

THE STAR of DAVID

Interior designer David Collins' first job in Southeast Asia is to decorate Bangkok's tallest tower

Words Charmain Leong



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If anyone knows anything about drinking in style, it's David Collins. The UK-based interior designer has many a recognisable watering hole to his credit, including The Connaught Bar, The Blue Bar at The Berkeley Hotel and Claridge's Bar. But he's also responsible for other famous establishments such as Nobu and many of Gordon Ramsay's restaurants. While his more prolific projects reside in the UK, Collins is currently working on the interiors for the MahaNakhon, designed by architect Ole Scheeren and soon to be Bangkok's tallest building. It is his first commission in Southeast Asia. We got him to share some insights on the experience, as well as tips on setting up your very own luxury bar.

How did you get started in the luxury interiors business?

I think it is really down to my upbringing in Ireland. We bought anything that was a luxury, especially while I was growing up. It instilled in me an appreciation for quality and an attention to detail.

This is your first project in Southeast Asia. What do you think of the design scene in the region?

I think design in SEA is at a level above that of many parts of the world. The confidence and commitment to quality that one sees in hotels and shops here is extraordinary, and quite inspiring.

Was there any particular challenge in designing the interiors for the MahaNakhon?

At 77 storeys, it is going to be one of the highest buildings in Bangkok, so the complexity of the building's turns and the extraordinary terraces are some things I found challenging.

We hear you're also designing a furniture line to go with the building.

I have relished the opportunity to do a limited-edition furniture line for this project. I have shied away from this kind of branding before because I did not want to get tied into any one particular style, but the idea of something bespoke and limited for this building is very attractive.

How different are European, American and Asian approaches and

perceptions of interior decorating?

European, American and Asian styles are becoming homogenous in that it is quite outdated to do anything in a particular style or theme. I think people are more involved in what is going on in all regions and are quite catholic in their tastes.

Is your own home anything like the projects you've done?

My work is always evolving and I always want my next project to be different. Similarly, I change my two-storey apartment with a certain amount of regularity. I'm quite focused on using blues and greens in work but this is just my personal taste; you'll see more of that in my apartment than in the interiors I've designed for work. There have been times when clients visit my home, like what they see and ask me to do something similar. Sometimes I oblige, and sometimes I don't.

What do you do to unwind?

I put on my favourite singer, Shirley Horn. Very slow, very relaxing, very soporific. Her music usually sends me to sleep, which is often a good thing. I also have an iPod that I take everywhere, especially to the gym. I tend to download music from Ibiza or wherever I tend to be on holiday, though these are often by anonymous musicians and given to me by DJs.

Do you frequent the places you've designed?

I do go from time to time. I tend to go when they first open to sort out problems. Often I feel quite ill at ease because I may spot things I could have done better. But usually I like meeting people for a drink at The Connaught Bar or coffee at The Wolseley. It's nice when people ask me about the bars I have created.

Any pointers on how to create an ambient home bar?

Keep in mind the people and the experience you can give them. If you don't want to have a bar with lots of bottles and glasses, then think of the presentation of the drinks. The choice of glasses and trays can be evocative. Having the drinks presented and mixed in front of guests, with the right background music, is all you need to create a good ambience.