

hinge

ARCHITECTURE
INTERIOR DESIGN

DOUBLE ISSUE DESIGN FEAST

RESTAURANTS
HOTELS
MUSEUMS
HOUSES
CINEMAS
SPORTS HALLS
SHOPS
WINERIES
COLLEGES
AND A LOT MORE...

www.hinge.hk

ISSN 1561-7811-5



9 771561 781004

HK\$80
RMB80
US\$11

THE FLEMING



WANCHAI, HONG KONG A WORK OF SUBSTANCE

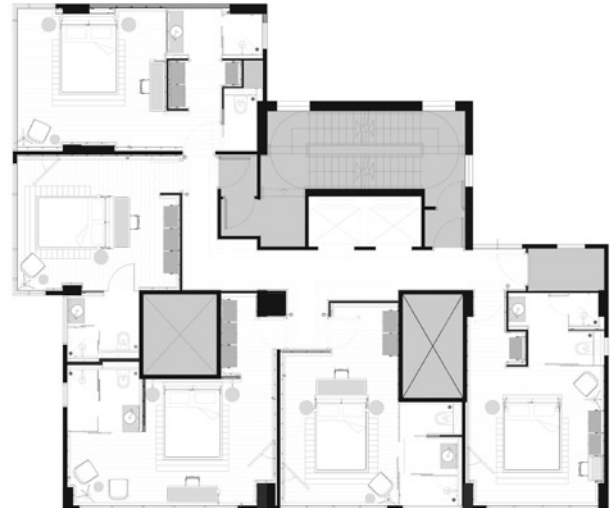
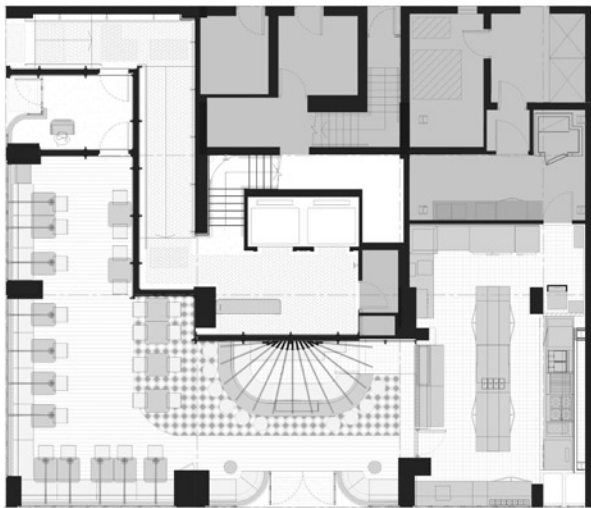
Photography by Dennis Lo



It has become rather easy to be nonchalant about boutique hotel design... the world has enjoyed this genre for decades now, and has seen both innovation and derivative repetition. So it's not often that genuine excitement ensues. Hong Kong boasts its fair share of small hotels with character. The Fleming, in Wanchai, has undergone a complete makeover that ought to inject welcome adrenalin into a category that could use a bit.

Designed from top to bottom by Maxime Dautresme and his crew, the 'new' hotel is an intricate homage to the Star Ferry, which still plies the fragrant waters of Victoria Harbour not far from Fleming Road and this property. The hotel's 66 rooms cater largely to business travellers in town for meetings or trade fairs, and many of them will be familiar with the age-old ferry service that more or less summarises any nostalgic quotient of the city. But perhaps not everyone who enjoys the brief crossing appreciates the lovely details of the boats themselves, distracted as the riders inevitably are by the world-famous views of the city on both flanks of the harbour. In fact, the ferry boats are beautiful examples of nautical design; marriages of luscious solid teak wood and thick, painted steel. Dautresme takes these modest masterpieces as his inspirational starting point, and comes up with a thick, layered palette of custom details applied throughout The Fleming, right down to the light switches and writing pads.

