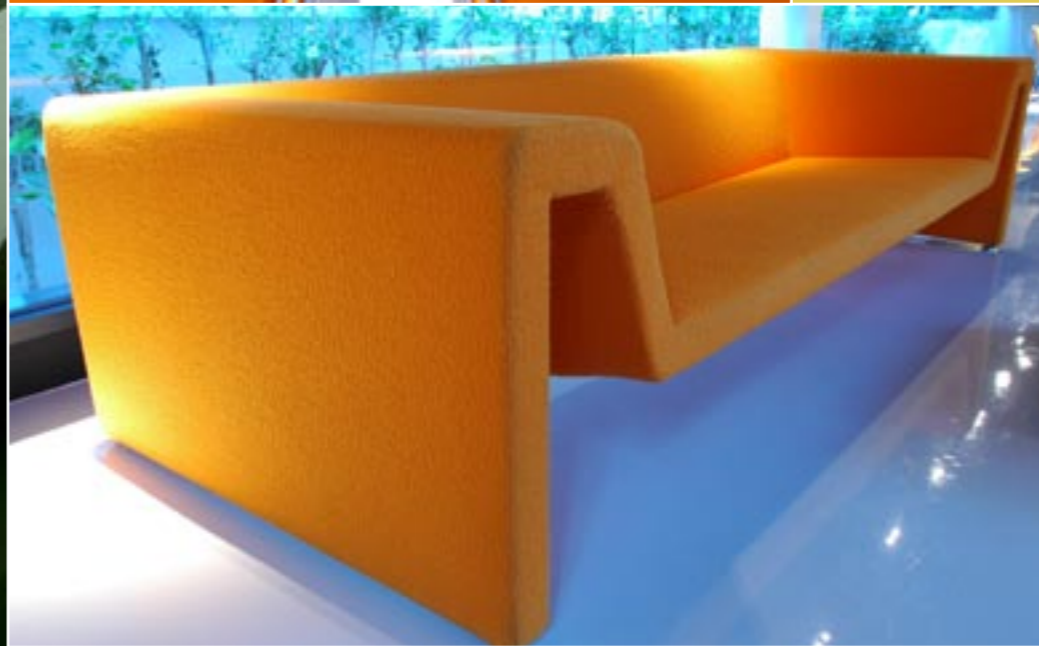
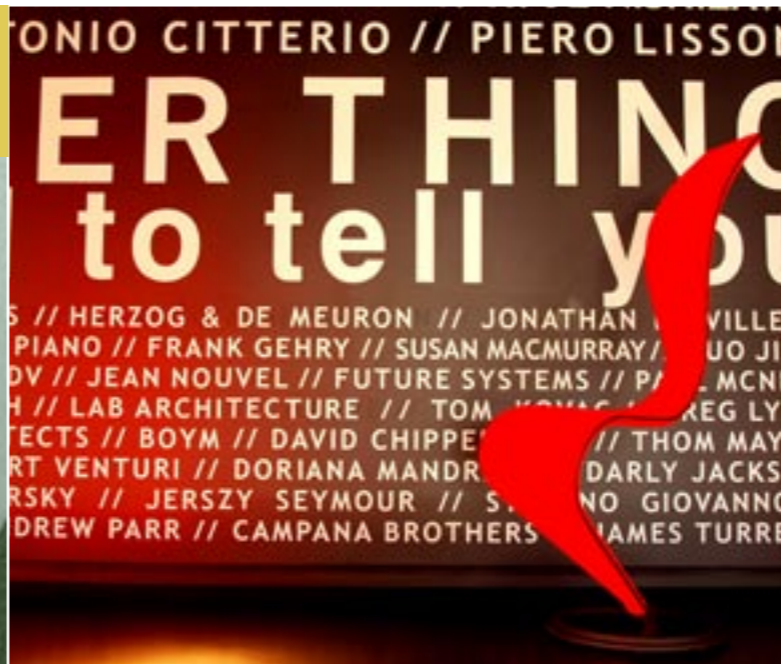




Bangkok Gets a Lifestyle

By Peter Myers



HI has just opened in Bangkok. A lifestyle and retail complex housing the funkiest in home décor, a Mediterranean bar & bistro, hip fusion cuisine outlets, an art book store, and a friendly, ice cream, coffee and cake parlour.

