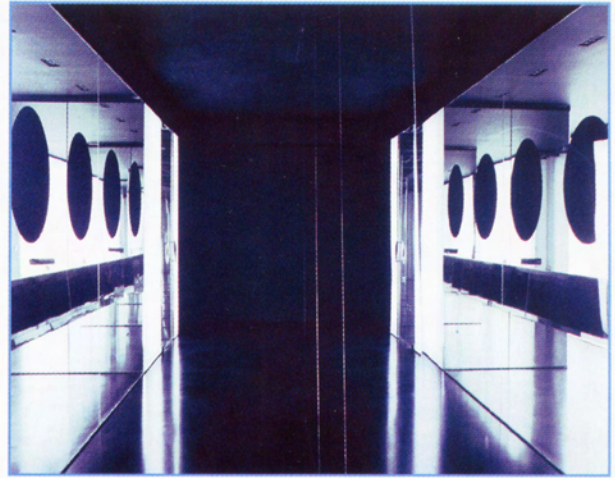
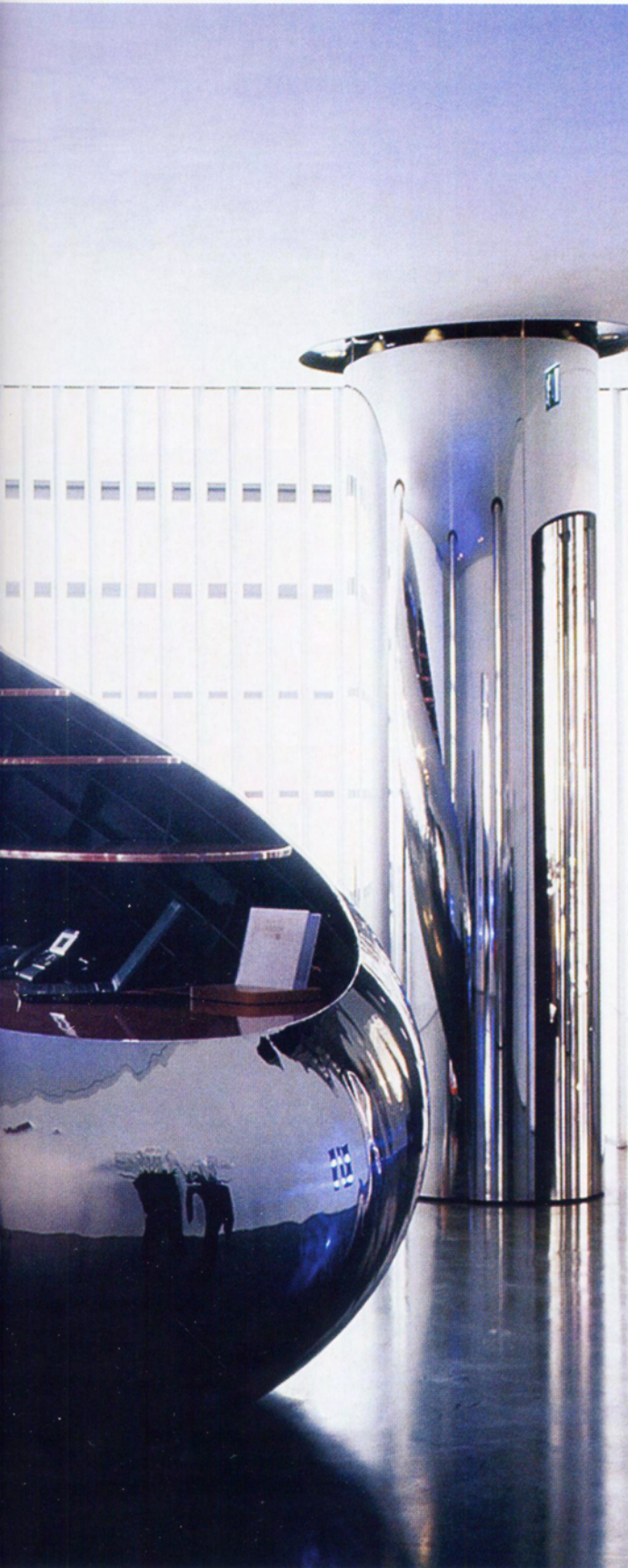


BRIDGE

FOR DESIGN



THE INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE FOR INTERIOR DESIGN



Hotel Duomo

R i m i n i

ITALY IS RENOWNED FOR ITS ENDURING SENSE of style. Its artistic heartbeat is a living museum to the Renaissance, and its cathedrals, its palazzos and grand piazzas, stand as an architectural monument to constancy rather than 'progress'.

The Hotel Duomo stood unchanged in the historic centre of Rimini for years until it broke with tradition by inviting the London based architect and designer Ron Arad to re-scope the hotel as a design statement to the new millennium in 2003, with a remit to attract a younger and hipper clientele.

Ron Arad, an architect and furniture designer, and professor of product design at the Royal College of Art in London, is not the most obvious choice for this traditional seaside resort with its ice cream pink coloured porticos and Juliet balconies.

Retrospectives of his work at the Victoria and Albert Museum and public sculpture commissions for Canary Wharf notwithstanding, he is a radical, and he sets the scene for a new era, more Far East and phoenix of urban regeneration than old Europe.

His early furniture designs were armchairs radically remodelled from scrap car seats, stripped down in his Camden workshop; his signature pieces are armchairs formed from ribbons of metal welded into loops like pussy-bows, recently showcased at a Design Museum retrospective.

Nevertheless, Italy is the home of design and Arad designed the Maserati headquarters and showroom the same year he was commissioned by the Hotel Duomo, a fashion flagship store for Yohji Yamamoto in Tokyo, and started work on the design for the Upperworld Hotel at Battersea Power Station, close to the River Thames in London.

