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Dramatic hand-blown glass chandelier by Lasvit, Renaissance Downtown Hotel's reception

Rebirth of luxury

WA International's Design Director Claire Craig reveals how the Renaissance Downtown Hotel, Dubai offers a new vision of contemporary hospitality design.

ORIGINAL ART + DESIGN

It takes courage to gently challenge the status quo. With her signature sense of beauty, grace and curiosity, Claire Craig created a design for Dubai's new Renaissance Downtown Hotel that surpasses even the most jaded jet-setter's expectations.

The Marriot-owned property, created within an existing office tower in Dubai's Business Bay district, features 298 guest rooms and 65 suites, each with views of the Burj Khalifa or Dubai Water Canal.

From the dynamic art installation of Dubai's cityscape that commands guests' attention as they arrive, to the photography in each room and Pablo Picasso's famed camel sketch that's been reimagined into a playful 3D iron rod sculpture, the hotel was designed to deliver an unforgettable experience.

"True to our philosophy, we approached this project with the idea of creating more than only unique interiors – but rather than referencing the landscapes of Dubai, which is often a common theme, we chose to reference Dubai's man-made built environment. Our concept for the public areas and guestrooms was the evolution of a skyline from concrete and glass, and of the natural elements of Dubai, sand and water," says Craig.

"The Renaissance is a good example of how the notion that in order to design a 'luxury' hotel we must specify exotic woods and rare marbles, is no longer relevant. Its simple concrete background provided the perfect canvas on which to feature and invest in timeless, modern classic furniture, lighting and art," she continues.

Polished concrete walls and floors are the main features that connect the guestrooms and public areas. The guestrooms average an incredible 60 m² in area and all have impressive heights. An open plan concept from the bathroom to the bedroom area further emphasises the wonderful amount of space.

"With a background colour palette of tonal pale greys throughout, we purposely controlled any additional jarring colours. Gold and black – referencing the city's gold souks and oil history – are our only accent colours. This seductive colour scheme exudes warmth but also provides a perfect backdrop for our custom-designed lighting,

sculpture and modern furniture pieces. This hotel's ideal guest is someone who will appreciate a relaxed cool grey minimal interior, admires modern classic furniture, and wants great restaurant and bar venues, says Craig.

For the guestrooms, Picasso's camel sketch re-interpretation was transformed into the indigenous one-humped local. For the suites Picasso's flamingo sketch was transformed into a 3D iron rod sculpture. The flamingo reference is from the site of the Wildlife Sanctuary at Ras Al Khor, situated further along the Dubai Canal. All of the sculptures were made locally in Dubai, while the various iron rod pots found throughout the lobby and in the contemporary Japanese restaurant, Morimoto, were designed by WA International and made locally.

Dubai-based photographer Nicolas Dumont was commissioned for the large camel images in all the guestrooms, and Dubai-based artist Nasr Warour was commissioned to create the unique Ruler's portraits, which are printed on clear acrylic. Yet another talent from the city, artist Jeffar Khaldi, was commissioned for the Sophia Loren painting on the rear wall of the Basta.

Selected furniture and lighting includes: Embrace chairs by Carl Hansen; Cradle chairs from Moroso; outdoor sofas by Uhopiu; bar stools from Emeco; and lobby chandelier by Lasvit. Another playful element: 12 of Fabio Novembre's Nemo chairs from Driade are on the Terrace of the Bhar brasserie and by the pool.

Craig's design inspirations for the hotel's restaurants – including the premiere Morimoto in the UAE – were all site-specific. She worked with chef David Myers on Basta, Bleu Blanc and Poppy to realise his vision

for each of the themed interiors. Their concept for Morimoto was to capture the essence of chef Morimoto's home country, Japan. Finishes include warm teak woods, black stone walls and black leather chairs. A preserved Japanese pine tree encased in a glass box extends through both levels, and oversized pendant lights referencing Japanese fireworks hang throughout the double-height space.

