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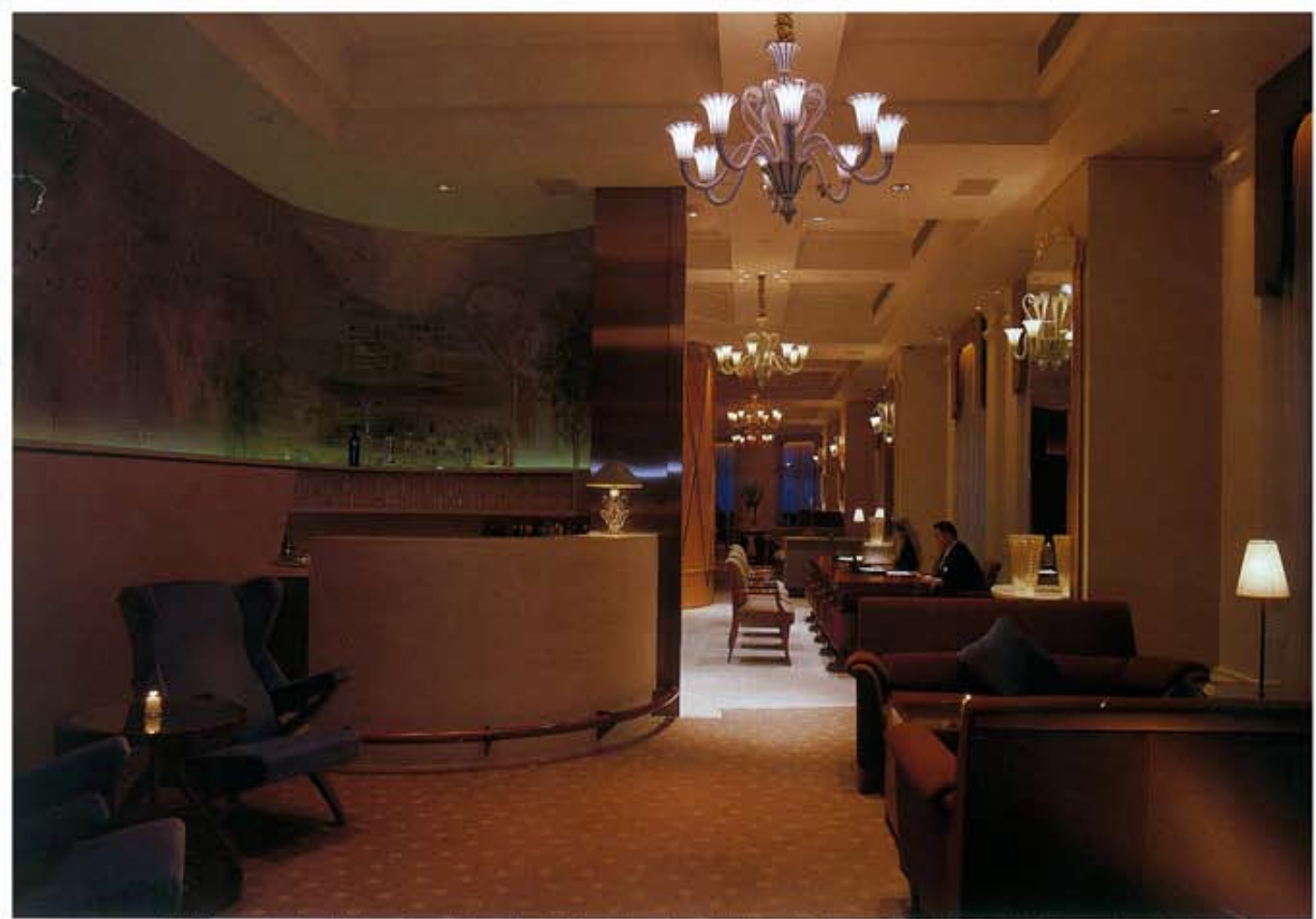
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# Theme Effort

Neoclassical cues blend easily with retro-modernism and some very clever spatial twists at Causeway Bay's Lanson Place

TEXT: YENNI KWOK PHOTOGRAPHY: DICKY



ABOVE An expressionist painting looms above the lounge's martini bar, adding a colourful artistic touch to the space OPPOSITE PAGE A splash of green at the concierge desk softens up the classical décor of the ground floor

From the moment the term was coined, boutique hotels have been defined as much by what they are not as by what they are. What they are not, essentially, is 'mainstream': that is, not anodyne, not standardised, not 'international style' establishments whose decor emphasises corporate identity over individual character.