>>



His vision for the Hotel Duomo owes much to the Rolling Volume rocking armchair he created in 1989, a chunky dice of polished metal with an indented seat. The design for the hotel plays on the concept of refurbishment as a new skin, coating the façade of the building in a 'skin' of bronze, within and without. The bronze layer flows into the hotel interior as if molten, covering the ceiling and wall of the bar, bathing the space in a warm glow. This bronze 'render' is lavish but the design retains functionality, bronze door frames forming a sculptural seat and walls incorporating integral bench seating inside the bar and outside the hotel, for people to sit on while waiting for a taxi outside in the street.

Ron Arad's customary curved lines and lurching angles, rolling on the horizontal plane as if on huge Atlantic swell, lend a cruise liner feel to the hotel's interior in the visual impact and spatial experience. The bedrooms are cabin-sized, with partition walls efficiently designed for maximum storage as well as privacy, and bathrooms are thermoformed white Corian®, the white curvilinear walls emphasising the look of the hull of a huge cruise ship, with teak decking floors.

The drab corridors and dated louvre shutters of its pre-refit were thrown overboard, to be reborn as white moulded tunnels redolent of some futuristic film set. The 'nightclubby' cloakrooms with porthole mirrors and windows on this internal world resemble an ultra high-tech, hospital surgical suite. >>



From the moment you step over the threshold, you are entering a mind-bending scene in the virtual world of reality. Take nothing from life as it looked before the 21st century for granted. The reception desk is as conceptual as it comes...

Glimpsed through the shiny red pinball-flipper doors inviting you in is a playground where everyday objects have been re-conceptualised and beamed into this future world. A mirror polished donut ring of shiny steel floats in mid-air like a fairground ride in another dimension, somehow suspended in a pure white space framed by gleaming steel pillars, like giant chrome pipework.

This reception area is infused with ethereal blue neon lighting of a frozen gaseous planet, designed by David Atkinson of the architectural lighting design consultancy DALD, who worked closely with Ron Arad on this project.

Arad tests his clients' mettle before embarking on a project with them. "If someone comes to us, they must be very ambitious, and that gives me an opportunity to test them and say, OK let's do something different – let's look at a reception desk..." If they embrace the radical, the new or the well-nigh impossible to do, they enter the designed-by-Arad arena. "This was a very lucky one – very easy to design and very difficult to make – the ring doesn't maintain its diameter," says Arad. The tapering ring had to be made in segments, welded together and the welds polished to a seamless surface.

The wall behind the reception ring is formed using a series of aluminium fins, allowing natural daylight to flood the space and enabling a filtered view into the office behind, while by night it is lit by gimbaled low voltage downlights fitted with dark blue filters. With Ron Arad designing the reception as a dramatic focal point to the hotel, DALD recessed LED colour change fixtures into the walls of the space, which reflect subtle hues of colour off the polished desk and white ceiling.

The bar itself is a large island with fjord-like scoops routed out of it for the patrons to eat and drink at. The bar top is bronze and its sides are finished in mirror polished stainless steel, creating distorted reflections which highlight the activity in the bar.

The entertaining area is lit in a warmer temperature palette of reds, glowing and flickering off the bronze. Square buried fittings with opalescent glass create a soft diffuse quality within the entrance with hints of warmth from recessed low voltage downlights which bounce light off the red doors.

"During our early meetings it was made quite clear that any lighting fixtures should become invisible," says David Atkinson, something that for a lighting designer who came from a theatrical background would be second nature. Indeed, the special effect of floating pillars and rings is created by recessed LED lighting. >>





“The wonderful thing about working with Ron Arad is that there are plenty of curves,” says Atkinson, who worked in creative synergy with Arad Associates for two years to get the lighting concept installed.

“One of the biggest challenges with the lighting of the bar area was not to interfere with the bronze skin,” he says. The solution was to step recessed downlights around the large polished stainless steel columns within the space and sleeved fluorescents against the walls. Large buried compact fluorescents upright the staff and throw shadows across the bronze ceiling to create interactivity at the bar service.

The hotel bedrooms are designed so that Corian® bathroom pods form the backdrop to the sleeping area. Each pod is a wet room with a teak slatted timber floor and has a large circular glazed window which lets natural light into the space.

Ron Arad Associates and DALD wanted to minimise the amount of fixtures within each bed pod. The bathroom is illuminated by fibre optics recessed into the Corian® wall around the mirror, frameless downlights and an internally lit shower. To reinforce the colour coding of the bedrooms, sleeved fluorescents are positioned beneath the bed and desk, and each bed pod has a lighting control with pre-set sequences. None of which is homely or bears any resemblance to the kind of décor and light bulb technology we have at home.

But then Arad does not recycle the view of a hotel being a home-from-home – his vision is something of an armchair adventure of the mind. “At the end of the day, you have an amazing reception room and a fantastic bathroom – but a hotel is about where you park yourself. It’s not about making another atmospheric place where people ‘feel at home’ – if you want to feel at home, you stay at home!”

As Julian Gilhespie, the project architect from Ron Arad Associates who worked on the Hotel Duomo says, “It is more Ron Arad than it is Rimini!”

Hotel Duomo
Via G.Bruno 28
47900 Rimini
Tel.: +39 0541 24215/6
www.duomohotel.com

www.ronarad.com
www.dald.co.uk

Hotel Duomo in Rimini won two categories at the SLEEP 06 European Hotel Design Awards: Winner of Hotel Design Bar & Restaurant and Winner of Hotel Design Lobby & Public Areas.

All images courtesy of John Perry s.r.l