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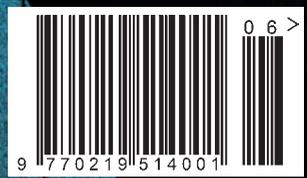
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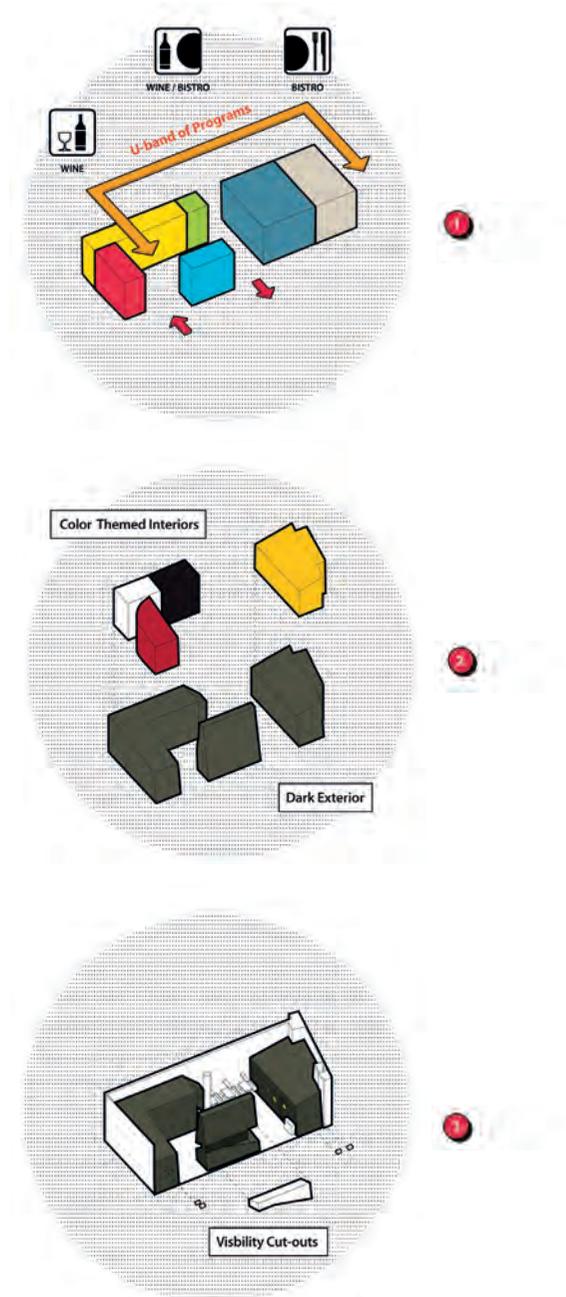
ISSUE 064. 2011 | S\$8



abstracts of wine

BY KOH KAI LI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY SAN | IMAGES COURTESY STUDIO SK LIM

Studio SK Lim reinterprets the experience of formal wine tasting to create an interior that is dramatic and inviting at The Tastings Room in Marina Square.



In Singapore, wine tasting events are often treated with levels of formality and exclusivity. However, when the owner of The Tastings Room, a young entrepreneur with a passion for wine approached Studio SK Lim with his concept of combining casual bistro dining with the experience of wine tasting, his brief was for a space that could enable the enjoyment of fine wine in a more accessible and affordable setting.

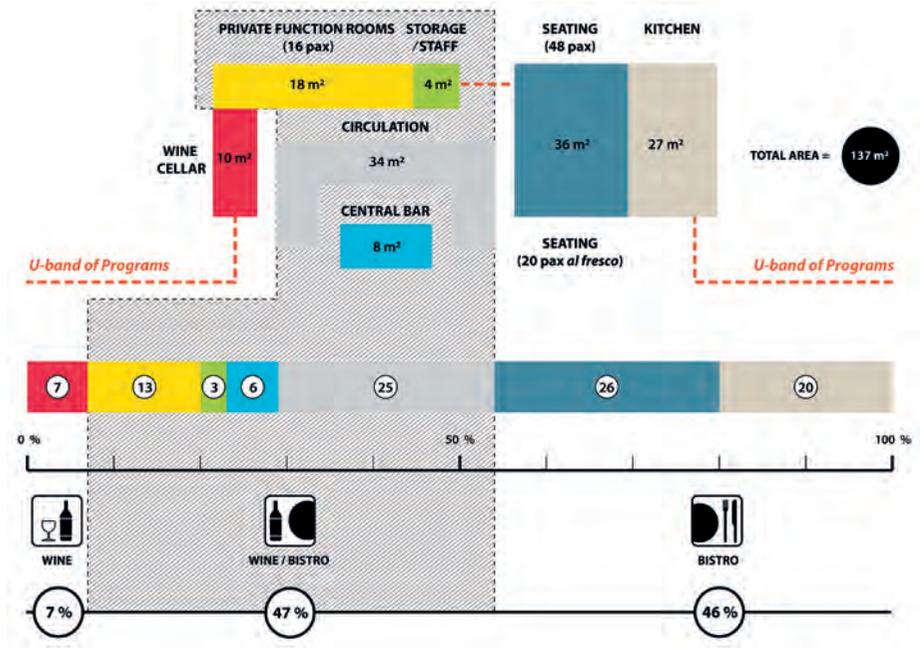
Its groundfloor location of Marina Square shopping mall with outdoor seating provided the bistro with the casual environment it needed, and for Kevin Lim, design director of Studio SK Lim, the challenge was to create a space with an ambience of sophistication, but without the opulence that so often comes along with the experience of wine-tasting.

