





Designing a big restaurant is a challenge and Yar was no exception. It's Australia's biggest Japanese/Korean restaurant, seating 300 people over four levels. But the interesting thing about this restaurant is that its clever design means that when eating there you never actually feel overwhelmed by its size – quite the reverse. It contains multiple places, hence multiple experiences. It's full of surprises – the sort that you get when opening a tiny Japanese paper package. The materials are simple, as found, not precious. The art is poignant, but also not precious. There's a message here – about finding or making art in everyday things. This is an interior that combines contemporary art, clever material and detail invention, and a robust gutsy response to the bare bones of a raw concrete shell.

Located in Queensbridge Square at the base of Freshwater Place, a recently completed residential/commercial tower complex on Melbourne's Southbank, Yar is a collaboration between architect David Saunders and artist Daniel Truscott. While the restaurant's owners are Korean, the food is a fusion of modern Japanese and Korean cuisine. Saunders was faced with an extremely detailed brief for the kitchen to satisfy the two master chefs flown in from Tokyo and Seoul, but an almost completely open brief for the restaurant proper. He was simply asked to create a unique interior, but with modest means. "I wanted to leave the concrete bare," says Saunders, "and I also wanted to avoid stereotyping the idea of a Japanese restaurant." Instead of the clichéd colour palette of red and black, Saunders opted for red