A common whinge among Bangkokians at present is that there's just nowhere to 'go' anymore. Specifically, they say the options are limited for groovy hang-outs where one can luxuriate an afternoon away with a café latte, or spend a relaxed evening with friends, dining on interesting cuisine, before sitting, inside or out, and cocktailing until the early hours. There are hundreds of places to do just that in Singapore, they cry, why not here?

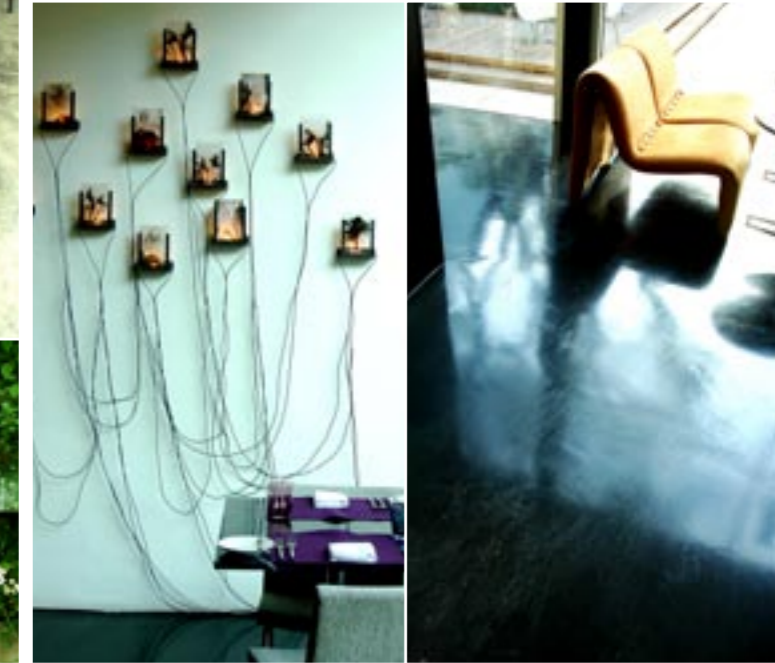
Well, HI has made Bangkok wake up and smell the post-modern flavours. Located right at the end of Thong Lor - or Sukhumvit Soi 55 - as soon as one enters this garden complex, enclosed by seven L-shaped retail outlets (most housed in panoramic-sized glass sheets), it is clear that you are in a top-quality lifestyle escape, and not some gimmicky, tacky complex.

The HI project was conceived and developed by Pornsak Rattanamethanon, a prominent furniture importer and owner of the boutiques Orrizonte, Minotti and Cappellini. Pornsak realised that people tend to work and live in high-rise buildings, and are forced to eat in 'same-same,' signature restaurants and in-mall eateries. He explains: "We wanted to create a participatory environment, which was unusual, liberating, and where you can enjoy a drink or a smoke outside if you wish in a green, urban setting."

Cappellini/Any Room
Vast sheets of glass, metal and white linoleum floors built around - not on top of - trees and shrubbery, provide a quirky architectural showroom for generation-next furniture, furnishings and décor items on display. Cappellini features ergonomically-designed furniture and decor brands in a variety of bright, prime colours, some of which would be an ideal, if cheeky, addition to many homes and offices, whereas others would only look 'in place' at Austin Power's love pad. Any Room reveals chic and minimalistically stylish options for the kitchen, bedroom, lounge and office.

