

Out of this

world

Cape Town's iconic Mount Nelson Hotel recently engaged interior design company dhk thinkspace to reinvent its Cape Colony Restaurant, with the resulting Planet Restaurant a reflection of the changing needs of the hotel's elite clientele

Photographs supplied by dhk thinkspace



planet restaurant

interior project

July/August 2011
Leading Architecture | 49



The brief was to create a crisp, clean and contemporary space which would form the backdrop for the true function of the old Cape Colony Restaurant – dining. “The client’s vision was to create a ‘top ten’ restaurant that carries a language of understated elegance and is a reflection of luxury and sophisticated flair,” explains Guido Tagge, Director of dhk thinkspace.

The scope of work included the complete interior refurbishment of the restaurant, which did not reflect the fresher design of the latest Mount Nelson refurbishments. The elegant, classical architectural envelope that was in existence in the old Cape Colony was retained but was given a fresh new look with a subtle palette of warm white hues.

Imperative in the brief was that the design ensured maximum flexibility in the layout without compromising the intimacy of the environment. Seating pockets were created through the use of various screening devices such as glass curtains, wine rack displays and lounge-type furnishings. Tagge explains their functionality: “As the pockets are diverse in size, they have the capacity to incorporate a variety of table sizes. The conservatory can be sealed off from the main dining area, which ensures that the area can be reduced in size and still remain personal when the restaurant is not busy. The restaurant was initially much less flexible – it was one big space. We have now created three spaces: the main restaurant, the conservatory and the private dining area.”

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Ambience

The playful yet sophisticated interior passage which runs towards the restaurant showcases twinkling star-shaped lights hand-blown by local glass artisans, adding an elegant and ephemeral quality to the space. The starlit ambience continues in the Planet Restaurant with the same style of lighting and decorative mirrors adding dimension and depth to the room. The bespoke lights add intrigue and drama to the aesthetic while offering functional comfort lighting. The restaurant builds on the passage-way's colour palette with shades of warm stone, adding touches of silver

planet restaurant

interior project

July/August 2011 | 51
Leading Architecture

detailing throughout. The ceiling is a midnight charcoal colour that mimics the vastness of space.

Even the wool carpet echoes the otherworldly theme – designed by dhk thinkspace and crafted by Ulster, the design mimics the view of the heavens, planets and stars through a telescope. Tagge says, “Guests or patrons will be welcomed into the space by a carpet that can only be described as ‘out of this world’. We drew our inspiration from the dynamic colours and patterns that are in existence in far off galaxies and the carpet weave actually mirrors the planets, stars, comets and other starry constellations. The carpet is, by virtue of its design, a defining element of the locale. One is surrounded by planets and stars wherever you are in the space. There are areas where one experiences the distant twinkle of tiny stars and others where one is rained upon by droplets of starlight. The lighting is indirect and the feature pieces are unique.”

The dining space itself blends elegant high-class dining with more casual areas using couches and lounge chairs, made from metallic sheen leather in muted coffee colours. The dining chairs reflect the synergy between classic and contemporary with a twist, expressed in the use of velvet and stainless steel.

The 260m² restaurant now also boasts a private dining area, lined with wine display racks which were custom-designed and made for the space, integrating lighting throughout. They are crafted from solid dark stained oak and are a leading design element in the space. Multifaceted in function, they serve as display cabinets for the wine, room dividers and the focal point for the restaurant.

The conservatory, which is a new addition to the existing restaurant, allows guests to enjoy semi al fresco dining and brings the outside in with its wrap-around views of the lush gardens for which the Mount

dhk's Guido Tagge takes *Leading Architecture* readers on a virtual walk-through of Planet Restaurant

Arrival:

The arrival space merges the various adjoining areas. The guest is greeted by Bisazza tiles, which are a combination of black mosaics and Swarovski crystals on the floor, wrapping seamlessly onto the front desk. This area functions as a first visual attraction – it's seen as a sparkly teaser of what is to follow.

Passage:

In this area we introduce the 'planet' theme and it functions as a transition between bar and restaurant. The guest is directed into the main dining area by a series of feature blown glass beaded elements and decorative mirrors on the one side, and a continuous glazed window facing onto the garden on the other. The visual connection is kept with the exterior, which in turn creates a light, airy atmosphere.

Main dining area:

The main dining room is intended to be grand and impressive while still affording privacy throughout. The unique, elegant informality is reinforced with the selection of fabrics and colours.

Conservatory:

The conservatory offers an alternative dining style – the space has a garden-like feel to it. The windows and doors open up onto the renowned Mount Nelson gardens, and the lighting is designed to create the feeling of being under the night sky.

Private dining:

The need for a separate private dining room for exclusive groups was integrated into the re-design. The area is an extension of the 'planet' aesthetic, but the individual experience is slightly different. One steps up into a space that is lined with glowing wine display racks that showcase the treasures of the Cape winelands. The atmosphere of this room is further enhanced by the dark, low ceilings, creating a private and intimate experience for diners.



Nelson Hotel is famous. Reminiscent of a sophisticated country estate conservatory, the area offers a more relaxed place for guests to enjoy a meal. The black and white check floor pattern and the selection of furniture enhance a connection with the Planet Bar, while adding to the relaxed external dining experience. The conservatory can be sealed off from the main dining area to maintain an intimate atmosphere when the restaurant is not busy.

Inspiration

When asked about the inspiration behind the project, Tagge explains that the new Planet Restaurant is an extension of the very popular Planet Bar in its core design approach. "I think the scheme that was used in the Planet Bar was our inspiration to start with. We had to interpret this into spaces that reflect the new identity of the restaurant, but also retain the Mount Nelson's iconic and historic elegance and sophistication. The galaxy theme was a fun and flexible framework for the vision of the spaces that allowed us the creative freedom to explore the definitions of space, universe, stars and planets."

From a sustainability stance, dhk thinkspace used local artisans and manufacturers in all elements of the refurbishment. In addition, natural materials were used as much as possible. From an energy use perspective, the lighting is efficient and appropriate as well as cost-effective.

Looking back at the completed project, Tagge says, "We have created a simple yet sophisticated restaurant that is on par with international restaurants. We have also created a space where you can just be... a place where one can enjoy the fantastic food offering without being 'dominated' or overshadowed by the interior design." The Planet Restaurant promises to be an unforgettable experience that will evoke strong emotion in those that visit the venue and it is guaranteed to create an impression on visitors. 