

Artist Features: Zadok Ben-David (Israeli, London-based)

Source: A Royal Fantasy, Mood.sg Magazine, March 2008, Page 26 - 28

venue reports: majestic bar

A ROYAL FANTASY

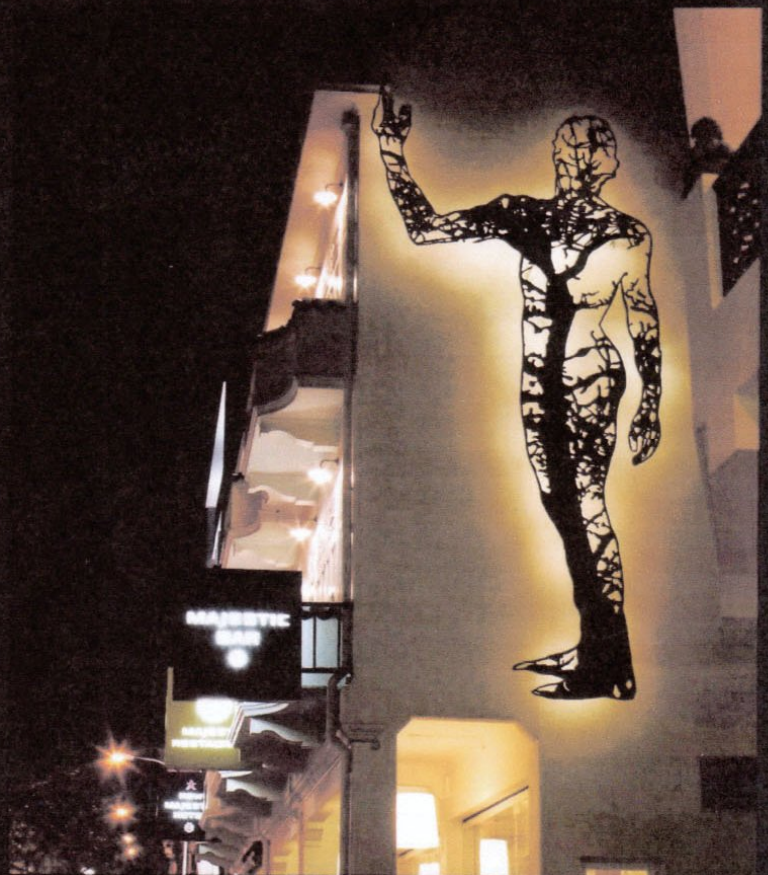
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JAMBU STUDIO**

Venture into the fantasy-themed Majestic Bar, a new addition to Singapore's hip designer boutique hotel New Majestic Hotel, to find absinthe and the Green Fairy.

One thing that stands out about the trendy Majestic Bar, and the New Majestic Hotel, is the very untrendy neighbourhood they are in. Located in the heart of Chinatown, where KTV bars and coffeeshops are more the order of the day, the Majestic Bar attracts as many customers as it does curious onlookers. And for good reason too—the Majestic Bar is out to grab attention with outrageous art works and an unusual Enchanted Forest-themed interior. Fronting the hotel, for instance, is an oversized 7.6-metre tall artwork of a man with branches as arteries by London-based artist Zadok Ben-David. This is a beacon for the bar—which is practically hidden in a recess between the hotel and another building—as well as a sight to behold for customers at the seafood restaurant across the street.

The bar, like its sister hotel, is owned by up and coming Singapore hotelier Loh Lik Peng. It deals with being in its garish neon light neighbourhood by wishing it was in another land: its façade is not along the street front but pushed so far back that you could walk past it twice without noticing it (if not for the Ben-David sculpture). Inside, architecture and interior design firm Annex A, who also designed the hotel, uses the Enchanted Forest theme to literally transport you to a different world. A giant gallery of works by Singaporean artists and Ben-David, who is represented in Singapore by local art consultancy agency Asian Art Options, adds a contemporary, avant garde feel to the place while soft lounge music flows out at the door to seduce passer-bys into its embrace.



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DESIGNING THIS SPACE WAS NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES.


The first story sets the tone for the entire bar—it is a cubby hole where you chill out with your friends and have leisurely conversations. The bar has a "feature wall", so called by Annex A's founder Mark Wee, and conceived by Donna Ong. Ong is a multi-disciplinary artist whose works were showcased at the Moscow Biennale '07 and Singapore Biennale '06. Her interpretation of the first storey as the tree roots and tree trunk uses antique clocks whose faces, adorned incongruously with dead butterflies, gaze down at you balefully. While the dead butterflies lie still in grandfather clock cases, as they would in coffins, clockwork mechanisms are liberated and transformed into insects, like a Dave McKean's dust cover for the graphic novel series, *The Sandman* come to life. The clocks are placed slightly apart, allowing light to flow through the gaps between them. This parallel grid is a mirror wall behind the bar counter and repeated in reflective slats at the end of the room; the effect is disorientating and playful. This is repeated in Yuki Chong's canopy grid that is made up of rectangular stained acrylic panels, which help to lengthen the room. The mirror wall magnifies the space, allowing guests to reflect on the intriguing feature wall.

Designing this space was not without its challenges. Annex A had to work within the confines of a long and narrow floor plate, and also had to comply with Urban Redevelopment Authority's standards of converting what was an office into a commercial space. Wee says, "We had to provide an additional fire escape and, of course, we had to re-configure the space". To top it off, the team also had to include a lift because "Singaporeans are basically lazy and if you don't have a lift, they're never going to your third floor".

The second floor is brightly lit with green felt hexagonal grass patches that bedeck brick walls. Ong's works decorate this floor too; this time her dead insects are in a table instead of clocks. The room's warm décor is perfect for lingering for a few hours after dinner—the bar's menu of interesting dishes includes ox tail and foie gras—for signature drink Absinthe Without Leave.

On the third storey is a star-spangled ceiling, with stars made from LED lights. The effect was created with much effort by a freelance lighting consultant who

experimented with various lights from Singapore's electronics emporium Sim Lim Square and figured out a way to stick them on panels that were fixed to the ceiling so that the lights would appear like a random scattering of stars. The task was not easy as the attic tapers upwards. A two-dimensional statue of a little girl by artist Sandra Lee stands in the middle of the room, holding a piece of string that leads to the biggest and brightest star.

The entire budget for this creative project has not been revealed, but one can hazard a guess that it was significant. It should pay off, as this unique concept will definitely appeal to the people who work in the advertising agencies and media companies that dot the larger Chinatown area. They will certainly appreciate the bizarre artworks, starry attic ceiling and will lose themselves in the Enchanted Forest. 

MAJESTIC BAR

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