



Buddha-Bar

The global bar and restaurant concept returns to London, reinvented with a new design by Tibbatts Abel

Buddha-Bar is back in town, and it has a new look. Dating back to the first Buddha-Bar in Paris in 1996, the restaurant and late-night lounge concept can be found in cities around the world from Beirut and Budapest to Mexico City and Washington DC. The brand arrived in London in 2008, opening in the arches by Temple station on Victoria Embankment but, within two years, it fell victim to the economic downturn and closed.

This time, Buddha-Bar has come to affluent Knightsbridge, in the former site of a Chicago Rib Shack. It is spearheaded by Tarja Visan, who co-founded Buddha-Bar Paris with her husband Raymond, and heads the global chain's owner George V Eentertainment. She says the new London venue is a "reinvention" of the concept. "Buddha-Bar is universal. Each destination is unique in its own right. With our brand new London restaurant, we have ensured the concept is flexible to the British lifestyle yet still attractive to the restaurant's eclectic audience."

For the concept and interior design, they brought in Tibbatts Abel, a specialist in luxury bars and clubs with a broad portfolio that includes Chinawhite and Movida in London and the Rutland in Edinburgh. Director Adrian Abel says their brief was to "take the DNA that makes the original Buddha-Bar unique" and "maintain, enhance and deliver it in one of the world's most demanding cities".

Their approach was "to make the Buddha-Bar experience more spiritual and sensory", Adrian explains. "This, combined with the dynamic layout which results in all guests being involved in the theatre of the venue, results in a perfect amalgam of

drama and style."

On entering the two-storey venue, the main staircase draws you down, with the shadows of a suspended copper-mesh Buddha sculpture projected onto a glass screen. It is flanked on either side by two-storey-high dragons formed from individual crystals lit from below. "The handrails are wrapped in padded leather to further add to the tactile link between the finishes and images," Adrian adds.

The floating Buddha sculpture, called Transpose, has been designed by sculptor David Begbie, who specialises in steel mesh, and is created from a single sheet of bronze mesh. It is a centrepiece surrounded by a myriad of loose and fixed seating, booths, bays and alcoves suitable for both large groups and more intimate dining. One wall is exotically finished in tiles that reflect the dragon texture. Behind feature sliding doors are the VIP lounge and private dining, which continue the stunning designs of the main restaurant.

On the upper level is a nine-metre-long bar with a DJ at the far end. The dining seating surrounding the staircase is further enhanced by the six-metre-high window drapes and a wall-mounted piece by David Begbie, called Transcend, made up of 207 brass Buddha figures.

Tibbatts Abel has created a "moody" table-lit environment with spectacular feature lighting suitable for day, early evening and late-night operations. "Great lighting makes good features superb," Adrian adds. The overall result has been such a success that Tibbatts Abel is in talks to develop a new Buddha-Bar in Minsk in Belarus.

The re-invention of the brand extends to the food which blends Far Eastern cuisine

Where to find it

145 Knightsbridge
London SW1X 7PA
Tel: 020 3667 5222
www.buddhabarlondon.com

Who did it

Lead design: Tibbatts Abel
Architects: Pron Architects
Contractor: WFC
Lighting consultants: Into Lighting
Furniture suppliers: Acanthus
Blinds: Regal Blinds
Sculpture: David Begbie

with Western tastes and influences. Chinese, Japanese, Thai and other Eastern flavours come into play to create what the owners call "a new-wave Pacific Rim cuisine". Dishes specific to the London restaurant include smoked duck and foie gras gyoza and pan-fried seabass with shiso butter.

The aim of the cocktail list, created by the company's in-house team of mixologists, is to be "avant-garde". Drinks include the Heart of Darkness, a blend of red grapes, cognac and red port, and the Ultimate, which is a fresh mix of maraschino liqueur, Cointreau and pineapple. Other cocktails include the quirkily-named Oh My Dog!!! which combines rose syrup, Pama pomegranate liqueur and gin infused with white pepper.

Open from midday seven days a week, food is served till 11pm and drinks till midnight, with a line-up of DJs playing a mix of electro-style rhythms and ethnic and tribal sounds alongside all-time favourites. "Restaurants are like fashion," Tarja adds. "We must adapt to our new generation's demands whilst continuing to cater for our loyal customers' needs."