

Babylon goes haute couture for its Real Studios refurbishment

November 2008 Following their hugely successful transformation of The Roof Gardens' event and private members' Club space last year, Real Studios has again been brought onboard to transform its restaurant venue, Babylon, into a glamorous, contemporary space. From November 10th 2008, guests to this lofty, seventh-floor Kensington eatery will find fabulous lighting features, luxurious wallpaper and fabrics and dramatic imagery evoking the glory days of the iconic 1970s fashion brand Biba, which occupied this building in its heyday.

A new, plush reception space features an antique-styled desk, huge, gilt-framed mirror and a black and white photograph of Biba founder Barbara Hulanicki, standing in the Roof Gardens surrounded by her beloved pink flamingos (ancestors of current residents Bill and Ben). The area is further dramatised by a stunning 'Balance' chandelier from cutting-edge lighting designers Windfall. Faceted Swarovski crystal pieces are suspended on invisible wire, and toplit by narrow beam spotlights. The stairway to the private members' Club downstairs also features individually hung swarovski crystal pieces from the same 'Balance' range which, together with the lush, flock wallpaper, give this space a theatrical splendour.

The Biba reference continues in the adjacent bar, with a large print of a classic Biba babe, reclining on a sumptuous bed of animal-print cushions. A mixture of antique-styled furniture with super sleek modern stools and fixtures creates just the right contemporary feel. Framed in walnut, the bar features a glass front, laminated with champagne-coloured voile – the same fabric which recurs as curtaining and screening elsewhere in the bar.

With a tight turnaround, two weeks from start to finish, minimal structural intervention was required. The restaurant space has been dressed with a back wall of black and white flock wallpaper, and the existing chairs re-upholstered in a glorious array of greens, from moss through to acid, inspired by the leaf-motif velvet upholstery used on the bar's traditional sofas (Designer's Guild).

The only major intervention has been the removal of the signature fish tank from the bar seating area, to a brave new location: the bathrooms. Previously noted for a

'waterfall' wall with view-through partition at the sinks, a whole fish tank wall now sits squarely between the men's and ladies bathrooms, filled with blue and yellow African Lake Fish.

Babylon's private dining area, with fantastic views onto London and the gardens below, has been refurbished in subtle colourings of white, off-white, silver and champagne, with a cream and white version of the same flock wallpaper used elsewhere, lit by pale, painted chandeliers.

Real Studios' design director Yvonne Golds says: 'We have combined traditional motifs with contemporary treatments to give the restaurant its own personality and feel, while also linking it closely with the Roof Gardens venue. The idea is that they complement and enhance each other, while celebrating this stunning garden location.'

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Note to editors

Now celebrating ten years of top quality exhibition and interior design work, Real Studios has demonstrated their ability to achieve the maximum impact and effectiveness for clients with a trio of awards. Last year, Real Studios' refurbishment at The Roof Gardens in Kensington won the venue a 'Best UK Club' in the BEDA Awards 2008, run in association with Night magazine; their local history exhibition was singled out for praise by the judges in awarding the Art Fund Prize to Woking's Lightbox gallery and museum space; and their most recent exhibition work at the Imperial War Museum Duxford, was awarded National Lottery Best Education Project. From the outset, co-founders Yvonne Golds and Alistair McCaw have sought to cover all key disciplines in-house – including graphics, furniture and product design – to provide a turnkey service to clients, and ensure far greater control over the finished project. In the last ten years they have created widely acclaimed interiors schemes for restaurants, bars and hotels, from Virgin Limited Edition's Kensington Roof Gardens and Babylon restaurant in London to Glasgow's aspirational Alea nightclub and casino; and from destination Rhodes 24 (Gary Rhodes' restaurant in Tower 42,

London) to substantial projects for Le Meridien, including the art-inspired Le Meridien in Vienna. They have designed more than twenty exhibitions, including the Imperial War Museum North, the new Airspace exhibition at Duxford and they have worked on many projects at The Natural History Museum, including 2007's precious gems room, 'The Vault' – the museum's first permanent exhibition space since 2002. Their work is typified by a strong narrative sensibility, refined use of colours and textures, sophisticated and creative lighting solutions, plus a knack for achieving maximum impact on tight, commercial budgets.

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