

By Jo Baker
Photography by Robert McLeod

cambodian cool



This page: The garden at Hotel de la Paix. *Opposite page:* Guests can dine on swing beds.

Glamour and local culture's elegant blend in Siem Reap



As a recent addition to the city of Siem Reap and Cambodia's growing collection of high-end properties, the Hotel de la Paix stands out for both its modern sense of glamour, and its fashionable, yet careful appraisal of local Khmer culture. "There was no brief other than a strict budget," says Bill Bensley of his namesake Bangkok design studio, who was chosen because of his work on hipper-than-hip establishments such as the Bed Supper Club in Bangkok, and took on both the architecture and interior design. "The client just trusted us. I love it when that happens and I put my all into a project with free rein."

The architecture packs a punch in its downtown location, where white Art Deco columns gleam and steel torches flame nightly to a backdrop of wheezing cars and dusty, potholed roads. However inside is a cool cocoon of gray hues and cream terrazzo providing a soothing introduction.

Inspired by the inner sanctum of nearby Angkor, the entrance lobby is a tall, formal space of smooth stone and paginated metal, adorned centrally with a single uplit statue of a Khmer woman. This sets the bar for the interior aesthetic: calming and elegantly

Below: The hotel's sleek lounge with its glowing bar.

Opposite page: A two-person soaking tub sits in the center of a suite.

Asian in its clean lines and local, textured fabrics. The coloring also remains subdued, with a faintly masculine palette of gray, cream, and black offset by stunning black and white photography, deco furniture pieces in raw silk, and ornate antiqued pewter murals. "The entrance lobby is one's first impression of [the hotel] and it must be a wow," Bensley says. "A tall, well-proportioned space remembering the space of Angkor's inner sanctum is detailed to be a contemporary version of the old deco Hotel de la Paix."

In the large 107 guestrooms and suites (including nine Duplex Spa suites with private terraces and oversized tubs, Courtyard Garden Suites with outdoor tubs on private garden terraces, and pool suites with their own plunge pool), Bensley kept plenty of Southeast Asian touches but the overall impression is of simple,





contemporary luxury. Wooden furniture floats on hidden bases and bathrooms (with two-person tubs) are sculptural and swathed in cream terrazzo, while iPod systems (already stocked with music) provide a tech edge. “[We] looked to the way the Dutch portrayed the Far East in their 1920s deco-like travel journals,” he explains.

Dining options at de la Paix range from a simple, almost rustic café at the front and a chic Arts Lounge at the back, to a more formal courtyard dining area. All have their quiet sense of drama, with the sexy, living room-like



Above: Guestrooms feature wooden furniture and Far East-inspired headboards. *Opposite page, top and bottom:* Guests reach poolside lounging areas (and the spa) by a series of bridges.

lounge featuring LED lighting, a glowing bar, various seating options (from beds and traditional *kan tok* to oversized French colonial charcoal leather armchairs), and contemporary Khmer art; while the restaurant offers suspended, swing dining beds around a reflective pool. “The decorations are 100 percent architectural,” Bensley says, noting that a vast, lushly landscaped deco swimming pool and a three-story Asian-inspired spa round out the property. **hd**



Hotel de la Paix

Siem Reap, Cambodia

Owner Sokoun Chanpreda

Architecture and Interior Design Firm

Bensley Design Studio, Bangkok

Architecture and Interior Design

Project Team Bill Bensley

Contractor and Engineering Consultant

MEPS

Purchasing Firm Bed Management

Company

Lighting/Landscaping/Engineering

Consultant BDS

LOBBY AREA

Furniture Chime Design

Fabric Ratcha Nida

DUPLEX SUITE

Loose Furniture Chime Design

Built-In Furniture Kanok Furniture

Fabric Mae Fah Luang

POOL AREA

Furniture Chime Design

Fabric Sunbrella

COURTYARD

Furniture Wiphanai

Fabric Sunbrella