

DESIGN WEEK

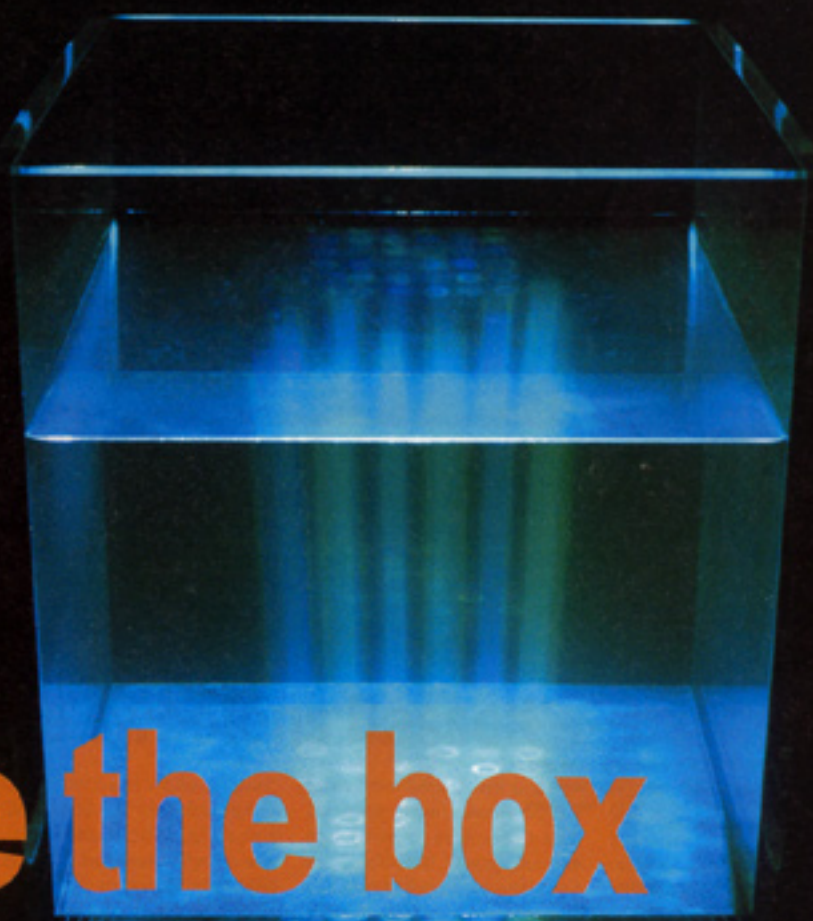
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PULL-OUT

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Fitzroy Surgey supports
French healthcare bid
to rival Bupa and PPP

McVitie's unwraps McV
branding by Design
Bridge and Elmwood

Last ditch bid by Design
Yorkshire provokes
positive local response



Outside the box

creative futures for digital design beyond the screen



Guest work

Miriam Cadji views three London hotels that are due to open soon, where design is helping to create a stylish and lasting look

WIDESPREAD predictions of economic doom and gloom have heralded the end for some of the capital's high-profile restaurants and bars. This year began with the closure of Marco Pierre White's Oak Room and Titanic, and Richard Naai's eatery in the Oxo Tower has closed after only seven months of trading. So how has the rest of the hospitality industry fared? The predicted downturn in US travel following 11 September 2001 has led to a drop for big chain hotels in both occupancy and revenue per room, which, according to independent consultancy TRI Hospitality, declined by around 22 per cent by the end of last year.

It may come as a surprise, then, to learn that rather than slowing down, the hotels sector is expanding. According to Peter Tyrle, director of the Elton Town House group, reports that at its lowest slump in the last recession London hotels still managed to achieve an average occupancy of 62 per cent, a reason to still be cheerful. Identified as a cyclical market, it is estimated that hotel room rates and occupancy peaks every seven to ten years, followed by a downturn and a history of quick recovery. Since the last peak was identified in 2000, according to many hoteliers, now is the time to concentrate on growth.

