



Smaller, but perfectly formed

At Mandarin Oriental Mayfair, Curiosity and Studio Indigo use both British and Asian design languages to tell one compelling story.

Words: Harry McKinley

Case Study

Mandarin Oriental Mayfair



Image on previous page:
The triple-height space housing Akira Back

Left:
A guestroom

Below:
The Mayfair Suite

Right:
The stone-backed concierge desk

“We see ourselves as the young, cool sibling,” jokes a member of the Mandarin Oriental Mayfair team, contrasting the 50-key property to the illustrious Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park. With 168 guestrooms and 26 suites, MO Hyde Park is one of the capital’s grandest stays, occupying a landmark building that dates to the late 1800s; the brand’s European flagship.

Mayfair then, is positively boutique by comparison, and a stylistic departure. Set on Hanover Square, it is the first new build in the neighbourhood in over a decade. RSHP led on the architectural front, creating an aesthetic and technical marvel – one of the first buildings in the UK to deploy the Vierendeel technique. This sees a steel exoskeleton wrapped around the development, infilled with red brick ‘baguettes’ (the longest in the UK) that nod to the surrounding Georgian terraces. It is unashamedly contemporary but, as RSHP explain, “a townscape response” that takes account of the square’s “historic urban grain”.

Inside, the first impression is one of quiet splendour, a leather-lined concierge desk framed by luminous green stone; the dramatic, triple-height space that houses the restaurant and bar, only revealed when venturing beyond the darkly rendered lobby. The main reception is accessed via a bridge that hovers aside the atrium, again offering only a glimpse of the dining areas – intended to feel as though one is stepping through a lantern, enveloped by light and shade. Tokyo-based practice Curiosity designed the public spaces and describe this interplay of the revealed and the concealed as a game of ‘hide and seek’, a foundational element of the interiors concept.

A spectacular moss-green marble spiral staircase leads guests into the Akira Back restaurant, the first opening for the much-vaunted South Korean chef in the UK. Set below street level, the space soars upwards across three storeys to a glass ‘sky roof’, affording views of the hotel’s façade and allowing natural light



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to flood in by day. For a property with a tight footprint, sandwiched amidst a dense central London location, it's an astonishingly noble space; one that will certainly provide a pull for locals, as well as hotel residents.

Curiosity settled on an 'elemental' narrative for the interiors, conjuring 'wind, fire, water and salt' across both Akira Back and the adjacent ABar Lounge. In the restaurant a wooden vortex sculpture spills from the wall, "embracing the generosity of the space and creating an environment that varies from every point of view, with shadow, transparency, movement and tension," explains the studio's president, Gwenael Nicolas. "The wood counter and open kitchen area, where the chefs perform, is also highlighted by a large sculptural piece, a transparent light feature suspended from the ceiling in the shape of a waterfall, created by layers of fabrics. The theme of fire is expressed in the bar then, where the space opens up under a ceiling of shimmering bronze."

The clarity of the design language, which balances drama with restraint, is undoubtedly informed by the East, but Mandarin Oriental Mayfair is also far from a microcosm of Asia. Through bespoke, one-off furniture pieces and 'warm' application of materials, it also speaks to its London surroundings.

"The whole design pays homage to Mayfair's unique charm and heritage while embracing its vibrant urban context," continues Nicolas. "The use of natural materials reflects the timeless beauty found in London's historic buildings and parks, while the incorporation of local artworks celebrates the city's diversity. By blending these elements, we aimed to evoke a sense of place that is distinctly Mayfair: sophisticated, cosmopolitan, rooted in tradition and yet open to modern influences."



The guestrooms and suites, designed by Studio Indigo, weave a similarly dual tale – but it would be disingenuous to simply label them East-meets-West. How, where and to what degree this meeting of influences would manifest was a source of meticulous concern for Studio Indigo, who have adeptly avoided pastiche at every turn.

The colour palette, for instance, was curated with a resolutely ‘Northern European’ eye – shades of emerald-green, maroon and turquoise intended to build ‘character and add identity’. “We wanted every room to feel like you’re inside an intimate, luxurious jewellery box,” says the studio’s founder, Mike Fisher.

Honing in more locally, it was crucial – indeed, part of the brief – that the guestrooms and suites say something about modern British aesthetics and, in particular, native craftsmanship. Here materiality and detail come to the fore, with splendid wood veneers (treated with skill and care), sitting alongside thick wool carpets, hand-woven silks and robust leather.

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With just 50 keys, it's little wonder that next to none of the design feels off-the-shelf, instead deeply curated and tailored. Studio Indigo worked with Hospitality Projects to collect over 3500 items of bespoke furniture while the sculptural lighting pieces are also custom; decorative rugs were crafted by Alarwool and the exquisite de Gournay silk wallpapers were developed with personalised colourways for each room, featuring intricately hand-painted floral motifs that respond to the feng shui of each space. In the palatial Mayfair Suite, these florals are even hand-embroidered.

"These elegant details not only enhance the aesthetic but also honour Mandarin Oriental's Anglo-Asian heritage," notes Fisher, "beautifully blending British and Far Eastern influences to create a cocooning, luxurious environments that are memorable."

Left:
The spiral staircase connecting floors

Centre:
The Mayfair Suite dressing room

Right:
A Bar Lounge