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**The World's
Most Beautiful
Restaurants**

**Airline Food
Reaches
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**Where to Eat
*in Rome***

**TAKING
FLIGHT**

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Looks Tasty

Beautiful food in beautiful surroundings is the key to a successful restaurant. Crave explores the latest trends in restaurant interiors.

Text by Cherrie Yu



A single candlelit table and plush chairs sit centrestage at Budapest's famous horseshoe-shaped, neo-Renaissance Hungarian State Opera House. But this is not a stage set for a play to be enjoyed by thousands; it is a table setting for a few lucky diners who will feast in theatrical luxury under a mural-painted vaulted ceiling, surrounded by marble columns, wrought-iron lamps and paintings and sculptures by leading Hungarian artists.

In The Netherlands, CuliAir Sky Dining is a restaurant in a hot-air balloon that drifts high above the landscape for the ultimate moveable feast. And in Mexico, Hueso Restaurant is located in a 1940s building refurbished by Cadena + Asociado with hand-made ceramic tiles cladding the exterior and white internal walls lined by 10,000 animal and cast aluminium bones. Hueso means bone in Spanish and the design takes its cue from the menu, rich in unusual cuts of meat and offal dishes.

A restaurant visit is about more than just the food, with interior designers going above and beyond to create the ultimate dining experience. So we ask interior designers around the world: what are the latest restaurant design trends?

Renowned Dutch designer Piet Boon, who headed the design of Belgian restaurant The Jane Antwerp in a former military hospital chapel, believes restaurant interiors are gravitating towards the concept of authenticity through the preservation of old buildings.

"Transforming old or even historic buildings into restaurants gives them a new purpose and creates longevity," he says. "People have become more mobile and knowledgeable in seeking out new experiences. Career status and possessions aren't what drives them anymore. Today, a meaningful life is about creating and sharing memories through experiences. And in their search for a restaurant people also look for authentic experiences. Not only in the

food and service, but also in ambience and the story behind the design."

The drive for authenticity has also sparked a new appreciation for long-established restaurants.

"We are seeing the revival of the grand old dames among classic restaurants, and places with true history and elegance," says Erik Nissen Johansen, founder of multi award-winning Sweden-based hospitality practice Stylt Trampoli AB. "Firmdale Hotels in London do this repeatedly, although often converting exciting buildings into new hotels and restaurants. Fifteen-year-old Balthazar [in a former tannery] still works in New York City. Another great example is Theatercaféen in Oslo, Norway."

Theatercaféen in Hotel Continental was built in 1900 and returned to its original art nouveau style by architect Hans Gabriel Finne in 1971. Named by *The New York Times* as one of the world's most famous Viennese-style cafés, Theatercaféen is famous for its extensive art collection. Beginning in 1924, it has so far collected 81 portraits of guests, including authors, painters, photographers and composers.

At award-winning London design agency Blacksheep, responsible for over 10 of Jamie Oliver's restaurants in Britain, design director Amy Wenden argues that restaurant interiors shouldn't simply follow trends. "Authenticity should be considered as a restaurant concept. Restaurants backed by passion, credibility and meaning have traditionally been far more inspiring than those that simply rely on a 'look'," she says.

Inevitably, another emerging trend in restaurant interiors is technology. In Stockholm, Melker Andersson's Mother has installed iPads in the tables so guests can place orders directly to the kitchen.

"This may be fast and efficient, but it's maybe not the best service experience. I believe staff interaction has one



From left: scenic views of Wat Arun at Sala Rattanakosin Eatery and Bar; the bar area at Berners Tavern

of the heaviest impacts on bringing a positive experience,” Johansen says.

Technology has also been integrated into restaurants in the unlikely settings. Two years ago, French architectural firm Agence Jouin Manku (best known for Le Jules Verne restaurant in the Eiffel Tower) created a modern hotel and hi-tech restaurant inside the Unesco World Heritage-listed Saint-Lazare Priory, a 12th-century abbey in Fontevraud, western France. The stone building has had various incarnations over the centuries, including a hospital, a hospice for nuns, a prison and a cultural centre before being turned into a hotel and restaurant in the 1980s. It was re-styled with 21st-century aesthetics without altering the original structure and Gothic arched ceiling. The original flagstone floors were removed to install underfloor heating without damaging the fabric of the priory. In the lobby, solid oak structures incorporate booths and table surfaces with interactive touch-screen tabletops and furniture with integrated tablets, containing information and games relating to the priory's history.

