

# A TAPESTRY OF TEXTURES

BY LUO JINGMEI | IMAGES COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS HOTEL AND LTW

The Four Seasons Hotel Seoul (opened Oct 2015) is a sophisticated, tactile and intricate collection of spaces put together by a group of seasoned design studios

**T**he Four Seasons Hotel Seoul presents a striking new silhouette in the heart of the city's heritage district. The project is put together by a group of esteemed creative studios that have managed to design a series of elegant hospitality spaces, which, while luxurious, elaborate and make many references to Korean culture, do not fall into the trap of being gaudy and kitsch.

Marrying tradition and modernity is a tricky balancing act. The process here begins at the architecture, conceived by both British architecture firm RMJM and Seoul-based Heerim Architects & Planners, with the former heading the schematic design. The building features sweeping facades made of angled glass panels that inform the interior of each guestroom. The roofs of the palaces and four mountains encompassing the site inspired these curves. Functionally, the angled window modules help to reduce the direct glare of sunlight while presenting the guestrooms with clear views of the ancient Gyeongbokgung Palace and the surrounding city.



At the entrance drop-off, a grand porte-cochère ceiling inspired Pantheon dome greets guests. It is made with coffered metal and simulated dimmer lights to create the illusion of depth. Meanwhile, limestone and glass at the upper parts of the exterior present an elegant appearance while the lower parts of the tower is finished with Brazilian stone with elaborate vein patterns for a more intimate street scale.

The interior design is put together by Singapore-based LTW Designworks (guestrooms, lobby and Maru lounge), Hong Kong-based AFSO helmed by Andre Fu (Yu Yuan Chinese restaurant and Kioku Japanese restaurant) and America-based AvroKO (The Market Kitchen buffet restaurant, Boccalino Italian restaurant and bar, and Charles H bar). The advantage of using a variety of consultants for such a large-scale project is the diversity of old-meets-new interpretations, as well as the impressive attention to detail.

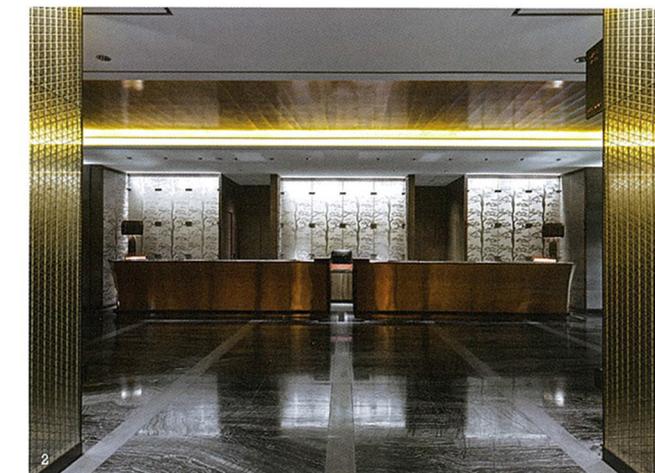
An elegant silk brocade wall backs the lobby on the first storey while adjacent to the front entrance is a lounge area, designed to be a focal point upon entry. Here is LTW Designworks' abstracted version of a traditional sedan carriage used by ancient royalty. Exaggerated proportions and a variety of light textures provide a contemporary feel that makes good use of the lofty ceiling height.

Says Su Seam Teo, co-founder of LTW Designworks and the designer in charge of the project, the materials – solid timber beams, lacquered wooden frames and silk screens – used throughout pay homage to the original ancient buildings that had gone before it. 'Each area is carefully crafted to break up a single space into separate storylines. The overall feeling is intimacy and belonging; as if one enters a traditional Hanok house.'

