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BOTANICAL BOUTIQUE

How Design Haus Liberty used beehives and botany to inject some luxury into this incredibly beautiful Chelsea hotel

Words FAY WATSON



PHOTOS BY JACE HEDGECOCKE

A roof that hosts eight beehives is not usually the first thing you'd expect from a boutique Chelsea hotel. Then again, My Chelsea is not your typical spot. With harvested honey on offer to guests and a café full of raw food snacks all in the historic Victorian building, the hotel certainly stands out from its neighbours.

So when Design Haus Liberty were tasked with redesigning the boutique hotel, they faced the challenge of retaining this originality alongside creating the atmosphere of luxury expected in the area.

The team were especially keen to integrate the natural ethos of the place into the design, drawing inspiration from the beehives, the owner's love of plants and even the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

'I took ideas from the local appreciations and vibe of the flower show,' founding principal Dara Huang tells me. 'The entire design needed to have a clear brand to appeal to the modern, elegant, chic residents and visitors of Chelsea, who would want to come here to feel comfortable.'

In order to do this, they integrated plants and botany into all aspects of design, from plants in every room and a colour scheme developed to highlight them, choosing black and gold to draw your eyes to the greenery.

'The green plants stand out more when it isn't over saturated with many colours. We decided to make the palette simple with black, white and green. This enables us to keep it modern,' Huang says.

'We painted the existing furniture black because the budget was tight, and it would transform an old timber chair to a modern stylish one.'

This black and white palette allowed continuity through the hotel alongside the use of timber floors, which created a high-quality finish throughout.

Another unique botanical feature is the communal space, which is modelled after a

greenhouse with its enclosed glass ceilings. This is Huang's favourite part of the hotel as the plants are complemented both by the leather chesterfield banquettes and luxurious green velvet chairs. The spot aptly dubbed 'The Living Room,' with its beautifully crafted brass-hue bar, seems the perfect place for guests to eat, relax and enjoy a drink underneath.

Huang explains: 'In London it is a struggle to find enough light, so the idea of a greenhouse and glass box that housed these plants were obvious ways to give the feeling of open space when you enter.' Aside from the botanical inspiration, Design Haus Liberty also wanted to create a feeling of serenity for the guests to escape the busy streets of Chelsea.

'This is all about the five senses,' she explains. 'You must think about what it smells, looks, feels and even tastes like – everything needs to be in unison.'

'We wanted to pick the hotel scent, the plants, the brass cutlery, how they display glass bubbles on the tables with a modern leaf,

which is brought in fresh every week. This is what the hospitality industry is all about – its attention to detail and user experience.'

'This needs to embody everything you feel and everything you want to say about the brand. We were even particular about the font they used for the door numbers, even how guests were greeted and brought to their rooms. They should feel they've just entered a botanical oasis to relax.'

But it was only when all these elements came together that the botanical design started to look really special. 'You don't really get a "hotel" until all the final touches are there and that takes time, but when it all came together, my team and I looked at each other and said, "now we have a hotel!,"' Huang tells me.

This attention to detail in their designs is what first got the team involved in the project, after the hotel liked the previous work they had done on the spa downstairs. Design Haus Liberty generally works across projects that focus on the interdisciplinary nature of their company through architecture, interiors and lighting. As such, the unique lighting that the team used in this particular project was produced by their own lighting company DH Liberty LUX. 'We love the quality of craft and handmade uniqueness that comes with these pieces,' Huang says. 'The lighting on the walls are our own industrial wall lights, contrasted with luxury with the brass. The lighting hangings are our pear lights, which are difficult to blow because they resemble organic shapes of nature.'

'If you want an odd shape, you need to create a mould to blow them into. At that scale we had to change the way we handled glass into a more spun like technique.'

What these allow the space is a feeling of openness and light. But,

as Huang and her team were not content to be predictable, they also painted their entire lobby pitch black to keep the guests guessing about what to expect before they even come in.

So what's next? 'We're expanding on this hotel to an all raw and health location in the commercial space as well as expanding the hotel. So keep watching this space as it's about to get even better.'

And with a design that keeps you guessing alongside a cultivated feeling of serenity from the entrance to the individual rooms, it will be fascinating to see what they have up their sleeves next. I think it would be sensible to take note – and watch this space. **I**

Find out more information at dhl Liberty.com

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