in Vietnamese hospitality.

This desire to create a one-of-a-kind has equally informed the interiors, with the tower's urban hotel occupying the upper-most floors, oriented towards the southern sun, affording unhindered views of Saigon River. With its name derived from the French verb meaning 'to dream,' The Reverie Saigon is intended as an unreserved study in opulence, breaking away from preconceived notions of luxury hotels, both in terms of product and sense of place. "Catering for travellers and local visitors seeking unexpected experiences, The Reverie Saigon has been conceived to surprise at every turn, with a sense

of fanciful splendour," confirms Lui. "Sense of place is conveyed by the liveliness and vibrancy of the palette, furnishings and decorative pieces – expressing the Vietnamese fondness for all colourful things."

Upon arrival to the ground-floor entrance, it quickly becomes apparent that interiors take their cue from classical architecture and craftsmanship, in particular Italian design. Lui explains that it is the country's formidable reputation for artisanship and lifestyle brands that has resulted in the sourcing of an unparalleled array of objets d'art, furniture, fittings and textiles direct from Italy. Indeed design houses such as Baldi, Cassina, Colombostile, Giorgetti, Poltrona Frau, Rubelli and Visionnaire have showrooms within Times Square, forming a unique partnership with the hotel through which selected pieces of their collections are showcased. Other inherent materials though, come from around the world – take the Bolivian Sodalite Blue marble usually reserved for grand palaces – and on closer inspection, Asian symbolism is evident too. The peacock is a recurring emblem, the bird's plumage reiterated in decorative materials, etchings, artwork and finishes – chosen as a Vietnamese symbol of abundance and good luck.

To achieve intricate layering throughout The Reverie Saigon, walls, ceilings and floors awash in patterned marble are augmented by custom-crafted compositions, from handblown glass sconces to panelling edged with mother of pearl. At the entrance lobby,





Above: The two-storey spa brings together elegant chairs from Provesi, Rozzoni side tables and Meroni sofas. A curvaceous feature staircase, underlaid with white and gold mosaics, leads to the treatment floor where corridors are shaped by undulating waves of slatted walnut panelling

a silhouette of Vietnam emerges from the ceiling, the installation combining Murano glass and VGnewtrend's egg-shaped crystal pendants. This reference to the country's geography alludes to the heavy use of floral and natural motifs around the hotel. Another notable feature is the ornate blue and gold reception desk, custom-made by Italy's Colombostile to mirror a sister piece found up in the hotel lobby.

It is upon emerging into the main lobby, situated on the 27th floor, that visitors gain a sense of how space has been maximised despite the plot's compact 5,000m² footprint. All hotel facilities flow from this tri-level mezzanine podium, which opens to aerial city views and an aspect of the pool terrace. Colombostile is one of the Italian names to take the spotlight here, a grandiose five-metre-long purple ostrich sofa and armchair from its Esmeralda line crafted especially for the lobby and displayed to prominent effect. Against a backdrop of signature floral wall panels – realised through the hand-laid mosaic art of Ravenna-based factory, Sisis – silver-plated reception desks float above glass pedestals. It is impossible to miss the larger-than-life time-related centrepiece – Baldi's Pendulum Monumental Clock embellished in gilded bronze and malachite. The Florentine company has also restored and veneered the surface of an 1895 Bechstein piano with a layer of mineral-green malachite. This rare artefact is

positioned outside La Scala ballroom, the largest in Saigon replete with Swarovski chandeliers, Rubelli wallcovering and an onyx stone considered more precious than marble. Backlit golden agate, which lines the hotel's elevator panels (and comprised part of a 200-strong container shipment of stone), also captures the imagination. All these conversation pieces are meant to overwhelm, as Lui says: "This should be the most unique interior décor that guests have come across, giving them access to masterpieces and eccentricities they would not otherwise be able to experience."

Taking inspiration from the cathedral-like height of its imposing red and silver mosaic columns, all-day dining outlet Café Cardinal matches grey-veined marble with modern leather furniture from Visionnaire – the dog-themed couches and chairs a witty addition. Two floors below, in The Royal Pavilion, the gold and vermilion colour scheme sets the scene for Cantonese cuisine, enlivened by jade sculptures, calligraphy-adorned friezes and three evocative mounted glass orbs showing painted Chinese landscapes, one a copy of a rare masterpiece by Song dynasty artist Zhang Zeduan. In subterranean Italian eatery, Romeo & Juliet meanwhile, a sensuous confluence of bronzed screens, mosaic art and mirrored surfaces is complemented by VGnewtrend's handblown candelabras and elegant dining chairs from Meroni.