Taking technology a step further is Shanghai's Ultraviolet, where renowned French chef Paul Pairet marries food with multi-sensory elements for an immersive dining experience. Each night 10 guests are led through sliding doors to a secret location; an airy space with bare walls, long dining table and spotlights on 10 chairs. As guests sit down a sophisticated projection system screens images on the ceiling, walls and table with synchronised light and sounds. The look changes with each dish, so that different sights, sounds and scents enhance each of the 20 courses. One minute the diners are sitting in an enchanted forest alive with hummingbirds, the next minute in a glass case surrounded by the vibrant colours of nighttime Shanghai. So effective is the combination of food

and technology that it has earned rave reviews as “the best dining experience ever” from diners and critics.

Sustainability is another key design approach. Some all-day dining restaurants are employing design elements that allow easy transition from day to night, matching the atmosphere and mood from breakfast to dinner.

Hong Kong's Silver Room uses light as the main controlling factor for this transition. Semi-transparent ABS panels on the walls and ceiling are opaque when front-lit during the day, but become translucent when backlit at night to reveal the structure of the building, creating a feature of ductwork and utilities. At night, upward spotlights cast intriguing shadows on the ceiling from two steel tree sculptures and solid teak wood column cabinets. The different moods reflect changes in the menu, from light food during the day to à la carte Italian dishes at night.

Johansen also notes the mushrooming of restaurants that convert into nightclubs, a trend led by the pioneering Buddha Bar in Paris. Its 1,000 square metre space is arranged over three levels around a monumental, four-metre-high Buddha. The ambience is cosy and relaxing, with cinema-style décor, candlelit alcove lounges and a dragon-sculpted bar, which becomes the focal point when party time rolls around. A change of music and lighting help to complete the nightly transformation.

“Fun dining will keep evolving. You don't have to be boring just because you're environmentally aware,” Johansen says. “Anybody that can guarantee a successful night out is the winner of the future that's why we will see more dinner clubs evolving. A restaurant that turns into a club in a very sensitive transition will be able to

charge more than a restaurant and a club because they can guarantee a better night out. We often see these places designed with a strong sense of escapism.”

While good design is at the crux of a successful restaurant, the costs can be exorbitant. Just how much are restaurants willing to invest in interior design today?

“The success of a restaurant also needs to consider the commercial aspect. Even if the interior is beautiful, if it's not working for the business then it doesn't work. Designers also need to consider the current market situation,” says local interior designer Kinney Chan, former chairman of the Hong Kong Interior Design Association and winner of the Hong Kong Restaurant Interior Design Award 2015 under the casual dining category.

“In the future, we will be seeing more casual dining concepts. With the current economy the expenditure per head is lower than before. In Hong Kong in the past we were willing to spend \$1,000, even up to \$3,000 for dining out. But today we might aim for about \$500. This is a global phenomenon. People still covet a good dining experience, but they're just not willing to spend as much.”

Sure enough, 2014 statistics published in *The Caterer* business magazine show a shift away from formal dining establishments in the UK with 47 million more visits to casual dining restaurants compared with 2009.

Chan foresees the approach to implement authenticity is set to continue apace this year, and more restaurants with design elements that tell a story will thrive. With the current economic slowdown steering businesses to invest in casual dining concepts, big players in casual dining interiors might take over in the next few years. ■

WORLD'S BEST DESIGNED RESTAURANTS

AT THE CHAPEL RESTAURANT



A 17th-century, grade two-listed chapel in the newly fashionable town of Bruton in southwest England is the stunning setting for British comfort food restaurant At the Chapel. A labour of love for restaurateur Catherine Butler and designer and furniture-maker Ahmed Sidki, it shares the space with a coffee shop, wine store and guest rooms. Working within the constraints of the listed building, architect MacKenzie Wheeler restored the chapel house into a light and airy contemporary space, while retaining the original features. Light floods through the tall arched windows and bounces off the white-painted walls and high ceilings. A dramatic bauble light fixture by Bruce Munro is suspended in the centre of the space over Sidki's hand-made furniture – wooden tables and calfskin chairs in white and soft green. At night, tall church candles create a soft glow throughout the dining area, creating a moody and relaxed atmosphere.