In the guestrooms, panelled walls and opaque lighted surfaces combined with a palette of unobtrusive neutral tones enhance the sense of lightness and openness. 'Even though the environment is rich in detail, there is absolutely no sense of clutter,' explains Teo. The reference to traditional Korean living spaces is seen here in panels and wooden frames with groove lines that stimulate the walls of old Korean Hanok residences. Also,

1 Maru lounge and lobby

2 Reception





#### FOUR SEASONS HOTEL SEOUL

**LOCATION** 29 DANGJU-DONG, JONGNO-GU, SEOUL  
**COMPLETION** 2015  
**TOTAL FLOOR AREA** 67,264.89M<sup>2</sup>  
**ARCHITECT** HEERIM ARCHITECTS & PLANNERS CO LTD  
**SCHEMATIC DESIGN** RMJM ARCHITECTS & PLANNERS  
**INTERIORS** LTW (SUITES, LOBBY, BALLROOM, FRONT OF HOUSE)  
AVROKO (BUFFET RESTAURANT, ITALIAN RESTAURANT, BAR)  
AFSO (CHINESE RESTAURANT, JAPANESE RESTAURANT)  
DAELIM INDUSTRIAL CO LTD  
**CONTRACTOR** PARSONS BRINCKERHOFF ASIA CO LTD  
**SUPERVISION** SEKWANG ENGINEERING CO LTD  
**CIVIL ENGINEERING** MAC ENGINEERS & ARCHITECTS CO LTD  
**STRUCTURE** DAE IL ENGINEERING & CONSULTING CO LTD  
**ELECTRICAL & TELECOMMUNICATION** GIMEC LTD  
**MECHANICAL** GROUHAN ASSOCIATES  
**LANDSCAPE**



carpets in standard guestrooms feature a pattern inspired by traditional bamboo blinds, while headboards takes their cue from Korean traditional costumes (Hanbok).

Nature is also a strong stimulant in the interior textures. There are silhouettes of tree branches in the gemstone colour palettes, wallpapers and silk screens, lighting fixtures constructed from delicate transparent glass tubes made like icicles suspended from tree leaves, and floral motifs in the plush carpets. 'The confluence of these two visual narratives – nature and manmade – are firmly rooted in the local culture and tells the story of Seoul,' explains Teo.

One exciting aspect for travellers at the Four Seasons Hotel Seoul is the number of choices of F&B destinations – seven in all. Each provides a distinct culinary identity that is matched by equally invigorating interior designs. Found in the spaces designed by Andre Fu is his signature language of 'relaxed luxury'. Kioku is a Japanese restaurant with a wonderfully airy seven-metre-high space, hinged by more intimate dining spots and showcase areas such as a sushi bar on the upper mezzanine. The use of bamboo, sand plastering, an abstracted herringbone motif applied to wall features and screens, and floating lanterns complement the lofty



photo by Michael Webber



3\ Kioku Japanese restaurant  
(design by AFSO)

4\ Boccalino Italian restaurant  
(design by AVROKO)

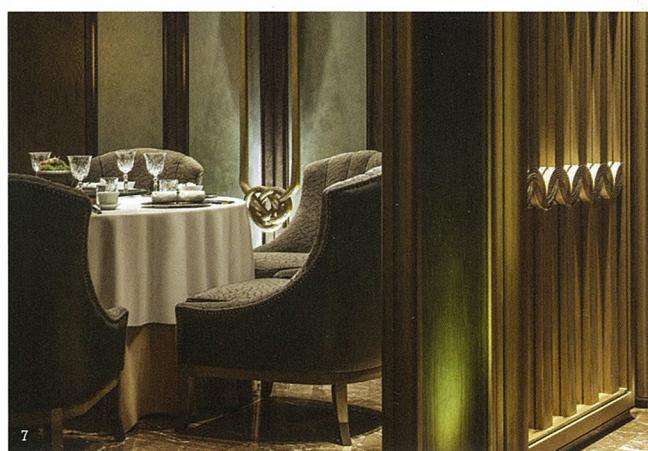
5\ Charles H bar  
(design by AVROKO)

6\ The Market Kitchen buffet  
restaurant (design by AVROKO)

7\ Yu Yuan Chinese restaurant  
(design by AFSO)

space and provide the touch of subtle textures and tranquillity reminiscent of traditional Japanese spaces. Fu describes this space as 'a modernist bamboo theatre' that begins from the darkened entrance lined with charcoal volcanic stone underfoot and bamboo batons inspired by traditional Japanese Torii tunnels.

