“Don’t be afraid to look back. How else are you supposed to see how far you’ve come?”

I have always loved this saying. After all, it’s only human to look back whether for the sake of reminiscing, reassessing, or for reference.

As the year 2015 – and what a year it’s been – comes to a close, we celebrate contrasts of old and new in this issue of In House magazine.

Starting with the launch of The House Collective brand – which encompasses Swire Hotels’ The Opposite House, The Upper House and The Temple House – whose properties reference history and heritage while introducing a new breed of hotel that focuses on art, design, and making you feel right at home.

Thomas Heatherwick – the legendary British architect and designer behind Pacific Place in Hong Kong’s fresh new look – talks about timeless design and plans for the upcoming Garden Bridge over the River Thames in London. In his own words, “it’s important that cities aren’t paralysed by their heritage and can keep evolving and developing.”

Swire Restaurants’ recently opened Mr & Mrs Fox embraces the rising popularity of wine on tap thanks to Swire’s Director of Wine, Yvonne Cheung, while The Continental’s award-winning mixologist Timothee Becqueriaux shares his passion for traditional Absinthe-drinking methods.

Further afield, 20th generation winemaker Ulrich Allendorf of Germany’s 723 year-old Allendorf Estate stays true to family roots while bringing its legacy into the future.

In the world of fashion, iconic designer Sir Paul Smith opens up about venturing into the art world, while sustainable fashion takes centre stage with Kevin Germanier, who is behind the first ever up-cycled capsule collection for Shanghai Tang.

I hope that this issue of In House inspires and delights you, and I wish you a prosperous Year of the Monkey.
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Art consultant and curator Alison Pickett is a woman with an eye towards both the past and the future. Known for her expertise and taste in the vast universe of art and sculpture, she has been responsible for the placement of significant pieces in both private and public spaces around the world, including Hong Kong, China, Tokyo, Singapore and London.

The Marriage Broker

'Phoenix Feather' and 'Wutong Leaf' by Wu Haiying
Pickett has been working in the business of art for more than 32 years, effectively straddling commercial and creative challenges whilst working with accredited artists from all over the world, it also takes a client with vision to commission hotel artworks at an investment level, rather than just for ‘decoration’.

The Temple House in Chengdu has used its art to bring a resonance of quiet intimacy within its walls, with pieces curated according to Pickett’s, “to embrace the classical and celebrate the contemporary.”

‘Contemplation’, a seating arrangement by Malaysian Chinese artist Hew Chee Fong, in polished black Shaxi and red granite, invites guests to stop and rest for a moment. The carved water table represents the mind in a state of meditation, whilst the ripples symbolise thoughts which may disturb this calmness. Three of the cushion shaped seat elements are occupied by large stones symbolising the weight of thought. This heaviness and disruption of the polished surface is carved in a trompe l’oeil manner, whilst the unoccupied seat invites the viewer’s participation and promotes awareness of the presence of the Daci Temple for reflection.

Hew Chee Fong was born in 1962 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and since leaving University in Australia, he has worked consistently to become a full-time practising artist, engaged in solo, group exhibitions and symposiums.

“Emotions are our reactions to our environment, which in turn are coloured by our experiences. Sculpture is the vehicle for the expression of my emotions,” states the artist. “Stone elicits strong emotional responses. It is more than simply an aggregate of minerals; it universally connotes all things of an enduring nature - stability, dependability, both timelessness and the passage of time. All sentient creatures feel and express emotions. Sculpture is how I express and communicate these emotions.”

Two sculptures, ‘Phoenix Feather’ and ‘Wutong Leaf’ by local artist Haiying was born in Chengdu in 1962, just a stone’s throw from The Temple House. After working on public art projects in the United States for many years, he returned to Chengdu in 2007, and thus it is somewhat fitting and poetic that these particular sculptures were commissioned for The Temple House, Swire Hotels’ latest property in China, in the heart of Chengdu, where each artist was engaged to create original and unique pieces for this stunning new hotel, resulting in a visual treasure trove for guests to observe and appreciate.

“Seven Sages Of The Bamboo Grove” sits in the Biteshi Lobby Reception, and is the work of another Chengdu artist, He Yong Hong. In cast bronze, a sculpture intended to be seen from all four sides, the sense of these seven heavenly gods ‘sitting’ in welcomes us to appreciate the ‘earthly’ delights of The Temple House.

The sculpture on the garden terraces in woodgrain sandstone is by Taiwanese artist Marvin Fang, connecting with the sculptures he previously made for The Upper House in Hong Kong, and creating an abstract link between the two hotels. The sculpture is a vessel, and will be planted with aromatic herbs, to lightly scent the air, as another one of our five senses to be satisfied through The Temple House experience.

The Courtyards inside MI XUN, the urban day spa, are two pairs of stone sculpture seats by renowned Hong Kong artist Danny Lee, a graduate of the Swire School of Design. ‘Seeds’ carved from polished black Shaxi granite and ‘White Lotus’ from Chinese white marble, represent yin and yang, through the forms of lotus buds and heart-shaped petals.

This is nature captured in stone, and somewhere cool and serene for guests to sit and rest in the gardens as part of their Spa journey.

‘Le Fleur du Petit Prince’ by young Hong Kong artist, Blanche Ho, is carved from Shaxi granite, the edges polished like black glass to represent the unfurling edges of petals and birth of new life, and sits inside the Spa’s breathing space.

At the VIP Entrance to MI XUN, Beijing artist Shi Zhourong’s ‘Heaven’ is an entrancing sculpture in metal, miniature figures climbing the ladders up to the clouds in heaven, suggesting to guests where their Spa journey may take them.

I ask Pickett what the process of successfully marrying an artist with each client involves. “Art is continually evolving, so I too need to move with the times,” she says. “Past civilizations are measured by the art that they leave behind. The intelligent placement of art into hotels, public and urban spaces brings both culture and pleasure into different environments.”

When the seasons are at their most beautiful, the art consultant curator Alison Pickett, ‘Taoist’ in her own sense, provides the perfect balance with her curatorial work.

The art consultant and curator Alison Pickett’s latest accomplishment is the collection of specially commissioned artworks for The Temple House, Swire Hotels’ latest property in China, in the heart of Chengdu, where each artist was engaged to create original and unique pieces for this stunning new hotel, resulting in a visual treasure trove for guests to observe and appreciate.

“I have often said that being a curator is somewhat akin to being a marriage broker, pairing artists with the right clients and projects, and in the case of The Temple House, I was seeking to marry the conventional with the contemporary,” states Pickett. “Taking inspiration from the proximity of The Temple House to the ancient Daci Temple, I wanted to showcase modern Chinese artists sourced from both inside and outside of China as a contrast between the ancient architecture and location.”

Pickett has been working in the business of art for more than 32 years, effectively straddling commercial and creative challenges whilst striving to maintain what she feels is the most important aspect of what it is that she does. “This is ultimately about the ‘pleasure principle’. Art is intended to provoke an emotional response, and we can only hope to bring a little joy into everyone’s daily lives as they go about their own businesses,” she states.

Pickett has worked with Hong Kong-based Swire Properties Limited as its art consultant and curator for more than 20 years and has commissioned sculptures and artworks for the company that reside in its buildings all across the SAR and China. Like the aforementioned marriage broker, Pickett is constantly traveling the world, sourcing new and established artists alike, whose work will fit each individual client’s brief. “Placing art into any public space is a ‘special sport’!”

Pickett is the expert behind the awe-inspiring collections of artwork at both The Opposite House in Beijing and The Upper House in Hong Kong, and has curated collections for both hotels with bespoke artworks, as diverse as the intended audience. “Hospitals all over the world are filled with paintings and photography, so I wanted to take a unique approach for Swire Hotels, and predominantly using sculpture as a medium brings not only a fresh and unusual approach, but also represents the sophistication of this particular client and their prospective clients. Working with accredited artists from all over the world, it also takes a client with vision to commission hotel artworks at an investment level, rather than just for ‘decoration’.”

The Marriage Broker
Quarry Bay, the hub of numerous fashion, architects’ and bank offices, houses Mr & Mrs Fox—the latest dining concept from Swire Restaurants and encompasses some innovative if not cunning design elements over three floors comprising 1,115 square metres (12,000 square feet).

Cunning As A Fox

The Den, Private Dining Room on 2/F
Far from being hidden amongst the hedgerows, Mr & Mrs Fox, the latest project to be unveiled by Swire Restaurants, is located slap bang in the middle of one of the busiest business districts in the Eastern part of Hong Kong Island.

Designed by local design studio Charlie & Rose Ltd, headed by interior designer Ben McCarthy, each of the three floors serves a unique function, presenting a few surprises along the journey from street level bar right on up to the private den on the second floor.

Originally hailing from Australia, McCarthy moved to London with an international architecture firm. For the past five years he has called Hong Kong home, where he designed several of the city’s most popular restaurants.

The brief was to create a unique dining experience in a newly constructed contemporary building. Following initial discussions, it was determined that subtle creative cues would be taken from children’s storybooks. With an 18-month design and build schedule, there was plenty of time to get the plot right. In developing the concept, Swire Restaurants chose the Mr & Mrs Fox personas to reflect the restaurant’s personality.

("In classic tales or fables, the fox always has some sense of mischief, is suave, confident and stylish," says Willem Van Emden, General Manager of Swire Restaurants. "These qualities represent Mr & Mrs Fox and are brought to life through the guest experience.")

Think ‘Wind in the Willows’ meets ‘Br’er Rabbit’ and you will get the picture. McCarthy was keen to point out that the stories were merely inspirational, intended to create ambience, and not to be taken literally (pun intended). The concept has a mature, if somewhat eclectic aesthetic that is highly detailed in every bespoke chair, table, hinge and hook. McCarthy has incorporated a definite masculine edge into the design, especially in the features of the craft beer house at street level. Mrs Fox definitely rules the roost on the ground floor, while Mr Fox presides over the first floor and the exclusive Private Dining Room, The Den, on the second floor with its own terrace.

A strong focus for the design was creating a quirky and irreverent environment through a series of spaces, each with its own character and function. This presented something of a challenge, especially as this restaurant and bar is situated in a new-build, ultra-modern, glass fronted building, part of which is the Taikoo Place Apartments complex.

