



Chin Chin

Designer Nick Cox, co-director of Projects of Imagination, drew tongue-in-cheek references to Asian pop-culture in this ob-so-hip Melbourne venue

“**W**e spent six months working on the Chin Chin project in 2011.

The property on Flinders Lane was originally an old nightclub. We met with the client, owner Chris Lucas, who wanted to develop an Asian restaurant and bar, as well as a basement bar. We all agreed that the space didn't need to be formal; we wanted to give it some real vibrancy. At least it had all the right elements—a great inner-city position, a decent sized building and a good relationship with the client and creative team.

“When Dion (Hall, co-directors of Projects of Imagination) and I started working on the concept, we knew the branding was key. In fact, we wanted to give the restaurant a cultural identity. We drew a lot of inspiration from the chef and its menu; it meant that the restaurant is an energetic but casual space with plenty of pop culture tossed in.

“When designing, we kept visualising Patpong—Bangkok's famous red-light district. I summed it up to a design magazine recently, saying the space is ‘a somewhat mischievous rebel in the Melbourne dining landscape’.

“We covered all aspects of the restaurant—the concept, design, construction and management. There were a lot of logistical issues with the existing building so the pre-design works were extensive. Despite that, the team worked together to bring whimsy and humour to the space.

“Some of the striking elements are various industrial objects, such as the Asian vintage delivery cycles. There is also plenty of tongue-in-cheek references to Asian pop culture, particularly the nostalgic propaganda and the rock posters. These were created quickly—the design team used a loose brushstroke, playing with different colours and hues and bespoke typefaces.

“You also can't miss the neon rabbit mascot. In fact, the interior features neon throughout the space—this illumination has an alluring quality, making it really inviting for diners.

“The total area is just over 1200 square metres while the floor space is nearly 250 square metres. Since it's a limited space, we decided to maximise the seating. The furniture and lighting is a mix of bespoke and existing items all reinterpreted. We added a new open kitchen to give it a real theatre feel.

“When we designed the GoGo cocktail bar (in the basement), we treated it as Chin Chin's seedy sister. While the two floors have a different feel, there's strong continuity—the neon messaging and bespoke ‘boob’ lights appear upstairs and downstairs. I recently told the Melbourne design magazine, *Process Journal*, ‘Chin Chin is a male and GoGo is a female, so the logotype was designed to look organic, fluid and sexual, almost like a piece of fruit or a drink.’

“Overall, we've worked on various hospitality projects and we have recognised important similarities. These days, a restaurant or bar has to offer more than just a place to dine and drink; it needs to be a more transformative experience. Diners need to feel like they have entered an original, unforgettable place—Chin Chin has a theatrical feel they will remember for a very long time.” ●

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