

2 minutes with... BILL BENSLEY

The prolific Bangkok-based hotel designer on whimsical style and why he loves Mongolia

Of the hundreds of hotels you've designed, do you have a favourite? I think of the upcoming Bensley Collection – Shinta Mani Wild as a culmination of everything that my life has stood for up until this day. It grows the conservation footprint and, aesthetically, it suits me as I'm a wilderness guy.

What's the most interesting piece of décor you've found? Years ago, in Aix-en-Provence, I found a single-person wooden elevator, from around 1880. I wondered what to do with it for the longest time. Then it hit me: I could put a Fifties Elvis lookalike mannequin inside, dressed in a Twenties-era pink pinstriped zoot suit, and hang it in the stairwell of the soon-to-open Pink Pearl restaurant at the JW Marriott Phu Quoc. Perfection!

Insider tips for seeing Bangkok? Throw away the guide books, ignore TripAdvisor. Eat all the street food. Go to Chatuchak market and talk to the locals. You will fall in love.

A destination that is special to you? I fly fish in Mongolia for a few weeks every summer. I love places that we humans have not ruined and value every second spent seeing what Mother Nature has created without the hand of man. Nature is the ultimate designer – what we do is only second class.

What are you working on now? Gosh, lots! One of the most expensive residential complexes in London's Mayfair, a chalet in Switzerland, a new Four Seasons in Mauritius, The Ritz-Carlton Hainan Island, Oberoi hotels in the Maldives, Kathmandu and the Bardia tiger reserve in Nepal. Plus an experiential 15-tent camp on a roaring river in Cambodia's Cardamom National Park. And Bensley Collection – Shinta Mani Wild straddling Cambodia's Bokor and Kirirom national parks is opening later this year. I'm on pins and needles trying to get it all ready, wish us luck.



INTERVIEW: LAUREL MUNSHOWER; WORDS: CHLOE SACHDEV



Ube ice cream from Soft Swerve and ube hot chocolate from Mamasons (right)

Taste buzz

UBE

Have a plateful of purple

The craze

Pronounced *oo-bay*, the purple tuberous vegetable is commonly found in the Philippines where it's much loved as the main ingredient in the nation's favourite pudding, purple-yam jam. Now it's growing new roots across the globe and turning ice cream, doughnuts, waffles and cheesecake a vibrant velveteen purple. Thanks to its semi-sweet, nutty flavour and electric hue, ube is being hailed as the new matcha by keen-nosed foodies.

Try it

At **Scout's Honor** (0063-2-887 2698) and **Le Petit Soufflé** (0063-2-886 3056) in Manila, quirky pastry chef Miko Aspiras adds ube to cookies, *pastillas* and even bottled milk. London's **Mamasons** (0044-207-267 1871, dirtyicecream.co.uk) turns hot chocolate purple, while in New York, you can order ube ice cream at **Soft Swerve** (001-646-476-6311, softswervenyc.com), and ice-cream sandwiches at **OddFellows Ice Cream Co.** (001-646-756-437, oddfellowsnyc.com), while Raindrop Cake-creator Darren Wong has used it to update the jiggly Japanese dessert at **Brooklyn's Smorgasburg** (smorgasburg.com). In Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Filipino restaurant **Hot Palayok** (00971-4-221 9797; hotpalayok.com) serves it as ice cream atop the popular *halo-halo* ("mix-mix") chilled dessert, a concoction of sweetened beans, evaporated milk and fruit.

Kiss from a rose

Made in Dubai, this refreshing facial mist uses the region's damask roses in a distilled spritz to refresh and revive skin, perfect for the desert environment but equally covetable on tropical trips.

Rosa hydrating facial mist, AED 140, **Hamamii**



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