Creating a sense of intimacy and atmosphere in a space that has floor-to-ceiling windows along the street facing elevation required the designer to use almost every trick in the book. His use of bespoke lighting fixtures quite surprisingly plays an important role on all floors from both an aesthetic and practical perspective.

Whilst not the antagonist in this scenario, Mr Fox’s input was definitely a match for any trickster, with an illusion or two up his sleeve. For example, the stuffed squirrel sconces may not be rabbit stew, nor to everyone’s taste, but according to sources close to Mr Fox, they were very tasty.

Rather than take the story too seriously, McCarthy stripped back the layers, embracing the raw architectural features such as the supporting pillars and exposed pipes, incorporating an almost industrial chic into the ground floor bar area.
“We designed bespoke lighting to create an extra layer of detail and uniqueness,” says McCarthy. “It creates a series of individual spaces and intimate dining settings while also drawing attention to key design features.”

Having worked on many projects in listed buildings in the UK, McCarthy has brought an artisanal mindset to the design. Much of the interior employs excellent examples of timber joinery; foremost, and connecting all three storeys, is the turned timber staircase. This is a unique construction that conveys customers on their journey through the Fox emporium with creative modern detailing in the balustrades, some of which depict caricatures of Mr & Mrs Fox themselves. Far from being twee, the staircase embodies the dichotomy of a traditional aesthetic with a contemporary application. It is also home to a few of those pesky grey squirrels.

“We used a palette of materials that we hope will offer a sense of nostalgia for those who visit – oak for cabinets and joinery, reclaimed timber for flooring, distressed saddle leather and tartan upholstery; brass detailing and bespoke furniture and feature lighting,” says McCarthy. “It’s a hugely detailed environment but rough enough around the edges so it doesn’t feel overly themed.”

It is this ‘roughness’ that adds such character to this eatery and defines the various spaces. In addition to sourcing the salvaged timber flooring and reclaimed butcher’s tiles, the design team spent weeks trawling through vintage farm stores in Northern New South Wales for decorative elements and more weeks searching antique markets in the United States for cabinets and furniture.

Additionally, the wine dispensary is something that started out as an absurd idea and conversation, but resulted in something intriguing to look at, which is ultimately very practical. A dedicated keg room adjacent to the ground floor bar is open to view with the workings and pipes exposed in an unpretentious setting dispensing draught craft beers and, in a first for Swire Restaurants, piped draught wines on tap throughout the venue.

The ground floor welcomes guests with a central island bar bordered by casual and group table settings. The glass windows can be opened up to bring the dynamic street atmosphere into the venue. Oversized lighting and the magnificent copper pipes on the double height ceilings add a sense of drama. The reclaimed butcher tiles, leather stools and wood cabinetry evoke reminiscence. Destined to be the go-to venue for group lunches, post-work drinks or late night gatherings, Mr & Mrs Fox’s menu includes artisanal cocktails, seafood and charcuterie platters as well as small plates ideal for sharing.
The first floor is Mr Fox’s hideout and houses the main dining room. The nearly 200-seat restaurant has its own fresh seafood counter with unique basin displays incorporated into the cabinets behind the bar. The main dining area is divided into sections with window seating, booths and intimate spaces. The booths are divided by ripple glass above the aged leather banquettes. A working, brass miner’s lamp lit by a wick accents each booth, whilst above, the bespoke pendant lighting is attached to butcher rails via real meat hooks.

An aging cabinet stocks a delectable display of beef for the signature steak dishes, allowing guests to see the aging process and through the cabinet to the kitchens. ‘With the more refined nature of the menu and focus on the quality of the ingredients required us to create a slightly more formal ambience for the first floor,’ says McCarthy, "but one which was still very fun and approachable."

The washrooms are worth spending a penny for with their pressed tin ceiling panels, Victorian tiling and fittings and with a nod to Mr Fox’s penchant for toilet humour, the WC sets are actually from Thomas Crapper & Sons with wooden seats and ‘The Venerable’ stamped on the bowls – very crafty. By the way, January 27th is officially Thomas Crapper day apparently, so there may be a bit of a queue.

The top floor hides Mr Fox’s den, an exclusive 24-seat private dining room concealed behind a bookcase. It has a secret button to open the door – so there’s a great sense of arrival for anyone hosting a private party. The dining room has a concealed alcove that can dispense the signature draft beers and wines, and can accommodate up to 70 guests in a cocktail setting. It also has an adjoining balcony terrace with barbecue facilities. The lighting is also exquisitely designed on a frame that can be lowered for a dining party or raised for stand-up events.

For those purists who shudder at the thought of wines on tap, the restaurant has a selection of over 100 premium wines (decanted from bottles) and a selection of fine whiskies. The Den’s rustic-meets-refined interior is the ideal retreat for chic urbanites and world weary travellers seeking a quiet retreat.

Mr & Mrs Fox brings its guests on a culinary journey and its purposeful lack of pretention allows them to access the story, making their own interpretation of the seemingly ramshackle tale being told. Therein lie the morals of the ‘tail’.

Mr & Mrs Fox was voted as “The Best New Restaurant” for Hong Kong Tatler Best Restaurants Awards 2016 (Readers’ Choice).

29 Tong Chong Street (just minutes from the Quarry Bay MTR station and the nearby EAST, Hong Kong).

www.mrmrsfox.com
British designer Thomas Heatherwick’s work knows no boundaries. 2010’s Seed Cathedral, the British Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo, was met with much acclaim. In 2011, Heatherwick revealed a new design for the London bus, and his studio was also involved in the Opening Ceremony for the 2012 London Olympic Games. In House speaks with Heatherwick about his projects, philosophies and the inclusion of disparate opinions in building his public projects.
British designer and inventor Thomas Heatherwick had a creative upbringing which, like the world he exists in today, knew no boundaries. His mother was an artist and his father a musician, whilst Heatherwick himself “trained in a broad spectrum of things based around design.” While he is best-known today for his architecture, he does not like the lines which have been established in contemporary society to distinguish architecture from design and from art. “I see them all as mixes of different kinds of function that include the most pragmatic things and most esoteric dimensions. These titles are artificial, a fashion of our time,” he says, questioning why it is that “we choose to say the largest scale objects with a certain type of function are these things we call architecture?”

Heatherwick set up his namesake studio in 1994, establishing a unique design practice with a spirit of discovery and invention at its heart, and placing the studio at the forefront of a wave of ‘New British Inventors’. He has courted criticism, pushed boundaries, stretched attitudes, and is uniting perceived design thoughts as well as urban communities.

Heatherwick is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, a Senior Research Fellow at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and has been awarded Honorary Doctorates from the Royal College of Art, and the Universities of Dundee, Brighton, Sheffield Hallam and Manchester.

His studio is home to a group of specialists with a wide range of skill sets, some not often associated with a typical design firm. It is more atelier than the single-discipline design spaces we are used to, reflecting his frustration at encountering “sliced-up ghettos of thought” where disciplines such as sculpture, architecture, fashion, product and furniture design are all in separate compartments. Heatherwick considers design in three dimensions as a single discipline: three-dimensional design. You are as likely to find product and furniture prototypes, textiles and innovative building materials scattered about his studio as much as the usual drawings and perspectives.

A recent exhibition in Hong Kong, ‘Heatherwick The New British Inventors: Inside Heatherwick Studio’ was curated by Kate Goodwin, Head of Architecture and Heinz Curator at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, provided a fascinating insight into Heatherwick Studio’s exploration of new ideas, materials, techniques and processes. The exhibition was co-presented by the British Council, the GREAT Britain campaign and PMQ, with Swire Properties Limited and KEF as the lead partners.
In House: How important is three-dimensional design to you in the way you look at life and projects?

Thomas Heatherwick: I suppose as a designer my particular interest is the world around us. I’ve always been interested in things that do jobs: whether that is product or furniture design, transport infrastructure, or the places we spend time in through leisure, education or health. To me, design is one interlinked realm that people like myself can work with. But historically it has been chopped up into all these different specialisms that are victims of the way people chop up the world. In the past it was expected that an engineer, for example might design not only the railway line and work on the trains, but also the stations and the bridges. That brought a cohesive look and feel, and the beauty of this approach was that it was all part of one narrative. Now we think that the engineers just serve as mathematicians. I find it a shame the way things get narrowed down and can somehow wither, so I suppose I resist the notion that there are different disciplines. I see that there’s one main discipline and all the different aspects are part of the same thing. As a result, I don’t regard my studio as multi-disciplined; we have one discipline. But I definitely think that there is a greater understanding that ideas are not limited by scale. I’m extremely interested in the way that we see these divisions which become clear when spending time with property developers. Often the designer of the building is wrapped up in thinking about how that building looks, working from the outside and not seeing that what matters most is how we live from the inside.

In House: Should there be more of an inside-out approach rather than an outside-in approach to designing buildings and environments?

Thomas Heatherwick: An inside-out approach is a vital way to think but you can flip between the two and keep cross-referencing. It can’t be one or the other, as they are all interlinked and it’s also about how a place makes you feel. There has been a great deal of emphasis on the visual image and a loss of emphasis on concept. I believe that the challenge in the design field since the Second World War is that there has been a bit of a wrestle to find how things actually make you feel. The celebration of singular big gestures, and large expanses of uniform materials have risked becoming quite sterile. In the world of housing and residential, it is particularly important that the environment should not be barren and hard to inhabit. Too often the public spaces that are created within public housing projects can be terrible – just because you include a big plaza doesn’t necessarily make a place that people want to be. How buildings meet the ground and how you create vitality and activity are the conditions that will make people more likely to cherish and look after buildings rather than them becoming abused over time. These are all aspects that matter and are not just about what you draw; it’s how you evolve the brief before you draw anything.
Ca: Can you cite any examples of this?

TH: I find that this is the case with most projects we are working on. Even for the new London bus we designed, there were lessons to be learned from the buses from more than half a century ago; lessons that have been ‘un-learned’ in recent times with modern bus infrastructure whereby the emphasis has shifted to treating passengers more as numbers to get from one place to another and not harm themselves. This became the benchmark of success and the human dignity of the passenger sort of fell between the cracks.

