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RAW

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Singapore-based WEIJENBERG crafts a restaurant interior as artful as the cuisine served within

contract



RAW

Architect **WEIJENBERG**

Client **Hasmore**

Where **Taipei, Taiwan**

What **5,000 square feet on one floor**

Cost/At **Withheld at client's request**

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One's experience of a masterful work of art is invariably intimate and, ultimately, very personal. Award-winning Asian chef André Chiang aims to evoke similar responses in those who partake of his exceptional food. So in his quest to create a new restaurant in Taipei, Taiwan, that would set the stage for such an interaction with his gastronomic creations, he turned to the Singapore-based architecture and design firm WEIJENBERG. The result of their collaboration is called RAW, a place where object, subject, and context merge in harmony. And, like a great work of art, it promises to inspire, too.

"André's artistic vision for food allowed us to discuss the design on a much deeper level," says Dutch-born architect Camiel Weijenbergh, the firm's principal and founder. "While André had specific ideas about the interior design, he also provided the creative freedom to actualize a new entity of restaurant that is fast becoming a hallmark of Taipei."

Situated on Lequn 3rd Road, the chic culinary hub of the city, the 5,000-square-foot, 56-seat restaurant not only reflects the visceral, primitive qualities its name evokes but it communicates how Chiang

wishes his food to be experienced. As glimpsed through the glass storefront, the centerpiece of the interior is a curvaceous wine bar constructed of spruce wood blocks joined with traditional shipbuilding techniques and resembling a massive piece of driftwood. It twists to form built-in benches that line the walls of the lounge area in front and draws the eye further into the restaurant's restrained interior.

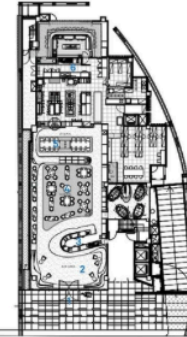
"André's food is always presented with artistry," Weijenbergh says. The food served as the muse for the selection of a subdued and minimal material palette, including concrete walls and copper light fixtures, which allow the chef's creations to take center stage. The goal, Weijenbergh says, was "to create a close proximity between customer and food. The experience of André's food is intended to be intimate."

Spaces without borders

With the notion of intimacy as a guiding design principle, wood was implemented "in its pure state," as Weijenbergh describes it, to create the organic form that draws guests into the tranquil lounge in front and

Floor Plan

- 1 Entrance
- 2 Lounge
- 3 Wine bar
- 4 Dining area
- 5 Semiprivate dining
- 6 Kitchen



The centerpiece of the restaurant, which is visible from the street (top), is a wine bar (left) made of spruce wood that extends to form bench seating in the front lounge (above).



The curving wood elements (left) define the dining area without partitioning it off. Local craftspeople built the wooden installations by joining blocks of spruce wood (below) using traditional shipbuilding techniques. Even the volumes of the restrooms (bottom left) appear as works of art. A semiprivate dining area (bottom right) is near the back of the restaurant.



Key Design Highlights

A curvilinear wine bar is constructed of spruce wood blocks that are joined using shipbuilding techniques.

The subdued materials and lighting, including concrete walls and copper light fixtures, keep the focus on the food.

Zones within the restaurant are suggested by the shapes of the wood elements and floor material transitions.

Melding beauty and function, the wine bar conceals storage and supports a serving island.

further within the dining area. Instead of dividing the interior with walls, Weijenberg signified zones through transitions in floor materials, such as the wood path that leads from the lounge to the restaurant area and the placement of wood elements, including a second island toward the rear that echoes the wine bar's form and wraps a semiprivate dining area.

"It was important not to have distinct partitions, as we felt this boxy approach would be restrictive for a highly creative chef," says Weijenberg, who is also trained as a carpenter and worked closely with local craftspeople to create the bar and other custom features, including tables, chairs, and wall panels. Altogether, these components are designed to "encapsulate the customers within a wooden sculpture in a gentle manner," Weijenberg says.

An array of distinct restaurant functions and operations were integrated into the design. While the sculptural bar defines the room

and stands like a sweeping work of art, it is functional, too, concealing storage and supporting a serving island with a massive counter. Comprised of two weighty pieces, it is reinforced with steel and diagonal bracing to meet seismic requirements.

"I wanted the space to look packed and warm but still have a see-through effect: it doesn't look crowded; it doesn't look empty; there are no cold corners," says Chiang. "The design follows the essence of RAW's cuisine, which is organic and natural, but when you look closely, you see the fine, subtle details of meticulous craft."

The sweeping elements simultaneously draw guests closer to the food and weave them in as animated contributors to the overall ensemble. Both the architect and chef view RAW as "gastronomy fused with design," according to Weijenberg, as well as a place "where food meets art." ■

