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# Paying Tribute

Text / Jessica Vahrenkamp

Historical preservation isn't one of Hong Kong's strong suits. Rather, you can take the pulse of this city on any given day through the sounds of the jack hammers, wrecking balls and pile drivers that permeate the airspace. We demolish and raze without a second thought, then erect higher, sleeker and more efficient structures under dizzying timeframes. It's part of a mantra of economies that drives everything in this city: economies of scale, time, space, you name it. So anything re-purposed is already an immediately unusual and intriguing proposition.

Now add to that proposition a keen interest in upholding local handicraft and elevating it to a level of contemporary sophistication that places heritage and design on equal planes. Enter Tribute, Hong Kong's newest concept hotel. Located in the Yau Ma Tei neighbourhood of Kowloon, Tribute is an ambitious and forward-thinking project that, as the name suggests, pays homage to local craftspeople and imbues its space with subtle cultural references for a uniquely enriching experience of Hong Kong.

Sited in a narrow office building, the repurposed structure was stripped back to its concrete frame before coming under the artistic direction of architects and interior designers Alex Jones and Hans Leo Maes of Spawton Architecture and stylist Candace Campos of IDentity. With just 1,000 square metres and faced with a prohibitive brief of rezoning requirements, the team had its work cut out to create a space that was not only comfortable but luxuriously so. In its final reveal, raw concrete and steel structural beams expose and feature local construction methods while proving a perfect complement to stately brass and timber details. In the foyer, a board-marked concrete bench extends inwards from the facade, providing a sculptural centrepiece. And the hotel's 24 guestrooms are appointed so as to fully avail of every centimetre with custom king-sized beds, floor-to-ceiling windows and a bespoke line of furnishings and finishes that are as contemporary as they are elegant.

To achieve the creative vision of Tribute, a team of highly talented collaborators helped to craft a story through materials and design references of the vastly rich cultural heritage found just beyond the hotel's doorstep. Yau Ma Tei is one of Hong Kong's oldest and arguably most dynamic districts, composed of crafts districts, industrial workshops, art houses and lively

night markets that feature jade hawkers, Filipino karaoke and multi-lingual fortune tellers, to list just a small sample.

Taking cues from its immediate environs, Tribute teems with subtle references at every turn: terrazzo tile, immediately recognisable from Hong Kong's numerous *cha chaan teng* (post-war 'tea restaurants'), finds new refinement when paired with brass hardware in the guest bathrooms; wire baskets under garment racks nod to the neighbourhood's fishing village past; a flirtatious inlaid motif in the brass headboards can be traced back to old neighbourhood shop gates; and the elegant brass and onyx details featured throughout the hotel are inspired by the antique film projector on prominent display at the nearby historic Yau Ma Tei theatre.

In the hotel lobby, a reception desk and F&B cart draw design cues from the mobility of dim sum trolleys and at either end of the day will salute some of Hong Kong's more contemporary artisans: a neighbourhood coffee roaster and hometown microbrewery. Tribute also teamed up with local studio Latitude 22N to produce a bespoke line of ceramics that feature stylised elements of local architecture with a contemporary twist. That same collaboration also produced a creative reinterpretation on the age-old hotel offering of local tourism information — a playful illustration promises to guide guests through the quirkier corners of Yau Ma Tei.