Chi

Pan-Asian cuisine eatery **Chi** run by Rika Dila is growing in popularity both with celebrities and 'ladies who lunch,' and reservations are now essential. Accessible by a bright red staircase, Chi is divided into different zones: from the bar and lounge to the 12-seater private dining room, to an outdoor terrace, with a couple in between. Each zone has a different design concept, but all are flamboyant, playfully retro, and downright surreal. One zone, for example, reveals a fully-stacked children's bookcase taking up an entire wall. Empty birdcages hang from the ceiling of another; the floor of which is bright turquoise. Enjoy a very reasonably-priced midday meal here, the diversity of cuisine reflecting the range of design themes. The dinner menu is divided, amusingly, into: 'To start the night,' 'Greens,' 'Liquids,' 'Things from the water,' 'Things that run,' 'Things that fill,' 'Things to munch on,' and 'To satisfy your sweet tooth.'



Extase

The Mediterranean and French cuisine eatery **Extase**, operated by Na-chanok Rattanadaros could be mistook, depending on the angle you view it, for a Barcelonan-style Tapas bar, a cool Islington hangout, or a seafront Brighton Hotel. One whole wall is taken up by a multi-layered bank of plants, creating a very environmentally-friendly greenhouse effect! This is a classy yet comfy and friendly space, perfect for swinging back a mojito, martini cocktail, chilled glass of wine, or creative coffee, either outside; on the charming garden terrace, or inside; on a tall, white, wicker chair. The menu, currently being developed, includes a selection of Tapas-style nibbles, as well as a diverse Western-oriented set of mains.



Basheer Design Books

A small, specialised bookshop making its debut in Bangkok, **Basheer** offers design, interior, architecture, advertising and arts books, and funky magazines that you rarely see elsewhere.



To Die For

Fashion house and restaurant operator Greyhound's owner Bhanu Inkawat is behind this 'modern European gourmet' bar and restaurant with his partners; veteran film director Nida Sudana, and Sunida Sinkorapum, part-owner of Costa Lanta resort in Krabi, and operator of the local popular cuisine-centric Website www.pai-kin-khao.com. Sip a Royal Pimms on brightly-coloured Moroccan seats by the manicured lawn outside, before an Italian or French-themed meal - but save room for dessert - as they are ridiculously good.



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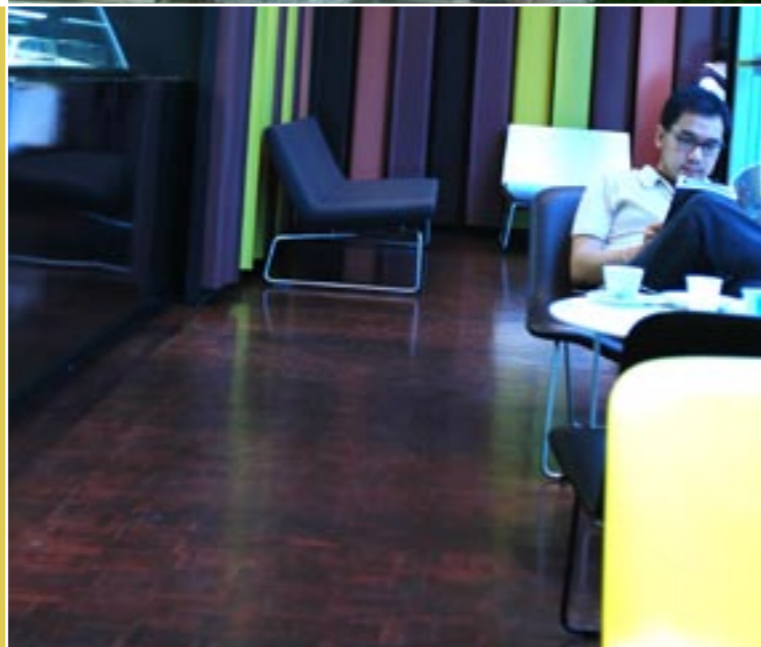
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Hay

A colourful, stripy-walled ice cream and bakery shop boasting some of the oddest seating I've ever seen, Hay is the place for those who like eclectically-flavoured coffees, shakes and ice creams, as well as rich, incredibly naughty-looking cakes and pastries. Thai bakeries tend to provide rather unappetising cake selections, so Hay is a welcome relief indeed for the café society here.

AD.GAYSORN