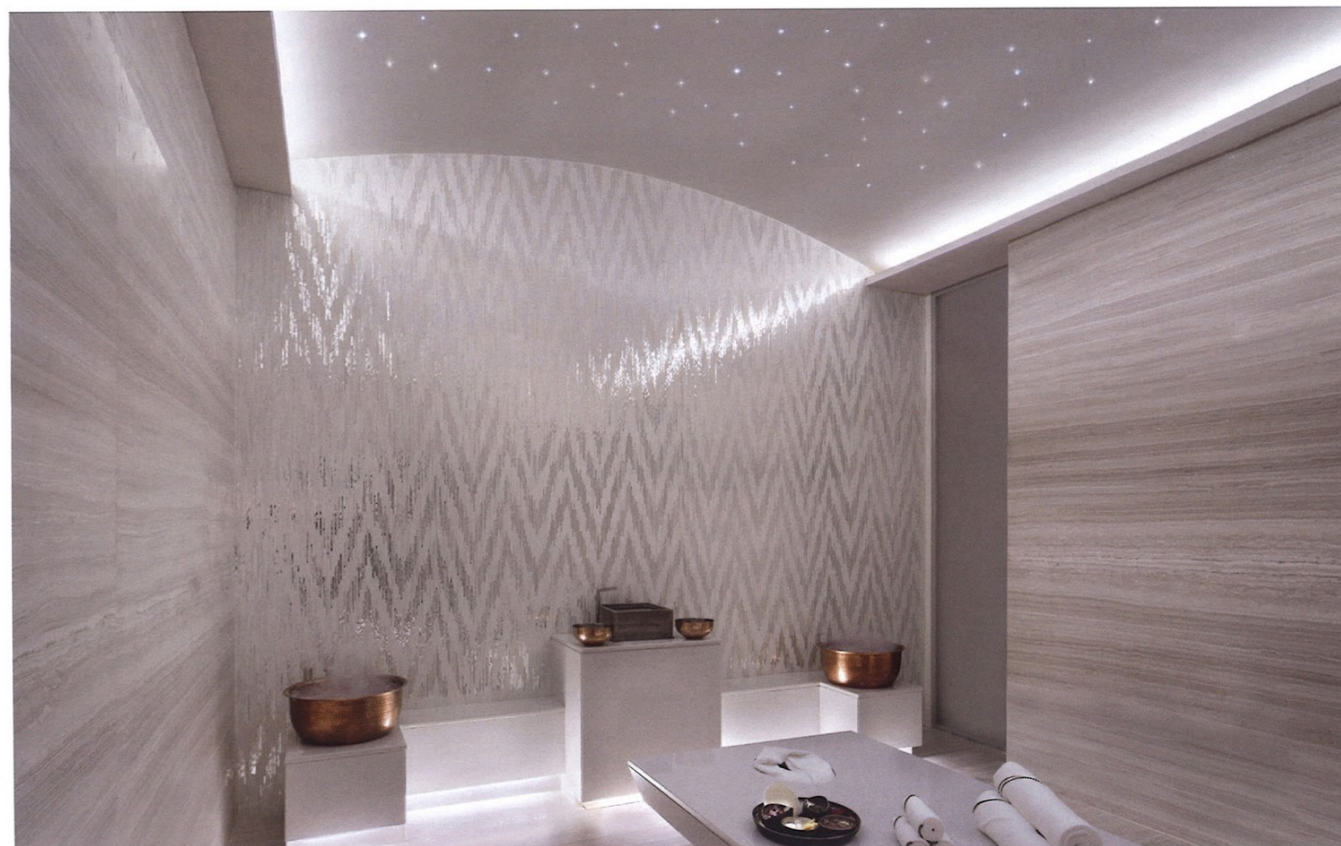
The overall design reflects Craig's personal vision, which has constantly been honed over the decades she's been living in Dubai and travelling abroad.

"This hotel's ideal guest is someone who will appreciate a relaxed cool grey minimal interior, admires modern classic furniture and wants great restaurant and bar venues."

Claire Craig



Bleu Blanc restaurant



Six Senses Spa Taste Suite



Indoor/outdoor pool

"I love to travel, and I travel quite a bit with our work, both to see new sites and to inspect custom-designed pieces made outside the region. I will be visiting the beautiful city of Prague in a couple of weeks to inspect chandeliers we're having made for a large ballroom in Bahrain. A couple of weeks ago I was in Liwa looking at a site bordering the majestic empty quarter. We are lucky in Dubai to be so centrally placed between the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe. Not only are these exotic regions just a short distance away to visit, but again we are extremely fortunate in Dubai to have a multitude of nationalities with their own cultural backgrounds from which to form our creative design teams." Given Craig's admirable wanderlust, it's no surprise she's managed to create such a nuanced vision for the contemporary stay. 📍



Claire Craig