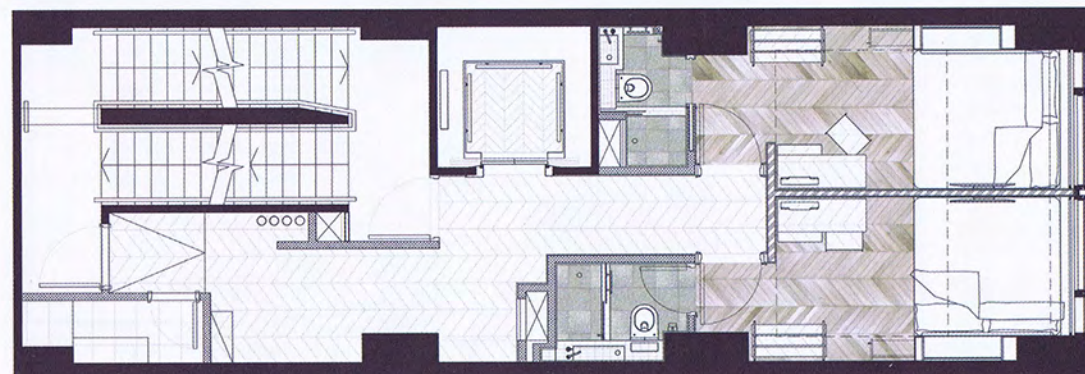
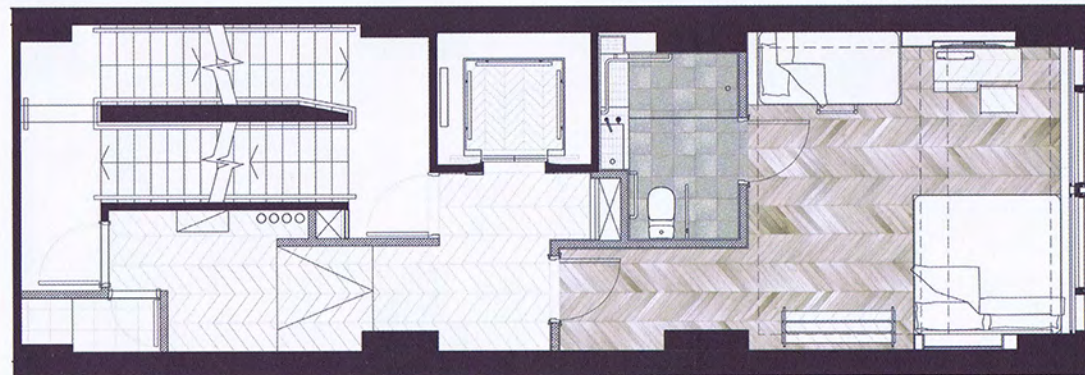
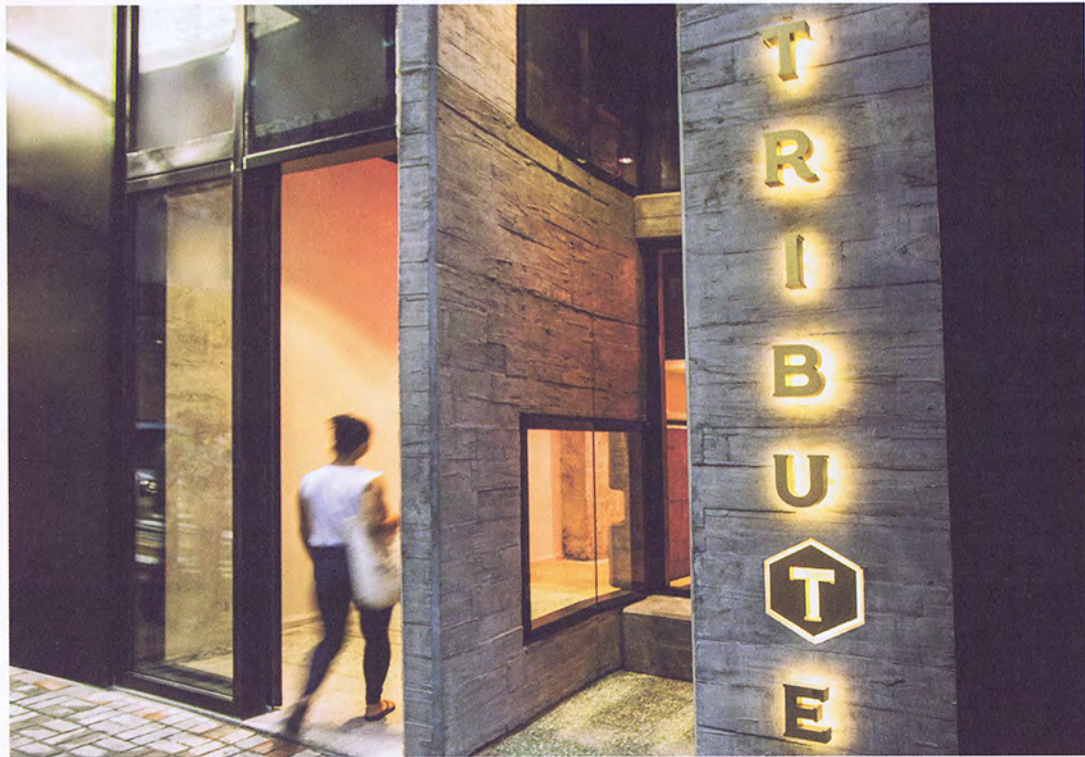
And finally, no cultural homage to Hong Kong would be complete without a little neon signage. Here, Tribute has taken some creative licence on what Jones terms 'abstract storytelling'. The result is a captivating installation: five levels of overlaid traditional neon tubing tell the visual history of Hong Kong's ever-changing shoreline under the ambitious land reclamation program of the past century.

