

hinge

IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS - HONG KONG



Given that most of us go to the cinema to escape life's frustrations, a cinema complex reeking of escapism is probably inevitable. Or perhaps it's just high time that the 'cinema experience' undergo radical reinvention, given that it's so much easier to curl up in the privacy of one's home with a library of DVDs. Alexander Wong of Hong Kong firm Asiacity Architects hopes to stem the tide of cinema obsolescence with what he describes as "the first designer cinema of Hong Kong". Rather than being planted in some swanky district like Central or Admiralty, though, Wong's latest addition to the cinema chain UA occupies a former supermarket in the satellite town of Tuen Mun.

To send patrons to fantasyland, Wong's design takes several pages out of Alice in Wonderland. Welcomed since January, patrons enter "through the rabbit hole", which consists of an "Eye-Ball Column" that is moulded from strips of wood and encapsulates a spherical screen broadcasting movie trailers, alongside a white fibreglass "portal" sculpture. Ticket purchases are made at the Hall of Dematerialisation - a clutch of free-flowing forms including columns, the box office counter and the ceiling, which Wong explains is "dragged down" to form a series of screens projecting trailers. The whole ensemble, bathed in a red glow and, according to the architect, connoting "an enchanted forest", runs counter to the Liquid Bar. This section, awash in electric blue, is essentially "a bar for the underaged that sells soft drinks, popcorn and confectionery," explains Wong. The counter extends sinuously, cleverly concealing popcorn-makers beneath. A mock ceiling of "marshmallow clouds" hovers above the bar while circular "bubble" convex mirrors behind provide multiple reflections of the giant glimmering UA sign emblazoned on the mirrored facade opposite. A swirling wood ceiling motif completes the scene. Veiled behind the mirrored facade lie four distinctly themed theatres variously named Inferno, Magic Forest, The Cave, and Golden Dreams. Colourful as their names may be, no theatre steals the show from feature films as elements of design are kept to a splash of colour and a smattering of motif.

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