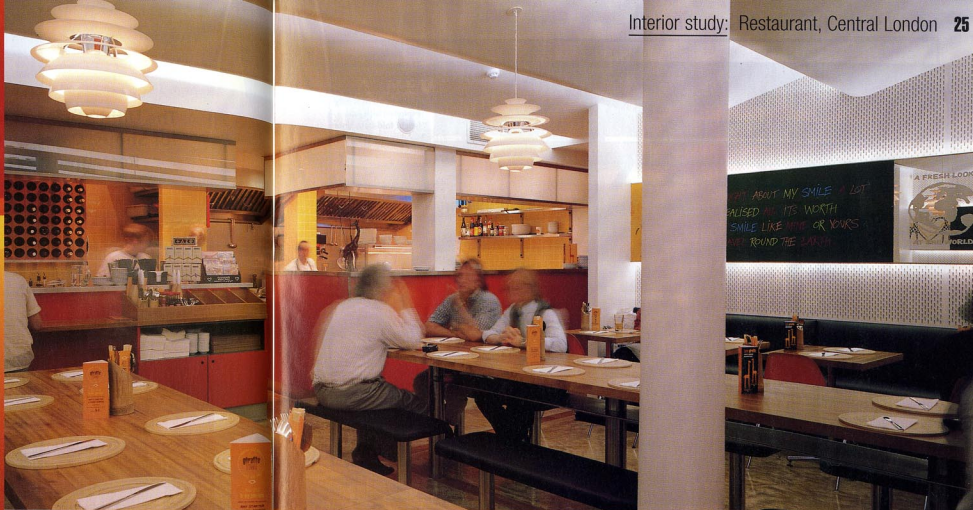


Tall order

At Giraffe, a new restaurant in Central London, architect Stiff + Trevillion sticks its neck out and fuses bold colours and patterns to suit the eclectic cuisine.

by Miriam Cadji



The main eating area (top right) is defined by the overlapping boomed ceiling. A more intimate eating area slots into the corner (below) for a ring-side view of the open kitchen and bar. Vibrant colour saturates the stairs leading to the chill out area below (above).

CHRIS CROOK/VIEW



The interior spills out onto the south facing terrace – a welcome addition which is fully exploited with full-height fold-back doors.

TIME WAS WHEN NOODLES CAME OUT OF A tin, covered in tomato sauce. Now they are found in spaces so cool they are called 'bars'. Architect Stiff + Trevillion is perhaps guilty of initiating this trend: the practice designed a noodle bar for Wagamama in 1991, which inspired many subsequent informal restaurants.

At the practice's latest gastronomic addition, Giraffe (not a noodle bar), the concept had already been dreamed up by the client, which opened its first restaurant in North-west London last year. Stiff and Trevillion was drafted in to help with the design after the client saw its work at Satsuma, another London restaurant. Any similarity with Wagamama ends at the tradition of communal eating at strip tables with matching benches. With its riot of colour – 'This is much more eclectic,' says Stiff – the restaurant makes its predecessors look rather puffed by comparison. It's clearly about fun: the interior is bold and vibrant, with colour, graphics and pattern working together to produce a strong, but slick aesthetic; the food fuses big flavours from North Africa, the Middle East, South-east Asia and the Mediterranean.

Whereas in the original branch the services were left exposed (the budget was lower), here the ceiling is the focal point of the room. Softly rounded louvres overlap each other above the central eating area – a white rectilinear space set against the tangerine interior. The ceiling responds to the plan – pulling in the eye from the window towards the 'theatre' of the restaurant – the open kitchen and bar – at the back. 'There's a bit of Aalto in there I suppose. We wanted to extend the width of the space and give it a strong linear look,' says Stiff. More than a quirky visual

effect, the ceiling is also functional, concealing air conditioning ducts and lighting, and acting as an acoustic baffle for the flats above.

The walls are lined with perforated MDF acoustic boards giving it a 1950s Royal Festival Hall feel, enhanced by the Louis Poulson lights suspended in the central eating area to supplement the concealed spots, and the Eames coat hanger rack and chairs.

Solid iroko hardwood is used throughout – on the well-detailed front door, and for the joinery and flooring. 'We were told it's sustainable – we try to persuade clients to use sustainable materials wherever possible.' The long tables have rounded edges and are lined with matching benches, upholstered in leather for a less spartan finish than noodle-bar style. The benches are screwed into the scribed floor, which was textured by sanding white cement into the surface before applying a lacquer.

The iroko extends outside as decking on the terrace, a welcome south-facing addition sheltered by a generous awning. It is accessed through floor to ceiling height windows that fold back completely.

Downstairs – described by the architect as the 'Austin Powers space' for its 1960s quality – is a chill-out area with brightly coloured sofas, and saturated orange and tangerine walls which slope right down to meet the coloured, poured-resin floor.

Restaurant design is a fast-moving area: already the architect has been asked to improve the first Giraffe and is committed for two other branches in London. But don't expect more of the same design – each one will have its own character. 'It's temporary architecture really,' admits Stiff. 'It's not going to be around forever, but it does have amazing public presence.'