Tribute plans to open its doors for business late this spring. According to the team behind it, 'the journey truly has been a labour of love', though anyone familiar with Hong Kong's demanding building requirements for repurposed development might term it lunacy. But in a world where international hotels are intentionally designed to represent territorially neutral environments, Tribute represents a refreshing devolution of that trend. This space will appeal to the discerning traveller who is driven by a spirit of discovery and meaningful engagement.

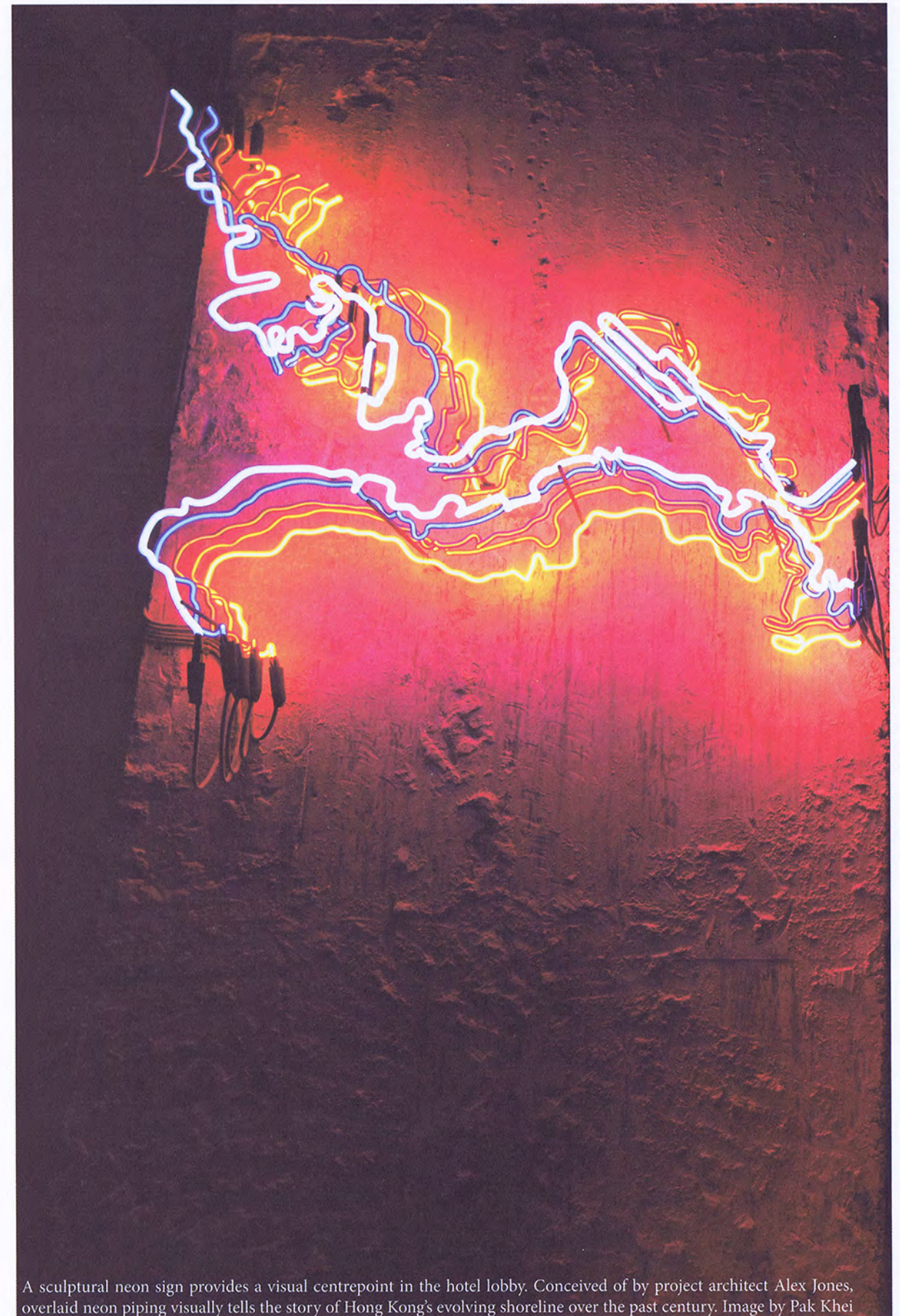


A vibrant street market scene in Yau Ma Tei. Image by South Ho





Top: The entry to the new Tribute Hotel. Image by Pak Khei  
Bottom: Tribute keeps things simple with just two room types: Big and Small



A sculptural neon sign provides a visual centrepiece in the hotel lobby. Conceived of by project architect Alex Jones, overlaid neon piping visually tells the story of Hong Kong's evolving shoreline over the past century. Image by Pak Khei



