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→ The custom cherry blossom tree framing the entrance is the design highlight of Foo.

ODE TO ASIAN CHIC

Designed by Sumesh Menon Associates, Foo at Phoenix Mills in Mumbai adds brilliance and provides stiff competition to the fine dining restaurants in the city

BY MARIA LOUIS

Foo is an ultra-chic urban oasis that feels like it's been picked right out of New York's Meatpacking District and dropped bang in the middle of the ever-evolving Phoenix Mills in Mumbai. 'Foo' is Chinese for fortune, blessing or happiness...and in terms of food, it inevitably relates to the joy it brings to patrons. The Asian kitchen celebrates fine ingredients and concentrates on small plates, exemplifying the concept of Asian tapas. Chef Eric Sifu presents a menu that has something for everyone, from dim sum to sushi to the city's first taste of Nikkei – the Japanese-Peruvian culinary sensation. Pair that with award-winning mixologist Dimitri Lezinska's never-before-seen concoctions and you have a winner!

Conceptualised and executed by architect Sumesh Menon and his team from Sumesh Menon Associates, the restaurant envelops you in modern sophistication from the moment you walk through the arched-glass entrance highlighted by a bold red sign. The capacious space is enhanced by high



“Lighting is one of the key design features of restaurant design”

Sumesh Menon, SMA

ceilings, rich burgundy walls wrapping around the entire restaurant, one complete wall adorned with a saké jar display – inspired by Kazari-daru, cherry blossoms, and a custom terrazzo cast floor with a metal pattern inlay.

The irrefutable showstopper, however, is the ceiling. The designer has succeeded in retaining the original saw tooth roofing of the old mill, which lends an earthy and authentic vibe to the eatery while letting in ample natural light during the day through skylights. “My first visualisation of the space was of something like Buddakan in New York's Chelsea Market, a classic example of a modern Asian space with subtle touches of Asian design without going over the top,” Menon recalls.

As with all of his avant-garde ventures, lighting played an integral role at Foo. It is one of the key design features of restaurant design, he feels, one that can make or break the entire look of a space. Here, the custom lighting concepts were carefully researched and developed through several trials before achieving the final grandiose effect.

Materials & suppliers

Flooring: Custom terrazzo cast flooring with metal pattern inlay

Stone: Lapato finish granite

Tiles: Laminam tiles - Classic Marble Company

Ceiling: Woven bamboo mat cladding

Lighting/light fixtures: The Purple Turtles; VPI

Wall textures: Custom designed

Paint: Asian Paints

Tables: Back-painted glass and wood

Chairs and loose furniture: Custom designed

Sofas/soft seating: The Rocking Chair Co.

Sanitary fittings: Duravit and Jaquar

One major design element is the abacus light installation, crafted entirely out of crushed banana paper and metal, inspired by the Asian-origin calculating tool. An additional crowning moment comes from the chandelier hung at the private dining area – a customised crushed fabric fixture shaped like the body of a jellyfish. Even the floor and wall lamps are all customised designs, that are products of modern lighting research work.

Another thing that Menon strongly believes in is an efficient layout and a seamless flow of spaces. “Creating spaces is more than just adding furniture and wall finishes,” he remarks. In this case, the bare shell of the site was a simple squared space that lacked severely in form and division – until the team began working their magic on it. “A designer must orchestrate varying needs of people and provide an energetic space and adequate privacy for those who desire it.” It is this ability of Menon’s to transform the aesthetic sensibility of a space according to the site conditions and brief that adds to the charm of every one of his projects. With this particular one, he and his team had to figure out how to scoop out spaces, levels and corners in what he remembers to be a boring square site, with the added challenge of the mall authorities’ specifications and regulations.

On entering, one is drawn to the main bar, which displays an intricate Asian-inspired backlit wooden screen apron with a rich burgundy laminam tile countertop. Touches of modern Asian design are seen on the wall opposite the bar,



➔ The 14ft-long Abacus light installation at the bar, is crafted entirely out of crushed banana paper.

Project details

The project: Foo

The client: Pebble Street Hospitality

The designers: Sumesh Menon Associates

Area: 4,500sq-ft

Location: Phoenix Mills, Mumbai

Duration of project: 5 months

Date of completion: June 2018

too, which displays a row of wooden panels with modern abstract carvings on it. This makes for a warm and distinctive backdrop for the pod seating area, the white patterned wall of which is complemented by burgundy couches.

The stunning cherry blossom tree installation stands as an ode to all things Japanese. Further ahead, the restaurant closes in to form an intimate dining area divided by more arched walls. Mirrors adorn the walls, stylishly reflecting the section’s vibrant floral chairs and burgundy tables.

It’s fascinating to see how so many different materials, textures and hues come together to form a cohesive personality-laden eatery. Primarily based on the modern Asian theme of the restaurant, materials that are seemingly disparate have been used to create a unique design language that runs throughout the space. The exquisite synthesis of raw terrazzo floors, rust-coloured walls and even the cane-cladded ceiling set against the deep colour palette of bur-

gundy, mushroom and grey lends an authentic Asian feel to the space.

Warm wooden finishes are complemented by grey concrete, touches of metal, and colourful fabrics. This blend of elements and influences creates a beautifully balanced and harmonised dining experience. Many of the design elements, from the custom carved wooden panels behind the pod seating to the cherry blossom tree, were crafted by local artisans and artists. Even the AC ducting is neatly and intricately wrapped in custom woven chattai sourced from Kerala, adding to the Asian feel and turning an otherwise mundane element into a design feature – in other words, a ‘blessing’ in disguise.

With the amount of thought and expert artistry that has gone into this gastronomical offering, it’s no wonder that it has already become one of the city’s frequently instagrammed and most-talked-about restaurants. One of the USPs of Foo is that the food is served even before the drinks can arrive, which comes as a pleasant surprise to guests.

Despite its uber-chic appearance, Foo is quite approachable and makes for an ideal meal after a visit to the mall. Pro tip from our Good Foo guide: when you decide to drop in, don’t leave without finishing your meal with the delectable, creamy black marble sesame cheesecake. As Menon rightly remarks: “The word ‘satisfied’ is an understatement in the case of Foo!” **PH**