

design anthology

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Nautical Charm

Text / Jessica Vahrenkamp Images / Dennis Lo

On an unassuming side street in Hong Kong's Wan Chai district, a new establishment is setting a new direction for the city's boutique hotel scene.

Drawing inspiration from one of the city's more evocative icons — the Star Ferry — the newly renovated Fleming Hotel channels the spirit of the vessels that, since 1888, have plied the banks of Victoria Harbour, transporting passengers from Hong Kong Island to Kowloon and back on a voyage full of yesteryear's charm.

A year in the making, the hotel's top-to-toe renovation was overseen by local design firm Substance, led by Maxime Dautresme. 'The Star Ferry was for us a great icon to play with,' he explains. 'It's a beautiful piece of engineering and a three-D time machine all in one.'

The inspired interiors thus evoke Hong Kong's maritime heritage, dominated by a bottle-green and sailor-blue colour palette with punchy red accents and canvas curtains that may well have been sourced straight from the mast. Wooden floorboards are interrupted by raw cord carpets underfoot, while customised brushed-brass light fixtures cast a warm glow across the space. 'When the building was originally built in the seventies and before more land reclamation works, it was a one-minute walk from here to the ferry pier,' explains Dautresme. Sentimental details from

this former era abound in the form of switchboard panels and levers for adjusting lighting, rounded porthole-like doorframes and an engine order telegraph-styled indicator on the door allowing guests to indicate 'do not disturb'.

As with most Hong Kong developments, the designers had to be clever to maximise space. Sliding doors with fluted glass detailing set off each room's emerald green-tiled en-suite, while open cabinetry with beautiful woven rattan inlay serves as a wardrobe and adjoining writing desk. Also responsible for the hotel's branding, Dautresme and his team built off Hong Kong's 'Fragrant Harbour' sobriquet and Chinese herbology to develop unique amenities with ingredients such as ginger, ginseng and eucalyptus.

In the downstairs osteria, a double-height space is headlined by an enormous globe pendant, while an exterior light canopy constructed of cast iron and brass cleaves to the building — a geometric abstraction on Hong Kong's iconic bamboo scaffolding. With a menu focusing on Italian coastal cuisine, Osteria Marza is clad in indigo tile and walnut finishing, deepening the maritime theme.

In a city not known for its sentimental side, The Fleming offers guests an unapologetically nostalgic indulgence into part of its own quickly disappearing heritage.

Following a year-long renovation, The Fleming hotel has reopened in Hong Kong's Wan Chai district, setting a new direction for the city's boutique hotel scene





With a design narrative driven by the city's iconic Star Ferry, the interiors of Hong Kong's newest boutique hotel The Fleming feature a maritime palette, rattan panels and fluted glass panes, while brass lighting features suffuse the space with a warm glow

