

The Milan Report

DIRECT FROM ITALY

BEST PICKS FROM MILAN FURNITURE FAIR 2013

LIGHT UP!
The what, why & how of lighting a home
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BRUNCH SPECIAL PG 49
THE BEST TABLEWARE, FURNITURE AND DECOR IN TOWN FOR ENTERTAINING

life in the GREEN LANE

text JASON POMEROY
photos COURTESY OF POMEROY STUDIO

Room at the top

HONG KONG 6.10PM WEDNESDAY

From the cooler temperatures of Toronto, to the mugginess of Hong Kong. En route to Singapore, I decided to spend a few days in one of my favourite cities. I'm meeting up with a few friends. Gary, who visited us in Singapore a few weeks ago, and Alasdair, a quintessential Englishman who I worked with years ago in Kuala Lumpur and subsequently frequented many a pub and "greasy spoon" in the city of London during the mid-naughties. Then there's Bobby, a Scots-born Chinese with an unmistakable lilt that characterises his home town of Glasgow and Mike, a Kiwi publisher whose Cantonese would put many a native to shame.

I'm staying at the Cosmopolitan hotel, a mid-range business hotel overlooking the Hong Kong Jockey club and Happy Valley race course – a welcome expanse of greenery in front of an aspect that is characterised by a sea of concrete high rise structure that form a curtain like backdrop to this green patch. When in Hong Kong, I tend to stay here, and for a number of reasons. It is great value for money, at a junction where grabbing a taxi or bus is very easy, and is within walking distance to Causeway Bay, with its myriad of shops and underground rail system that is cheap, efficient and easy to use. Furthermore, you do not feel suffocated by the other structures around you. The suite that I have been given is ample - the OSIM foot massager being a welcome edition and would become a heavily used contraption after walking from food point to shopping point to drinking point and to food point again.

We tried a new rooftop Italian restaurant at the Regency hotel. The antipasti was ok, though the slow roasted lamb finished with black truffle oil was spectacular. Later on I met with Ai, who was in good spirits, as were we with the sipping of cocktails upon a converted rooftop that now houses a >

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(top) The exterior view of the hotel.
(left) The OSIM suite comes with the OSIM massager, perfect for the weary business traveller.



swanky bar with a wonderful panoramic view that did not disappoint, despite holding umbrellas to keep the rain off. In both experiences, it was painfully clear that the spaces that one would normally frequent on the ground, have been elevated to loftier climbs in urbanised settings, and highlights how social space is a commodity in need of preservation and replenishment, as it continues to be depleted through urbanisation.

One feels conscious of this in high-density environments such as Hong Kong – whether this is through experiencing the confines of a micro-apartment or even simply sharing a table in a restaurant that has been ergonomically attuned to cater for multiple strangers dining at any one time. According to the academic Edward Ng, Hong Kong's high housing prices catalysed illegal roof top structures that did not comply to the planning or building control process, and paradoxically continue to be the homes of 3,962 ethnic Chinese (95.5%), Indian, Pakistani, Filipino, and Nepalese (4.5%) illegal immigrants who have salaries below the median household level of HK\$10,000, or US\$1,282 (HK\$AR 2008). The now demolished Kowloon Walled City aptly demonstrated how such illegal extensions were the home of an underprivileged and marginalised sector who faced social difficulties integrating into an otherwise affluent Hong Kong community. Yet the rooftop has also become an environment to help legally densify the city. In the Netherlands, 1.9 million of the 3.4 million hectares of land surface area (or 55.8%) is designated for income generating agricultural produce that impinges on the opportunity of satellite urbanism (Sukkel et al, 2009). The extension above rooftops in the Netherlands has therefore been explored in both research and commercial projects, and has consequently created a new skyward architectural realm that seeks to increase urban density without necessarily demolishing and re-building the existing urban fabric to achieve greater plot ratios. Projects such as The Bridge in Rotterdam aptly demonstrate this, and how the topping up expansion of rooftop properties can be considered further as a legally acceptable means of increasing the density in our cities.

Post-colonial cities that went through a process of demolishing and rebuilding, thus having structures potentially newer and more capable for rooftop extension, may provide opportunities for such an application. This would make the exploitation of air rights and roof top spaces an additional solution to the densification of city centres by making use of existing energy systems, maximising existing public infrastructure and helping reduce the pressure to develop on open spaces. Then everyone can have a room with a view. **O**

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