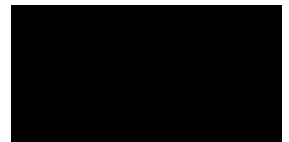




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# Stand out from the crowd

Mark Ludmon reports on how designers are helping to create the “wow factor” in bars, pubs and clubs

**A**t the new wave of Walkabouts, you can escape to an undersea world thanks to the new Reef Bar. First seen after the refurbishment of Walkabout in Cardiff, it has now been added at Birmingham and Derby, using multiple projectors showing undersea footage on linked screens. It is part of operator Intertain's investment programme to put the “wow factor” back into the 19-year-old bar concept. The refurbishments have also brought giant projection screens for showing sport while sharing drinks are served in quirkily shaped vessels such as wellington boots and suitcases. Derby also has two new bars and a garden with a VIP area and a separate DJ and sound system. “The refurbishment will reinforce Walkabout's position as the best party and live sports venue in the city centre,” explains Intertain chief executive John Leslie.

Creating focal points within a bar is incredibly important, whatever form they take, points out Kay Brannon, partner at Harrison Ince Architects. “A successful development needs to draw people in and, once inside, the concept needs to maintain interest, whether this is by way of a new way of dispensing the beer, brewing the ale on site, providing a different service, or simply providing a talking point. Large or small, it can set a venue apart from its competitors.”

At JD Wetherspoon's new pub, The Great Glen, in Fort William, Inverness-shire, small models of climbers appear to clamber up tiny ropes over the interior architecture, inspired by the 73-mile Great Glen Way that starts nearby. “Having a unique idea can get people to visit as a specific destination rather than have to rely on passing trade and can encourage people to return again and again and recommend the site to their friends and acquaintances,” Kay says.

At another new JD Wetherspoon project, The Master Mariner in New Brighton, Merseyside, Harrison Ince created large circular stainless-steel pods that glint in the sunlight and can be seen some distance away down the promenade. “They are such a striking feature at the front of the development that they have attracted a lot of interest and have been a key talking point with locals and visitors to the area

alike,” Kay adds. “Everyone appreciates stimulation of their senses and likes a good debate about whether something is nice or not. Either way, design can challenge and provoke a reaction.”

Design practice Paul Nulty Lighting has earned a reputation for creating the “wow factor” in bars and clubs. At Adventure Bar in Clapham, south London, Paul worked with Finch Interiors to create a scheme that carefully balanced the lighting over the bar with lights on the wall opposite to create rhythm that draws the eye through the space. At the same time, a large neon sign at the back – saying “Wait here, I've gone for help”, created by Electro Signs – was deliberately designed to be brighter than any other element. It can be seen from across the road, helping to draw people in. “A clever designer will realise that lighting is far more than simply selecting the right product,” Paul says. “It's ultimately about how each layer of light blends and balances with the next, creating a composition that draws the eye through the space, taking the customer on a journey.”

At The Grill at The Montcalm in London's Marble Arch, a bespoke light sculpture complements the nature of the restaurant by resembling hot embers. Developed by Paul Nulty Lighting with Tonik Associates and Iberian Lighting, it uses 600 copper-plated rods, mounted to three large diabond panels, which in turn are mounted within the central coffer. Each rod has a one-watt LED that illuminates downwards onto a copper polished sphere. The light hitting the sphere provides “sparkles” of light with a warm hue. “The chandelier is both permeable, letting the eye pass through, and at the same time a solid central feature,” Paul explains. Thanks to new LED technology, the chandelier uses only 600 watts of energy which is less than half the power required to boil a kettle – a definite wow factor for any operator.

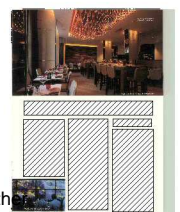
“Lighting has always had a key role in creating atmosphere within bars and clubs,” Paul adds. “It's the mix of contrast and drama that sets the tone, and when it's well considered, it seamlessly blends with the interior decor. Owners have got wise to the flexibility of light, creating different moods for different times of the day. The development of new technologies such as

LED has enabled designers to integrate lighting within architectural details that provide layer upon layer of visual interest and sophistication.”

