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The Upper East Side Hotel: Beauty by Contrast

By Stacey Rowan
& Shiree Darley



The open spaces of the hotel have numerous layers of unconventional materials, rhythmic patterns, vibrant colours and lighting and are adorned with indulgent accessories.



Le Corbusier, a Swiss architect and one of the pioneers of Modern architecture or the International style once said: “I have decided to make beauty by contrast. I will find its complement and establish a play between crudity and finesse, between the dull and the intense, between precision and accident. I will make people think and reflect...” This statement aptly describes the overall design concept of the Upper East Side Hotel where key interior architectural elements partition and break up the space, creating a somewhat ambivalent atmosphere, a sense of mystery and surprise when what you think you are seeing may not be what it seems.



The Upper East Side Hotel, a newly revamped 4-Star City Hotel completed earlier this year, is set in one of the oldest suburbs in Cape Town – Woodstock – which is located between the docks of Table Bay and the lower slopes of Devil’s Peak, just East of the City Centre. This urban renewal area is served by two railway stations, resulting in an industrial setting to the area. Woodstock’s dilapidated charm is what has made it such an excellent contingent for the inner-city revival that has recently taken the suburb by storm. The Upper East Side Hotel is only one aspect of this revival, with various other components including Loft Apartments and a vibey Shopping Centre forming part of this urban renewal.

LEFT: Furnishings are custom designed, fabrics selected and accessories sourced to create conversation and relaxation lounges.

RIGHT: Open plan spaces are skillfully zoned using raised platforms, stone boxes, screens and postbox frames to create intimacy, but not total separation.

With Architecture designed by Design 360 Architects for Redefine Properties, the client, the Upper East Side Hotel features open plan, double volume and combined lower ceiling public hotel areas accommodating the reception lobby, conversation lounges, a trendy dining area with cocktail Bar, businessmen’s library, cigar bar and outdoor dining terrace.

Darley Interior Architectural Design (DIAD) – the hotel specialist interior design team – designed and created the interiors for the public areas of the Upper East Side Hotel working within the parameters of the existing structure. This involved developing the architectural framework by conceptualising and designing the interior spaces, space-planning, accommodating the client/operators requirements, theming the dining and bar areas and selecting and detailing all finishes, shop fitting, paneling and lighting – all within a pre-determined budget and very fast track programme. Furnishings were cus-



tom designed, fabrics selected, artwork commissioned and chandeliers and accessories sourced. These were all then procured and installed by the DIAD team including project management of the shop fitting installation.

DIAD found design inspiration from the up-and-coming Woodstock location with its underlying industrial nuances. With the Upper East Side Hotel aimed at a more youthful market, both international and local, as well as seeking to encourage resident and corporate based professionals to frequent the dining and bar venues, the interiors needed to be stylish and chic. The architectural approach is slick and minimalist so DIAD decided to create a young vibrant interior filled with unusual diverse spaces – so that patrons could have interactive or individual experiences.

From an interior design perspective, the various visitor activities such as arrival, eating, business,

bar and relaxation have been combined and planned within the main public areas maximising, where available, the generosity of the volumed spaces which are framed by mezzanine levels, and then playing on the intimacy of the existing low ceiling areas. Rather than closing off and separating the amenities – the design philosophy was to accommodate all recreation within “one space”. This led to the challenge of distinguishing the different open plan spaces and creating intimacy but not total separation.

DIAD achieved this by skillfully zoning the areas with raised platforms, stone boxes, screens and postbox frames. Different colour palettes of playful light, texture and fabrics were then juxtaposed. The design concept was kept coherent with the monochromatic black and white background embellished with a signature language of design patterns which were repeated in different applications throughout the areas.

Dining options offered are 2 and 4 seaters, casual bar style seating and comfortable intimate banquette style seating.



The overall concept produced the creation of numerous layers of unconventional materials, rhythmic patterns, vibrant coloured fabrics and lighting, adorned with indulgent accessories, providing the clientele with visual discoveries and illusions progressing from space to space.

Design Concept

The interiors were inspired by the black and white film era and artwork of the "Roaring Twenties", a boisterous period characterised by rapidly changing lifestyles and the fast pace of technological advancements. The economy in the 1920's soared after the First World War; much as Woodstock has during this renewal and revamp period, departing from the history of a slightly seedy neighbourhood. Nightclubs and decadent restaurants were chic



places to meet and be seen and this is what DIAD set out to create for the Upper East Side Hotel.

The 1920's art, artists and illustrators were an additional source of inspiration to the DIAD team whilst establishing the design concept. The two art movements which had their genesis during the 1920's were Surrealism and Art Deco. Surrealism began in post World War I avant-garde literary circles and featured elements of surprise with unexpected juxtapositions. Photography also became

recognised as an art form in the 20's and its black and white depictions established a strong motivation to create a base theme of a monotone architectural backdrop.