We felt that our role was to try to champion the experience of the passengers as well as meeting all the health and safety regulations and best of practice, and create a bus that people would actually feel good in.

IH: Transport for London has recently announced that they will retro-fit and install opening windows on the top decks of new buses. What do you think of this?

TH: Finally I’ve got the design that I intended! When it was commissioned, the brief was that there were not to be opening windows because there was a belief that chillers would technically make passengers cooler. Our experience showed that having some control of your environment changes the way you feel even if technically you are a lot cooler. If you are able to open the windows, this gives you a feeling of connecting with the world and being more in control. I’m very happy that it has been possible to lobby for that.

IH: What inspired the façade of The Upper House in Hong Kong and how did that integrate with your overall redesign of Pacific Place?

TH: Pacific Place was a very exciting project for many reasons. It is a very public space and needed to be worked on whilst not disturbing the businesses, visitors and shoppers. It was a major challenge for us – almost like an apprenticeship when we started 10 years ago. It had an existing bone structure with existing buildings that were 20 years old at the time, and it was also at its most successful. We were brought in by Swire Properties Limited to look at how it could be for the next 20 years.

A key theme was finding a language that would be able to stitch it all together. In a way, the whole of Pacific Place is like a little town. It was not like building one big new thing, but it was composed of many details, so we tried to evolve a philosophy of how we might combine all the different elements together.

For example, the proposed entrance to The Upper House was originally a loading bay. How could we turn that from a back door into a front door? The podium level of Pacific Place was more like a car park entrance so it wasn’t really a public space. We managed to remove the pyramid skylights, which were forcing people to use narrow pavements, and make them flat and walkable, which tripled the amount of public space. This also allowed us to create a café building and frame Harcourt Garden on the west side and suddenly people wanted to have their front doors on level four. The sweep of the façade was a natural element combining the materials and language used throughout the redesign.

IH: You’re not averse to a bit of controversy here and there. You get critical acclaim and a fair amount of criticism. How to deal with the criticism you get in a constructive way?

TH: I think the decision to propose public projects in a democracy, you are engaging with people and they will likely have different opinions. The word ‘controversy’ can be overstated in that of course there are going to be opposing responses – it would be positively strange if everyone said, ‘great, marvellous, smashing, do it!’ You’d probably have a pretty terrible proposal if that’s going to happen.

At the moment we are working on a project called Garden Bridge over the River Thames in London that will be free for everyone forever and that will stitch the city together. Of course, there have been a few people who are worried. Projects are complex and it can also be quite hard to articulate all the aspects of them so things tend to get a simplistic reading. More than 80 percent of Londoners want it to happen; an almost unprecedented number of people wanting a project in the epicentre of one of the thought-leading capitals of the world to happen.

Sometimes many of the projects that I work on develop and evolve with the input of people and their thoughts, because consultation is what you have to do to try and make the best possible project. It is now at a really exciting stage and due to start construction at the beginning of next year. I can’t wait because I think it will be a project that will give something back to us all.

The British are famous for being hard-bitten. Many thought that the Olympics would go wrong and were astonished when they didn’t! They worried about the London Eye. ‘A big wheel? Isn’t that too simplistic?’ And then the projects happened, which is fantastic, and teaches us all a lesson that London can take it.

It is important that cities aren’t paralysed by their heritage and can keep evolving and developing. I feel very lucky that the studio is able to play a small part in trying to keep pushing for the public areas we share to function better and be more special for everyone.
Luxuriate

Street Life

Images: Tim Moldenhauer
Art Direction & Styling: Ann Tsang
Grooming: Krystina de Tahanara
Model: Sergey Kovor
Wardrobe: Dior Homme
With more than 40 years of experience in the fashion industry, Sir Paul Smith is one of Britain’s leading designers and renowned for his idiosyncratic take on traditional British styling - ‘classic with a twist’. Following the success of 2014’s collaboration, The Opposite House once again partnered with the designer earlier this year for a unique creative installation in the hotel’s Atrium. In House chats with the man who has the ability to anticipate and spark trends, not only in fashion, but also in the wider context of popular culture.

**A Play On Words**

In April this year, fashion designer Sir Paul Smith returned to The Opposite House in Beijing to present a unique art installation inspired by his 2015 Spring/Summer collection. The installation comprised 3,000 dual-powered, illuminated mini “waggers” (little waving flags), each 13.5 centimetres in height, bearing the season’s signature catchphrase – “YEAH!” The aim of the exhibit was to remind hotel guests, customers, and passers-by to approach everyday life with an optimistic, colourful attitude. In House talks to Sir Paul about art, social media, and what’s next...

**In House:** It is said that “art imitates life”. What in your life has influenced your art?

**Paul Smith:** I find inspiration in all sorts of things. I often talk about the importance of both “looking” and “seeing”. So many people go through life without paying attention to what’s surrounding them as they walk down the street and how inspiring that can be.

**In House:** What was the significance of the word ‘YEAH!’ in your installation at The Opposite House?

**Paul Smith:** I think it’s really an observation about the evolution of language. The word “YEAH!” is used so heavily, so it’s sort of a play on that.

**In House:** What was the significance of the word ‘YEAH!’ in your installation at The Opposite House?

**Paul Smith:** In this instance it’s a hobby, but many people say that our displays and window concepts are like works of art - be it because of their aesthetic or their meaning and sense of humour.

**In House:** How has social media impacted you and your business positively?

**Paul Smith:** I’ve always prided myself on the individuality of the business I have developed and although often the Internet can flatten a lot of that personality into a rather functional experience, social media obviously helps us to communicate the extent and variety of everything we do at Paul Smith.

**In House:** What is your favourite social media platform and why?

**Paul Smith:** I’ve always taken lots and lots of photos; my Dad was an amateur photographer. Now lots of the photos I take every day, I post on Instagram (@paul_smith).

**In House:** What is next for Sir Paul Smith?

**Paul Smith:** I can’t really be specific. Every day offers something different and there’s always something exciting just around the corner!
British shoe designer Nicholas Kirkwood celebrates 10 years with an 80s arcade-themed collection – aptly titled ‘10’. In true Nicholas Kirkwood fashion, the quirky collection is all about colour, fun and making a statement.

The visual merchandising for Nicholas Kirkwood’s 10th Anniversary collection is like stepping onto the plastic fantastic set of an 80s movie. Primary colours and bold shapes abound, complete with boxy arcade machines, an oversized PACMAN chair and a galactic-chic rug.

“As soon as I decided on this theme, I knew it would look cool in the stores,” says Kirkwood, who’s surprisingly unassuming given the bold designs he has become known for. “It’s so visual and graphic, and bold in terms of colour; there was a whole world around it that I could use and build on and it became a complete story.”

In House: How does it feel to be celebrating a decade of Nicholas Kirkwood?

Nicholas Kirkwood: It seems like time has gone by so quickly. For this special anniversary collection, I wanted it to be something that not only looks back at the first 10 years of the business – the iconic styles and silhouettes – but I also wanted it to look back at the first 10 years of my life which was everything from computer games to 80s movies, Star Wars, and toys… I created this special collection just for that.

IH: If you could tell yourself something 10 years ago, what would it be?

NK: I would say to be persistent, and to always trust your own judgment. A little bit further into my career, I started getting big stores saying to me “you should do this” or “you should do that” and slowly I would start wondering if I should be doing what they thought I should do. But the best thing is to stick with your vision, and go for it.

IH: You have said that this collection goes back to the essence of why you started designing shoes – which was to challenge convention. Do you think that in the last 10 years, you have managed to successfully change people’s ideas of what footwear should look like?

NK: I think there are collections where I have, be it with a new platform construction or a new heel shape, or unexpected combinations of materials. Newness is what I always find exciting, I think that an element of the unexpected is what always gives something an edge.

IH: Where do you produce your shoes? Who have you entrusted to bring your out-there designs to life?

NK: Everything is made in Italy, but this particular collection is made by hand at a small artisanal factory near Bologna. I have worked with a few factories, but this is the only one I have worked with that really felt right, who had that real attention to detail and the passion to be able to do it. I have been working with them for eight years now.

IH: How has the response been to ‘10’ so far?

NK: There’s definitely a certain amount of nostalgia, especially for anyone my age. The timing of it was quite good too. When I started designing the collection, I had no idea the ‘Pixels’ movie would be coming out, plus they have made a film of that 80s cartoon ‘Jem and the Holograms’, which is also coming out this year. The ‘Neon City’ shoe from ‘10’ definitely has that ‘Jem and the Holograms’ feel.
IH: What kind of woman wears Nicholas Kirkwood?
NK: My designs are obviously quite bold and graphic; it takes a tastemaker type of woman, someone who’s not afraid to make a bit of a statement, to wear them - a woman who is quite bold. She’s a girl who takes risks and who doesn’t wear something just because the magazines tell her to wear it. She wants to look great and has an inherent sense of style.

IH: With fashion being so minimalist these days, have you ever felt pressured to tone it down a little?
NK: I’ll usually have a basic pump, just to have something more accessible. But when it comes to designing shoes, for me it’s about creating a symphony. There are so many elements to a shoe, and to make it all work in harmony is not always easy. That’s what I think my job as a designer is all about, it’s layer upon layer upon layer.

IH: What would you say to girls who are afraid of wearing colour?
NK: The great thing about a pair of shoes is, if you’re wearing something really minimal and simple on top, or if you’re wearing all black, shoes are the perfect way to add a pop of colour to an outfit.

IH: What is key to being a great designer?
NK: With fashion, it’s key to always have to have your ear to the ground. You have to constantly have your finger on the pulse, be it in terms of art, movies, and anything to do with culture or creativity. It’s important to be ‘in the know’ and to stay up to date with everything.

