

COMMERCIAL

Interior design

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SPECIAL REPORT

NEW TRENDS IN SURFACE DESIGN

FIRST LOOK

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RISING STARS

MEET THE UP-AND-COMING DESIGNERS ON THE
REGIONAL COMMERCIAL INTERIORS SCENE





EMBRACING DUBAI'S DESERT

CID EXCLUSIVELY PREVIEWS RENAISSANCE DOWNTOWN
HOTEL IN BUSINESS BAY, DESIGNED BY WA INTERNATIONAL

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PHOTOGRAPHY: SHARON HARRIDAS, ITP MEDIA GROUP;
NICOLAS DUMONT

Renaissance Hotels, part of Marriott International, has just opened its second property in the Middle East. Renaissance Downtown Hotel in Dubai's Business Bay boasts 298 guestrooms, including 65 suites each with Burj Khalifa or Dubai Water Canal views. The design, led by Dubai-based interior design firm WA International, entices with its modern, but distinctly local interiors and numerous design features that can be seen in both public areas and guestrooms.

The Renaissance was a study of the growth of Dubai and its basic composition; the building of a city literally 'out of the sand and water' to create concrete and glass structures.

There has been an emphasis on using materials that are in their raw and natural state, such as the wood that has been widely used, as well as concrete and metal chain curtains, which were intentionally used to divide certain areas but also act as statement pieces, especially in the reception area. Another main feature in the lobby is a hand-blown glass chandelier. Made in Prague by Lasvit, the form of the chandelier emulates the shape of sand dunes in the desert.



- 1 Renaissance Downtown Hotel is designed by WA International.
- 2 Modern interpretation of the majlis concept.
- 3 Concrete is the most prominent finish in the hotel.
- 4 Hotel signage features cracked desert textures.



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5 The style of the furniture is modern-classic, creating a right-at-home feel.

6 The suites are spacious and luxurious. Photo by Nicolas Dumont.

7 Picasso's line drawings inspired the camel line art above the bed.

8 Bathrooms feature concrete-looking tiles for the flooring and glass mosaic tiles in the showers. Photo by Nicolas Dumont.

"The colours of the chandelier, gold and black, represent the black oil and gold souqs in Dubai," explains Craig, adding that the skyline artwork in the lobby further represents the city that has grown from the sand.

Gold waves surrounding the elevator entrances on each of the floors represent the shapes that are created when the wind blows across the sand in the desert. The subtle references to the desert can be seen throughout the hotel. On each of the guest room floors, for example, there is a "crack" next to the floor number. As Craig explains, this crack takes inspiration from when the desert floor becomes dry, and cracks start to appear in the ground. Taking the cue from the concept for the public areas, the concrete is the most prominent finish in all of the guestrooms.

"Polished concrete walls, concrete tiled floors and glass mosaics to the showers are the main ingredients of our guestroom finishes," explains Craig.

An open-plan concept from the



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bathroom to the bedroom area further expresses the volume of the rooms, which average 60m².

Photography is also prominent in the rooms. The camel and flamingo canvas images were taken by a local photographer Nicolas Dumont, while the camel and flamingo metal sculptures above the beds was inspired by Picasso's line drawings. The designers kept the overall colour palette in the rooms very neutral, with the blue tones representing the sky and the water canal.

For the executive suites pink accents have been added to the cool grey colour palette. The pink is a direct reference to the pink flamingos found further along the canal at the Ras Al Khor wildlife sanctuary. Abstract paintings depicting the flamingo sanctuary were commissioned, printed and stretched over large canvases for all the executive suites.

The desk is a stand-out piece made from a solid tree trunk slab, supported on a brass iron frame with floating leather clad drawers.

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Culinary outlets at The Renaissance Downtown Hotel, start with Bhar and Grounded. A contemporary dining experience offering Middle Eastern cuisine and atmosphere, Bhar, the Arabic word for spice, is designed to awaken the senses. The restaurant features a series of different seating arrangements including booths that are divided from the rest of the space by solid wood mashrabiya screens and smaller dining tables with statement Nub chairs from Andreu World. The space is filled with quirky signage and coloured glass

chandeliers that are suspended from the metal mesh ceiling.

"Bhar was a fun venue to work on," says Craig. "One of the only areas where we decided to inject colour and vibrancy into the space."

Bastal and Bleu Blanc, by chef David Myers, are two contemporary takes on authentic Italian and French cuisine, respectively, conceptualised for the refined foodie culture of Dubai. Craig and her team worked very close with Myers on the design and inspiration for both restaurants.

Bastal interiors successfully combine raw and natural materials, such as stone and wood, with industrial-looking elements, including Edison-inspired hanging light bulbs, which are suspended from the exposed ceiling. Along with long wooden benches, the designers introduced two types of leather lounge chairs with black metal and brushed bronze framing, complementing more refined marble and wooden table tops.

"David Myers opened his first restaurant in Los Angeles and it was this connection with Hollywood and the concept

9
The colour scheme for Bhar is more vibrant.
Photo by Nicolas Dumont.

10
A portrait of Sophia Loren adorns the main wall in Bastal.
Photo by Nicolas Dumont.

11
Leather chairs with brushed gold framing complement more refined marble table tops.





of painting film posters directly on city brick walls that inspired us to paint Italy's most famous actress Sophia Loren on the end wall of this double height space" says Craig.

For Bleu Blanc David Myers' vision was a southern French farmhouse inspired restaurant.

"One of the biggest challenges for Bleu Blanc was to create the entrance", says Craig. This restaurant is located on a mezzanine level between a car parking level and the entrance lobby and its only access was through back of house areas. We added a link bridge between Basta and Bleu Blanc at the canal side of the property and at the front of the hotel we cut out a 6 meter x 6 meter slab to create a double height space for a new elevator". This gave the designers an opportunity to create a statement entrance façade on the front of the hotel with a tall vintage indigo blue door. The entrance area comprises of an old work-bench acting as a maitre d' counter and a double height live herb garden



adjacent the new elevator.

As Myers has a passion for mid-century design elements, the lights in the venue are also inspired by turn-of-the-century French lights, along with furniture, old cabinets and large mirrors that are placed against the walls.

The dining area is spacious, featuring an open-plan kitchen and a large bar. For more privacy, the designers created a curtain-like screen from old-looking wooden spatulas. Craig placed a long white oak dining table with wooden benches, which are upholstered in light blue, while contrasting a vibrant turquoise blue carpet.

"We are delighted to open our newest property under the Renaissance flag and welcome global travellers and local residents alike to experience Dubai through the brand's lens," explains Alex Kyriakidis, president and managing director, Middle East and Africa, Marriott

International. "This hotel will truly be a staple in establishing the Renaissance brand as an unmistakable lifestyle destination in the region."

A much-anticipated restaurant Morimoto Dubai is currently under construction and scheduled to open in December. Craig and her team also worked closely with Masaharu Morimoto, a Japanese chef, famously known as an Iron Chef on the popular Iron Chef America television series to create vibrant and statement interiors inspired by modern Japanese flavours. The lights in Morimoto are based on popular Japanese fireworks displays and festivals.

An all-suite spa concept, from Six Senses, is also set to open next month. It will feature six treatment suites, each designed and dedicated to a different sense – sight, sound, touch, taste, smell and intuition.

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Old-looking wooden spatulas were used to create a screen.

13
The chef has a passion for mid-century design elements.