Hence, the overall background of the interiors is detailed and fitted out with refined black and white finishes in opulent designs and patterns. These are then layered and splashed with bright colours and a variety of contrasting finishes to bring in the funky vibe. The spaces are adorned



and layered with clean-lined furniture in iridescent fabrics, cascades of crystals and bold patterned wall coverings. A contemporary take on the excitement of the 1920's era, this design theme generates the thrill of the excess and indulgence of a theatrical pastime.

Design Walkthrough

Strolling through the internal shopping plaza from the Porte Cochere, past the café style terrace seating, one enters a double volume, open spaced entrance lobby. The crisp white stone reception desk with a soft glowing blue circle patterned glass insert, contrasts against the black reflective floor and is set against a paisley wallpapered back

drop displaying one of the commissioned artwork pieces.

Surreptitiously tucked behind the custom designed high backed banquet seat is the dining venue – *Liberty's* – featuring a versatile conversation piece – the contemporary styled Butcher's Block which is transformed into two large tables centered in the restaurant for the breakfast buffet set-up and then placed in a mirrored niche, elegantly decorated with ornate black accessories during the lunch and dinner services. Dining options offered are 2 and 4 seaters, casual bar style seating for the single businessmen with laptop space and comfortable intimate banquette style seating.

The white stone walls contrast with against the black reflective floor.

The young vibrant interiors are stylist and chic, with a minimalist look.



From the dining area, the guest moves through a screen opening into the private library area with oversized acid green reclining chairs for comfortable TV viewing or relaxed reading, with generous selections of complimentary novels which line the oversized, glamorously accessorised book shelves.

Featured behind a sandblasted glass door is the cigar bar with translucent glass wine displays surrounding the guest with an extensive selection for personalised choice from cognac to champagne. The focal wall is lined with a voluptuous, full height plum banquette seat and intimate turquoise tub chairs nestle around funky timber and glass tables. A sense of humour has been added to this space with the polished chrome horse head sculptures surveying the room from floating niches

and the wall of clocks all to their own time creating a timeline spin.

Glam with loads of funk is the only way to describe the cocktail bar – *Estreet*. An enormous mirrored and glass back bar dwarfs the barman below, exaggerating the double volume surrounds and creating a deceptive myriad of 3D reflected images. With the brave use of the strong black and white stripe wall covering, the mirror sparkles with the reflection of cascading crystal chandeliers and laser cut patterned screens, creating a constantly animated, lively space which varies according to the lighting levels. The vibe here varies with the adjustment of the lighting which glows from the bar panels as well as ceiling recesses, between trendy cocktail to decadent nightclub.



Inspired by the 1920s era – with the deliciousness of excess and indulgences, the monotone black and white background is layered with colour, decadent textures, over scaled patterned wall finishes, crystal chandeliers and ornate accessories, with the slickness of the design detailing creating an undeniable sense of glamour.

Reasoning behind the design

DIAD set out to break some of the rules on contemporary design, creating an alluring and whimsical interior, but with careful attention to detail, comfort and scale, providing an expressive inner-city living destination with vibrant, interactive spaces.

With photography being a recognised art form in the 1920s, its black and white depictions established a strong motivation to use the monotone architectural backdrop that DIAD explored, then bringing in the layers and splashes of vibrant colour with fabric selections and lighting panels – these all inspired by the fashion of the day.

The inspiration of Surrealism and Art Deco is evident in DIAD's design with the circular patterns creating a consistent theme with the counter fronts, screens and carpet designs set against a variety of indulgent patterns and the blending of man-made materials of backlit art-glass, laser cut screens, polished technistone and mirrored stainless steel.



Opulent designs and patterns, splashed with bright colours and layered with clean-lined furniture bring in a funky vibe.

However DIAD have still put an emphasis on simplicity, functionality, efficiency and economy. Open spaces were retained and similar finishes used throughout to create a unified interior with a definite continuity created by the consistent use of different material combinations in different applications.

Key Elements and Design Innovation

One of the key innovative features of this project was DIAD's creation of a gathering place within the hotel's public spaces where clientele can do business, dine, relax and socialise, encouraging an

interactive space that never sleeps. The challenge of establishing distinct paths for functional hotel operation and food and beverage services, within the open plan spaces, without imposing or intruding on the guests, was managed with the skillful partitioning of the space using key architectural elements. These included laser-cut screens and postbox frames manufactured from a combination of materials of metal, sandblasted glass and timber, giving rise to a play on positive and negative spaces with their patterning and filtering of lighting, creating a design vernacular unique to this international award winning hotel. <