



VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

Adam Tihany is behind some of the world’s best hotels and restaurants – and has been hailed as one of the greatest American designers. The first thing he does when working on a restaurant? Make the chef cook for him...



As told to Josh Fenton

> A restaurant should be a portrait of the chef. Before I design any restaurant, I ask the chef to cook for me and show me what they are going to serve, because the environment and the food need to align. Food, service and design are the three pillars of any restaurant experience.

I didn’t always have an interest in food. In part because, growing up in Jerusalem, food wasn’t a big part of our culture, at least not in the way it is now. I was 18 when I first ate in a restaurant – Chinese, if you can believe it – and the experience I had was more shocking than anything. For me, life really started at 21, when I was living and studying in Italy. It was here, attempting to perfect homemade pasta, that I found a love for cooking. This interest only grew during my time as a restaurateur, becoming acquainted with the details that go into making a restaurant work – and in my early career as a designer, sharing and learning from creative and passionate chefs.

There is a distinct attention to detail in managing restaurants that also applies when designing them. My relationship with Mandarin Oriental is very personal, and one that has been built on mutual attentiveness. When I first met Head of Food and Beverage David Nicholls at my restaurant Remi in New York, we had an instant appreciation for each other’s strengths within the hospitality world. This has grown over years of working together into a fluid dynamic – where I see the details of the design, he brings an instinctive knowledge about what works where and in which markets.

Entering a restaurant should be a voyage of

discovery. Being entertained is an intrinsic part of eating out. At Dinner by Heston Blumenthal at Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London, we aimed to provide a central moment of delight to highlight Heston’s gallery-worthy dishes. To do this, we emphasised the open kitchen, which was designed around the reworking of a mechanical rotisserie element from the 16th century. Having the diners’ eyes focused on the kitchen brings another dimension to the drama of the meal – there is an unspoken invitation to engage with the

‘When I work with Mandarin Oriental there is a mutual attentiveness’

processes of preparation. These gestures, in combination with the dark, earthy red colouring and exposed beams in the private rooms, are a nod to Heston’s unique take on British cuisine.

Lighting is critical in the orchestration of all of our restaurants; whether it’s the discrete opal lighting in Rasoi by Vineet, Geneva, or the striking, curving lines of the fittings at The Aviary NYC in New York. Imagine a simple experiment: take a room full of people and then suddenly dim the lights. Their voices will become hushed, and the mood will instantly change. Lighting can control, to an extent,

our experience, which is why every piece of art needs its own spotlight and why the lights in the bathroom have to be just right.

Despite recent trends to downplay the elements that we know of as fine dining – the white tablecloths, the waiters in black-tie uniform – and instead stress the craft of cooking in much more casual environments, there will always be a place for luxury.

I have had the good fortune of dining all around the world, and despite my profession, I will often overlook lacklustre design for good food. Some of the best meals I’ve had have been in humble bistros. There, the food is cooked in front of you, perfectly executed, with great ingredients. Perhaps this is in my mind as I am designing, as we are always trying to convey luxury without being overbearing.

Designing a restaurant is a balancing act between the diner’s experience, the need to entertain and the personality of the chef. Above all, it should feel personal. The best luxury is comfort, where you are in a space that respects your proportions, gives you great light, and where every effort is made to demonstrate the thinking behind the food. Then you have a truly captivating experience.

See Adam Tihany’s designs at Mandarin Oriental hotels in London, Geneva, The Landmark in Hong Kong, New York and Boston.

> Call to action TK

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