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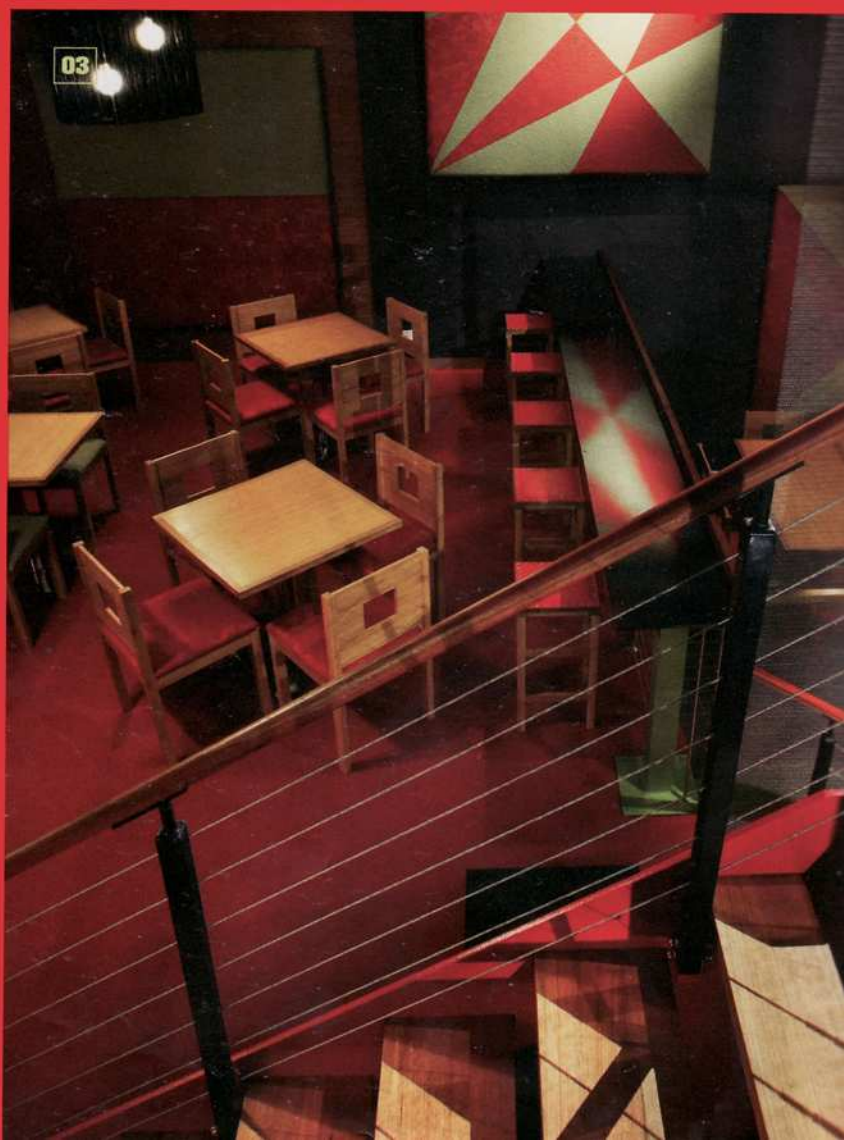
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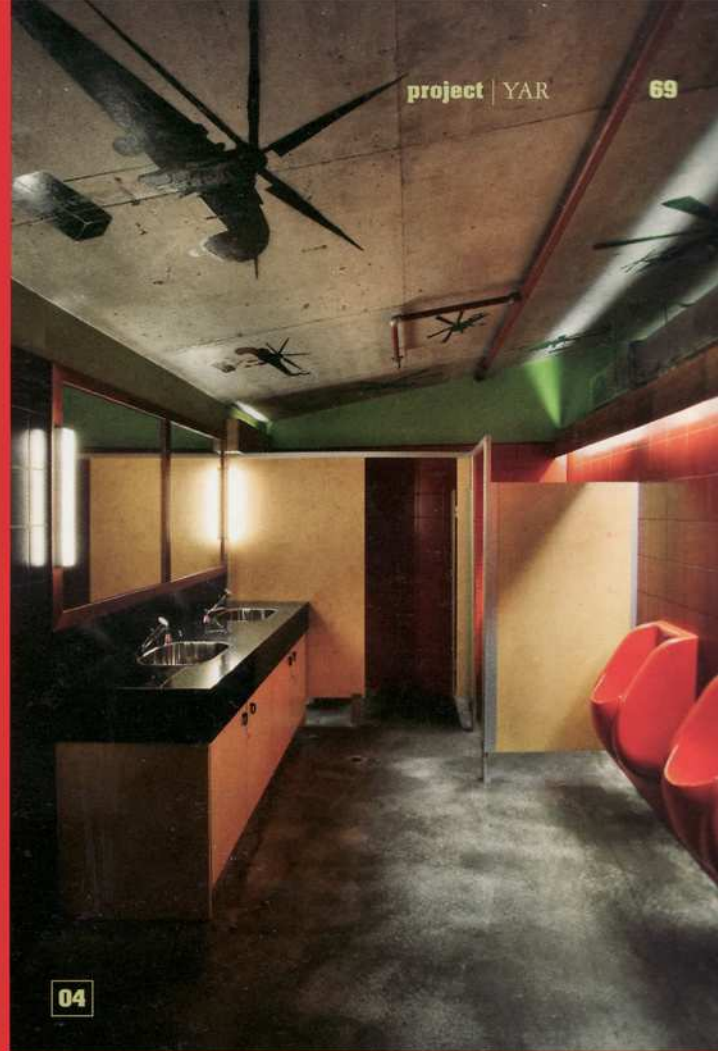
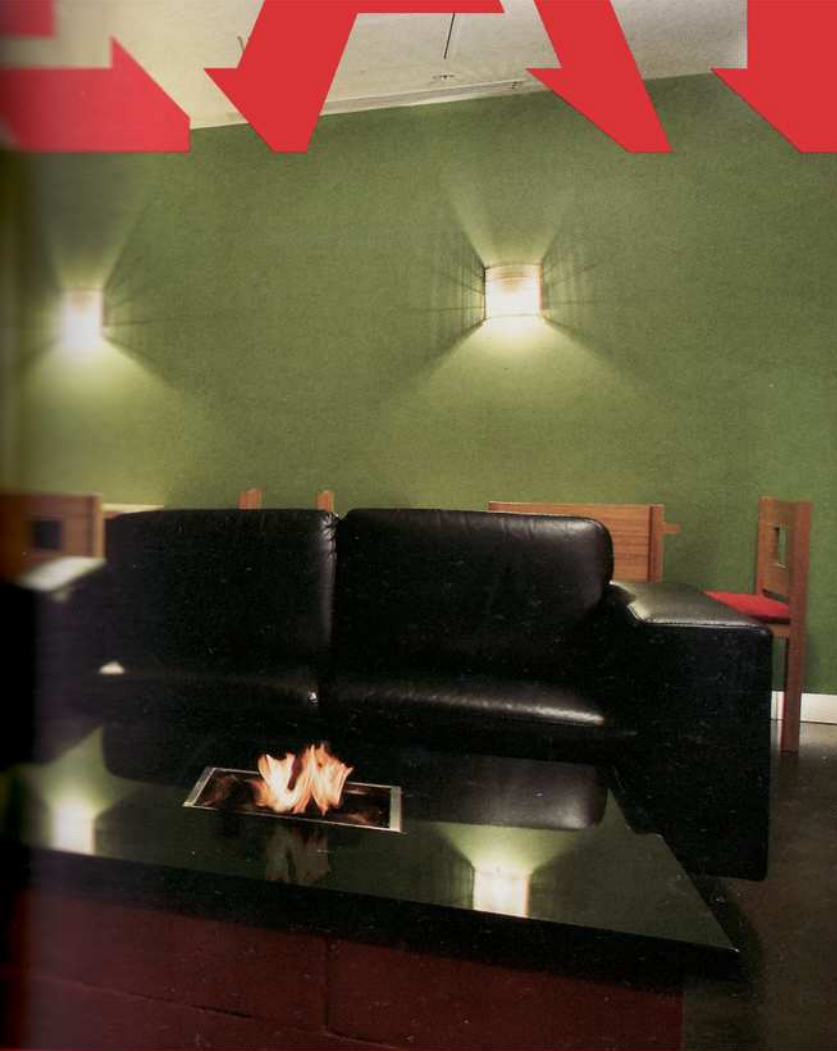
INTERIOR BY S2 DESIGN