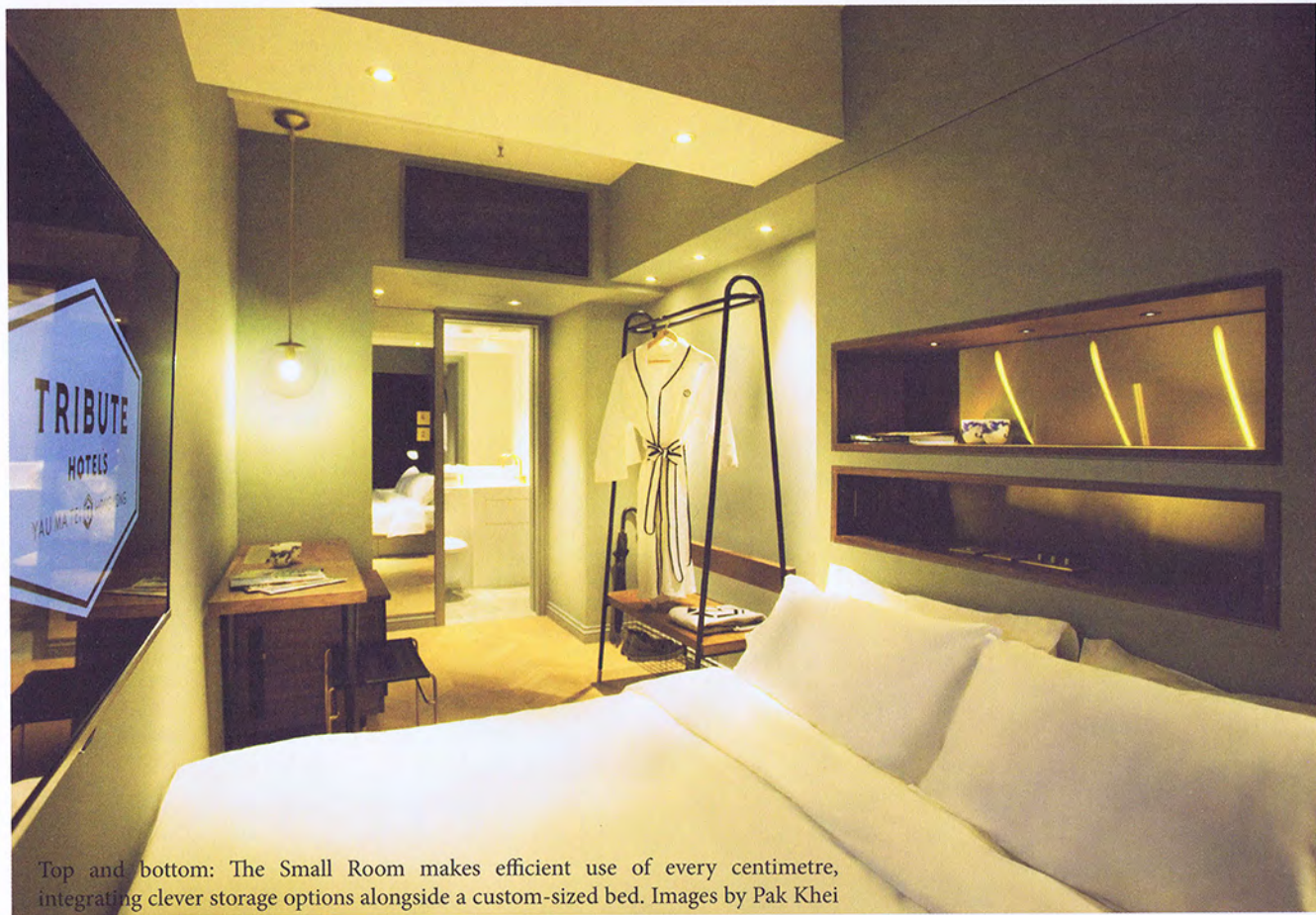


This page: Built-in bunk beds sit across from an amply sized bed in the Big Room and built-in brass headboards are inlaid with a flirtatious motif. Images by Pak Khei



Brass hardware provides a luxurious counterpoint to terrazzo tile in the guest bathroom. Image by Pak Khei





Top and bottom: The Small Room makes efficient use of every centimetre, integrating clever storage options alongside a custom-sized bed. Images by Pak Khei



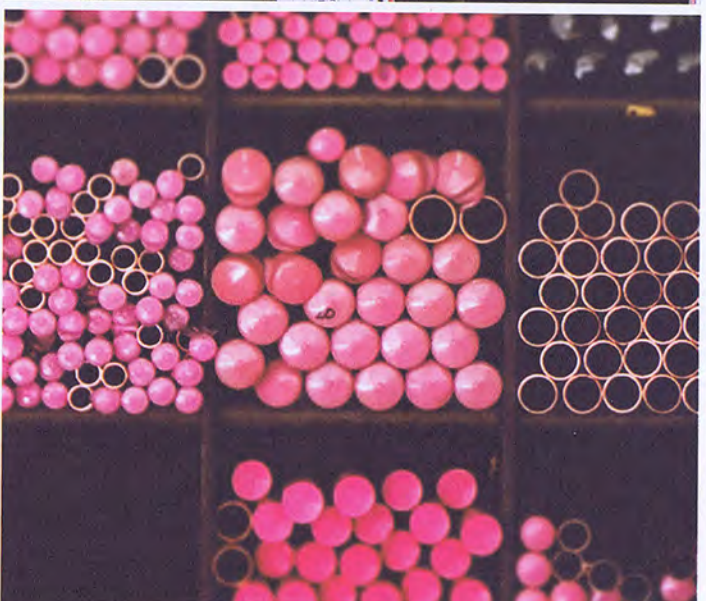
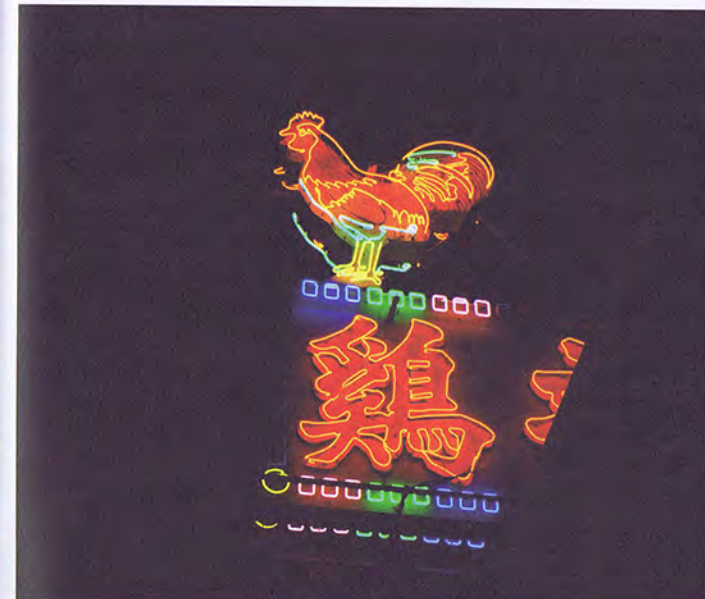
The visual experience is clean and compelling. A colour palette of soft greens, grey and ivory combine with brass and black detailing for a contemporary feel, while modern bespoke furnishings made of walnut richly contrast with a light oak herringbone timber flooring to impart a luxurious warmth. Image by Pak Khei







This page: A game of Chinese checkers takes place beneath the tendrils of banyan trees in a nearby park. Image by South Ho  
Facing page: An inspiration board of photos taken from the surrounding neighbourhood







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