IH: What advice do you have for aspiring designers?
NK: I’d say to get experience. Go and work with someone else for a while. It will be more valuable than anything you learn in college. I also think it’s important to make sure you have some kind of partner, whether that’s on the business side, sales, marketing, or even another designer. It’s crucial when you have your own line to have someone to make the journey with. Of course, you can have an employee, but it’s different. They’re not going to put blood sweat and tears into it the same way a partner would. You can’t call them at midnight complaining or worried about something. You need someone whose opinion you trust to bounce ideas off and to make big decisions.
Going green is definitely the new black. In House speaks with The EcoChic Design Award winner Kévin Germanier about how to make sustainable fashion high end and his upcoming up-cycled capsule collection for Shanghai Tang.
Consumers are more environmentally conscious than ever. With people around the world becoming increasingly eco savvy when it comes to choosing their food, cosmetics, cars, and hotel options, it seems sustainable fashion is the next step.

Balenciaga, Stella McCartney, Louis Vuitton, even H&M with its 'Conscious Collection', are slowly but surely proving that sustainable fashion is not a trend – but that it’s here to stay.

“Many people don’t realise the amount of waste and negative impact the fashion industry has on the environment. But it’s very real,” says young designer-to-watch Kévin Germanier, whose beautifully constructed designs using up-cycled materials made him the winner of The EcoChic Design Award 2014/15 competition.
Debuted in 2011, the competition is organised by Redress, a Hong Kong-based non-government organisation that promotes sustainability in fashion, and through the competition encourages emerging designers to create clothing with minimal textile waste and minimal environmental impact.

The textile industry is arguably one of the biggest offenders when it comes to pollution, drawing heavily from natural resources such as oil and water, and using vast amounts of chemicals that create toxic carbon dioxide emissions. The fashion industry also produces millions of tons of unused fabric gone to waste each year – a statistic based on factories in China alone – where the rivers run with the season’s colours due to fabrics being dyed the wrong shade.

“Fashion designers are very powerful in terms of influencing the sustainability of a product,” says Christina Dean, founder of Redress. “However, we have found that in general there is a lack of education for fashion designers about sustainability, and this is what drives the competition. It allows us to engage on a much deeper and lasting level with fashion designers to make a significant impact on their careers and, as a ripple effect, on the environment.”

The inspiration for Germanier’s competition collection started with a Swiss Army blanket that belonged to his father when he was a soldier, paired with polyethylene, which he bought in a second-hand DIY market – he says this was “inspired by modern China and its huge use of plastic bags.”

“The Swiss Army blankets are old and made of natural fabrics, representing the past, and the polyethylene represents the future,” says the designer, who assisted with Alexis Mabille Haute Couture in Paris, and was working as a freelance designer for Victim Fashion St by Taiwanese designer Meihui Lui. “My collection was a mix of contrasting materials with particular attention to the finishings. I tried to mix the classical way of making clothes with new finishings – avant-garde but still wearable and luxurious.”

As first prize winner of The EcoChic Design Award, Germanier is now designing the first ever up-cycled capsule collection for renowned Chinese label Shanghai Tang.

“When designing my collection, I asked myself, what is China for me? And my answer was a perfect mix between technology and tradition, between the future and the past. You have all these amazing traditions in history, fashion, architecture and art, but at the same time you have new buildings and groundbreaking technology,” says the Swedish designer, who at the time we spoke was two months into his three-month stint at Shanghai Tang.

“I know it sounds quite cliché, but I feel very blessed. It’s such an honour to work for Shanghai Tang. Most fashion designers or students dream about working in Paris or London. But in my case, I had always wanted to work and develop my creativity in Asia. The region has so much history, which fascinates me.”

Known for its luxurious fabrics, Germanier will be using Shanghai Tang’s leftover and end-of-roll fabrics to create his capsule collection. Part of the battle in Asia, according to Germanier, is the stigma many people have against reused or recycled clothing and materials; the misconception that sustainable fashion can’t look high end or even stylish.

“Shanghai Tang’s fabrics are spectacular. Looking at the quality of the pieces that will come of them, you would never think they came from waste materials,” Germanier says excitedly. As for the theme or style he’s going for? “All I can say is expect the unexpected.”

It’s hard to guess what Germanier will do next, now that he has quickly established himself as a quirky, out-there and bold designer whose inspiration comes from just about anywhere. One of his favourite collections was inspired by the unlikely combination of organs and veins, mixed with Korean pop band Girl’s Generation.

“My creative input always comes from finding beauty in the dirtiest, weirdest things that I then mix with a subtle touch of humour. I spend a lot of time making patterns, with minimal sewing, so that it’s all about construction – I like my designs to be sculptural,” Germanier explains. “I’m so thrilled to be sharing my European fashion sense with Shanghai Tang and working with a team to prove that sustainable fashion can be exciting, refined and high fashion, because what qualifies as high fashion to me is the quality and cleverness of the piece. The entire process matters – from the way the garment is produced, where it is made, who made it, whether the factories are waste-conscious, and so on. You can tell when a brand genuinely cares about its designs. There are some brands that are truly passionate about what they’re doing, and Shanghai Tang is one of them.”
Having mastered his cooking skills from well-known chefs, several of whom are highly recognised in Hong Kong, Chef Li Dong has accumulated more than 22 years of experience in cooking and kitchen management. Chef Li heads the kitchen at Jing Yaa Tang at The Opposite House in Beijing, leading the restaurant to wide acclaim and success in the city. In House speaks with Chef Li about his career so far, sustainability and being at the helm of an award-winning restaurant.

Centre of Attention

Opened in September 2013, Jing Yaa Tang, the regional Chinese restaurant at The Opposite House in Beijing, is a Swire Hotels’ collaboration with London-based and internationally-recognised restaurateur Alan Yau as lead designer and concept consultant. The restaurant celebrates Beijing roast duck at its heart, with the menu extending to a wide range of favourite dishes from different regions across China.

A mere six months after opening, Jing Yaa Tang was awarded the Best Chinese Restaurant of the Year (Hotel), Best New Restaurant and Best Hotel Dining by City Weekend @Beijing, accolades which are testament to the passion and dedication of the restaurant’s team and Chef de Cuisine Li Dong.

Chef Li’s passion for food and cooking has led to him creating delectable Chinese dishes from all regions across China to bring this cuisine to the next level. Jing Yaa Tang offers a specialty selection of Beijing roast duck dishes, simply prepared and expertly executed. The menu also extends to Chinese regional favourites such as authentic Kung Pao Chicken and Dandan Noodle recipes. Jing Yaa Tang utilises the best ingredients sourced from within the region and all dishes are MSG free.

The restaurant aptly summed up in an excerpt from a review in Time Out Beijing: “Jing Yaa Tang still makes a great place to stop for first-rate duck and a few classic dishes. Once seated inside the restaurant, served by respectful and knowledgeable staff and nibbling on crunchy duck skin, it is easy to imagine that you are in a classy dining hall of modern royalty, enjoying a relaxed yet distinguished meal.”

The 155-seat restaurant, open for lunch and dinner, is set within a striking contemporary Chinoiserie theatrical style design. The interior opens into a central social dining space or ‘tang’ taken from the literal Chinese translation of hall. Interior design accents reveal layers of dark lacquer application with plum and burnt orange detailing and ornamental highlights to capture and intrigue. Elevated dining viewing platforms run parallel on each side of the central area replicating theatre itself with intimate private dining booths positioned in each adjacent corner. A communal table to share snacks, a central bar and a scene setting duck oven command a centre stage.

Chef Li Dong was deeply involved in the pre-opening stage of the restaurant and continues to ensure that Jing Yaa Tang functions like clockwork, whilst never compromising on quality.
IH: What is your greatest achievement so far in your 22-year career?
CLD: Without a doubt, it has been opening Jing Yaa Tang and watching the business become better and better. I truly feel so proud.

IH: Why did you choose this dish?
CLD: It is very simple to prepare. Walnuts are also very nutritious and contain vitamin E, Omega-3, folic acid and anti-oxidants. Chinese Toon is uniquely aromatic which attracts children. This vegetable contains Vitamins A, B and C, which are crucial in the development and growth of children. Chinese Toon also promotes digestion.

IH: What tips do you have for home chefs and their children when making this dish?
CLD: If you are using raw walnuts, soak them in water for at least 15 minutes to bring out the flavour. The tannins are simultaneously rinsed away, leaving behind a softer, buttery nut. You can also use cooked walnuts, but it is important to select roasted walnuts. Avoid fried walnuts as this is already an oily type of nut. Also avoid purchasing boiled walnuts as vitamins and nutrients are lost in the boiling process.

In House: What influenced you to become a chef?
Chef Li Dong: One of my family members was a restaurant owner, so from an early age, I became interested in pursuing a career as a chef.

IH: Did you receive any type of formal training?
CLD: I took Chinese cooking classes when I was at high school, which also included learning other aspects of running a kitchen, such as costing and accounting. I also studied to earn a number of professional certificates.

IH: Has any particular person been a special inspiration to you and why/how?
CLD: When I worked at the Kerry Hotel in Beijing, there is a chef from Hong Kong who was a great influence on me. He taught me the importance of paying attention to every detail, which helped not only improve the quality of my dishes, but also my ability to manage an entire kitchen.

IH: Do you source produce from sustainable sources? How important is this and please give some examples.
CLD: We use sustainable chopping boards, instead of using wooden ones, we use the plastic variety. We also carefully monitor the usage of water and electricity. Normally, a large amount of water is used for defrosting and cleaning, so we made some changes to the pipe system, which has enabled us to reduce our water usage by up to 30 percent.

Once we close the kitchen, we also shut down any unnecessary form of power supply. We also undertake garbage classification so that many unused materials can be safely recycled.

IH: Were you surprised that Jing Yaa Tang became so successful so quickly and received the Best New Restaurant award?
CLD: There was an element of surprise when we received the award in such a short time, but this was all thanks to teamwork and the cooperation of other departments.

IH: What is involved in running a successful and productive kitchen?
CLD: The main thing is good communication between the restaurant floor team members and the kitchen. The other is training; it is extremely important to train all of our team members to a high level of skill.

IH: How do you keep your team motivated?
CLD: First of all, the overall working environment is very important and letting everyone know the importance of working here. I want to make every team member proud of their position within the restaurant and the hotel.

IH: Where do you get inspiration to come up with new dishes?
CLD: I can be motivated and inspired through anything from reading a book to talking with a friend to enjoying a meal.

