



Gingerboy

The challenge of invoking an Asian hawker-style vibe in a high-end restaurant appealed to Melbourne architect Callum Fraser.

The brief from Teage [Ezard, owner-chef] was to give the restaurant and bar an Asian street-market feel. He wanted it to be more experimental—a bit more accessible to customers with lower entry prices. Despite this brief, I knew it was a Teage restaurant, and it still had to be a high-end dining venue.

Gingerboy has all these things: Pan-Asian cuisine with lower entry prices, fast turn-around and a fun environment. The place was modelled on a Shanghai teahouse from the '60s. Back then, Shanghai was the Hollywood of Asia, so made an appropriate source.

It took about six months to complete, opening in late 2006. In designing the restaurant, we needed to make sure it was functional for both the staff and customers. It's quite a tight room so when the place

is pumping, it relies on all the skills of the floor staff. They are all snappily dressed so they look great and they move among the 'movie set' as if they are award-winning actors.

The bamboo panelling on the walls and ceiling is a focal point. The material is often used in Asian street architecture and as scaffolding in temporary buildings in China and Japan. The bamboo provides us with an external structural material that is supposed to take the dining experience into a plain-air environment.

Even the dining tables and floors are bamboo. It's a great new-age material—a very renewable source. The Louis Ghost chairs [for Kartell] by Philippe Starck are in coloured acrylic. One sees straight through them, so in the bamboo environment, the chairs virtually float.

There's about a million small LED lights embedded into the bamboo canopy, and the effect is one of dining underneath the night sky. When I say there are a million, I'm not exaggerating but we had to take our entire office staff there one afternoon to install them!

A lot of our design work uses mirrors, which blur boundaries

a little. At Gingerboy, we used them to link the bar to the restaurant. Since the bar runs into the kitchen, there are chefs preparing on one end of the bench and mixologists shaking bizarre new variants of mai tais on the other end.

Naturally, any great project is the result of a collaboration, and Teage was involved with the whole process. He also planned his own kitchen, which we integrated into the space. Kitchen planning is a sensitive process; it reflects the kind of work ethic you have and literally describes your business plan.

The food at Gingerboy is fantastic, partly because the menu changes regularly. My favourite thing is to duck in at lunchtime, sit up at the bar and have a cocktail and a couple of plates of dumplings. While the bar is high-end, it still has an eclectic ambience. □

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