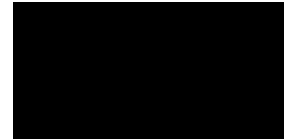
The interior design of Bath Ales' Graze bar-restaurants has taken inspiration from classic bars and chophouses in London and New York, working with design practice Simple Simon Design. An integral part of the look is the tiling, including Graze's signature blue brick tiles, supplied by Solus Ceramics, a specialist in hospitality interiors. Solus Ceramics tiles can be seen on counters and floors in numerous high-end bars and restaurants around the UK, such as the new Tozi restaurant at the Park Plaza hotel at London Victoria, where B3 Designers used hexagon-shaped glass mosaic for the bar area.

At Drake & Morgan's latest bar and restaurant, The Happenstance, in Ludgate Hill, London, Solus Ceramics contributed to the stunning interiors by supplying three colours from its Synergy range cut into strips and arranged in a chevron pattern on the floors. As with other Drake & Morgan sites, The Happenstance interior was created by Fusion Design & Architecture. They chose to combine an industrial backdrop of exposed brickwork and open ducting with luxury furnishings to create visually exciting areas, sourcing many of the eclectic pieces of furniture and furnishings from contract furniture specialist Andy Thornton. These include draughtsman's bar stools, with a tubular steel frame, wooden back rest and a seat upholstered in leather, as well as machinist's bar stools in a polished metal finish, which are height-adjustable and feature a durable wooden seat.

If you want your bar to have the “wow” factor, you need to start with the bar stools, says Vaughann Turnbull, national sales manager of hospitality furniture supplier GO IN (UK). “The bar stool is an essential piece of furniture for a bar or club, not just for seating but, equally importantly, for the design statement it makes. The bar stool is







one of the most visible items of furniture, carrying a strong style message, so it plays a central role in influencing your overall design theme, conveying the required look and feel of your operation."

GO IN offers a range of bar stools in a wide variety of designs, colours and finishes as part of its Modular System of hospitality furniture. Elements can be mixed and matched to create unique bar stools, such as a variety of leathers and fabrics, in different colours and designs, for upholstering seats. For a more minimalist look, wooden or laminate seats can be chosen. Central columns and bases can be specified in different finishes such as chrome, stainless steel or powder-coated and in a variety of shapes. They can be further customised with accessories such as foot rests, decorative trims and adjustable stems. "From simple to extravagant, from retro to contemporary, from funky to traditional, there's a bar stool ready to provide the 'wow' factor," Vaughann adds.

Urban-inspired materials combine with rustic style in a range of furniture introduced for hospitality interiors by new UK company Steel Magnolias as part of its urban vintage collection. They include bar stools, tables, mirrors and accessories, using a combination of epoxy powder-coated steel with lightly sandblasted and sealed wood to create an authentically distressed and aged look. Metal framework is available in Antique White or Aged Rust and the bar stool is finished in pewter while the timber used for each piece is hand finished, making every product completely individual.

While the wow factor may be a key element for some operators, it is not always necessary. "I have always believed that people don't always notice good design," says Kay at Harrison Ince. "When everything is in its place and the operation and lighting are right, you can have a smooth unchallenging experience where you can sit back and enjoy the atmosphere and company."



## Rosso Bar

Italian restaurant group Rossopomodoro is trialling a separate bar at its seventh site which has opened in Wandsworth, south-west London. Located on the first floor, it features industrial-style furniture from Andy Thornton. It includes leather-topped Factory bar stools around the bar plus the popular Industrial bar stools in pewter alongside high dining tables set against a wall. In the main ground floor restaurant, Andy Thornton provided a large number of French café chairs, combined with elegant Liberty cast-iron table bases in black. A large industrial table with 2.8-metre-long reclaimed pine top is matched with Andy Thornton's popular School chair.