Walnuts and Chinese Toon Leaves
Ingredients
100g raw walnuts
5g salt
2g sugar
2g sesame oil
Chinese Toon leaves to garnish
Water (to soak the walnuts in)

Procedure
Step 1: Soak the walnuts in a bowl of water for 15 minutes
Step 2: Rinse the Chinese Toon leaves
Step 3: After 15 minutes of soaking the walnuts in water, drain the water, add salt, sugar, sesame oil, mix well, then place on a serving plate.
Step 4: Garnish with Chinese Toon leaves on top of the walnuts (avoid adding additional flavouring to the Toon otherwise the original fragrant flavour of the vegetable will be lost).
The EAST-ern Influence

In House speaks to EAST, Beijing’s Executive Chef Robert Cunningham about his culinary influences and working in the bustling international Chinese capital.

The biggest influence on Chef Rob Cunningham’s cooking style would have to be growing up on his family’s farm in Victoria, Australia. “The produce on our farm was the best training ground for a young chef,” says Chef Rob. “To have all those amazing fresh ingredients and to learn what is in season are the fundamental basics of cooking and menu planning.”

This was an experience that many chefs don’t have the luxury of learning at such a young age. The farm had 500 olive trees from which the fruits were picked and crushed to make its own virgin olive oil and preserved olives. There was also a commercial pig farm where Cunningham learned how to make bacon, ham, and many other small goods influenced by his Italian neighbours. “It’s where I fell in love with their cuisine, with how simple and tasty the rustic Italian cooking style was and how their cooking focused on the seasons; you could always see that through the dishes they cooked, which varied from season to season,” he adds.

One of Cunningham’s favourite lessons was the art of preserving and pickling all the fruits from the farm’s orchard into jams, chutneys, and poached in syrups. All the vegetables were either sundried or pickled, a traditional practice that enabled the vegetables and fruits to be eaten when they were out of season and also meant that nothing was wasted. “The lesson of country life where we never wasted food and utilised everything has been most helpful throughout my cooking life,” he says. “I had the luxury of growing up cooking and had no intention of becoming anything but a chef.”

Chef Rob considers it important to be able to make regular visits to his suppliers on their farms and also to the local seafood markets. This helps to keep him and his chefs inspired and creative and ensure the quality of all the produce served to customers. “I get to see what’s in season and what’s available in Beijing,” he says. “This allows me to be inspired to create new dishes for the menus.”

Living in the Chinese capital for more than five years has allowed Cunningham to get a better insight into the culinary tastes of his Chinese patrons. “Our local customers are the most interesting because Western cuisine is not what they grew up with, so for these customers it’s a completely different experience,” he says. “They are looking for a restaurant that has good food, is accommodating, and does not feel so foreign that they feel uncomfortable.”
Cunningham has adapted certain dishes to accommodate the local palate. For example, the risotto and pasta dishes are cooked for slightly longer than they would be in the West because local customers are not used to eating them al dente. Another example is that he uses less salt in his dishes than they would usually be seasoned with. “All that said, Chinese people are the most adventurous diners that I have ever encountered; they are always happy to try new dishes.”

EAST, Beijing’s international travellers are looking for something in a Western restaurant that they can associate with the food and tastes that they miss when travelling in Asia, so Cunningham wants them to feel a little reminder of home through the dishes at the hotel’s restaurants. Sometimes something as simple as a good steak is all it takes. “I love that our customer base is comprised of both locals and international travellers,” he says. “It creates a very different mix, yet both are after the same thing - a great meal.”

Cunningham says that being part of the Swire Hotels family and especially EAST, Beijing has been an amazing journey. Being part of a smaller hotel family that aims to raise the standard of hotel dining to be the best possible product for the customer means that most often, the guest feels that they are actually in a free-standing restaurant and not a hotel dining venue. “It’s exactly the homey feel that we set out to achieve here at EAST, Beijing and Swire Hotels overall,” he says.

EAST, Beijing offers multiple dining options. At Feast (Food by EAST), an eclectic mix of Western dishes, some including a splash of Asian flavours, are on offer. Domain is an ideal place for breakfast meetings or working throughout the day, serving coffee, freshly baked cakes, and salads, sandwiches, pasta, noodles and rice dishes. The Japanese restaurant, Hagaki, focuses on a contemporary style with much-loved Japanese classic dishes, whilst the Xian bar serves one of the best pizzas in Beijing.

“We have many special dishes that we serve here and each outlet has its own signature dishes which they really excel at,” says Cunningham. “My favourites include Hagaki’s signature sushi rolls and sashimi. Feast has so many Western and Asian dishes that I love but my favourite has to be our seared salmon with yellow curry, a kaffir lime/tomato chutney and bok choy with steamed rice. Xian offers a great pizza and Domain makes the best coffee to start the day off right,” he enthuses.

One of Cunningham’s favourite culinary features is the Saturday night ‘Steak Night at Feast’ where the restaurant serves only imported Australian beef which he says is “so good you cannot get a better steak in Beijing for the price.”

In addition to his Western palate, Chef Cunningham also has a great appreciation for Chinese food, which he has acquired on his travels and work experience throughout the region. He admits that he is particularly partial to any kind of dumpling. “I also love so many noodle dishes here that I can’t name them all,” he says. “Also anything from Yunnan and, of course, when in Beijing, there’s nothing quite like a traditional roast duck.”
“About eighty percent of the food on shelves of supermarkets today didn’t exist 100 years ago,” says Dr. Larry McCleary, award-winning author of Feed Your Brain, Lose Your Belly. As the world continues to shift its focus to holistic healing, we continue to learn – or perhaps relearn – the importance of our food as medicine. Here are some of the world’s most effective ingredients, otherwise known as superfoods.

**The New Heroes**

**Bee Pollen**

When it comes to superfoods, bee pollen is, quite literally, gold. These bright yellow bulbs are nature’s most complete and nutritious food with endless benefits. For centuries, cultures around the world have used bee pollen in a number of applications including improving endurance and balance, improving focus and alertness, regulating the intestines, preventing infectious diseases such as the cold and flu (bee pollen has antibiotic type properties), helping overcome developmental problems in children and more.

Concentrated in all elements necessary to life, bee pollen is highly absorbable and loaded with antioxidants; it has more protein than any animal source and more amino acids than eggs, beef or cheese of equal weight.

**Turmeric**

Turmeric contains a wealth of antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal, anti-carcinogenic, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, earning it the title “Queen of Spices”. Turmeric has proven to be effective in removing harmful free radicals in the body, boosting immunity, and lowering cholesterol, but perhaps most impressive is turmeric’s strong anti-inflammatory properties that match the effectiveness of some anti-inflammatory medications, making it a natural and holistic alternative to over-the-counter drugs.

**Pumpkin Seeds**

Feeling peckish? Pumpkin seeds are the snack of choice for nutritionists the world over due to the fact that pumpkin seeds have fewer calories, fewer carbohydrates and more protein than almonds.

Pumpkin seeds have been proven to stabilize blood pressure and build bone strength, while its high levels of tryptophan – an amino acid that converts to mood-enhancing serotonin – can help to relieve anxiety symptoms.

**Sardines**

Like little miracles in a can, not only do sardines contain more heart-healthy omega three fatty acids than salmon or tuna, they are also significantly lower in mercury. So much so that, according to the American Pregnancy Association, even pregnant women can eat up to 12 ounces per week.

These little fish also contain 35% of the daily value for calcium, 45% of the daily value for phosphorous and 45% of the daily value for vitamin D, which has proven effective in lowering the risk of developing arthritis or cancer.
Kelp
Yes, that slimy plant that gets caught on your legs at the beach is in fact good for something. Kelp has been hailed a superfood for a multitude of reasons. First, a rich source of organic iodine, kelp is extremely beneficial in maintaining healthy thyroid function. “A healthy functioning thyroid is essential in maintaining metabolism and preventing the accumulation of body fat,” writes Burton Goldberg in Alternative Medicine.

Kelp is also rich in sodium alginate, which is effective in protecting the body from and removing radiation. A study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal found that sodium alginate from kelp reduced radioactive strontium absorption in the intestines by as much as 50 to 80 percent – something we can all benefit from with the regular use of and exposure to mobile phones and Wi-Fi, which have been inextricably linked with the increase in cancer rates.

White Tea
White tea or bai-cha is the Rolls-Royce of teas. Once reserved for Emperors and nobility, it still remains as one of the rarest of all teas. In the Song Dynasty, Emperor Hui Zong wrote: “White tea has the rarest and most delicate flavour. It is different from all others and is the pinnacle of refinement.”

Dark Chocolate
Dark chocolate has a permanent place on any list of superfoods, and we’re not complaining. The consumption of dark chocolate and raw cacao – in moderation of course – has endless benefits; the antioxidants in cacao have been shown to boost heart health, fight diabetes, protect against UV damage – perfect for those long hours spent lounging by the pool at The Peninsula - and even soothe stress. Plus, a little piece of dark chocolate after a meal can help curb cravings, ensuring you don’t overindulge on dessert.

Saffron
Saffron has for long been known as a remedy for many types of pain, and is a natural solution for many modern day health problems. In the East, saffron has been used to treat light to moderate depression as it has a reputation for bringing happiness and wisdom. In Morocco, saffron is part of a remedy that has been passed down from mother to daughter, and it is still used to relieve tooth ache when babies get their first teeth by massaging gums with a gold ring coated with honey and saffron, a lotion with natural antiseptic properties.

Cinnamon
According to studies, this sweet spice can potentially do wonders for neurodegenerative diseases. Two compounds found in cinnamon have been found to inhibit the buildup of a protein called tau in the brain - one of the hallmarks of alzheimers – while a study looking at mice with parkinson’s found that cinnamon helped protect neurons and normalize neurotransmitter levels, even improving motor function.

Maca Powder
Many take maca for its energy boosting qualities, but this Peruvian treasure is best known for its hormone balancing properties. Maca has effectively relieved women of menstrual and menopausal symptoms such as cramps, body pain, hot flashes, mood swings, depression and problem skin.
Award-winning mixologist, Timothee Becqueriaux, Operations Manager at The Continental, Pacific Place, Hong Kong, takes us on a journey tinged with green, swathed in myth and diluted with passion.