**28 High Street, Bruton
Somerset, England
Tel: +44 17 4981 4070**



Photos by Brett Stevens



BENNELONG

Named for the first Aboriginal encountered on the restaurant's site by Western settlers 200 years ago, Bennelong is located in Australia's most iconic building: the Sydney Opera House. Following an 18-month renovation, it reopened in July 2015 with a more casual vibe and an Australian produce-driven menu devised by renowned chef Peter Gilmore. The multi-million-dollar project headed by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects imbued the tri-level space with ochre and natural

tones. Gone are the white tablecloths, replaced with Marblo tables and Neoz lights. A constellation of Tom Dixon's Melt lamps echo the old globe pendants and the original Fritz Hansen swan chairs have been reupholstered. As well as the main and upper dining rooms, there's a bar and a counter overlooking the kitchen with seating for 14 guests. Arguably the best seats in the house, however, are the six chairs at the table in kitchen, with spectacular views of Sydney Harbour and the chefs at work.

**Sydney Opera House, Bennelong Point, Sydney, Australia
Tel: +61 2 9240 8000**



BERNERS TAVERN

Once described as “a faded Edwardian fossil” in Fitzrovia, in London’s West End, the dowdy Berners Hotel was restored in 2013 by Toronto firm Yabu Pushelberg to emerge as New York hotelier Ian Schrager’s glamorous London Edition hotel, home to Jason Atherton’s award-winning modern British restaurant Berners Tavern. The original stained-glass windows and corniced ceiling are a backdrop to 211 gilt-framed photographs and paintings that crowd the walls salon-style. Towering and exuberant, it could be the hall of an English manor or French palace. Adding majestic flair are large arched windows draped in voile and rich champagne-coloured leather banquettes. The jewel in the golden crown is an elaborate sparkling chandelier, adding to the grandeur of the architecture. No wonder celebrity visitors are regulars.

10 Berners Street, London, England
Tel: +44 20 7908 7979



BRASSERIE LES HARAS

Built in the mid-18th century as a stud farm for Louis XV and declared a historical monument since 1922, this wonderful old building in Strasbourg now houses Brasserie Les Haras. It opened in 2013 after a three-year renovation project by architects Denu and Paradon, design agency Jouin-Manku and three-Michelin-starred chef Marc Haerberlin. The space is anchored by a dramatic six-metre-high oak and blackened steel staircase, which connects the former royal stables on the ground floor to a new dining area on the first floor. Like the original 18th-century roof beams, the staircase is made from untreated wood, which will age naturally over time. Its spiralling shape is reflected in a free-standing circular kitchen and elliptical bar. The original horse stalls inspired the bespoke banquette seating, and much of the furniture is made in hand-stitched saddle leather from L’Arche du Bois. There are leather Lou armchairs by Patrick Jouin and tables, stools and armchairs by Jouin Manku.

23 rue des Glacières, 67000
Strasbourg, France
Tel: +33 3 88 24 00 00



CARLO E CAMILLA

Discerning diners in Milan will be familiar with this hotspot. Once an historical sawmill owned by the Solci family since 1929, it’s now owned by Tanja Solci who in 2014 turned it into a restaurant in collaboration with revered Italian chef Carlo Cracco, and site manager Nicola Fanti. The space is little changed, with every brick and beam still in place, including peeling walls. Seating up to 100 diners, the long wooden tables and seats were produced by Jasper Morrison Cappellini. Above each table are majestic crystal chandeliers that imbue the space with soft lighting and add a touch of luxury in palpable contrast to the industrial building.

Segheria Via Giuseppe Meda,
24 20141 Milano, Italy
Tel: +39 02 837 3963



Photos by Enrico De Luigi



HOTEL RISTORANTE GROTTA PALAZZESE RESTAURANT

In the heel of the Italian boot, this stunning contemporary restaurant has been constructed inside a natural cave, with raw rock walls and ceiling and a polished wood floor. Waves crash against the cliff face below tables set deep inside the cave and in galleries carved into the cliff lit by the aquamarine reflection of the Adriatic Sea. Inhabited since the Neolithic era, the cavern was once a Greek colony and was later used for banquets by local nobility in the 1700s. Today it’s the highlight of a modern hotel, which sits on the clifftop. Taking a minimalist approach, the restaurant’s white-clothed tables are lit by soft lighting and candles, adding to the magical atmosphere. It’s a unique location that attracts frequent celebrity visitors.

