

Turning the Tables

New York's Le Cirque 2000 may scream for attention, but Jean-Georges whispers quality and restraint, displaying another facet of Adam Tihany's skills.

THE NEW RESTAURANT JEAN-GEORGES is cool, elegant and—perhaps most conspicuously—restrained, not a term typically associated with Adam Tihany's interiors. Exuberance and wit are more generally applicable. The term "over the top" certainly enters conversation when the topic turns to one of Tihany's most recent projects: Le Cirque 2000, the rather riotous restaurant intervention within the historic setting of Stanford White's Villard Houses (which were

later remodeled by Sarah Tomerlin Lee), captured the attention of the consumer and professional press as well as the restaurant-hungry public, all but eclipsing the almost simultaneous opening of its polar opposite, Jean-Georges. After all, controversy makes good copy. But so too does the story of a thoroughly modern approach to restaurant interiors. Jean-Georges shows Tihany to be a master portraitist in addition to a premier designer of hospitality

installations. "My responsibility as a professional," he says, "is to interpret the dream concept and fantasy of the client." With restaurants, that means discovering the client's perceived place on the food chain and grounding him there.

Jean-Georges Vongerichten is thoroughly contemporary, Tihany says of his client, from his culinary approach to his physical appearance. "Everything about him dictated that this be a contemporary space," continues the architect, whose relationship with the client extends back to Vongerichten's reign in the kitchen at Lafayette, a decidedly more traditional restaurant in New York's Drake Hotel, where Tihany designed the public spaces.

When the architect, working with project designer Erica Pritchard, confronted the designated site at the Trump International Hotel and Tower on Columbus Circle, he found nothing but a slab and a perimeter of 22-ft.-high curtain walls. The fact that three of the four walls defining what would become the main dining room were glass posed obvious challenges relating to lighting control and differentiation of daytime and evening moods. The lack of any intrinsic architectural interest meant that it all had to come from the architect's hand.

Aside from a requested aesthetic of layered and textured minimalism, Vongerichten and partners Bob Giraldi and Phil Suarez (whose own visual acuity comes from careers in film/video production) began collaboration with an operations brief. Jean-Georges, the restaurant, was to have both cafe and formal dining venues, the former anchored by the almost obligatory open kitchen. Each →



Left: Decorative delight comes from silver-leaf panels etched with a grid in homage to Josef Albers above the open kitchen.

Opposite: A zinc-topped, anigré bar and terrazzo flooring anchor the informal cafe component.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER PAIGE



room would have its distinct character and composition of elements, yet a spirit of continuity would rule through consistent tones of ecru and taupe sparked by gilt detailing, pervasive anigré woodworking and a strict absence of anything even remotely outré.

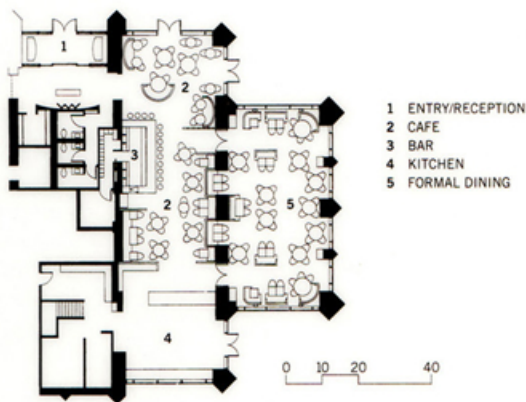
Tihany drew on the image of an embossed grid to order architectural detailing and decorative motifs. In both cafe and dining room he manipulated ceiling planes, employing a series of raised and lowered panels in the former and more prominent latticework in the latter. The dining room's one solid wall was emphasized through a positive/negative play of niches anchoring banquette seating.

Within the rooms' well-defined shells are some exceptionally beautiful elements. A pair of 18-ft.-high anigré doors, stained silver/gray, separates the two rooms. Gilt panels—a trio of them above the exhibition kitchen plus a sculptural composition resembling Eileen Gray's signature screen—impart a shimmering quality while reinforcing the motif. And a floor mosaic of marble and terrazzo pays homage, says Tihany, to Afra and Tobia Scarpa's Olivetti showroom in Venice. All this occurs in the cafe.

The dining room is unadorned simplicity; spatial interest comes entirely from structure. Tihany also designed everything from the checkerboard carpet and chairs to the china and serving trolleys.

With minimalism the revived buzzword of the moment, Tihany's take on the aesthetic is one tempered by years of experience plus a myriad of international influences. For him, minimalism need be neither stark nor threatening. It has, as Jean-Georges exemplifies, room for layering—of textures and elements—achieved with an eye to restraint.

—Edie Cohen



Above and opposite: For the formal dining space, seating 72, Tihany used the ceiling plane and single solid elevation to impart definition to a strikingly simple space. Custom chairs, manufactured in Italy for the project, subsequently have been put into B&B's production.

MOSAIC FLOORING: **D MAGNAN & CO.** (TERRAZZO AND CONSTRUCTION); **MILLERDRUCK** (MARBLE SUPPLY). LIGHTING: **MODULAR; LIGHTOLIER.** CUSTOM CHANDELIERS: **BALDINGER.** CUSTOM BAR LAMPS: **KERN/ROCKENFELD.** CUSTOM FURNITURE: **COLBER.** FABRIC: **UNIKA VAEV.** SILVER LEAF: **TERRA FIRMA.** SANDBLASTED GLASS: **JAN TILE.** MILLWORK AND BACKPAINTED GLASS: **RIMI WOODCRAFT.** CUSTOM CARPET: **BLOOMSBURG.** CUSTOM VASES: **FOSCARINI.** METAL PAINTING IN CAFE: **NATHAN SLATE JOSEPH.** CUSTOM CHINA: **BERNARDAUD.** LINENS: **FRETTE.** HARDWARE: **JOSE REGUEIRO STUDIOS; IRON MONGER.** PAINT: **BENJAMIN MOORE.** STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: **THE CANTOR SEINUK GROUP.** MECHANICAL ENGINEER: **I.M. ROBBINS.** CONTRACTOR: **HRH CONSTRUCTION.**