## The A Bar

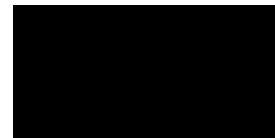
London-based RPW Design worked on the A Bar, a new destination cocktail bar in the InterContinental Amstel hotel in Amsterdam, designed to appeal to a younger audience while retaining the traditional customer base. It features a light installation, comprising eight individual light fittings created from hand-blown glass, which is not only striking but complies with Dutch regulations on low-energy lighting. The smoky blue of the light fittings is reflected in the colour of the leather used for the bespoke chairs, adding to the "contemporary lux" feel of the bar. High-quality craftsmanship and materials are used throughout, from the bronze chain-mail curtains and solid timber broad plank floors to the polished gold-finish back bar and shelving units.



## Catch

Catch Champagne Bar & Lounge has opened at the Andaz Liverpool Street hotel in the City of London, combining traditional and contemporary design. Matching the luxurious list of 70 champagnes and signature Bellinis, the interior balances modern lighting and elegant furniture with original features. It was designed by Wilsdon Design Associates which worked on the dramatic renovation of the former Great Eastern Hotel in 2007.

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## Wytes Bar

Victoria Crowe and Robert Milton have opened tapas and cocktail bar Wytes down the road from their boutique hotel Stanwell House in Lymington, Hampshire. A focal point is the iBar, an interactive bar that allows customers to browse the menu, place orders and play games on the bar top just through hand movements. Created by Emily Stafford Design, the interior has white walls and furniture that provide a backdrop to sophisticated mood lighting. Fitz Impressions, which specialises in bespoke fixed seating and upholstery, supplied posour tables, poseur seating and banquettes.



## Ormer

Michelin-starred chef Shaun Rankin has opened Ormer in St Helier, Jersey, housing a restaurant, bar and outside terrace. For the £1.4million project, he brought in Martin Brudnizki Design Studio and local contractors Camerons. Keeping with the mustard yellow and peacock blue colour scheme, seating specialist Craftwood manufactured sprung-base Chesterfield-style dining banquettes upholstered in a plush mohair fabric from Vescom, mounted on turned solid timber feet. A banquette in the bar was upholstered in a mix of leather and fabric, all upholstered onto bespoke solid oak show frames.

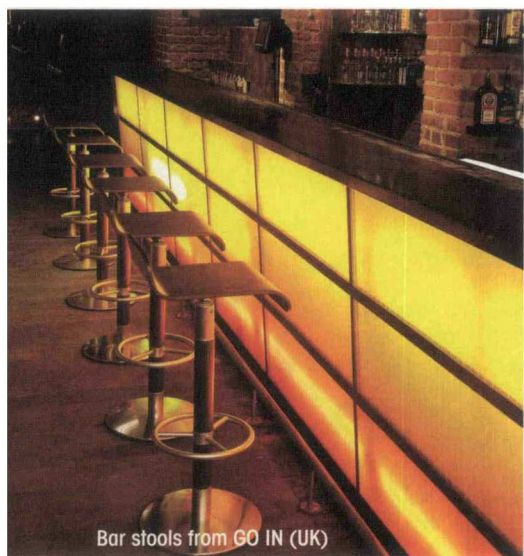
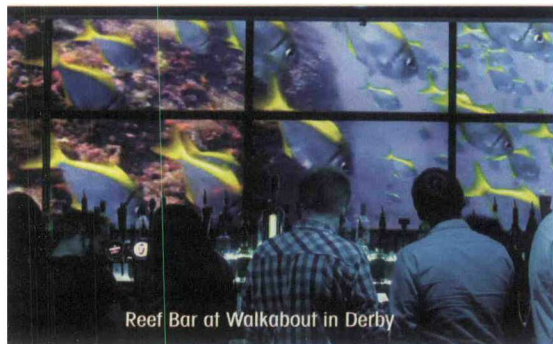
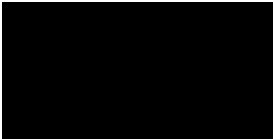


## The Pearson Room

The Reebok Club in London's Canary Wharf has opened The Pearson Room, a restaurant and bar headed by leading sommelier Sunaina Sethi. Created by B3 Designers, it has dark timber flooring complemented by raw and galvanised steel and exposed industrial light fittings. The large pewter bar is surrounded by industrial-style stools with antique leather upholstery, with elegant 1950s-style furniture and large heritage leather armchairs providing further seating in the lounge. Located on the second floor, it offers views out through floor-to-ceiling windows.



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