# HOSPITALITY Kvoto **Group dynamics**

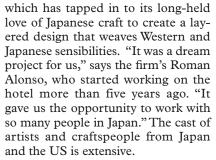
The expansion of a storied Kyoto building into Ace Hotel's first Japanese venture called for a dizzving collaboration of creatives.

By Fiona Wilson Photography Kohei Take

wooden buildings and temples, the Shimpukan comes from a different part of the ancient city's architectural past. A handsome brick building on Karasuma Street in the centre of the city, it was designed in 1926 by in the entrance to a series of printed Tetsuro Yoshida, a modernist who had studied in Germany. Originally the even designed the hotel's logo. Kyoto Central Telephone Company Building, the Shimpukan has been headquartered hotel brand.

"When we're looking for properalways engaged by the history and lore that a potential site might hold," officer. "Kengo Kuma is a longtime Kyoto family business. friend of Ace and has been sending us potential sites in Japan for years." The makers out of their comfort zones Shimpukan was just the property that the hotel group was looking for: an old building with history and a sym- of them responded positively and pathetic modern addition. "[Kuma's] studio, KKAA, designed an entirely US artisans were commissioned new ground-up building crafted with too. For the Italian restaurant, Kori local materials that create visual refer- Girard - grandson of textile designer ences to traditional rvokans and reside Alexander Girard - created a tiled seamlessly alongside the historic portion of the property," says Sawdon. were printed by hand in Berkeley and "KKAA connected these two struc- then assembled in Japan. tures in an honest dialogue with one another, creating an expansive space design with a vintage look and pieces where the future meets the past."

For the interiors, Ace worked with a regular collaborator, the Los Angeles-based Commune Design,



The key collaboration was with legendary Japanese designer Samiro Yunoki, whom Alonso describes as Although Kyoto is famous for its old the godfather of the project. The now 98-year-old took some time to be convinced but once he was on board he went "above and beyond". His work is evident throughout the building, from the beautiful noren (door hanging) works on the walls of the rooms. He

There are craft and art pieces throughout the hotel: earthy ceramic renovated and extended by Japanese pots by artist-fisherman Kazunori architect Kengo Kuma and forms part Hamana ("way out of our league of a new 213-room Ace Hotel, the first but he wanted to participate," says opening in Japan for the Los Angeles- Alonso); curtains and upholstery fabrics by Tokyo studio Minä Perhonen; tiles made in Shiga prefecture; a frieze ties to house an Ace Hotel, we are in the main restaurant by Kyoto paper specialist Kamisoe; and spectacular spherical bamboo and paper lights says Kelly Sawdon, Ace's chief brand by Kobishiva Chube, a 200-year-old

"We had to pull some of these and get them to think differently about their craft but every single one came through," says Alonso. Many floor and room-dividing screens that

The furniture is a mix of custom from Japanese furniture-makers such as Tendo Mokko. Bedrooms have Commune-designed beds with Ace's signature Pendleton blankets and the







(I) Staff at the hotel's Piopiko cocktail bar and taco lounge (2) Tatami suite with artwork by Samiro Yunoki (3) Workspace in the entrance lobby

(I) Cocktail hour (2) General manager Nico Black (3) Taco at Piopiko (4) Terrace at Mr Maurice's Italian (5) Piopiko cocktail bar (6) Chairs by Isamu Kenmochi (7) Garden courtyard (8) Stumptown café's Andrew Curry (9) The Shimpukan building

bathrooms feature amenities from Tokyo skincare and nail brand Uka.

Instead of opening a Japanese restaurant – an impossibly competitive market in Kyoto – Ace has brought a US vibe via a cocktail bar and taco lounge by Wes Avila (the chef behind Guerrilla Tacos in Los Angeles), a cosy Italian from Philadelphia chef Marc Vetri and a third all-day restaurant due to open later this year. Stumptown Coffee Roasters has opened its first coffee shop in Japan here too.

These are clearly challenging times to be opening a hotel. Kyoto has suffered an almost complete drop in visitors from overseas but it should soon welcome the return of Japanese tourists, for whom the city has long been a favourite destination. "Obviously it's not ideal," says general manager Nico Black, who moved from LA to Kyoto last year. "But this time is giving us the chance to get to know the community and for locals to get to know us." It's an interesting area too, with a historic sweet shop just across the way, typical of the dense texture that characterises Kyoto's tight streets. Visitors can explore on one of the hotel's Tokyo Bikes: Nishiki Market is down the road and Nijo Castle and the Imperial Palace are within striking distance.

The rest of the Shimpukan, now known as Shin Puh Kan, houses shops such as Beams Japan, Bonjour Records and Pilgrim Surf + Supply (see page 132), plus an outlet of independent cinema chain Uplink. The development, which is directly connected to Kyoto's subway, is a welcome addition to the city and it comes as a relief that the building has been restored rather than demolished – never guaranteed in Kyoto. A programme of cultural events and exhibitions should be up and running before the year is out. "Our vision was for this to be a place for everyone, offering different experiences depending on what you're looking for," says Kelly Sawdon. "We wanted to build Ace Hotel Kyoto as our love letter to Japan." — (M) acehotel.com/kyoto













## Kyoto directory

## Jiki Mivazawa

Ten-seat restaurant serving seasonal dishes presented to perfection; every detail is a pleasure. Punctuality essential. jiki-miyazawa.com

### 2. FIL Kyoto

Cult brand that combines founder Hiroki Nakamura's love of Japanese craft and Americana; indigo shirts, jeans and shoes. visvim.tv

### 3. Kyukyodo

Founded in 1663 as a pharmacy, Kyukoyodo now specialises in stationery, calligraphy brushes and incense. kyukyodo.co.jp







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