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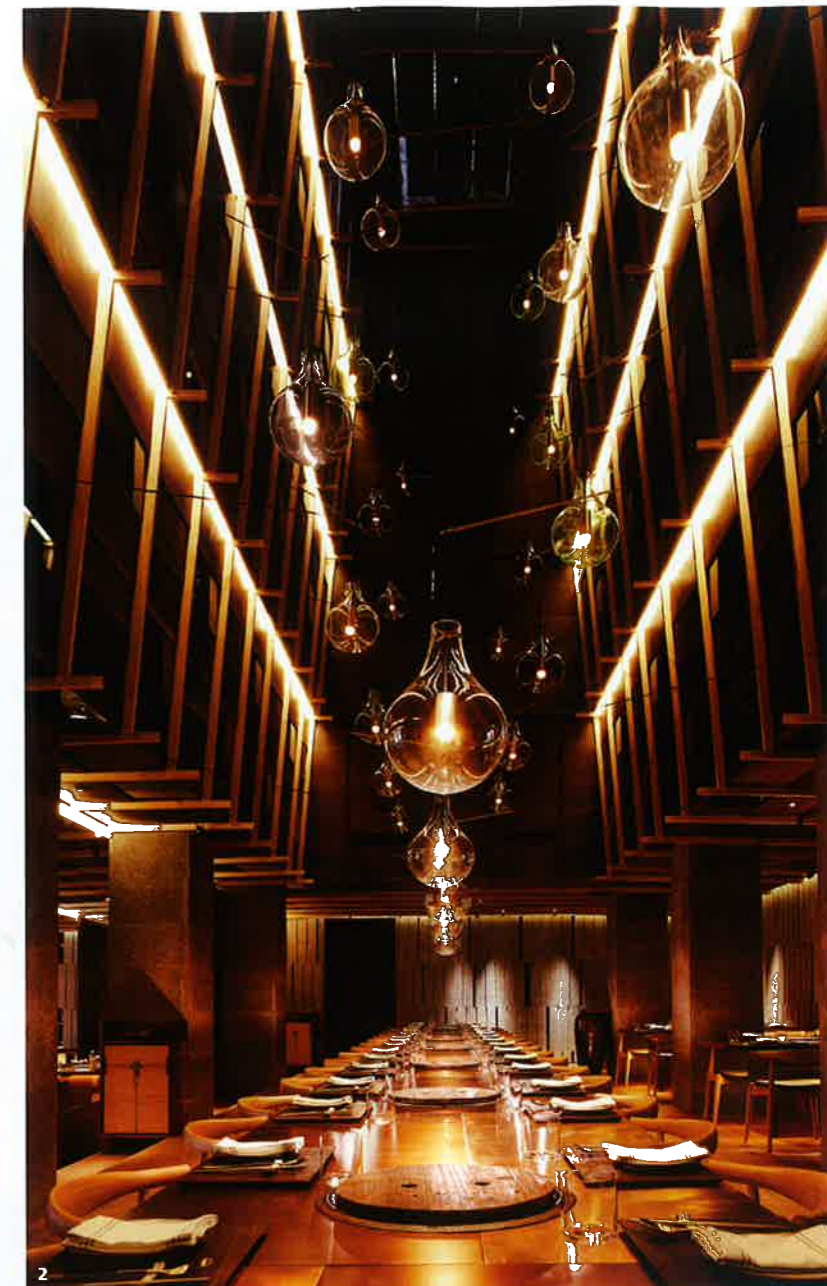


Seoul of the Bund

Neri & Hu add new flavor to a historic Shanghai landmark

By Robert Paschen
Photos by Zheng Bin

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1. Neri & Hu added Korean-inspired flair to the design of CHI-Q at Three on the Bund. 2. Lights hang down within the four-story western atrium above the main banquet table at CHI-Q. 3. The designers wanted to create a space with "a strong attitude."

When Three on the Bund was constructed in 1916, rapid industrialization was sweeping across Shanghai. The Union Insurance Society of Canton Ltd. decided to construct their new headquarters next to the Huangpu River on the Bund, and erected the city's first steel-framed building. Steel allowed the Union Building to be larger and taller than the surrounding structures. From atop the building's sixth floor observation deck, the Union insurance company executives would monitor the boats entering and leaving Shanghai.

Ninety-eight years later, most of the boat-watching is done by Three on the Bund's restaurant patrons. The historic building has become increasingly known as a dining destination. And when chef and restaurateur Jean-Georges Vongerichten decided to open his new Korean concept at Three on the Bund, he turned to Shanghai designers Lyndon Neri and Rosanna Hu, recently named designers of the year by *Wallpaper**, to remake the interior.

"For every project, we always start with a concept and we also do a lot of research," said Lyndon Neri about the CHI-Q project for Jean Georges. "We think it is important to experiment and explore different design ideas. Of course there are issues that we always explore such as layering, transparency, texture, framing and materiality. So in essence some of these issues are always part of our projects."

Rosanna Hu added that the firm's "design phi-

losophy always starts with an underlying concept. It is crucial to have a strong concept behind every project."

Jean Georges had previously launched a successful Italian concept—Mercato—at Three on the Bund. He knew the building was nearly 100 years old, and that putting a restaurant in this location would add a certain level of profile to his establishment. He also knew that Neri & Hu were the best designers for CHI-Q; they were the team that had designed Mercato.

Neri and Hu, eductated at Harvard and Princeton, respectively, walked through the space and began formulating ideas for CHI-Q, approaches that could respect the space and support the underlying design concept. The interior was stripped down nearly to the building's steel frames. One of the first features that caught the designers' eyes was a four-story atrium.

"It started with the western atrium which was left unnoticed for many years," Hu said. "The design concept celebrates the beauty of the dramatic yet often neglected atrium at the heart of the restaurant, a feature of the momentous 2004 renovation of this historic building."

About twenty years after the Union Insurance Society of Canton built Three on the Bund, the company had their assets frozen following the Battle of Shanghai. The Mercantile Bank of India had been a building tenant since 1922, and in 1937 purchased the building. The bank held ownership until 1952, when they transferred the property to the Shanghai Municipal People's Government. For the next four decades, Three on the Bund housed offices of the Shanghai Civil

1. Workers install seating and ceiling supports inside the 1916 historic space. 2. The first phase of construction on the long bar inside CHI-Q. 3. The exhaust requirements of Korean barbecue proved a design challenge for Neri & Hu.



Architecture and Design Institute, Shanghai Architectural Design Institute Co., Ltd. and Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources. In 1997, the property was purchased by the Giti group, a conglomerate of private Singaporean investors who, seven years later, hired acclaimed American architect Michael Graves to restore the building. The new Three on the Bund opened to patrons that September.

For CHI-Q, Neri and Hu used "raw and authentic material" to "capture the essence of solitude and a sense of serenity while creating a comfortable and dramatic space for dining." They transformed the western atrium into a four-story raised ceiling above the restaurant's main banquet table, and suspended

small globe lights that look like illuminated bubbles or a school of iridescent jellyfish.

"The atrium is a dramatic space that is the highlight of the restaurant," Hu said. "We respected the height of the west atrium and left the existing windows where they were."

Challenges to the restaurant design included the shape of the space as well as the function. "There is a low ceiling," Neri said, and "Korean barbecue dining has strict exhaust requirements. With the play on materials, textures, and the varying spatial and sitting configuration with the food, we attempted to create a modern Korean abstraction. We created a restaurant with a strong attitude and sense of place."