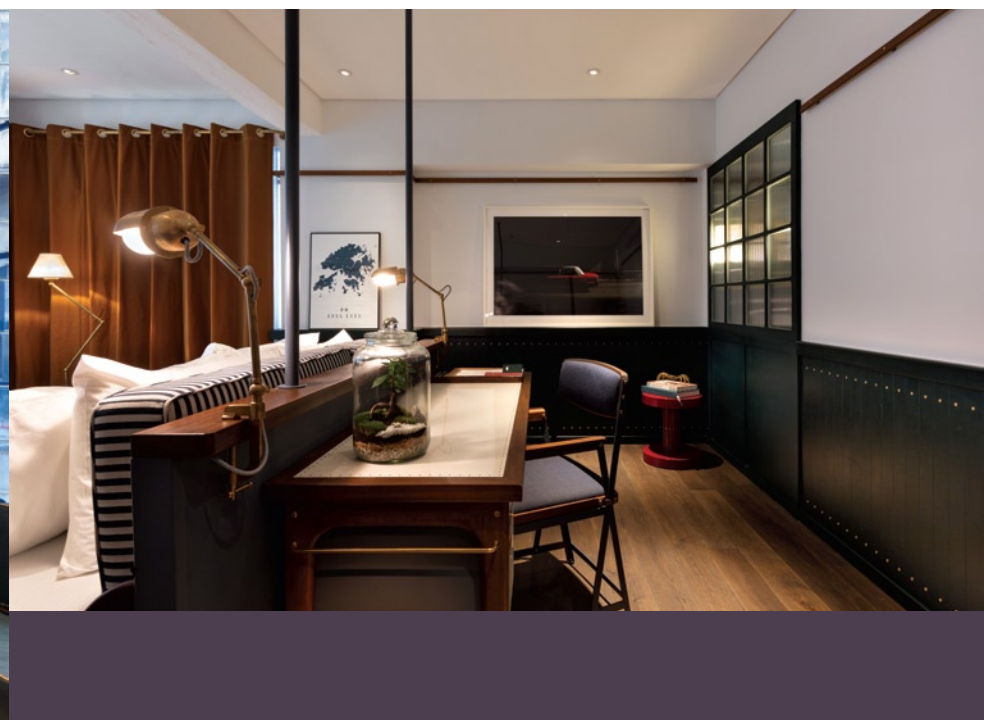
The project is really masterful in presenting a coherent ensemble of details, colours and materials.



Although the building is not enormous or new, from the sidewalk it already announces its unique presence. Using the typical two-storey streetfront, overhung by the upper floors (handy in rain), a ground-floor restaurant sits against lovely blackened steel shophouse windows, while just above it the reception lobby hints its presence through mezzanine windows. Hanging off the facade is an installation of downlights on a framework inspired directly by the city's ubiquitous bamboo construction scaffolding, here in black and brass and regularised pattern. Together it all offers an eye-capturing welcome to the property.

The large restaurant explores the nautical references fully, with plenty of teak elements and casual, captain-chair seating, as well as whitened bamboo wall coverings and what becomes

a minor theme of the project: richly toned tilework. A similarly clad bamboo wall – this time in dark tones – wraps the access lift to the lobby, an intimate, cosy space that feels like a private club room wrapped in wood veneer with brass fittings. As is throughout The Fleming, corners here are rounded in a nod to seafaring craft, and the ample use of custom brasswork hews to form as well. But it's all done with originality and unique touches. And there are small delights scattered throughout the venue; not least the carmine-red-lacquer-faced walls of the lift interiors. Rides in these will feel too short. The public restrooms are another surprise: lovely combinations of deep tones and shining brass fixtures. Clearly the budget wasn't shorted on areas of the hotel that often make the 'supporting role' list. The Fleming doesn't do secondary.





The guestrooms are Hong Kong petite, but designed with space-expanding storage solutions, partially open bathrooms and plenty of natural light pouring through the large windows. The materials here reach a crescendo: brass and wood, of course, but also gorgeous tiles, blackened metal, ribbed glass, lacquer finishes, and the like. Colour tones are kept in check, the better to show off a deep carmine red, royal blue or bottle green. Lighting fixtures have been custom-designed in solid brass. Control panels, similarly crafted in brass but in retro style, are a wondrous delight for detail aficionados. Picture rails hold evocative local artworks that can be rotated or changed, and the few fabrics work in support of the general ambience, not in competition with it. These

rooms provide for sleep or work, but may also consume time as guests ponder the many expertly conceived touches.

The project layers aesthetics richly, and could easily have missed the mark. Too much cake leaves one more bloated than satiated. But A Work of Substance has pulled this one off with aplomb. The tightness of the design is impressive and thorough, so that nothing feels like extraneous grandstanding. Rather, it all feels like something meant to last a long time, thanks to its high quality and the depth of attention paid to it. Even committed minimalists will bow in respect.