the metaphor of wine

Programmatically divided into three areas (Wine, Bistro and shared spaces of Wine/Bistro), the 137m² space is envisioned as a series of black volumes organised sequentially along a U-shaped circulation path.

Taking inspiration from aesthetics of the dark wine bottle, black volumes of private activities punctuate the main dining area. This results in an intimate, cavernous setting with walls of black timber veneer laminate tiles. These timber tiles of varying textures are laid diagonally in a spontaneous order and direction, a playful interpretation of the weaving of the antique wine basket holder. Silver pendant lighting of varying heights strategically positioned around the space add visual depth, while also keeping a tone of ceremony.

Hidden within these black volumes are individual rooms of singular solid hues housing the functions of wine cellar, kitchen and private function rooms. 'These interiors metaphorically allude to the "hidden" flavour of wine,' says Lim.





For the 'red' wine cellar, a central pivot glass-door provides a view into the room, where a custom-designed shelving housing the collection of new and old world wines takes on a smooth curved surface that makes for more legible cataloguing and encourage easier comparisons, experimentation and sampling of the wines among guests.

The 'yellow' kitchen is visible from the main dining area only through three circular openings. Through these visual connections, the inner workings of the bistro often hidden from view become part of the dining experience.

The only spaces in the bistro that are fully enclosed are the private function rooms. These rooms are a chromatic dichotomy of the other; one being entirely finished in white while the other in black. These rooms are divided by a foldable looking glass door with the option of amalgamating into one. Large gatherings becoming an intimate affair with the ethereal fusion of these two rooms.

turning requirements into an advantage

'It's always interesting to note the economics and social dynamics that help to shape and influence the design of a project. It's working within and around these parameters that keep a project lively,' says Lim. For the Tastings Room, the restrictions faced came not from the client but the mall's strict regulations on its tenants. The designer, rather than seeing these regulations as disruptive to the restaurant's concepts instead, turned them into design opportunities.

Not wanting to heedlessly comply to the given 500mm storefront setback guidelines, the designer chose to slant all periphery walls abutting to the setback

– the ceiling corner of the walls keep to the required setback, the lower end of the wall is pulled away from the glass façade, which is essentially still setting away the walls from the storefront façade.

The idea of 'pulling away' and the language of the slant translates itself in a curious manner at the central bar counter, the main feature of the bistro. While its angular form provides an interesting focal point in the space, its design of the counter goes beyond a mere aesthetic exercise. The angular planes of the counter facilitate the activities that occur around it – the counter is raised at areas to conceal the fridge and other service equipment and lowered at areas such to allow for interaction with the staff behind the counters.

One of the regulations stipulated by the mall also requires tenants to maintain a standard level of transparency. While the most immediate response to adhere with the regulations would have required Lim to place the counter away from the façade, his response was to playfully extend the use of cut-outs from the interior to the exterior of the bistro. These cut-outs enable visitors to get a peek into the spaces at the wine cellar, kitchen as well as the bar counter, inviting even passers-by to become voyeurs of the inner workings of the bistro.

The designer's willingness to allow external factors to mould the language of the place and instinctively guide them to accommodate the client's design brief, created this charming wine bistro. As with wine, a patron's curiosity is first piqued with a scent or sight of its content, a curiosity which is satisfied with a tasting. In the case of this aptly named bistro, its gastronomical feast is not just a treat for the tongue but also for the eyes. +