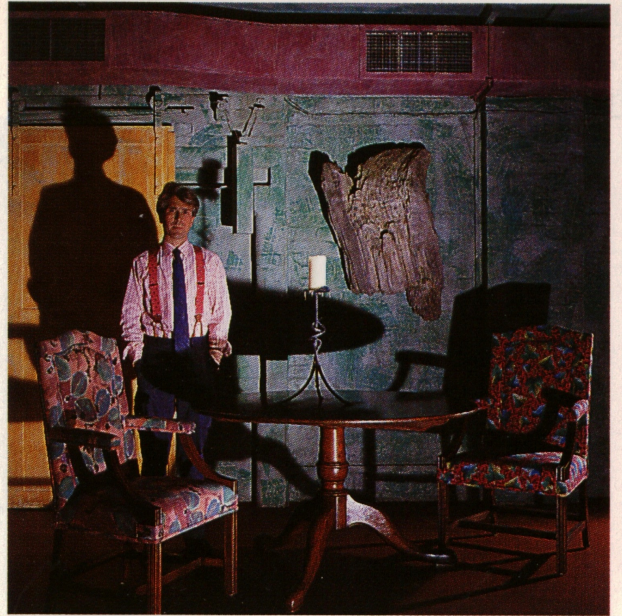


DESIGN

Club of many colours



In an old Chelsea bottling plant, a forbidding speakeasy door

now leads into a cosy explosion of colour. CAROLINE CLIFTON-MOGG

applauds the best designed night-club of the year



When is a bottling plant not a bottling plant? Easy, when it's a Nautilus gym. Wrong – when it's a night club. There in three succinct sentences you have the design history of the hottest club designed in 1990 – above the Furniture Cave, in the King's Road – eMbargo.

Hot, because it is owned by Jeremy Norman, of Embassy fame, and hotter still because the design has been done by one of London's coolest designers, Derek Frost.

Changing a bottling plant into a night club, via a gym, is simple really. First you take out all the bottling machinery, then you build the gym, then you destroy the gym, but keep all the stuff that will work in the night club. Like the glass brick floors which are the old gym shower walls, and the mirror glass counter which sits on two of the shower's steel shafts. No change to the air ducts and so on. They all stay.

Club decoration over the last decade has followed a path that led from a Chicago speakeasy just as far as NYC – a style complete with curved bars, chrome and glass; black, shiny, uncomfortable, but smart – then.

But isn't it time, I hear, through the smoke filled room, for something entirely different? Yes it is: like Dorothy landing in Oz – suddenly we have colour.

At eMbargo, there are syrup-coloured walls, raspberry purée pillars, blackcurrant-fool air ducts, pistachio ice-cream ceilings, and lime cordial windows.

Derek Frost was inspired by the work of Mexican architect Luis Barragan (see *H&Q* September 1989), whose flat blocks of pure rich colour are an artistic as well as an architectural form; he also, like everyone who saw it, was much moved by the Glyndebourne production of *Katya Kabanova*, designed by Tobias Hoheisel, which used strong angled flats of colour that threw the drama into high relief.

'Because it is a private members' club, we wanted the entrance to be hidden and unfriendly; forbidding, even,' Derek says. It is. First, a steel staircase with industrial railings and walls. Then, memories of Chicago again, a closed door stares back at you. Then, suddenly, you're in.

Above: designer Derek Frost, standing in the eating area of the club. Far left: hand-carved Indian peasant chair upholstered in string. Behind it hangs an abstract oil on canvas by Martyn Brewster. Left: pastel drawing – The Jester – by Sharon Aivaliotos – all pictures in the club come from the Thumb Gallery. Below: paper lights against a mirrored background, designed by Sarah Hocombe





Above: bar with free-standing table made of cracked mirror sandwiched between glass. Left: old metal sliding door painted in sweeps of turquoise, purple and ochre

A bright red lobby leads you down to colour and light. It's happening. What Derek calls immediacy.

The chairs don't match, that's nice; nor do the tables; and nor do the bar stools. Six of one, six of another – anything to get away from the dreary monotony of a company club.

Derek Frost, who designs furniture as well as interiors, has a large group of craftsmen with whom he works. He speaks of this project as a joint effort. On this occasion there was Harry Lendrum, who did the specialist hand painting; Auriol Innes who painted all the swirling curtains by hand; Sarah Hocombe, who specialises in sculpture, did the stretched paper lights which are a homage to Japanese sculptor Isamu Noguchi. Based on his designs, she wanted to develop further the basic Japanese lantern. The lights were to look like friendly flying insects – and they do, like UFOs floating in night space.

Tim Sherburne did the metal work and in particular, the amazing chandelier, and Catherine Purvis the wall-lights in the lobby. The planters were by Michael Savage, and the bold etched steel chess/backgammon tables are by Adrian Reynolds.

There is very little sense of chrome and mirror, although there is actually quite a lot of both, in particular in the illusionist counters, seemingly of broken glass – mirror on the bottom level, broken glass in the centre, then clear whole glass on top.

As Derek says, 'It is all very modern, but you must understand that I am opposed to what most people understand by modern. This is warm and cosy.'

It is Derek, it is.



Additional eMbargo Image from French Design Magazine

A I L L E U R S

EMBARGO: UN EXTRAORDINAIRE «SUPPER CLUB», Imaginé par Derek Frost, avec six jeunes étudiants du RCA, dirigé par une belle impérieuse, Diana Wand, reçoit dans ses salons pétillants de couleurs, une haute société mélangée autour d'un mobilier qui ne l'est pas moins. A noter, le retour des gerberas, les appliques post-Naguchi et l'exercice de styles des tabourets de bar.

