

SUPPER

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André Fu

Why good F&B design is more than meets the eye

Alain Ducasse

Turning French cuisine into an international empire

Jesse Vida

Taking an independent spirit to the world of the hotel bar



Brasserie, Four Seasons Kyoto

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something completely different, but at the level they expect.”

It is not a new way of thinking for the duo. They designed SinToHo, a pan-Asian Singapore-Tokyo-Hong Kong-style loft at St. Petersburg’s Four Seasons Hotel Lion Palace and are now working on Ai Forni, a high-end Italian for the Four Seasons Kuwait, scheduled to open later this year.

“We don’t like to express ‘ourselves,’” Destefanis says with emphasis. “When we are designing a space we don’t design for our client, but for the client of our client.” Such as the Kyoto billionaires he mentioned before. “We are not interested in making ‘beautiful restaurants’ but in making restaurants that work. We have a very strong empathy for the materials, an empathy for people and the environment around them,” he concludes.

The name Kokai sounds Asian but is, in fact, the Venetian dialect’s word for seagulls, which is “gabbiani” in Italian. Gabbiani and Destefanis, both graduates

of Venice’s University of Architecture, have been based in China since 2002 – what they call the “life-changing year” – when a Taiwanese developer asked them to bring Bund 18 back to its former glory. The stunning 1923 building was originally constructed as the China headquarters for the Chartered Bank of India Australia and China and had fallen into catastrophic disrepair during half a century of use as office space for government bureaucrats.

“When we arrived we found there was something missing in this country,” Gabbiani recalls. “China was in a situation of hyper-development in terms of quantity but suffered from extremely poor quality. In general people would swoop in, build something, take the money and run. It was very bad for the country and for the people. We brought a different concept of work: social architecture.” The partners shut down their Italian operation and moved to Shanghai.

“People would ask us ‘what are you doing?’” Destefanis, a native of Turin, recalls. “We’d say ‘we’re doing renovations.’ At the time it sounded insane. Now it has been 15 years of us telling people, look, you don’t just flatten cities down and rebuild. It is not sustainable.” Bund 18, the entire building, including the iconic restaurant Mrs & Mrs Bund and the rooftop Bar Rouge, won a UNESCO award for preservation in 2006.