Defying A Myth

Award-winning mixologist, Timothee Becqueriaux, Operations Manager at The Continental, Pacific Place, Hong Kong, takes us on a journey tinged with green, swathed in myth and diluted with passion.
Absinthe was blamed for many ills, psychoses and crimes around the turn of the 20th Century, and indeed the enigma surrounding this emerald liqueur are the many infamous rumours about the effect it has on anyone who drinks it. Much of the myth has subsequently been debunked, but stories surrounding Van Gogh and his drinking buddies Degas, Monet, Toulouse Lautrec and, most notably, Gaugin, led to the aperitif being nicknamed 'la fée verte' (the 'green fairy') and later dubbed 'the green curse'.

There were many reasons that contributed to the decision as to why absinthe was banned in France in 1915, one of which was that doctors at the time were trying to prove that the amount of thujone in the drink drove people insane, which now know to be completely false. Another reason is that absinthe was traditionally distilled using a wine-based spirit. Following The Great French Wine Blight caused by the migration of a North American aphid known as the grape phylloxera, which decimated 40 percent of French grape vines over a 15-year period from the 1850s, wine production went down, prices went up, and absinthe had to find another base spirit. That was when producers switched to a grain-based spirit. "This was obviously cheaper and made the drink more because it is stronger – you still keep to 3-5 parts water, otherwise you drown the spirit."

Back to absinthe. There is no legal limit on the percentage alcohol content by volume (ABV), and an authentic absinthe should contain between 55 and 75 percent – under 55 percent would not be considered as an absinthe.

"If you try either a 55 or 75 percent proof, you won't really be able to tell the difference between them. You won't feel the alcohol because it's now a wine-based spirit that has been spent time on; it has been perfected," says Becqueriaux. "You should also not dilute the solution more because it is stronger – you still keep to 3-5 parts water, otherwise you drown the spirit."

Becqueriaux stocks mainly European absinthe at The Continental and has a dark history," says Becqueriaux. "Or perhaps people have been misinformed that it is served as a shot or they have seen it on fire; to a Frenchman, that's something very wrong."

Like most aperitifs, absinthe is actually meant to be served chilled, and savoured slowly; no flames, no shot glasses. Just a refined combination of fine botanicals and sugar to taste, with the mesmerising slow drips of infused iced water creating a calm anticipation amongst the diners and as such he insists that the collection is served traditionally. He has all the ‘absinthiana’ accoutrements and paraphernalia, such as the absinthe fountains with spigots to allow iced water to drop slowly onto a sugar cube and through a slotted absinthe spoon into a special Pontarlier glass that has a bulbs reservoir base to a perfect one-ounce shot of absinthe. He adds a modern twist by infusing the iced water in the fountain with herbs, vegetables and fruits that fit the flavour profile of a particular recipe. Adding ice-cold water to absinthe is the usual method of preparation that causes clouding, called the ‘louche’ or the ‘ouzo effect’ in other drinks. It is pure theatre and aims to engage the customer, heightening their experience and understanding of this much-maligned aperitif. "When people hear the word 'absinthe' they are often slightly intimidated by it because they think that it is something that has just come back and has a dark history," says Becqueriaux. "Or perhaps people have the misconception that it is served as a shot or they have seen it on fire; to a Frenchman, that's something very wrong."

Becqueriaux explains that the extremely low price of absinthe actually gave people a reason to go out. It brought society outside and was very popular in other big cities as well as Paris, with cramped apartments and big families. It was a social phenomenon whereby people would interact with each other around these kinds of aperitifs. It was subsequently mass-produced and French soldiers were the biggest consumers of absinthe from around the world. It was a restorative. It was subsequently mass-produced and French soldiers going to war in the 50s, 60s and 70s would bring a litre of absinthe with them. Absinthe, which is why it is often called 'the French gin'. Most recipes have been kept a secret by the old distilling families, and there can be up to 30 different ingredients in some of the best absinthe recipes.

Wormwood (Artemisia absinthium), is the key ingredient used in absinthe and a relative of the distinctly bucolic daisy. Adding anise and fennel gives the spirit its distinctive aniseed taste, and there are many recipes for distilling absinthe that use various combinations of herbs and herbal extracts to create its delicate flavour balance. Of these herbs, wormwood is the most essential and also the most controversial. A by-product of wormwood is thujone, a psychoactive element that was held accountable for the alleged misbehaviour of absinthe drinkers falling into its allegedly hallucinogenic properties.

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A successful participant in the International Operations Management Trainee programme, James Bridle’s career has been nurtured by Swire Hotels over the past four years, and today he holds the position of Operations Manager at Mesh at The Opposite House in Beijing, one of the city’s sleekest bars offering some of the coolest cocktails in town.

James Bridle was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he lived until 1989, before his family relocated to Hong Kong. Upon completing his high school education in the SAR in 2006, Bridle embarked on a journey to London with the intention of pursuing a BA in International Business and French at The European Business School. However after two years of study, he decided to return to Hong Kong to pursue something that he had discovered, and found much more interesting, the art of DJ-ing. Bridle spent the next four years working throughout the city at various nightclubs and bars to earn a living, but as they say, some things don’t last forever. “It was a great time in my life, but eventually I made the decision again to move into a new field.”

Bridle comes from a family of hoteliers, with both his parents having worked in the industry and his grandparents owning a small hotel in the Seychelles, so perhaps it was a natural evolution for him to be drawn towards that industry. “One day I found myself talking with Dean Winter, Area Director of Operations - Hong Kong and China Projects for Swire Hotels, and following that conversation I found myself with the opportunity of an interview at EAST, Hong Kong for a position at Sugar (Bar.Deck.Lounge), the hotel’s rooftop bar,” recalls Bridle.

Bridle subsequently embarked on a career with Swire Hotels as a server at Sugar, where he then discovered a passion for bartending. “At EAST, we had some excellent training sessions on the history of cocktails and spirits which really grabbed my attention, and this gave me the motivation to learn more about the industry, something that I had not really experienced before at school or university,” says Bridle. “For the first time in my life I wanted to study, and after less than a year I found myself training to be a professional bartender.”

With great encouragement from his peers, Bridle applied to enrol in the International Operations Management Trainee programme. “I found myself slightly out of my depth coming into the application and interview processes as I was one of the only, if not the only candidate, without a degree in hospitality,” he says. “But it was at that point that I discovered the difference between Swire Hotels and other hospitality companies. Swire believes in its people and always looks to promote from within where possible. The Company also understands that there are many skills you can teach, but personality and attitude you cannot. Luckily for me they saw potential and offered me a position on the programme alongside five other exceptional applicants.”
The 18-month programme involved working at Swire Hotels’ Hong Kong Central Support Office and the Company’s various hotel properties in Hong Kong and Beijing, which Bridle says “really helped me gain a deeper understanding of our business model, our approach to hospitality, and the way we work.”

Four years on, Bridle now holds the position of Operations Manager position at Mesh, the chic bar at The Opposite House in Beijing, where he is a fine example of Swire Hotels’ nurturing of potential talent.

In House: What do think makes Swire Hotels different to other hospitality brands?

James Bridle: That’s an easy question to answer. I have to say that it’s the people and the unique approach we take to service, which I feel is much more personable than some of the other brands out there.

IH: In your opinion, what makes a great bartender?

JB: I think that time is key. I have been working in bars for four years now and I am constantly learning new things. It is this knowledge that will make a great bartender. Also, for me, it’s about connecting with our guests, and being willing to adapt drinks to their needs and preferences.

IH: What is your favourite cocktail that you have personally created?

JB: I’d have to say that my favourite, and most memorable would be a cocktail I had a part in creating with an old colleague, Patrick Natino, from Sugar. Currently I have a version of it on the menu at Mesh called the ‘Chocolate Fashion’. The original drink consists of Zacapa 23 year-old rum, caramelised sugar, orange and chocolate bitters, garnished with an orange peel and a cinnamon stick. It’s prepared very much like an ‘Old Fashioned’, but I find it has much more complexity and smoothness.

IH: Do you consider mixology to be an art form?

JB: Yes. Mixologists have dedicated, in some cases, decades of their lives to their passion of bartending. When you are up front watching a true mixologist it is magic; the way they move around the bar, and their complete understanding of the products they are using is amazing. I think to become a true mixologist you would need to have been bartending for at least seven years, so I’m only about half way there!

IH: What advice would you offer to young people wishing to enter the hospitality industry?

JB: Well, once you enter the industry you need to listen and learn from your managers and mentors. If you are willing to take criticism from them and use it in a positive way, you have the potential to go far. Learning from your mistakes is also pivotal... don’t keep making the same ones! I have made many, many mistakes, but I have always learned from them.

IH: What inspires you?

JB: Watching the people around me develop and move up in the company has always been an inspiration which I have drawn from. I have been lucky enough to work with some great people and to see where they are now from the humble beginnings where they started is great.

IH: How have you seen consumer habits evolve in the four years that you have been in the industry?

JB: I would say people have become a lot more open in terms of trying new, interesting ingredients in cocktails, like blue cheese or squid ink for instance. You come across things that you may never have thought of before, but which consumers actually seem to be enjoying. Never say “never”!

**Agave Kiss**

**Ingredients**

- Capsicum-infused high degree tequila 50ml
- Fresh lemon juice 15ml
- Sugar syrup 15ml
- Black pepper
- Ice

**Procedure**

Step 1: Combine 50ml capsicum infused high degree tequila, 15ml fresh lemon juice and 15ml sugar syrup in a cocktail shaker with ice, then shake well.

Step 2: Filter into a Martini glass.

Step 3: Add some black pepper as garnish.

Step 4: Enjoy!
Drawing wine from a tap at the bar is far from most people’s perception of how to enjoy this highly ritualised beverage. However, kegged or draught wines are increasingly being used in chic bars and restaurants not just for cost and space saving, but also for their reduced environmental impact and superior shelf life.
When we purse the bottle wine list in a restaurant, we rarely consider the amount of energy required in producing it, transporting it, storing it, and the disposal of the bottles once empty. Even when there is an active recycling programme – only about 27% of glass bottles are recovered – the energy consumption used in the various processes from collection through redistribution has its relative environmental impact.