Via Narciso, 59
Polignano a Mare, Puglia, Italy
Tel: +39 80 424 0677





LE PAIN FRANÇAIS RESTAURANT

Looking like something out of *Alice in Wonderland* on Gothenburg's most prominent boulevard, Le Pain Français is part of a successful chain of French-inspired cafés. Designed by Sweden's award-winning Stylt Trampoli, the concept combines French elegance with surreal objects that play with scale and proportions like an old-fashioned storybook. Connecting the restaurant's four floors is a glass elevator that travels through whimsical yet elegant spaces furnished with richly coloured armchairs and sofas. The basement pâtisserie contains a library of cookbooks, while the ground floor has a giant clock and a hot-air balloon basket holding the DJ station. More books decorate the elegant first floor centred around two fireplaces while the second floor has gothic cabinets containing an unusual collection of French antiques from ladies' boots to stuffed birds, and a hand-carved wooden mantelpiece. Lemon trees and grape vines grow on the glazed roof terrace, which is lit with Parisian-style street lamps.

**Kungssportsavenyen 7, 411
36 Göteborg, Sweden
Tel: +46 31 790 11 09**



NOPA RESTAURANT

With its green walls and retractable ceiling, Mediterranean restaurant Nopa in Istanbul scores high on style points. Opened in April 2014, the 220 square metre space was created by internationally renowned designers Seyhan Özdemir and Sefer Çağlar of Autoban design studio in a classic-meets-modern style with black and grey marble walls, warm wood and brass fittings and a sexy curved marble bar counter that runs almost the length of the interior then swirls out onto the patio. But it's the lush vertically planted walls, custom-designed leather seating and geometric stone flooring of the patio that draw the eye. The retractable curved glass roof opens fully within seconds and a vertical stainless steel waterfall designed by Patrick Blanc anchors the rear wall. It's a magical space at night, with downlights around the lip of the roof highlighting the plants and casting dappled shadows over the diners. Antiques from Istanbul's famed flea markets are a nod to Nopa's location.

**Harbiye, Teşvikiye Caddesi, Atiye
Sokak 6, Şişli, İstanbul, Turkey
Tel: +90 212 327 58 68**



SALA RATTANAKOSIN EATERY AND BAR

Sala Rattanakosin is a boutique property on the banks of the Chao Phraya River created in 2013 from a row of seven old shophouses by Bangkok architect practice onion. A highlight of the renovation is the eponymous two-storey Thai restaurant and bar dominated by the stunning view across the river to Wat Arun, the temple of the dawn. The temple view lures guests out onto the ground-floor deck and looms through

floor-to-ceiling windows on the first floor. The cement has been peeled back from the interior walls to reveal the raw brick walls of the original shophouses, complementing the minimal black and white interiors elsewhere in the hotel. Huge glass partitions laminated with black and gold film reflect the view throughout the space, creating interesting illusions from different angles of the temple shimmering like a mirage across the interior fittings.

**39 Maharat Road, Rattanakosin Island, Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: +66 2622 1388**



THE JANE ANTWERP

Following a rock'n'roll makeover by renowned Dutch design studio Piet Boon, a former military hospital chapel has been reborn as the award-winning fine-dining restaurant The Jane Antwerp. To retain the property's authenticity, the studio didn't just keep the beautiful period features, but also the peeling paintwork of the ceiling and the ceramic floor tiles. The original altar now holds the glass-framed kitchen, so guests on the ground floor can witness the cooking process. The lighting is showstopping.

The centrepiece is an 800kg sculptural chandelier by Beirut-based PSLAB, with more than 150 protruding light bulbs, and an illuminated skull light grins down at one end. A contemporary twist was provided by Studio Job, which replaced the chapel's stained-glass windows with 500 individual panes with images of sunflowers, devils, skulls and ice cream cones. The first-floor gallery now contains a marble-topped bar surrounded by black upholstered bar stools that overlooks the action below.

**Paradeplein 1, 2018 Antwerpen, Belgium
Tel: +32 3 808 44 65**