

EAST VISION

The Nail
Library

Fungus Workshop,
Po Hing Fong

ERN

ON



Hotel Icon

Blindspot Gallery,
Aberdeen St

Mrs B's Cakery,
Gough St

As the West looks east for the latest in art, design and innovation, Hong Kong's Po Hing Fong district is leading the way, discovers **Clare Vooght**



Konzepp,
Tung St

DESIGN FOOD AND DRINK

DUDELL'S

The modern Cantonese dim sum and Champagne brunch – all you can eat black truffle dumplings and all the bubbles you can quaff – is as exciting as all the art on the walls of this restaurant cum exhibition space. The latest exhibit is curated by Ai Weiwei.

dudells.co

THE COFFEE ACADEMICS

If Walt shunned meth in favour of coffee in *Breaking Bad*, this would be his flagship. Hand-brewed, custom-blended coffee, at the optimum temperature, is served in scientific beakers at this uber-hip brew bar, with exposed red bricks and chandeliers.

the-academics.com

HUTONG

Sister to the London Shard's Aqua bar, this is the place to be seen. Serving up spicy northern Chinese food, concept restaurant Hutong's design is based on eastern dynasties and old 'Hutong' alleys that can be found in Beijing.

aqua.com.hk

ZUMA

The design principle in this sleek bar is to balance out the elements; lots of glass and a huge ice block behind the bar, counteract the 'fire' from the kitchen. Order the Zuma Bellini, laced with Campari.

zumarestaurant.com.hk

The face of a cow diagram on an Angus beef chart looks down at me as I cut into blue-dyed leather hide, while jazz pours out from a sound system. Records are propped up next to huge leather rolls, while offcuts hang down from the walls. "The leather comes in different thicknesses; it's thicker towards the back, but thinner and softer towards the belly. Like a human," laughs my teacher Baldwin, a fashion designer who turned to leather because he was sick of sewing. He's advised me to use the soft stuff for the iPhone case I'm making.

I'm learning the art of leatherwork at the Fungus Workshop in Hong Kong's Po Hing Fong district, or PoHo, so dubbed by those who are gentrifying it. A clash of ideas from a Harvey Nics-stocked leather bag label and a handmade lifestyle brand, the workshop's ethos is unique and back to basics.

This may be vom-inducing for committed vegetarians, but I'm a carnivore and unfazed; I draw the line at fur, but I say anyone happy to order a juicy rib-eye, or just wear shoes in general, should be prepared to get hands-on with leather.

After rubbing a clear substance, the consistency of Chinese soup, into the underside of my two pieces of leather – to prevent fraying – I hammer in some holes around the edges so the case is ready to stitch. Baldwin catches me making tentative notches and tells me to use more force. Make no mistake, this isn't a night in

COOL CREATIVE SPOTS ARE SPREADING THROUGHOUT THE CITY. WELCOME TO HIPSTERVILLE



ABOVE: The buzzing district of PoHo has seen an emergence of funky restaurants, hip hotels and cool boutiques – such as Mrs B's Cakery – with young locals influencing a new wave of design creativity

darning doilies with the twee brigade.

Cool creative spots like these are spreading through the city, which was once synonymous with skyscrapers and expat playtime. So much so that Sir Terence Conran said: "If I were a young designer, Hong Kong is where I'd be setting up my pitch." Welcome to Hong Kong Island's Hipsterville, aka PoHo in Sheung Wan. On its way to becoming a design hub, Hong Kong is being taken seriously on the world art map. Art Basel – previously of Switzerland and the US – debuted in 2013, providing a global stage for local artists.

A walk around PoHo sees a neighbourhood abuzz with both the local and the trendy: couples shop for light-fittings, butchers hack at slabs of meat, rich kids pillage Ralph Lauren, Filipino nannies crack jokes on pavements and bespectacled (minus lenses) kids sell bedroom-made designs on blankets in side streets.

Konzep on Tung Street is one of the area's best design boutiques, flogging original, exclusive and limited-edition watches, clothes and gadgets. Its bright yellow asymmetric façade smacks of Pacman visiting LA and Berlin on acid. Inside I find a light fitting made from black, white and cream lampshades hanging from S-shaped meat hooks. Towards Central on Hollywood Road is Edit fashion boutique, which stocks pieces from small fashion brands and unique kitsch jewellery.