At Yu Yuan, the motif of traditional Chinese knots are deployed throughout as decorative and lighting details, while in the main area, circular portals reminiscent of Chinese Suzhou rock gardens, soft banquette seating separated by antique-gold screens and lacquered wall panels in emerald green complete





the Chinoiserie touch. These are tempered by the earthy tones on the floor and wall surfaces.

The four F&B spaces designed by AvroKO are equally rich in textures. At Boccalino, which comprises an annexe bar, geometric patterns rendered in black and white marble on the floor to demarcate 'area rugs' and classic architectural detailing such as deep, coffered ceilings and detailed panel moulding evoke a grand Milanese residence. 'In Boccalino, we mined the artistry and tailored cleanliness of mid-century modern Italian



design, bathed in marble. This is more Gio Ponti than Italian farmhouse. Black steel and brass contrast with white marbles and Venetian plasterwork. This is a very light and airy Italian design,' explains Kristina O'Neal, designer and co-partner at AvroKO.

Meanwhile in the basement Market Kitchen buffet restaurant, ancient village and house foundations that were found during excavation are preserved and glassed over, presenting points of interest underfoot for guests like museum exhibits. 'As we were in a

sprawling subterranean space, it also felt natural to hark at the sense of being engulfed in the strata of the earth juxtaposing a certain modern elegance with the weight of visceral, strong stone,' says O'Neal, on the massive slabs of highly veined, warm onyx lining the walls and the brass screens inspired by mining scaffolding and enclosures of mining elevators.

Just a few steps away, a nondescript door leads to a speakeasy type bar. Charles H is infused with a vibe of mystery and sensuality, decorated with custo-

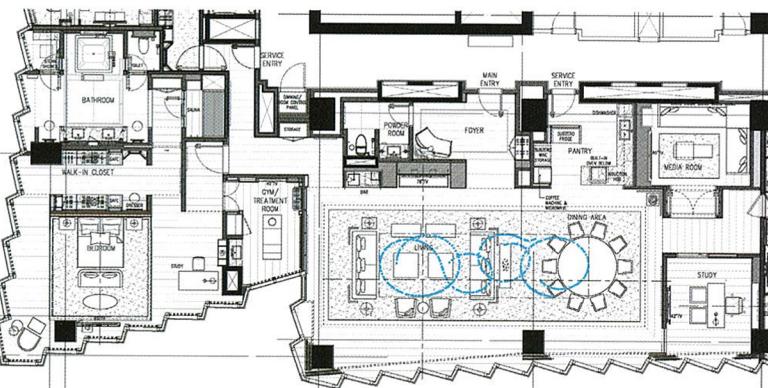
furnishings and furniture laced with traditional Korean references. Examples are brass tables blind etched with sceneries like in a traditional painting, as well as a seven-metre-long wall art inspired by traditional Korean hair plaiting. Glass mosaic flooring with traditional Korean decorative motifs provides a touch of shine while evoking a cavernous bathhouse feel.

The Four Seasons Hotel Seoul is refreshing in an age where many new hotels would rather lean on the extreme end of modernity, eschewing any elements of heritage at all. Very often, the latter can lead to sterile, soulless spaces. Done well, like the Four Seasons Hotel Seoul, welcoming and engaging spaces that are more layered with subtle storytelling and textures are created. +

- 8\ Ambassador Suite
- 9\ Palace View Suite
- 10\ Premier King Room
- 11\ Presidential Suite



TYPICAL GUESTROOM PLAN  
SCALE 1:50 (A3)



PRESIDENTIAL SUITE PLAN  
SCALE 1:100 (A3)