Glass has been used to store wines in various forms, shapes and sizes since Roman times, though there are written references from early writers that wooden barrels were used by the Celts, or Gauls, before then. As such, the art of coopering (barrel making) has been in existence for thousands of years and the metal ‘keg’ is a fairly recent introduction used primarily for beer in the 1930s and the aluminium alloy one we see today was developed for mass transportation in the 1960s – its advantage being that it is 30 percent lighter than the traditional barrel.

Whilst wine served from a keg has had a long-standing history in wine-growing region where wines on tap have been a staple for a number of years. The draught tap system at Mr & Mrs Fox.

From early on in the conceptual stage, the project team wanted the draught tap system to be a significant feature of Mr & Mrs Fox. This includes locally brewed craft beer as well as its own draught wines. Cheung has always loved the idea of serving wines on tap right next to the beers because draught beer has for long been readily accepted. It is one of the best ways to serve beer, so why shouldn’t that apply to wines as well? The point is, that it is actually quite fun and fits perfectly with the slightly mischievous nature of the restaurant concept and décor.

The taps are all separate with draught available on each floor with each keg placed in the totally visible keg room on the ground floor. The wine is transported through an amazing array of copper pipes that artfully snake along the ceiling. Cheung has been visiting the restaurant every day checking every floor to make sure that the wines are consistent and has staked her reputation on it working.

"The tap system is perfect for Mr & Mrs Fox as the whole concept of this place is to be part of the neighbourhood, family-oriented, welcoming and approachable. All the things that my company stands for," says Cheung. "I don’t want to create the impression that these are some luxurious high-end wines that are coming out of the tap. Quality doesn’t always have to equate to well-known brands; many ready-to-drink wines are just as enjoyable."

In fact no one is pretending that the Californian Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc are incredibly complex, long aged type wines. They’re nothing of the sort; but they are honest, straightforward wines that you can drink anywhere and with anything.

The Pinot Noir has sweet fruits though it is a dry wine that is served cool because of the draught dispensing system. Cheung is very particular about serving temperature for wines. When you think about it, people have been conditioned to serve red wines at room temperature and chill white wines. But room temperature in the northern climates is different than those of Hong Kong, so quaffing a glass of Pinot on the balcony when it’s 33 degrees in the shade and the wine is 34 degrees is not a pleasant experience. Cheung says that whilst she certainly wants guests to explore the draught wines, she also encourages traditional drinkers to have fun flipping through the bottle list once they are ready to move beyond the tap.

The draught wine programme is most certainly meant to be a draw, but we certainly don’t sacrifice the bottle list for it,” notes Cheung. "The wine list is as much or as little as customers would like to make of it – it has multiple elements both in terms of style, story lines and stand-out picks, as well as content, predominantly built on classics, but most definitely left of centre. Building the wine list was so much fun for me, as it’s one of my favourite things to do. I knew I had a 100-bin capacity at Mr & Mrs Fox and I think I started with about 200 different wines, all of them my favourite!"

Cheung says whilst she certainly wants guests to explore the draught wines, she also encourages traditional drinkers to have fun flipping through the bottle list once they are ready to move beyond the tap. In a city with such a dense population and available landfills nearing capacity, recycling has been slow to gain much serious traction. Finding ways to reduce waste is an important company precept and a necessary mindset that the food and beverage industry as a whole can contribute to the city and the world.

When the team finally had a chance to test the tap concept, from a borrowed draught dispenser I managed to procure, the keg had probably been open for probably for a couple of weeks,” says Cheung. "They were amazed that there was no spoilage. It still tasted as if it had come out of a fresh bottle."

The draught system works well for beer and the same principles that keep beer fresh from first to last pour applies to that of wine - though the kegs are smaller. The pressurised gas stops the wine from oxidising, thus keeping the wine in perfect condition, unlike an open bottle which if not used has to be discarded as waste and is a loss to the establishment.

Feedback from industry colleagues, wine aficionados and local customers has been extremely positive. The wines have also been given a firm thumbs up, even if a few still can’t get their lips around a cold Pinot Noir. Cheung recognises that the draught wines will not be everyone’s cup of tea, so catering to all tastes and preferences, there is a 100 bottle list on the wine menu.

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The Rise of | Riesling

For the longest time – and perhaps it’s been long enough – Germany has been known for its beer drinking culture. Now, slowly but surely, German wines are taking centre stage.
German wines have been likened to those produced in Burgundy and Bordeaux, but hiked in prices for the latter have provoked a growing curiosity and fondness for the former. Wine drinkers, particularly in Hong Kong and China who are spoiled for choice, are increasingly looking for wine that offers the best value for money.

“Children owe their existence to the wine mystique,” says Ulrich Allendorf. “It’s a great history and a great honour.” He says. “We have been blessed with the opportunity to become one of the greatest wine makers in the world.”

Allendorf is a 20th generation winemaker at the family-run Allendorf Estate which, founded in 1292, is still going strong 723 years later. “It’s a great history and a great honour,” he says. “We have been blessed with the opportunity to become one of the greatest wine makers in the world.”

Allendorf Estate is located in Oestrich-Winkel, a small town at the heart of the Rheingau, one of Germany’s 13 designated wine regions, and covers 60 hectares, making it one of the largest family-run wineries in Germany.

“My hometown of Oestrich-Winkel is a small village, so small that in fact maybe one of these skyscrapers in Hong Kong houses more people than the entire village,” says Allendorf. And yet, it is the Riesling producing capital of the world – 78.8% of grapes grown in the region are Riesling. Allendorf Estate’s 2013 Jesuitengarten Riesling dry VDP was awarded Best Dry Riesling at the international wine festival, Mundus Vini.

“Riesling is such an interesting wine because it can show so many different faces,” says Allendorf, who credits the rich terroir in which the vines are grown. “When a Riesling grape starts a second life, this is by the age of about 25 up to 30 years old. By this time, the Riesling is gone and the grape has to be removed to make room for fresh plants. After those 25 years, if you connect all the rootstock from a single Riesling vine tree – about three cubic metres of soil – it will be more than five times the length of Hong Kong airport’s landing strip. Those roots have assembled the nutrition from the soil, giving us the possibility to make the soil tasty and that is what we call terroir. As a winemaker, the terroir is part of me; it’s a child that I must nurture and then release after a number of years.”

Riesling aside, it is often overlooked that Germany has the third biggest plantings of Pinot Noir in the world after France and the U.S., and Oestrich-Winkel is also the second largest Pinot Noir producer in the Rheingau.

“While Riesling is the king of the white grapes, Pinot Noir is the diva of the reds,” says Allendorf. “You have to treat her very honestly, you have to keep her alive. You have to let her go, but she will come back even more beautiful than she was before.”

In September 2014, Janina Huhn was given the title of Germany’s 66th ‘Wine Queen’, an ambassador for Germany’s budding wine culture. “The election to become Germany’s Wine Queen is very serious. They ask a lot about your wine knowledge, from production to marketing, and you also have to give speeches and do a blind wine tasting,” recalls Huhn, who now travels the world to host tastings, wine pairing dinners, seminars and wine fairs to share the joy of German wine with wine enthusiasts from Hong Kong to Toronto and beyond.

“There is a renewed energy among Germany’s winemaking fraternity which, coupled with an ongoing evolution both stylistically and with the labelling of the wines, was palpable at the Sunny G Major UK trade tasting in London this April,” wine writer Andrew Catchpole wrote in a recent article for Drinks International. “One of the drawbacks for Germany is that, despite being an economic powerhouse and major political player at the heart of Europe, its culinary prowess is little known beyond its borders, which in turn means there is no authentic ‘ethnic’ German restaurant sector to showcase its wines.”

Hence, why people like Huhn travel the world hosting wine pairing dinners to showcase the versatility of German wines, and their ability to complement various cuisines. Most recently, she was in Hong Kong where she hosted dinners that paired German wines with Thai, Japanese and Cantonese cuisine.

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“German wine is very light compared to French or Italian wines, and complements Asian cuisines beautifully,” says Huhn. “The aromas are quite similar – you have both a bit of sour and a bit of sweet. You also have a lower alcohol level, which is ideal for hot and spicy dishes.”

As interest in German wine continues to grow in the East, several companies have been set up for the sole purpose of importing and distributing German wine, and educating local wine enthusiasts about this largely undiscovered region. One such company is Hong Kong-based Schmidt Vinótheke, which features fine wines from German-speaking regions including Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Established in 2012, Schmidt Vinótheke is a regular exhibitor at the Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival, and has sommelier-assisted outlets in Hong Kong’s affluent areas of Happy Valley, Sai Kung and Quarry Bay.

“Wines from German speaking regions have been underrated for a long time. Apart from the world renowned Riesling, red wines from these regions are full of potential, characteristically distinctive and have often received rave reviews during international blind tastings,” says Jacky Chan, President of Schmidt Marketing (Asia) Ltd. “We hope to introduce these praiseworthy alternatives to Hong Kong’s discerning wine lovers and we also hope to successfully cultivate a wine pairing culture with Chinese cuisine.”
Hospitali-Tea

Infused with the ochres and lavenders of its native Provence in the South of France, the eco-certified skin care, home fragrance and organic tea company, terre d’Oc is leaving a fragrant trail of responsibly produced, fair trade products throughout the world.
**Because** tea brings people together and is an invitation to travel all over the world, it is a sincere gesture of friendliness and hospitality, a theme that echoes our philosophy.
Elephant Grounds has brought more than just good coffee to Hong Kong, it has inspired a café culture that has – for so long – been a missing piece in the busy metropolitan puzzle. In House speaks with Co-Founder Kevin Poon in light of the Elephant Grounds pop-up café at The Upper House.
“You can’t get good coffee in Hong Kong” is something you hear often in this city, and while many have said it, two people decided to actually do something about it. Thirsty for the taste of a proper cup of good coffee, entrepreneurs Gerald Li and Kevin Poon launched Elephant Grounds.

