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Our round-up of
the most fabulous
hand-pulled noodles



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Chinese bartender, Lech Adriel, was inspired by the tradition *sui gai fu* (rose essence spirit) to create an East-meets-West libation that pairs perfectly with modern Chinese dishes.

lookbook



Damaged drawers from a restored antique chest have been converted into a bright yellow display niche.

Four heritage buildings have been connected to make Blossom Hill Inn, Zhouzhuang.



Ming-style chairs painted a striking silver colour and window lattices in contrasting patterns are laid side by side for maximum effect.

Framed by willow trees and perfectly rounded, carved stone bridges, picturesque canals characterise the ancient town of Zhouzhuang, 50 kilometres from Shanghai. Here, time seems to stand still, and life has remained the same for centuries: villagers still wash clothes in the waterways and gather over tea under the graceful upturned eaves of its classical Ming and Qing dynasty courtyards.

When the local government and developers from Blossom Hill Inn jointly called for a competition to

design a boutique hotel that captures the town's spirit, Shanghai-based firm Dariel Studio found the perfect blend of romanticism and history in the Chinese agricultural calendar, the inspiration behind their winning design concept. The traditional solar-based calendar, which divides the year into 24 periods reflecting changes in climate, is still commonly used in the countryside today, guiding farmers on when best to conduct activities such as planting and harvesting crops. "I happened to be reading about it in a book on Chinese history and found it interesting and appropriate—each 'moment' could be defined by >

Chinoise chic

Inspired by the traditional ways of Chinese water town Zhouzhuang, French designer Thomas Dariel gives three heritage buildings a modern makeover. By Lim Sio Hui



The restaurant represents the theme of "solstice of summer and winter" with evocative colours as well as a mix of Eastern and Western style décor.



Custom-designed metal lamps in the shape of traditional Chinese paper lanterns line the corridors.



A suite fashioned after the theme of Spring features an internal courtyard with the building's original 19th century stone arches.

From the outside, the hotel blends in with the historic town's Ming architecture and street facade.



"I happened to be reading about it in a book on Chinese history and found it interesting and appropriate—each 'moment' could be defined by different colours, materials and styles."

different colours, materials and styles," shares founder and lead designer Thomas Dariel.

More importantly, with names such as 'grain rains', 'cold dew' and 'vernal equinox', each calendar period were infused with poetic symbolism that translated well into moods for each of the hotel's public spaces. The restaurant represents "solstice of summer and winter", where the extremes of the two seasons are highlighted through a striking juxtaposition of fiery and monochromatic shades as well as of East and West: French terracotta tiles line a European-style bar, but the space is matched with traditional Chinese furniture, and an oversized lantern 2.4m in diameter. The library is aptly modelled after the "Awakening of Insects", a place of contemplation marked with a piano and cosy seating. The hotel's 20 rooms are also divided into sections corresponding to different seasons, characterised by variations in colour and style: a second floor corridor painted in vermillion conveys Autumn,

while a suite signals Spring with lush courtyard and decorative accents in the shade of green.

In a town filled with small and simple guesthouses, the property stands out for its bold modern design statement, although its elements are coherent with the rest of the town's ancient architecture and décor: the furniture styles are centuries-old; wooden lattices line every corridor and window; intricate decorations adorn the fittings. Yet a closer look will show just how they differ. Colour, a trademark of Dariel Studio, plays a starring role: the usually dark-stained Ming-style chairs are given a lick of paint in bold modern colours. Patterns on each window's wooden lattice panels are not uniform,



but flaunt horizontal and vertical slats placed side by side. The lantern that dominates the restaurant is covered with linen, not paper, while others are shaped in its sinuous curves, but made of metal rods.

Transforming the site's aesthetics was easy enough, but working with the outdated structure was not without its difficulty. Originally not one but three Ming-style buildings built during the 19th century by the three sons of the affluent Dai family, the site had fallen into disrepair over the years, its space carved haphazardly into a museum, tea house, guesthouse and a leftover, abandoned structure. "We salvaged and restored the beams, some of the windows, and even the stone flooring, each one removed, numbered and polished, then put back in its place," shares Dariel.

The biggest task, however, was restructuring the site, which suffered from problems such as poor light diffusion and uneven floor surfaces. The floor plan could only be decided during demolition so that his team had to deal with surprises: "Some walls we thought were possible to bring down were not, and others vice

versa." Due to these restrictions, none of the rooms share the same configurations, and some of the rooms are given to odd corners and smaller open spaces, admits Dariel. His favourite is the suite at number 14, which he recommends for a relaxing time: "It's one of the bigger ones and the space is harmonious. It comes with a jacuzzi, and the best courtyard views."

"My suggestion is to arrive at 5pm when the day trippers start to leave—it's quieter, more relaxed and you get the town almost to yourselves," shares Dariel. Even nicer is when the lights go out come nightfall, and illumination from the hotel casts an elaborate shadow from the window lattice designs on the cobbled streets outside, a beacon for leisure seekers and design lovers alike. e