



Tickled Pink

IF HOTELS ARE THEATER, THE JW MARRIOTT PHU QUOC EMERALD BAY IN VIETNAM IS THEATER OF THE ABSURD.

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Boutique Design

Like the cherry on top of a decadent ice cream sundae, Bill Bensley's eccentric design of Pink Pearl (the resort's experiential restaurant opens in October) is the pièce de résistance in the resort's fabled backstory as the former French colonial Lamarck University.



Pink Pearl is inspired by the legend, wink wink, of Madame Pearl Collins, the great-great-grandmother of Ty Collins, the current “Dean of Lamarck University” (actual job description: the resort’s general manager). Bensley’s zany interiors set the stage for the gastronomic soirees Madame Pearl hosted at this beachfront art deco mansion, with bubblegum-pink splashes, flamboyant prints, extravagant gilt-framed portraits and a sparkling chandelier—all bespoke. “Really, the entire house is a bit daft,” says Bensley, founder and creative director of Bangkok-based design firm, BENSLEY. “Giant birds stare down hunting dogs; Elvis in a hot pink zoot suit is stuffed into an 1880s wooden lift; and the world is falling on Abhi the penguin. Pearl had a very odd sense of décor. My favorite, though, is her painting collection of all her friends.”



The six private dining rooms feature vintage photographs and bric-a-brac telling the story of Madame Pearl and Lamarck University, while classical musicians provide audible ambiance. "The French cast iron lanterns were sourced in a really dirty shop in Ho Chi Minh City," says Bensley, "and the 100-plus crystal decanters dating from 1850 to 1950 were sourced in Lincoln, U.K., along with the plethora of books and turn-of-the-century vacuum cleaners. The Thai and Chinese elements are from Chiang Mai and Shanghai respectively, while I bought the table lamps at flea markets in France." That multi-cultural aesthetic blends into the perfect framework for the French fine-dining, farm-to-table fare prepared by chef Amine Ouameur Lakhdari, who has worked in Michelin-starred restaurants including The Ritz Paris L'Espadon, Apicius and La Truffe Noire.



As layered as these interiors are, nothing is extraneous to the narrative—especially the color. Bensley explains all this pink was not his choice, nor the client's, but what Pearl chose in her last renovation in 1905. "Pearl was Vietnamese, a great cook, the second wife of the first dean (Ty Mathew Collins) and she loved pink," he says. "A large portrait of her can be found in the foyer."



And there was no fear such a feminine décor would alienate male guests, according to Bensley. “Do you really think any real man could be threatened by a color? If he were, I would not suggest dating him!”

All fixtures and furniture were made bespoke by AA and are combined with period-relevant antiques and artefacts Bensley personally collected at markets and fairs across the world.

Photos courtesy of JW MARRIOTT PHU QUOC

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