Eschewing trends for longevity, the key to the new contenders is achieving staying power rather than finding the latest 'look'. Although the new hotels have undeniably looked to trend-setting boutiques by the likes of Ian Schrager and Anoushka Hempel, their extremes have been tempered with a more commercial edge that aims to appeal across the board.



→ **Myhotel Chelsea**
Location: Boworth Street, London SW3
Rooms: 45
Design: Project Orange
Hotel Group: Myhotels
Opening: October

Billed as an urban retreat, this is the second addition for the mid-range boutique hotel group that was established in 1996. It has been designed by Project Orange, whose co-director, James Soane, was involved with the group's first effort, Myhotel Bloomsbury, while still at Conran & Partners. The chain is quietly confident it has found a niche that offers an alternative to the staid, traditional hotel that is overly reliant on the US market. All set to capitalise on the brand it has created, next in the pipeline are Myhotel Brighton and Myhotel Glasgow, both due to open next year, followed by Myhotel Paddington, planned for 2004. The group then hopes to move into Europe, pinpointing Barcelona as a possible next step.

While Myhotel Bloomsbury attempted to create the atmosphere of a town house, here in Chelsea it aims at the more Bohemian feel of a contemporary country home. Situated just behind upmarket shopping Mecca Brompton Cross, it is not chasing the city financiers, but is more likely to appeal to the younger media and fashion crowd seeking a

contemporary alternative to the usual chirtry, plush west London hotel.

The building, which was built in the 1930s as a police station, was recently converted into a hotel, so much of the necessary air conditioning and services were already in place and all that was required was a new fit-out. As such, the scheme's budget is a relatively modest £1.75m.

Consciously targeting the female market, the look is pretty and soft with artfully mismatched old and new furniture upholstered in English florals. The 45 bedrooms are decorated with a variety of soft furnishings, including full-length toile-patterned curtains, the only concession to technology being a stereo and wide-screen television.

'Wellbeing' is an important buzzword for the brand, and US feng shui guru William Spear is a consultant to the group, helping to decide where the ubiquitous fish tank and crystals should go. 'We're designing from the inside out - it's a process of layering,' says Myhotel owner Andy Thrasyvoulou. 'The vibration quality and energy levels are very important.' A mini fitness and therapy room offering aromatherapy and beauty spa treatments has been squeezed in. There will also be a library for guests to use to surf the Net, check their e-mails and relax. A lively bar will provide a contrasting buzz and will be available for use by non-residents.

Project Orange's architectural drawings of Myhotel Chelsea. Top: Elevation of the bar area on the ground floor; Above left: Plan view of a sample room; Above: Elevation of a sample room



Braun Multiquick hand blender
James Soane, Project Orange

A kind of magic wand for the 21st century. In the days before power tools of all kinds there were hand-powered gadgets; the egg whisk being one of them. The motorised revolution in the kitchen saw the rise of the Kenwood mixer and a host of copypats. It was the domestic equivalent of the power drill. These bulky items had many parts and were kept in long sugar-coated boxes in a bottom drawer. The idea of having to engage in a mechanical engineering exercise every time you wanted to whisk a soup was daunting.

The Braun blender is a delightful and simple piece of industrial design that does not attempt to do everything. In fact it only does what it says, however its sleek ergonomic handle means it is easy to use and even easier to clean.

The Braun website promises that it 'mixes/blends fruit, milkshakes, smoothies, pancake batter'. And is also great to create home-made marmalade! Now you can't ask much more than that.

James Soane



James Soane became co-director of Project Orange in 2001 after nine years at Conran & Partners. Previously, he worked for SHCA in New York and London. He became a director at Conran & Partners in 1999. At the moment he is

working on a new hotel concept in London's Chelsea, the consulting rooms for a plastic surgeon and a variety of small restaurant and bar projects. He is also writing a book, *New Homes*, to be published in 2003.