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hostels

By JoAnn Greco



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SLEEP CHEAP

Backpackers rejoice. Hostels are upping their design game.



For years, backpackers have tolerated the bare-bones furnishings and barely-there mattresses of the world's hostels in return for a cheap night's sleep. Now, a new breed of affordable—yet über-stylish—lodgings is turning up everywhere, from a Mexico City palace to a tagged-for-demolition biscuit factory in Reykjavik.

Biscuit-factory maybe, but not cookie-cutter. At KEX (Icelandic for “biscuit”), the building's raw materials, from old tiles to a money safe, are reused. Elsewhere in Europe, Generator, a small

chain of boutique hostels, is now open in eight cities, and offers “properties with cool design features and subtle touches that evoke a sense of place,” according to designer Anwar Mekhayech of Toronto's the Design Agency. In Dublin, for example, a giant chandelier is crafted from old Jameson bottles.

Meanwhile at Freehand in Miami Beach, the first in a planned line of American boutique hostels, the creators of New York's popular Ace Hotel have arrived at a relaxed mix of “Florida



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1. A rendering of the café at Generator's newest property in Barcelona.

2. The lounge at Generator Copenhagen, set in a converted apartment building revamped by Philippe Starck.

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living room meets community center," says designer Robin Standefer of New York-based Roman and Williams.

And at DOWNTOWN Beds in Mexico City, yesteryear's hostel staple, the laundry room, is located near this year's trendy amenity: a rooftop terrace. "A hostel doesn't have to be boring or standardized any more," observes Carlos Couturier, managing partner of the developer, Mexican boutique hotel company Grupo Habita. "It should be fun, friendly, and a social hub."

Social Beings

Shared bedrooms, and even camp-style bunk beds, are still found in all of these efforts, but the new versions also offer private guestrooms and, most importantly, a refined concept of activated public space—from game rooms to art galleries—that remains central to their mission.

"We put a great emphasis on events and cultural happenings," says Petur Marteinsson, co-founder and owner of KEX. "The music scene here was a driving force in opening the hostel. We wanted to create a place where travelers and locals could hang out together."

Much of the gathering takes place in Gym & Tonic, a lounge styled as an old-fashioned boxing gym; at Drinx, the hotel bar; and at Text, a cozy and well-stocked library. To ensure the right vibe, the owners turned to Halldan Pedersen, an experienced movie set designer. Pedersen started by keeping the industrial feel of the warehouse—lots of exposed beams—and stocking it with three shipping containers' worth of mid-century furniture and fixtures, sourced from Pittsburgh and eastern Ohio. Along with 16 standard private



3. The bunk beds at DOWNTOWN Beds in Mexico City are placed away from the walls and encased in a lime green lattice structure.

5. Gym & Tonic, the social hub of Reykjavik's biscuit factory-turned-hostel KEX.

4. Serene outdoor space at DOWNTOWN Beds.



6. Text, KEX's cozy, well-stocked library.



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7. In Miami, Freehand's communal spaces are inspired by sun-baked boats and docks.

8. Guests of Freehand sleep in jungle gym-like bunk beds topped with Mexican blankets.

rooms, the 142-bed hostel also offers 16 dorm-style rooms, complete with bunk beds and salvaged lockers.

At DOWNTOWN Beds, located in the servants' quarters of a 17th-century palace, the idea is presented with a twist. The bunks are placed away from the walls and encased in a lime green lattice structure that sits in the middle of each room to "offer guests a feeling of privacy," says Couturier.

The arrangement also allowed architects Abraham Chereh and Javier Serrano to showcase original features such as tile work and barrel vault ceilings. Elsewhere, the 76-bed hostel offers everything from ping-pong to a screening room.

Hostel users, design-conscious or not, "are looking for a social dimension and the chance

to interact with other guests," says Carl Michel, executive chairman of Generator. If their rooms can boast material flourishes and design touches that their older brethren never did, all the better. Today's hostel guest may still be value-oriented, but he or she is just as keen on finding "authenticity and style" as any higher-end consumer, says Michel. So Generator's properties are located in distinctive buildings, such as a former Hamburg recording studio where the Beatles once recorded, an old London police station, and a converted Copenhagen apartment building designed by Philippe Starck.


Coming to America

Not unexpectedly, the trend has hit American shores with the just-opened Freehand, a total

renovation of the old Indian Creek Hotel. "The [hotel developer] Sydell Group came to us about starting this new category in hospitality," says Standefer, "and we were interested in looking at the idea of designing spaces that reflect that sense of the communal."