“We started about a year and a half ago; it just came out of the love of coffee and also a passion for the culture,” says Poon. “Having somewhere for people to hang out, where creatives can get together and exchange ideas, where people can drink and talk, you know, the ‘global tribe’ vibe.”

“We missed the coffee culture that you find overseas, in places like Los Angeles, Toronto and Melbourne - where quality and taste is paramount and friendly baristas love their job and can actually recommend the right coffee for you, whether it’s a single origin drip coffee or an espresso blend,” adds Li.

Elephant Grounds takes its beans seriously. Each bean has its own flavour profile, and to create the desired characteristics in a blend, Elephant Grounds’ skilled team of baristas assesses the blend for flavour, aroma, after-taste, acidity, sweetness and uniformity, until the perfect blend is achieved. The beans are then roasted locally in small batches to ensure freshness, then they are tasted to ensure consistency and quality.

Aside from its house blends, Elephant Grounds also serves Bulletproof Coffee – a brand that has surged in recent years. Bulletproof Coffee consists of ‘upgraded’ black coffee blended with grass-fed butter and ‘brain octane oil’ and has been hailed for boosting cognitive function and triggering weight loss by way of ketosis.

The first Elephant Grounds was a small café and terrace at the back of WOAW, a lifestyle store opened by Poon in Hong Kong, on boutique and restaurant-filled Gough Street, followed by the opening of a much larger space that takes over the entire floor of an industrial building in Wong Chuk Hang. A third location in Causeway Bay is due to open later this year.

Wong Chuk Hang, home to countless studios, fashion headquarters, and other creative digs, Elephant Grounds quickly became a place where a new generation of creative heads – architects, artists, entrepreneurs, designers and more – came together.

With a bigger space came a bigger menu. The breakfast, lunch and brunch menus are ever-changing, offering soulful favourites like fried chicken and waffles, pork kaetsu sandwiches, avocado and eggs on toast, and of course, Elephant Ground’s famed ice cream sandwiches. “They’re the best ever – and I mean ever,” enthuses Poon. He’s not wrong, as they are, in a word, spectacular.

Elephant Grounds has taken this childhood treat and turned it into pure adult pleasure, introducing creative combinations almost weekly – think smoked milk ice cream infused by hand from wood chips before churning, a ‘Melon Bun’ featuring cantaloupe ice cream topped with cantaloupe cubes stuffed between two green tea Hokkaido milk buns, prickly pear ice cream sandwiched between white chocolate chip cookies topped with chocolate tuile and sliced pistachio, or Hokkaido honeycomb swirl ice cream between fluffy lady finger cookies topped with crunchy honeycomb, just to name a few.

For its pop-up location at The Upper House, Elephant Grounds introduced an exclusive and oh-so indulgent Double Chocolate Chunk Mille Feuille ice cream sandwich. “We were given this really special dark chocolate from Chef Gray Kunz at Café Gray Deluxe, so we decided to put our spin on it and sandwich it with flaky puff pastry,” says Poon, who took to his social media to share that world renowned DJ Steve Aoki was the first guest to try The Upper House exclusive treat. He was about to have one bite to be polite but once he bit into it he wanted it all. “He was only going to take one bite because it wasn’t part of his diet, but after that one bite he ate the rest of it.”

Elephant Grounds opened its pop-up in Level 6 of The Upper House in October 2015, serving a concise menu of both its house blends and Bulletproof coffee – served in the brand’s custom mugs, of course – and The Upper House limited edition ice cream sandwich for guests to enjoy either on The Lawn or delivered to their rooms.

“In my opinion, The Upper House is one of the most exquisite hotels that I’ve ever been in. The service, the design by Andre Fu – everything is so captivating from the moment you walk in,” says Poon. “To have the chance to collaborate with the property was a no brainer for us.”
In June 2015, Swire Hotels announced the launch of The House Collective brand, an umbrella for its three ‘House’ hotels - The Opposite House, The Upper House and The Temple House.

A Common Bond

In June 2015, Swire Hotels announced the launch of The House Collective brand, an umbrella for its three ‘House’ hotels - The Opposite House, The Upper House and The Temple House.
With each property within The House Collective, Swire Hotels aims to provide its guests with an experience that’s more than just a place to rest your head; one that is less like a hotel, and more than a residence. The Opposite House, The Upper House and The Temple House follow the concept of a strong design focus, replacing regular hotel rooms with large, liveable ‘studios’ and unparalleled service. However, each property is also distinctly unique.

“Our goal is to create a series of highly individualised hotels which houses a range of dynamic restaurants and uniquely designed facilities,” says Brian Williams, Managing Director of Swire Hotels. “They are specially designed for seasoned travellers who seek a different, intimate and personalised experience.”

Swire Hotels launched in 2008 with the opening of The Opposite House in Beijing. As its name suggests, The Opposite House is a place of contrasts; old and new, East and West. The striking property was designed by eminent Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, known for his playful manipulation of traditional Japanese architectural elements, his spectacular use of natural materials, and his clever use of light. With The Opposite House, he brought his signature style to reinterpret Chinese architecture, giving traditional elements a clean and contemporary makeover.

The Opposite House sits strong and proud, like a treasured lacquer box amidst designer stores, restaurants and bars in the surrounding area of Taikoo Li Sanlitun. The Atrium perfects that immediate ‘wow’ factor that so many hotels aspire to achieve, with cascading mesh panels that drape over four storeys.

The House Collective hotels are designed in a way that they amplify the best of their respective cities; each proudly honouring its past while exciting guests with the potential of the future, and The Opposite House is certainly a unique embodiment of modern day Beijing. True to the Swire Hotels dedication to championing the arts, The Atrium at The Opposite House doubles as an exhibition space. Installations change every three months and are curated by one of Asia’s leading galleries, Red Gate Gallery, which is at the forefront of the ever-growing Chinese contemporary art scene.

The hotel’s Chinese restaurant, Jing Yaa Tang, is a collaboration between The Opposite House and famed restaurateur Alan Yau of Michelin-starred restaurants Hakkasan and Yauatcha. It serves traditional Beijing style roast duck, cooked using techniques that date back to Imperial China, as well as classic dishes from different regions in China, in a dramatic Chinoiserie theatre-inspired setting.

“We have sought to create a concept at Jing Yaa Tang which references early pioneer travel and Beijing’s industrial heritage, yet looks forward to reflect the tastes of modern China,” says Yau. “With Jing Yaa Tang, I hope it remains an exquisite complex and daringly subversive drama. The humble next to the precious. The profound next to the profane. A perfect meal is a memory which lasts a lifetime.”

Following the success of The Opposite House, Swire Hotels opened The Upper House in Hong Kong one year later.

Behind the brilliantly minimalist design of The Upper House is one of Asia-Pacific’s youngest and most sought after interior architects, Andre Fu. The hotel’s studios are spacious – they definitely give Hong Kong’s apartments a run for their money – and offer luxurious amenities including window-side bathtubs to soak in panoramic views of Hong Kong, walk-in rain showers, an IPTV loaded with hotel information, an espresso machine, and complimentary snacks, soft drinks and beer.
As one anonymous reviewer wrote on Mr. and Mrs. Smith: “It feels more like staying at your best friend’s sleek-and-chic, Asian-style pad in Los Angeles, complete with jars of ‘help yourself’ cookies and sweets, an IPTV, a palatial (for Hong Kong) spa-style bathroom and – nice detail – complimentary drinks.”

The Upper House’s restaurant and bar, Café Gray Deluxe, is a partnership with renowned chef Gray Kunz, serving seasonal modern European cuisine. Perched on the 49th floor of the hotel, it’s also a place where travellers and locals alike, flock to appreciate jaw dropping panoramic views through the venue’s large windows. A new perspective of the city is visible at every turn, from the cluster of buildings looking towards Causeway Bay, to the sparkling glass skyscrapers in Central, and of course the city’s iconic harbour and skyline.

Finally (just for the moment), there’s The Temple House in Chengdu, which opened this year as part of the historic and beautiful Daci Temple Cultural and Commercial complex – a large-scale mixed-use development in the city’s bustling Jinjiang district. And though Chinese Emperors once stayed at the thousand-year-old Daci Temple, The Temple House evokes the understated luxury of modest houses provided to scholars who once upon a time would come from far and wide to study at the temple.

If there’s a word for The Temple House, it’s enchanting. The Temple House’s design, by UK-based firm Make Architects, embraces a typical Siheyuan or ‘courtyard house’ style. Set in a beautifully restored 100 year-old Chinese courtyard building built during the Qing Dynasty, it is surrounded by lush landscapes and elegant bamboo trees.

“A sensitive response to the local context was needed due to the close proximity of the site to several historic buildings, in particular the ancient Daci Temple. Our design introduces specific features and materials that complement these important structures and reference the unique architectural styles and traditions of the Sichuan region,” says Katy Ghahremani, a Director at Make Architects. “These themes are subtly incorporated throughout all elements of the scheme, from the exterior through to the landscape and the interiors.”

The Temple House houses 100 studios and suites, 42 residences, two restaurants and a bar, landscaped hills and courtyards plus an urban day spa MI XUN with a teahouse.

“The Temple House is very different in design to both The Upper House and The Opposite House, as each is completely unique. However, in all the houses there is a recurring design theme of warmth and intimacy,” adds Ghahremani. “Each house reflects the character of the city in which it is located and has been carefully designed to become part of the local community. With The Temple House we hope to achieve the same level of connection and integration with local life in Chengdu.”

With a growing portfolio of hotels, The House Collective brings the “House” hotels together under a single brand. The name suggests a collection of properties with a strong design collaboration and intent; referring to the “Collective” as being a cooperative enterprise and a group of close-knit like-minded people working together towards a common goal.

Stay tuned for further additions…

The House Collective recently won a Silver Award by W³ . W³ honours creative excellence on the web, and recognises the people behind award-winning sites. It is sanctioned and judged by the Academy of Interactive and Visual Arts (AIVA). The AIVA is an invitation-only body consisting of top-tier professionals from acclaimed media, interactive, advertising and marketing firms.

www.the-house-collective.com
Temptation is in house.