

# AN AESTHETE'S DREAM COME TRUE

*Besides handsome design details, the Mandarin Oriental Wangfujing in Beijing is also full of luxurious touches inspired by the city's history, says Mavis Teo*



From top: *Mountain Pasture with Floating Cloud*, a mixed media art piece by Yao Lu; Koi Lamp by Frank Gehry  
Opposite page: Sunset views of the Forbidden Palace from the hotel terrace



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he Mandarin Oriental Wangfujing opened in the middle of last year (2019) to bated breath and much fanfare. Housed within the metropolis' latest and most opulent multi-purpose complex, the WF Central designed by world-renowned architects Kohn Pedersen Fox, the hotel is within walking distance to the iconic Tiananmen Square and Forbidden City.

The hotel deserves all the superlatives it can get because for one of Asia's finest luxury hotel brands, its arrival is long overdue, although this is not for a lack of trying under different earlier owners. The first one literally went up in flames in 2009 while still under construction. Plans to build one in 2015 were abandoned. But as the saying goes: third time lucky. And this time, it doesn't disappoint.

## BEAUTY AT EVERY TURN

Art lovers, particularly Frank Gehry fans, might let out a squeal of delight (like yours truly) if they look up at the ceiling of the compact lobby upon arrival. Suspended from the ceiling and circling above





From top: Rooms at the Mandarin Oriental Wangfujing start at 55sqm, making them some of the largest hotel rooms in Beijing. Most rooms offer sprawling panoramic views of the Forbidden Palace; The MO Bar serves a special cocktail menu inspired by landmarks and major historical events in the city

cloud-patterned reliefs pay tribute to an era when heavenly imagery was in vogue and revered.


### A NOD TO IMPERIAL HISTORY

Besides a well-appointed spa, there are other quiet spots for retreat and relaxation. One of them is The Library, which was inspired by Sir Ernest Morrison, an Australian who had served as advisor to the imperial court and lived in the area. Here guests can enjoy an afternoon tea or browse

an impressive collection of books, which includes the 60-volume *The Complete Collection of Chinese Arts* – an art lover’s treasure as it covers the country’s most famous artefacts over 5,000 years. To get to The Library, guests walk through a skylight corridor that reinterprets the walkways that flank the courtyard gardens of wealthy families and court officials during the Qing dynasty.

The MO Bar, which channels traditional Chinese medicinal halls with a wall of pull-out drawers, has a specially curated cocktail menu that pays tribute to the city’s landmarks. Other F&B options include the all-day dining Café Zi overseen by feted Hong Kong chef Wong Wing-Keung, and the Adam D. Tihany-designed Mandarin Grill + Bar, which is decorated with black and white photographs by Chinese photographer Jin Shisheng and French photojournalist Louis-Philippe Messelier.

Those who know Chinese history will appreciate the refined references to its culture in the hotel. The uninitiated may now be interested to learn more about this 5,000-year-old civilisation as Chinese culture is undergoing a revival. Many of its finer aspects were sadly obliterated during the Cultural Revolution as they were deemed bourgeois by Mao’s Red Army.

While city hotels are never quite meant for one to check in and linger, it would be hard to venture out much if you pick this Mandarin Oriental outpost. But you should. With your appetite for traditional and contemporary Chinese art whetted, consider signing up for a tour of 798, Beijing’s famous art district, or visit some private galleries through the hotel concierge. 



guests are three of his ceramic koi fishes in pink, red and peach chasing one another in a circle. Although Gehry has made over 150 of these fish lamps out of Formica fragments, the one here is the first multi-hued lamp on public display. It might take you a while to notice the good-looking staff with winsome smiles in draping silk

blouses designed by Vivienne Tam waiting to greet you.

Although the property has only 73 rooms and suites – making it one of the brand’s smallest hotels, it offers one of the most spacious rooms in the city starting from 55sqm. From the sprawling rooms (tip: choose the Mandarin Rooms for the best views) and the rooftop bar, you get spectacular panoramas of the labyrinthine Forbidden Palace.

For the interiors, Hirsch Bedner Associates (HBA) took cues from the property’s location while staying true to the Mandarin Oriental’s signature style of contemporary luxe. The rooms and suites are dressed in a palette of luscious violets and soothing jade, with traditional Chinese motifs woven into the furnishings. Taking centre stage in the sleeping area of the suite is a four-poster bed frame carved with designs of flowers and trees. Even the whorl-patterned plush teal-blue carpet’s pattern is inspired by Chinese ceramics and the water wells of Wangfujing built since the Qing dynasty. In the bathroom,