The guestrooms themselves offer warming touches like Mexican blankets alongside playful bunk beds that call to mind jungle gyms. Standefer and her husband/partner Stephen Alesch were inspired by a trip they took to Morocco around the time they were designing Freehand. "We're not big on color, but there were all of these incredible faded boats on a dock and we loved that sun-baked feel and their interplay with the ocean," she says. "So Miami Freehand uses a lot of de-saturated yellow, for example."

While the palette and themes will be different at subsequent properties, according to Standefer, what's really important will remain. "What we're saying with Freehand is that hostels don't have to be austere and uncomfortable," she observes. "But they will always be about interacting with strangers at close quarters and coming to enjoy their company. We want to enhance that culture." **hd**



projects momofuku toronto

northern exposure

**David Chang brings
Momofuku to Toronto**

By ASHLEIGH VANHOUTEN
Photography by BOB GUNDU

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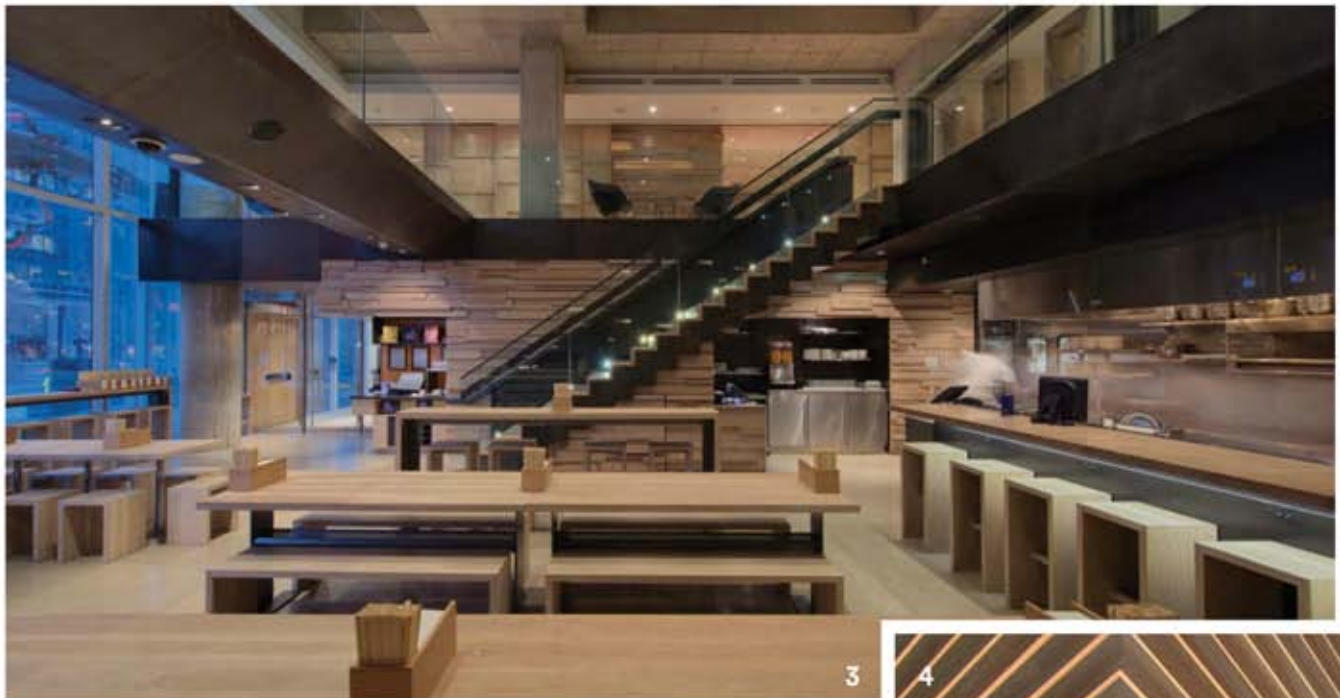
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1. At expansive Momofuku Toronto, a raw and elemental material palette and large windows add to the airy, clean feel.

2. At the restaurant's entrance, a dramatic metal sculpture by Chinese artist Zhang Huan beckons diners.



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At first look, the shimmering metal “Rising” sculpture by Chinese artist Zhang Huan standing in front of Toronto’s Momofuku restaurant communicates what type of eatery this will be: beautiful, inspiring, and more than a little bit dramatic. “We were very fortunate to have that in front of the space, essentially calling out the entrance of the restaurant before we started,” says Allen Chan, partner of Toronto-based firm the Design Agency. When Westbank, the developer of the attached Shangri-La Hotel, approached Chan and his team to design an as-yet unnamed restaurant within the three-story space, several high-profile names were discussed, but they suggested David Chang and Momofuku as the perfect fit.