and green. He also wanted to work again with Daniel Truscott. In 2005, the two had proposed a giant horse made from milk crates to be erected at Melbourne's Docklands for the Next Wave Festival. It would have been Melbourne's equivalent to the Colossus of Rhodes. But instead of a permanent monument, it was to be a temporary pop-scaled Trojan horse.

This idea of making art objects/experiences with everyday things was to be a driving force in Yar's interior design. Both designers were looking for resonances with the cultural context of Japanese food. Saunders designed lampshades made from bamboo sushi mats and chairs made of laminated bamboo that he had fabricated in China. Truscott painted Japanese koi (carp) on the bare concrete columns and people-scaled Kokeshi dolls on the toilet doors. To attenuate sound, he designed giant fabric acoustic panels that resemble the abstracted shapes of whales that might emerge from origami, the Japanese art of paper-folding.





...at the entrance to
...the staircase VISTA

...can be divided into
...by the use of
...curtains to
...areas

...and stools
...offer different
...for the

...carry through
...colour scheme,
...not to be missed in
...end.

...ground level can eat
...surrounded by
...of preparation and
...for the restaurant.

...dining on the terrace
...Freshwater Place in
...Southbank.

Saunders likes the idea of working with artists and inserting memorable pieces within his spaces. He inserted a giant yak's head, for example, in the tiny and short-lived café/bar known as hard YAK (2005) in Melbourne's Hardware Lane. He's also committed to an ecological sparseness – using plantation plywoods, 100 percent wool carpets and 100 percent cotton fabrics. One of his greatest challenges was the almost dumb quality of the tall narrow volume that he was given to work on. Many things were given, such as the sight of the sloping underside of the car park ramp at ceiling level and having to accommodate myriad exposed services. Saunders decided to bare it all and that's what he had to do to create a series of 'places', different spaces of different characters, where spaces could be small or perhaps even enlarged. Flexibility was the key. On the ground floor, you can eat at a table in the midst of the cooking action. Upstairs, you can retreat to a view overlooking the Yarra or be ushered to a private table within its own 'implied' private room. At Yar, spaces can be divided by hanging string curtains. Stairs and platforms break up the volume and so does a differentiated use of furniture. Varying moods are and can be created. You lose the sense of this being a very large volume. Yar becomes a labyrinth of warmly-lit, comfortable places to eat and drink.

Complementing Saunders' convincing loose-fit design is Truscott's intriguing fusion-art. When he first visited the site with the architect, Truscott was struck by the shell's industrial toughness. He felt that the only thing missing was spray-painted graffiti on the walls and he knew immediately that the idea of stencilling would be appropriate here: "It seemed to me a perfect way for me to unite traditional Asian designs with modern techniques whilst relating to the industrial feel of the space," he says. Instead of the formality of Japanese folded and painted screens and broad scaled murals, Truscott applied his stencilled artworks of traditional Japanese images of koi and cranes in guerrilla-style, hence graffiti-style art across bare concrete columns, on walls, and even on the roof of the toilets.

I love Melbourne, but when I was at Yar, I wanted our sedate city to be a Tokyo, Seoul or Shanghai. I wanted Melbourne to be streaming with people and with rain, so that I could look out from Yar across to a city silhouette of lights and neon, a futuristic scene that might have been the acid rain of the fusion megalopolis that was the centrepiece of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. But I was still content. I'd got the food and the interior right. The city was yet to come. (*inside*)



