

WORDS BY GUY DITTRICH

BUDDHA-BAR HOTEL PRAGUE



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BUDDHA-BAR HOTEL



Raymond Visan has opened his first Buddha-Bar Hotel, where his vision for the brand extension has been executed by DWA Architects working alongside local architects Zbysek Syblo and Gama Studio for developers CPI Group.

The interiors of the Buddha-Bar Hotel are a decadent mélange that manages to overlay the restored historic elements of an Art Nouveau building (wrought iron balustrades, floor tiles now used on stair risers, a recreated stucco Art Nouveau ceiling) with the unmistakable air of Eastern exoticism associated with the worldwide chain of bars of the same name. The opulence and lavishness of finishes (red-lacquered casework, shellac wall treatments) and fittings (beds from Jacaranda wood, pull-out minibar drawers by Subzero) dominate. The hotel is a bit of Oriental-inspired colonialism dropped into Prague where it will, in due course, doubtless be a hit if the experience of the Buddha-Bars that spawned

it is anything to go by. Perfect for an indulgent and luxurious stay, the hotel is not for those after an authentic Prague experience.

"It is the blend of Art Nouveau, Oriental and Pop Art styles that I most like," enthuses General Manager, Veronika Fajčíková, of the hotel that opened earlier this year. In terms of Prague's architectural heritage the Art Nouveau building constructed in 1916 is largely unremarkable and the developers, Czech Property Investments (CPI) Group, were able to reach varying levels of compromise with the heritage authorities in the total restoration. That the planners insisted on keeping the deep red colour of door and window reveals played neatly into the hands



OPPOSITE PAGE (LEFT): The hotel is housed in a restored Art Nouveau building (MIDDLE) The Siddhartha Cafe has a wall arrangement of 72 buddha statues lit in different colours (RIGHT) The restaurant is overlooked by chandeliers and a giant Buddha Bar statue THIS PAGE: Guestrooms are sumptuously decorated with silk lampshades, red Chinoiserie, crocodile patterned upholstery and bamboo wall coverings

of the Asian influenced red, black and gold colour scheme. For the Andy Warhol encounter see the wall arrangement of seventy-two Buddha statuettes in alcoves, brightly lit with neon colours, in the Siddhartha Café. The 100-cover café is a new concept for the George V Restauration group of Raymond Visan, the founder of the Buddha-Bars. The café plus the hotel's 250-cover restaurant and bar are the chief parts of this so-called "Eatertainment" venue that also includes thirty-nine guestrooms.

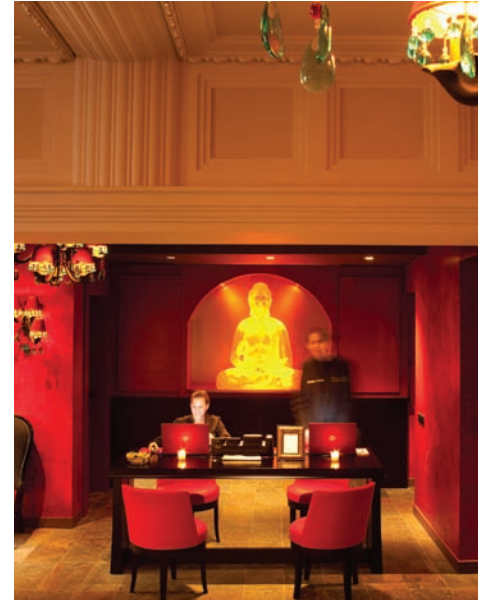
The original building included a galleried, double-height basement space formerly used as a cabaret venue. The gallery is now the bar that overlooks the dining area through highly decorative coloured-glass

chandeliers by Preciosa. Where the cabaret stage was is now a brooding 2.6m high black Buddha statue. "It (the site) was a jewel in Prague, providing the perfect setting for the bar and restaurant," explains Fajčíková. Bounded on three sides by the narrow cobble-stoned alleys of the historic Josefov district, each of the hotel's F&B outlets has their own separate street entrance, the sweep of stairs to the basement bar being particularly impressive.

That the first Buddha-Bar Hotel is located in Prague is the result of a series of coincidental interests between CPI, the lenders and the vision of Visan that allowed him to "stretch" the Buddha-Bar concept to encompass a hotel. If Visan provided the direction,

DWA Architects in France were the main act in execution along with architect Zbysek Styblo and Gama Studio as the supporting cast providing the local expertise and interpretation of regulations. The main contractor in the CZK350 million (13.3 million) investment was Konstruktiva Branco, with Philippe Joseph of CPI as project manager.

Entertainment is a key theme of the hotel and the interactive Bang & Olufsen TV allows for the transmission of the music mixed by the bar's DJ's into the guestrooms. The guestrooms are packed with other technical kit. Just about every single light, fitted and freestanding, is on a four-setting dimmer switch that is pretty simple to understand with a little








ABOVE LEFT: Guestrooms feature bathtubs decorated in Chinese dragon motifs
 ABOVE RIGHT: The lobby and reception area

patience. Curtains and blinds are controlled remotely. Even the toilets, the Balnea 8000 range from Geberit, are fitted with remote controlled retractable shower and dryer arms that allow the WC's to double as all-singing bidets. Some bathrooms include Jacuzzi tubs with coloured lights and underwater speakers so bathers can still listen to the TV hidden behind the mirror opposite. If all that technology leaves guests a bit bemused they can chose a room with a 'regular' tub decorated in a mosaic dragon pattern. A similar pattern is used for the wall hanging above the bed. Together with silk lampshades, crocodile-patterned leather upholstery and bamboo wall coverings these create the boudoir Asian theme. The decorative oriental vases and *objet d'art* by Asiatides are also available for sale in the ground floor shop. Space permitting, guestrooms, the average size of which is 39m², have large walk-in showers and a neat arrangement of diagonally positioned basins.

A small disappointment is the shellac-effect wallpaper in the guestrooms; odd that the real thing should be found in the heavier use public areas such as the staircase that spirals around glass-sided lift and not here. Textures are strongly evident throughout the hotel from the crocodile-skin pattern of the bathroom wall tiles to the creased orange wallpaper and dark-green ruched upholstery in the Siddharta Café. Here the turquoise wood grain-effect tabletops look like a photographic veneer of dubious quality. Describing the décor of the bar and restaurant is to some degree pointless as the area is so dark that even the menus are difficult to read. Suffice to say it is very glamorous with plenty of gold leaf, embroidered red silk upholstery and a curved wall of faux white orchid flowers surrounding the large Buddha statue. Impractically lit it may be but then that is all part of the voyeuristic experience to which every self-respecting bar aspires.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

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 Tel: +420 221 776 300
www.buddha-bar-hotel.cz

-  39 Guestrooms
-  Buddha-Bar Restaurant & Bar
-  Siddharta Cafe
-  Fitness Zone
-  Shop