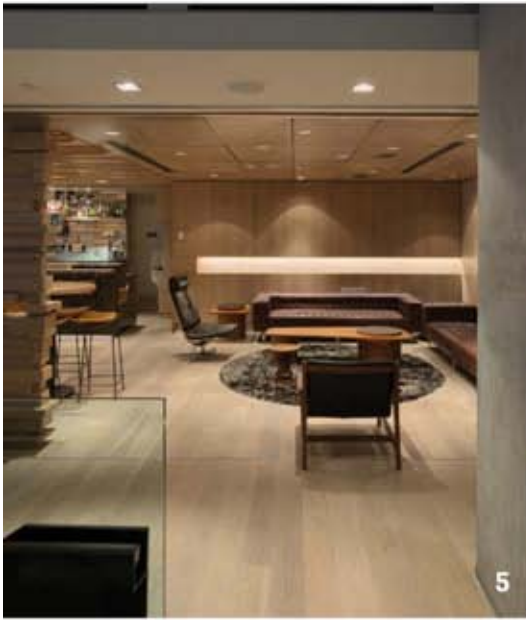
The restaurant’s design brief was just that: brief. Minimal and clean were the buzzwords, with a “raw and very elemental material palette that complements the focus that Chang and his team place on food and service.” Cultivation of the “Momofuku experience,” was also key, with the integration of four concepts under one impressive roof: the ground-floor Noodle Bar, second-floor Nikai bar and lounge, and Daisho restaurant and tasting-menu spot Shoto, both housed on the third floor. And there are plenty of hints at existing Momofuku restaurants: the white oak slat wall is an adaptation of New York’s Noodle Bar, and guests sit on the same stools in both

outposts; and Steve Keene paintings hang in both the Toronto location and New York’s Ma Peche (although in Toronto, the painting is of iconic Canadian rocker Neil Young). “We felt that a synergy within the design vocabulary across all their locations was important,” says Chan.

Not only did being “attached to the Shangri-La create that immediate connection to the Asian-inspired design language,” Chan says, but it also dictated a few design solutions. At Daisho, the underside of the hotel’s pool juts from the ceiling, clad in a wooden box with a fin pattern that mirrors the aluminum louvered wall just adjacent on the patio. “The eastern elevations of the restaurant all pay homage to the city and the ‘Rising’ sculpture out front, capturing views to and from the city,” adds Chan.

Considerations had to be made for the large space: Chan remembers that from the first visit, “it was clear to us that the interconnection of the vertical elements would play a big part in the overall design and experience.” To that end, a continuous circulation pattern spirals throughout the restaurant, touching and splicing together all the dining concepts. **hd**

thedesignagency.ca; momofuku.com



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3. The ground-floor Noodle Bar's white oak slat wall and minimalist stools are borrowed from Chang's New York outpost.

4. At Daisho, the underside of neighboring Shangri-La Hotel's pool is clad in a wooden box with a fin pattern.

5. A clean-lined seating area in Nikai, the second-floor bar and lounge, showcases Momofuku's "Asian-inspired design language."

6. Stunning views of the exterior sculpture and city beyond are a highlight of Momofuku Toronto.



Momofuku Toronto

Owner

David Chang, Momofuku NYC

Management Company

University Investments Partnership

Architecture Firm

James K. M. Cheng in joint venture with Hariri Pontarini Architects, Toronto

Architecture Project Team

Sandro Zanini, Douglas Keith, and John Manley

Design Firm

The Design Agency, Toronto

Design Project Team

Anwar Mekhayech, Allen Chan, Shady Wanis, Lorelei Lucas, and Kristel Lee

Contractor and Purchasing Firm

180 University Management

Lighting

Light Brigade

Engineering

Jones Kwong Kishi in joint venture with Adjeleian Allen Rubeli Limited

Kitchen

Mark Stech-Novak Restaurant Consultation & Design

Graphics and Custom Furniture

The Design Agency

NOODLE BAR

Art

Steve Keene

NIKAI BAR AND LOUNGE

Vintage Barstools

Arthur Umanoff

DAISHO

Armchair

Maruni

Floor Lamp and Chandeliers

Rich Brilliant Willing

SHOTO

Barstools

TOKEN