



THE CHANG DYNASTY

MOMOFUKU'S MASTER CHEF DAVID CHANG BRINGS TO TORONTO HIS LOVE FOR MIXING HIGH-END CUISINE WITH ELBOWS-ON-THE-TABLE DINING
BY ALISON GARWOOD-JONES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB GUNDU

Artist Zhang Huan's dragon-like sculpture scales the side of Toronto's Shangri-La Hotel, where Momofuku occupies three levels.



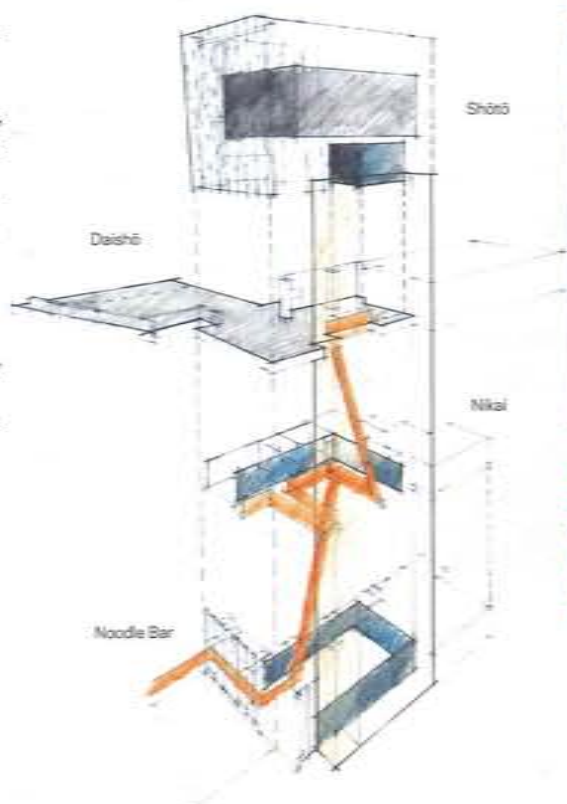
IF YOU PLAN ON TUCKING A SIDE PLATE under your coat as a keepsake of your hard-to-score dinner reservation at Toronto's Momofuku outpost, don't bother. The plates were sourced at a Chinatown discount store, Tap Phong Trading Company, just a few blocks west of the Shangri-La Hotel, where chef-impresario David Chang's eatery has been a tenant since last fall.

The plates, believe it or not, are a metaphor for Chang's penchant for combining high and low in his menu, a mixture he has mastered to critical acclaim at his New York locations. Here, the 613-square-metre dining experience comprises four restaurants spread throughout three levels. Each environment offers a distinct culinary experience, from the Noodle Bar at street level, serving the business crowd ramen on the go, to Shōtō, a dark, gleaming inner sanctum where 22 diners sit around an open kitchen and sample a 10-course tasting menu prepared, served and explained by the chef right before them.

While each restaurant offers distinctively different eating environments, the spaces interconnect through an open stairway between the levels, letting the eat-and-run crowd commingle with those arriving for a theatrical culinary experience upstairs. Traffic between spaces moves so effortlessly that you would think Momofuku was baked into the hotel's original plans. Not so. "When we designed that section of the hotel, Momofuku wasn't in the picture," says project architect James Cheng of James K.M. Cheng Architects. Only two restaurants were originally slotted: one occupying the main level; the other located within the expansive third-floor glass cube that cantilevers over University Avenue. This light-filled space is now Daishō, the third eatery, where large round tables and bench seats match the menu's communal offerings. "When Chang first approached the hotel's developers and explained his four-concept plan," recalls the architect, "it became far more exciting to connect it all."

Making those connections visible from the street was always Cheng's intention. The Vancouver architect has spent most of his 30-year career playing with structural glass in ways that best frame his city's impressive views while letting in the most light possible on grey days.

But all of this sounds so high minded. Where is the low? The New York Momofuku concepts, Má Pêche and Ko, for instance, have particleboard and plywood walls, the napkins are like paper towels, and the seating is famously in need of lumbar support. "The communal-style benches are here," says Anwar Mekhayesh of the Design Agency, the Toronto firm brought in to give the interiors their distinctive look while maintaining visual ties to the Momofuku brand. He also points to the custom-made



↑ Seating for 70 at the Noodle Bar. The ground-level eatery serves up \$12 bowls of ramen from an open kitchen at the back.



↑ A catwalk and an open staircase connect the second level with the busy Noodle Bar below. Both areas are wrapped in textured oak walls.

→ Chef David Chang is renowned for mixing nouveau cuisine with family-style dining. Left to right: Bowls of smoked chicken and egg with rice and scallions, and kimchee stew with pork shoulder and rice cakes.





Granite countertops surround the open kitchen at Shōtō, which serves a \$150 tasting menu to 22 guests. Says designer Anwar Mekhayesh, "We visualized Shōtō as the black pearl," the culmination of Momofuku's theatrical dining experience.



← Peepholes are cut out of the wall panels at Nikai, the lounge bar on the second floor. Sliding doors allow the bar to be closed off for private functions.

↑ The Design Agency extended the oak panelling across the bar's ceiling and mixed custom furniture with vintage finds, giving the space a warm feel.

benches and stools in the Noodle Bar, designed with partner Allen Chan, as distinctly Momo. The duo opted to use an abundance of white oak throughout, to give the interiors a consistent, clean and toasty glow.

Oak is used on the floors of all four concepts and, most notably, on the textured wallcoverings that define the first and second levels. The horizontal striations were designed, says Mekhayesh, to make guests in the Noodle Bar feel as if they are sitting at the centre of a swirling bowl of ramen. "The walls fit with the way the room moves," says Chan, "especially during the lunch rush: high energy, with a bit of organized chaos." The wooden strands move with the stairs and encase the walls of Nikai, the intimate cocktail lounge tucked to one side on level two.

The entire emporium is best taken in while leaning over the glass handrails of a catwalk that leads from the elevator on the north side to the second-floor lounge and the restrooms on the south. It also affords the best view of *Rising #7*, a 20-by-20-metre sculpture by Zhang Huan outside the front entrance. Delicate in its detailing but massive in scale, the stainless

steel piece depicts birds taking flight from a dragon-like twisted root. "When we were designing the overall spatial aspects for each floor, in our minds we panned around this spectacular sculpture and tried to create sightlines that framed it best," says Chan.

The see-and-be-seen spot, however, is Daishō, the 204-square-metre restaurant, with its million-dollar views overlooking University Avenue. Set within the "ice cube," as the space has been dubbed, is an overhead interior box that covers the underbelly of the hotel's swimming pool. The Design Agency effectively swathed it in uplit white oak louvres. From the street, it glows gold, like a wooden honey dipper, under which guests dine and staff buzz about, not in standard uniform black but in regular street clothes — another casual design element from Chang that incenses pinched foodies but gives Momofuku what it's after: good food served up like a family dinner. **AZ** thedesignagency.ca

Momofuku is located at the Shangri-La Hotel, 190 University Avenue, Toronto.



↑ Chicken from Harrison Co-op in Ontario, presented with egg, carrot and mole, is on the Daishō menu. → Contained within the "ice cube," Daishō seats up to 70, and serves communal dishes at tables with bench seating, or more intimate ones for four. Pendant and floor lamps by Rich Brilliant and Willing, black Hiroshima chairs by Maruni.