Beyond that, the definition of 'boutique hotel' has blurred as they proliferate across the globe. They can be big or small, basic or luxurious, based upon old structures or housed within new ones, contemporary in style or positively atavistic. It seems the term can be applied to just about any hotel that offers reasonably personalised service and embodies a unique design concept. Needless to say, from the designers point of view, that's not a bad thing at all.

For a look at why, one needs go no further than Causeway Bay, location of a new establishment that in many ways symbolises the vast creative opportunity offered by boutique hotels. For designers Joseph Fung of SP2 and Simon Tong of LRF Designers, the Lanson Place hotel represented a number of invigorating challenges, beginning with the structure itself. "The owners wished to have something resembling a Parisian structure," explains Fung, who was responsible for the hotel's facade and ground and first floors. The starting point for the design, however, was a rather nondescript 28-storey office building that had been left empty for years before the current owners took over. Transforming it into

something interesting — let alone elegantly "Parisian" — would not be a straightforward task.

Compounding the challenge was the spotty track-record of neoclassicism in Asia. All too often, attempts to transplant stereotypical European design motifs to Far Eastern settings result in an undesirable 'theme park' effect. To avoid that trap, Fung was sparing with the fussy details and unstinting with genuine materials, creating a new grey stone facade that strikes a delicate balance between the classic and contemporary. Bolstering its sense of appropriateness is an airy, high-ceilinged ground floor interior accommodating a concierge desk and 'indoor courtyard' whose splashes of green and natural, earth toned materials really do go some way to evoking the feel of a garden.

The reception desk, located on the first floor, is part of an expansive lounge area that encourages guests to relax in comfort and simply wait to be served. Covering a total of 5,900 sq-ft, the space features a martini bar, private room, piano and even a small library, a combination that endows it with a hint of the exclusive, at-home cosiness of a gentlemen's club. In character, the furnishings range from modern to classic to retro-modern, a rarely found mix to be sure, but one that adds to the sense that the interior evolved over time rather than having been put in place only a few months ago. "It is an unusual mix," Fung remarks. "On one hand it's a classical European space, but it also has a modern feeling".



ABOVE The retro-modern furnishings of the lounge strike a fine balance with their classical surroundings. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The lounge area's sense of cosiness gives it a surprising touch of 'gentlemen's club' atmosphere • The lounge bathroom 'foyer' is a striking space thanks to red steel doors, chandeliers and velvet curtains • More suggestive than overt in its neoclassical detail, the façade manages to look both authentic and comfortable within its typically Hong Kong context • The suite's bathroom includes a retro-modern interpretation of the classic 'four-legged' bathtub

Not all of the first floor's eclecticism is quite so smoothly integrated, however. The bathrooms adjoining the lounge provide a sudden and radical change of pace from the larger room's quirky classicism, being accessed via red steel doors in a foyer equipped with red velvet curtains and chandeliers. The guestrooms upstairs contain their own share of surprises. Ranging from 380 to 1,900 sq-ft and designed by Tong, no two rooms on each floor share the same look and design. "This was born out of necessity than design initially," says the London-based designer. "Sometimes unconventional and difficult problems make you look at an issue with different eyes."

The difficulties Tong had to overcome concerned everything from the unavoidably tight dimensions of some guestrooms to a lack of natural light in some parts of the lower floors. A carefully considered lighting scheme complementing a muted colour palette provided part of the solution to both problems, giving even the smallest guestroom a pleasing sense of airiness and open space.

The way amenities and features are arranged in the rooms also helps maximise available square footage. Glass partitions, compact storage spaces and other details such as televisions mounted on swing arms cleverly enhance the spatial arrangement. Some of the bathrooms also boast vanity counters suspended from metal tubes, encouraging the impression that

"An overriding aspect of the rooms was 'less is more'," says Tong. "Nothing should run-of-the-mill"

they are floating in mid-air. "An overriding aspect of the rooms was 'less is more'," says Tong, who has since set up his own design firm Simon Tong Associates. "Nothing should run-of-the-mill, so the attention was focused on the room and not necessarily out the window."

From the onset, the owners of Lanson Place insisted on the absolute necessity of good design, not just as a means of carving out a visual identity for their hotel, but as a way to imbue it with something more infinitely more valuable: the sense that one has arrived at an oasis of elegant calm in the middle of one of Hong Kong's most frenetic districts. On that score alone, Lanson Place is certainly not a mainstream hotel.





