

# MAYBOURNE

CLARIDGE'S CONNAUGHT BERKELEY

## ART REVOLUTION

*Why EVERYONE is coming to Mayfair*

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# Suite dreams

At the Berkeley, a luxurious new fourth-floor suite will open this year. FIONA RUSSELL talks to its creator, interior architect André Fu, about the philosophy and thoughtfulness behind his work

**W**E ARE VERY EXCITED about André Fu's design for the Berkeley's new super-suite,' says the hotel's general manager Justin Pinchbeck. A comment that is not without reason: the so-called super-suite is an expansive, two-bedroom 260 sq m space overlooking Hyde Park and fashionable Knightsbridge, comprising a series of functional yet beautiful rooms with the opportunity to open into a third connecting suite – ideal for the business/leisure guest. And André Fu (pictured right) is its interior architect, having met international acclaim with his sensuous work, from an Emmanuel Perrotin gallery space to luxury hotels, including the Upper House in Hong Kong and Fullerton Bay in Singapore.

'André brings an added depth of "new Asian" sensitivities and draws from historical references mixed with his own emotion,' says Pinchbeck. 'This creates clarity in space while retaining sympathy for everyday use.' Fu himself was educated in Britain and studied architecture at Cambridge University, founding his design studio, AFISO, shortly afterwards and heading back to his native Hong Kong in 2004.

**Is it important to understand art history as an interior architect, to understand the old before you create the new?**

Indeed, the appreciation of the historical is important, be it something very ornate or

'From the *furnishing* to the *lights*, everything will be **CUSTOMISED**, and that bespoke design will feel **PERSONAL** to the guest'



very minimal. It's that sense of order. A lot of art history is about thresholds and hierarchy, that precision in terms of how you carve space. Fundamentally, that has a strong role to play in how I create spaces. It was in Europe that I understood the appreciation of the old and being able to reinvent it or reinterpret it in the context of today. In Asia now, everything is about the moment – a skyscraper can be built in just two years.

**How is your work perceived?**

It's often described as being visually calm or balanced. Or you could say it's symmetry or totality in the environment. That's one level beyond what people perceive as decoration; it's beyond decoration in a sense.

**You like to create an 'emotional connection' in your work. How do you achieve that?**

Especially in hospitality, it is important to create places for people to be in, not just look at. A great, grand space can be amazing and theatrical, but the challenge is how to make it intimate. And when you have a small space, it's how you could make it feel less cluttered. That's when you can incorporate all the thought processes: ensure the needs of the



ELEGANT LIVING SKETCHES OF ROOMS IN THE SUITE AND A MOOD BOARD (BELOW)



traveller are being addressed. For example, a plug socket should be easy to find, or a huge suite should lend itself to easy navigation. Once the guest feels at ease and indulged, and has merged into the environment, that's when the emotional connection happens.

**You've worked on a diverse range of projects, from restaurants to galleries, to shop and hotel interiors. Do you have the same starting point for each?**

The key inspiration is the dialogue with the client and what they are trying to deliver. The projects that I do are in different contexts, whether it's creating a luxury environment in which to sell a pair of Christian Louboutin shoes or designing a restaurant that has an urban market concept, so I tend not to restrict myself and there might not be a signature

style. I sometimes describe myself as being like a film director: you can direct different types of films, but at the same time there's a degree of sensibility infused into the way you tell your stories. But I always start with function, carving the space in accordance with the parameters and the requirements. Then I add the other layer, or garnishing, which is the soft fabrics and materials, and create the mood and the lighting.

**What is the secret to your success?**

First, it's possibly because I maintain an atelier-type approach to how I run my studio: initially, I draw the sketches of the spaces myself, rather than doing computer renderings, and whether it's a small project for an art gallery or a hotel with 260 rooms, I'm involved in all the projects because I need to feel that personal connection. Secondly, I have worked with great people in Europe, such as John Pawson, who was surrounded by top-tier consultants, and people who share a similar vision. Also, when I returned to Asia there was opportunity – it was a point in time when the world turned to the east to look for fascinating news and stories.

**Do you apply contemporary Asian design in your work?**

Western journalists are fascinated with 'new China', and 'new Asian' sensitivity is a phrase that's linked to myself, too. But it's constantly changing and people are still in search of what it is. Hong Kong, for example, has such a transient nature – expats whizz by, design talent, clients. It's about understanding the energy and appreciating it.

**What do you believe is the fundamental element of good design?**

It's the thoughtfulness that goes into addressing the finer details. In general, it's to think about the core or the needs, rather than going for something that's purely visual. For hotels, it's not being style driven; it's all related to the physical experience of being inside a particular suite.

**Do international travellers have similar expectations regarding hotel rooms?**

We are dealing with the most demanding tier of the market, who can be in all corners of the world within 48 hours. So, in my view, there are no Asian clients or western clients and it's important that a space reflects its sense of place.

**What was your brief for the new suite at the Berkeley?**

Fundamentally, the brief was to create the 'new Knightsbridge', a kind of timeless elegance. For me, it's also to bring a different perspective of luxury to the western market, which is something that is very modern,

although certainly with a sense of simplicity or purity in the space.

**What is your inspiration behind the suite?**

In the hotel and hospitality scene, people still want things to be grand and impressive and extravagant. But in this day and age, the key thing about luxury is the process that has gone into the design, rather than whimsical, visual excitement. From the furnishing to the lights, everything will be customised and, ultimately, that bespoke design should feel personal to the guest.

**What is the standout feature of the suite?**

It's really the general space: the vastness of the bathroom, and all these multiple layers of family room, living room, study, master bathroom, kitchen, dining room, secondary bedroom, for instance.

**What colours and materials will be used?**

The palette is muted but not cold; there will be mauve, green tea colours, bamboo. The bamboo could be perceived as something that's Asian, but really it's creating that next level of luxury that's not purely visual, for balance. There will also be a bronze island kitchen and a curated art collection. Bathrooms will be clad in limestone, and the rooms will mostly have sliding doors, so the guest can flow freely from one part to the other or have the ability to create privacy. It's also about how you move around the suite, the things that you see as you turn; that's always something that is key to how I design.

**What does it mean to you, working at a Maybourne hotel?**

I told Stephen Alden [CEO of Maybourne Hotel Group] that I remember driving past the Berkeley and Claridge's when I was studying in the UK. You look at the hotels as if they are monuments in terms of that niche market of hospitality. To collaborate with them and have that dialogue, and to understand the Maybourne mentality, for me, is the fascination. ☒