Hollywood Road lots are now also renting floor space to contemporary galleries, such as film and video-focused **Experimenta**, alongside the Chinese antique shops. Visit Blindspot Gallery on Aberdeen Street for cutting-edge photography; while

From computerised-sound sculpture to multimedia video installations, the art space pushes boundaries across a range of artistic mediums, creating diverse material.

nearby White Cube, the London gallery's first international space, has exhibited the Gilbert & George and Damien Hirst.

Hungry after so much visual

bombardment, I head to Mrs B's Cakery, with its enormous stained glass-effect butterfly behind the counter. Owner Bonnie Gokson has worked with Chanel, Prada and W Hotels. Needless to say, the cakes here are as much about looks as taste, and would make Marie Antoinette proud. Better Than Sex gets its name from a giant pair of sugar-crafted red lips and Be Gaga'd is topped with jagged white and dark chocolate lightning bolts. I pick a Blessing in Disguise; a carrot and cheesecake treat with a sticky red berry glaze, topped with raspberries and green pumpkin seeds. Delicious. ▲





FROM TOP: Design boutique Konzepp; Hotel Icon is one of the design capital's most original places to stay, marrying technology with contemporary style and traditional eastern philosophies of harmony and balance

Last on my PoHo to-do list is The Nail Library, which is as design focused as they come, complete with wooden shelves filled with decorative bell jars, flowers and rainbows of nail polish – Dior, YSL, Mac. Upstairs by a treatment room is an obligatory old-fashioned typewriter. I left after an IN-CREDIBLE shoulder massage, foot spa and flawless shellac nail art.

Sheung Wan is changing fast, and soon Kowloon will be too. The West Kowloon Cultural District is under construction, and slated for a 2017 opening is the M+ museum for visual culture, with founding director of the Tate Modern, Lars Nittve on board.

Kowloon is a great place to stay if you're close to the harbour, placing you in front of one of the world's best cityscapes. This is where I find myself, gazing from my room at Hotel Icon, dumbstruck by the dozens of lit-up skyscrapers across the **Victoria Harbour**; the IFC building has 100m on the Shard.

Rewind five minutes and I was looking up at the hotel's leafy, vertical garden on the wall of the lobby, and tall glass panelling with dissected elements of the Chinese character for 'one'. It's a unique hotel.

The £2,590 a night Vivienne Tam designer suite – panoramic views included – takes inspiration from Shanghai's Art Deco era and the fashion designer's own New York home. My more wallet-friendly room is still pretty spectacular with Bose speakers, a curved black mosaic-walled bathroom (the shape reflects the

Originally a source of trade and a link to the West, the harbour still sees 220,000 ships a year, as well as being a buzzing nightspot of vibrant bars and fantastic views.

EACH FLOOR HAS DIFFERENT ARTWORK, FROM FASHION SHOOTS TO INK PAINTINGS

hotel's yin-yang design ethos) and a guide to all the art in the building, chosen by Hong Kong curator Freeman Lau. Each floor has different artwork, from fashion shoots to ink paintings, and mine has Justin Wong's Ai-City!, a graphic bird's eye view of Hong Kong in black, white and primary colours.

A few floors down is Above & Beyond. The restaurant is designed to champion the skyline with mirrors to reflect the view. Eating my poached eggs, crabmeat and asparagus, I think, "If I had superhero vision, I'd be able to spot another concept store opening across the water in PoHo." **C**

Return flights to Hong Kong International start at £399; discoverhongkong.com

MORE DESIGN HOTELS

PENTAHOTEL (RIGHT)

The brand new East Kowloon hotel masters the concept – pronounced sik-zhu-wan in Cantonese – of eating, sleeping and playing. In big communal spaces, with Banksy-style stencils and exposed red brickwork, guests can choose to play Wii, pool, listen to their own choice of music, or eat in the conjoined, local market-style restaurant.

The vibe here is a grown-up, luxury hostel, except rooms aren't communal. They feature clean lines, glass and a wall that's a



huge black and white photo of a Hong Kong city scene. All guests get a free mug made by local design brand Goods of Desire. pentahotels.com

J PLUS BOUTIQUE

The centrally located, fashion-obsessed J Plus Boutique hotel, was decked out by French designer Philippe Starck. Sanderson-style white net drapes cordon off the studios' kitchenettes and decor ranges from sleek marble bathrooms to chairs made of cardboard (they're actually very sturdy).

Staff uniforms are designed by international luxury brand Shanghai Tang, and guests get priority reservations for hip local hangouts such as Duddell's and restaurant/bar/club Dragon-i (Rihanna has been), plus discounts for fashion and lifestyle brands across the city. jplushongkong.com