

COMMERCIAL

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The essential guide for Middle East interior design professionals

An ITP Business Publication

May Vol. 10 Issue 5

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MEET IRANIAN  
DESIGNER SHIRIN EHYA

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REVEALS ITS DESIGN-DRIVEN INTERIOR



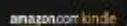
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# May 2014

VOLUME 10 ISSUE 5

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CASE STUDY

# SWAN LAKE

KAREN EGLY-THOMPSON REPORTS ON THE GALLERY HBA'S DESIGN OF IL LAGO DEI CIGNI RESTAURANT IN RUSSIA, WHICH LOOKS TO THE BALLET FOR INSPIRATION







## CASE STUDY

**W**hile the design of many Italian restaurants draws inspiration from their Mediterranean roots, the Il Lago dei Cigni restaurant in St. Petersburg, Russia looks to the romance of the ballet. Meaning “swan lake” in Italian, its name not only references Tchaikovsky’s famous dance composition, but also its location.

Built by the creators of St. Petersburg’s trendy Buddha Bar, Il Lago dei Cigni lies alongside a picturesque wooded pond on Krestovsky Island, an upscale area of St. Petersburg where those favoured by csars once resided. The restaurant is located next to the

“swan house”, a home base for the elegant birds that grace the island’s idyllic waters.

Designed by The Gallery HBA in London, the two-story restaurant’s beguiling design is woven from a peculiar, but wonderfully imaginative mix of narratives. “Tchaikovsky’s composition was originally inspired by Russian folktales, so these legends formed a perfect foundation for our storyline. Our aim has been to translate the ballet’s intensity, passion and romance into Il Lago dei Cigni’s dramatic décor,” says principal and creative director Inge Moore.

Perhaps the most striking of folkloric elements The Gallery HBA so elegantly

incorporates is an enchanting columnar chandelier in the shape of a weeping willow tree interpreted as a maypole. Selenite, a semi-transparent crystal formed from gypsum, creates the “trunk” of the tree. Rough split clefts of the crystal are vertically layered to resemble bark, dissolving into a spherical 4.7m high ceiling soffit, which emits a soft glow of light washing down its textured trunk. A free-flowing canopy of “tree branches” up to 6.3m in width is created by hanging threads of golden wire, sprinkled with selenite crystals and chimerical metal amulets.

As a spokesperson for the firm sums up, the chandelier “is a shimmering



1

Il Lago dei Cigni, inspired by Tchaikovsky; photography by Eric Laignel.

2

The main dining room displays a theatrical chandelier inspired by Russian folklore.

3

Decorative accessories help play out the interior’s story.

4

The shelving has a rustic appeal.







allusion to Russian fairytales and the folklore around maypole dancing, the ancient rite of dancing in the forest to celebrate the solstice and the rhythms of nature." When we asked Moore what she feels is the most successful component of the design, she quickly cites the selenite maypole. She adds, "When kids enter the room, they run to touch it – and the adults would so the same but they practice more restraint!"

Despite being constructed of hard-wearing materials, the effect permeates lightness and fragility. Moore reflects why selenite was chosen for the project: "The delicate, frosty white luminescence of selenite looks beautiful in all the seasons – it reflects the glints of light from the snow and the ripples in the lake. Although it is smooth to the touch, it has irregular clefts which are part of its beauty."

Vernacular details also enter through textiles. Slavic motifs take form in

pierced, stylised floral patterns on decorative pillows placed amongst the seating. A subtle gold colour, the pillows bridge the past with the more contemporary earthy brown herringbone and leather dining room upholstery in caramel and cordovan. The cut and loop area rug designed by The Gallery HBA in rich espresso and cream translates the design of traditional lace doilies and adds a touch of femininity to the space. The rug, made by ICE International, mimics the circular shape of the chandelier above.

In addition to traditional motifs, The Gallery HBA also incorporates into its design 17th century components referencing the city's history. Peter the Great envisioned his new capital city as the "Venice of the North", with a commitment to allure architects, scientists and philosophers of the day. This enthusiasm for Enlightenment-era intellect is acknowledged by an array



of scientific curiosities carefully displayed on wooden shelves throughout the restaurant. Specimens such as butterflies and beetles are preserved under glass cloches. Oversized antique brass magnifying glasses, framed pen and ink sketches of swans, and French manuscript bound together in parcel

5 The first floor dining space entails an intimate setting.

6 The circular rug in the main dining hall compliments the shape of the lighting piece.



twine are interspersed amongst the timber shelves. Pillar candles with selenite shades made by Stonefish provide candlelight for exploration and discovery. In fact, selenite crystals are known as “healing stones” and create a calming effect that is ripe for clarity, understanding and concentration – perfect for scholarly pursuits.

In keeping with the nature-based aesthetic, wood is used heavily throughout the restaurant. In addition to the shelving, wide plank light teak timber floors from Indonesia wash the space in warmth. A series of hefty wood beams overhead anchors the linear axis of the bar area in a more intimate setting. Chamfered corners catch light thrown from the adjacent private dining rooms, adding layered dimension at the ceiling level.

7  
A private dining area.

8  
The chandelier was inspired by the folklore surrounding maypole dancing.







Clefts of selenite on the otherwise understated bar front are dramatically washed in light. Suspended from rustic chains and a timber backing, the hand-blown coloured glass bauble light fixture by Preciosa warms the shivery aura of the selenite. The sinuous edge of the bar top mimics the waves of the water just outside.

Near the bar, two private dining spaces are screened off from the public areas by panelled slicing wood doors trimmed with substantial textured copper hardware. A coloured glass chandelier which coordinates with the bar fixture and antique mirror on the private dining room's rear wall adds luminance and drama. Meanwhile, bronzed metal rods sandwiched between uplit glass sheets forms the upper portion of the private dining wall, serving as a screened transom from the exterior.

9

Il Lago dei Cigni sits on an idyllic pond.

When dining outdoors is more appealing than behind closed doors, Il Lago dei Cigni offers waterside dining on two levels. Weather-permitting, alfresco dining on the lower level accommodates thirty guests.

The upstairs terrace includes a rooftop bar with a glass canopy, protecting visitors from harsh weather, yet still open to take advantage of the island's breezes. Foliage arrangements form semi-private nooks for dining or lounging on sofas outfitted with throws. Sun-bleached wood decking, woven seating, as well as the rustic metal finish on the contemporary light fixtures perpetuate the clean, natural aesthetic that is present indoors.

Taking in the view is paramount to Il Lago dei Cigni's layout. The round footprint of the main dining room, in rhythmic unison with the columnar light

fixture, features colossal floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows. Visual access to the outdoors is still maintained throughout the more axial portions of the restaurant, with ceiling-height windows separating the indoor dining area from the waterside outdoor terrace. Whether summer, winter, fall or spring, the island's natural scenery serves as a backdrop to the restaurant's interior.

Russian ballet patriarch Fyodor Lopukhov referred to Swan Lake as a "national ballet" because swans are present in Russian lyrical sources and several of the ballet's movements originate from Slavonic ring dances. Like the ballet, The Gallery HBA's design for Il Lago dei Cigni infuses fantasy, drama, motion and touches of vernacular design to create a setting that takes its guests to another place in time within the Russian landscape.