Thanks to some smart packaging and muted, simple colours, even the hotel's smaller guestrooms feel much more spacious than they really are

## 精雕細琢

銅鑼灣精品酒店Lanson Place的空間策略極盡巧妙，將新古典主義與現代復古風格不著痕跡地融為一體

撰文：YENNI KWOK 攝影：DICKY

「精品酒店」這名詞自面世之後就一直被濫用，市面上充斥的精品酒店很多都名不副實。其實，精品酒店從來都代表非主流：設計絕不會令人沉悶，也不會是倒模式，更沒有為強調酒店品牌形象而硬套的單一化國際風格。

隨著精品酒店熱潮在全球迅速蔓延，它們的定義就更加模糊不清了。大量標榜「精品」的酒店不單面積大小不一，環境可簡潔可豪華，由舊建築物改建或新建皆可，設計可以是完全當代風格，也可以古老當時興。總之任何能夠提供個人化服務及擁有獨特設計的酒店，便可以標榜為「精品」。然而對於設計師來說，這現象未嘗不是件好事。

銅鑼灣新開張的Lanson Place從不同角度探索精品酒店的無限設計潛能，正好證實了以上的理論。對於SP2設計師Joseph Fung及利是百順設計公司的Simon Tong來說，這間酒店包含了種種令人振奮的挑戰，首先是它本身的結構。負責設計酒店外觀、地面層及一樓的Joseph Fung解釋道：「酒店持有人希望模仿巴黎式建築結構。」這個指示乍聽之下十分含糊：要將一棟28層高、空置數年的平庸辦公大廈變身成一間外表吸引的「優雅巴黎式建築」酒店，可以想像絕不是一個簡單直接的任務。

另一挑戰是新古典風格來到亞洲，往往容易變質：一個東方空間搬字過紙地加插最典型的歐陸設計，往往會營造不倫不類的主题公园效果。為免出現這種情況，Joseph盡量少用一些多餘的裝飾，反而採用大量優質建材，為酒店建造灰色石外牆，以展現古典與當代的微妙平衡。擁有高樓底的地面層極具空間感，優雅的感覺跟外牆同樣那麼恰如其分。大堂設置了禮賓部櫃檯及一個「室內庭園」，其中的點點綠色及泥土色系的天然物料，看起來竟真的帶點花園的味道。

一樓接待處旁邊是個偌大的休憩區，客人可舒適地坐著等候酒店職員的服務。5,900平方呎的休憩區設有馬天尼酒吧、貴賓房、鋼琴和小型圖書館，營造出一種獨一無二的溫暖家居氣氛，感覺猶如紳士俱樂部。傢具的

格調則傾向多元化，現代、古典及摩登復古的混合風格十分罕見，使人覺得整個空間彷彿已存在了好一段日子，而不是幾個月前才堆砌出來。Joseph說道：「這種風格組合非常獨特，一方面帶有古典歐陸氣氛，另一方面具有現代氣息。」

然而一樓的兼容並蓄風格並不是貫徹始終，休憩區旁的洗手間跟一樓其餘部份的怪誕古典氣氛截然不同。打開紅色銅門，裡面是一個飾以紅色天鵝絨窗簾與水晶吊燈的洗手間前廳。樓上各層的客房有更多尚待發掘的驚喜，從380到1,900平方呎的多間客房都由Simon Tong操刀，每層樓沒有兩間房的設計是重複的。以倫敦為工作基地的Simon說道：「那是出於真正的需要，而非刻意賣弄設計手段。有時遇到不尋常及棘手問題，你才會懂得從另一角度去研究。」

Simon口中的棘手問題是多方面的，首先是某些客房面積實在狹窄，其次是一些低層房間欠缺充足光線。Simon運用了一個方案去同時解決兩個問題：細心的燈光安排加上柔和的色彩，令狹小的房間呈現優雅愉悅的感覺，空間看上去也寬敞了許多。

房間的設備與裝飾也經過精心構思，務求令空間看來更開闊。玻璃隔屏、密集式貯物系統以至安裝在懸空臂上的電視機，都大大改善了空間佈局。某些客房浴室更設有從鐵管吊下來的梳妝櫃檯，營造出懸掛在半空的錯覺。成立了自家公司Simon Tong Associates的Simon說道：「所有房間都奉行極簡的法則，每個元素都不會平平無奇，焦點就在於房間本身，而不是窗外。」

Lanson Place持有人從一開始就堅持酒店必須有好的設計，除了營造深刻的視覺效果及突出酒店形象之餘，更要營造一個難能可貴的經驗：在香港一個最喧鬧的旺區之中，竟隱藏了一個如此優雅恬靜的避世之所，單是這一點，已足以肯定Lanson Place走的絕對是非主流路線。E