

Tripping the Light Fantastic Made In Kitchen II, Wuhu Panorama International

When faced with the task of outfitting a contemporary Asian eatery, some designers opt for clean, streamlined settings with only a hint of Oriental iconography (think Alan Yau outlets such as Cha Cha Moon and Wagamama). Not Horace Pan. The head of Hong Kong design firm Panorama International chose to do up the latest iteration of Made In Kitchen, a high-end restaurant brand specialising in contemporary Chinese cuisine, like a nightclub. And not just any nightclub, but one meant to conjure in visitors' minds a Chinese garden with a massive lake.

This idea begins in the expansive lobby. It is clad in reflective granite surfaces and contains an elliptical "pool" from which metallic rectangular sculptures rise. Pan also included in the narrative the corridors leading to different parts of the programme. One boasts a reflective ceiling etched with water rings as well as a bronze-coloured wall inlaid with a LED-lit leaf-like motif. Another, leading to a "rock garden" of sculpted metallic furniture, is capped by a mirror ceiling patterned with butterflies.

The 4,000sq ft area is divided into two open dining spaces – one inclusive of a bar and the other centred on an open kitchen – and a surfeit of private dining rooms. Walking into the main dining hall, which is flanked on one side with a mezzanine and oriented toward the bar at the end, is like entering into a nightclub's main dance arena. A central zone for casual dining is squared off from the rest of the vicinity like a bona fide dance floor, and metallic "bubbles" in lieu of disco balls hang from the ceiling. The backlit bar stands in front of a cream wall branded with ripple marks and a colour-changing "moon" projecting images of fish swimming.

The Chinese love for themes is played out further in the private dining rooms. Each has ownership of a different season, flower and colour scheme, and each follows this blueprint: a photographic image of a flower makes up one wall while all other walls feature vertical slats depicting an abstract image. From the artificial ceiling drop glass "bubbles", accentuated by furnishings that are velvety rich.

According to Pan, "Unique dining experience" is the key phrase for any successful restaurant's business strategy." There's no denying he has given Made In Kitchen that uniqueness.

