

# ROOM

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AS the BIG Group juggernaut continues its single-minded domination of the Klang Valley f&b scene, it's become practically impossible to not encounter its broad array of brands when visiting any upscale malls. But in sleepy Taman Weng Lock, Bangsar, more BIG business is brewing with Hit&Mrs - a renovated old shophouse showcasing a concrete bunker dining hall downstairs, and a Mid-Century Modern 1950s style lounge upstairs. Hit&Mrs is BIG CEO Benjamin Yong's curvy baby, a deliberate move away from the group's now familiar brands, but like a couture gown, it will be unique and one-off.

[CHIC AND HIP, HIT&MRS IS STUDIO  
BIKIN'S HOMAGE TO ITS CONTEXT]

# HEARTSTRUMS





An aptly-named concrete tables of raw and cast walls along with specially designed concrete tables form an unlikely backdrop for a fine dining experience

To accomplish such a special project, Benjamin charged Studio Bikin, a young innovative architectural studio comprising Farah Anizan and Adela Askandar, with the task. Benjamin and Farah knew each other socially, and when the shop lot opposite Studio Bikin's home office became available, Farah alerted Benjamin to the fact. Within weeks, Farah and Adela were in the thick of designing the project, sped along somewhat by the fact that the site shares the same typology as their office just across the road so they already had the building plans and drawings.

"From the beginning, Benjamin expressed the interest of making this restaurant completely different from the other brands so we mentally divorced ourselves from everything we knew about the other outlets, and started afresh," Adela explains.

"The brief was quite open except for some technical requirements although Benjamin did say that he wanted the restaurant downstairs to be clean and modern. Farah and I agreed because our instinct was that the bar upstairs should capture the 1950s, Taman Weng Lock vibe, while the more minimalist lower floor would be a nice contrast to the retro feel upstairs."



ONE CAN EASILY IMAGINE THE LIKES OF P RAMLEE AND JINS SHAMSUDDIN REVELING IN THE CASUAL SPEAKEASY VIBE OF THE LOUNGE UPSTAIRS MINUTELY DETAILED WITH A BEAUTIFUL TIMBER BAR, RATTAN STOOLS AND CRYSTAL DECANTER LIGHTS



LOOKING LIKE IT WAS  
LIFTED FROM A SEPIA-  
TONED PHOTOGRAPH  
OF A PARTICULARLY  
GROOVY '50S LIVING, ALL  
THINGS TROPICAL WITH  
A GENEROUS DOLLOP OF  
KITSCH IS ENCAPSULATED  
IN THE DISTINCTIVE  
BANANA LEAF WALLPAPER.



Instead of insulating itself against its  
suburban neighborhood, the space embraces  
it, even welcoming a view of the back alley.

#### COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

One of the first things the architects did was to open up the air-well that had been boarded up over the years so that the back of the house now has the benefit of an airy double-volume space. The natural light filtering in via a custom-made grill securing the back is a wonderful feature that unites both levels but that's about where the shared attributes end.

Due to the inherent space constraint, Adela says the biggest challenge was fitting the open kitchen into the 30-seater bju restaurant downstairs. "We felt that the exciting thing about dining here is the chef preparing the food live, and to screen that off with glazing would make it not as intimate, so we decided to make it an open kitchen."

Although Studio Bikin is barely into its second year, its penchant for experimenting with concrete has been well documented in local and regional publications (including previously in this one) and the concrete wall cast in one piece stretching from the front all the way to the back of the restaurant is a first for Studio Bikin.

"We wanted to try casting the concrete in a soft form so we tried using tarpaulin," Adela explains. Not content with architectural detailing, the architects also designed and crafted the industrial-meets-kitsch dining tables that feature an embossed floral pattern in the concrete, and raw metal legs. "The tables are original Studio Bikin bespoke, and we call them our concrete chintz tables," Adela laughs.

#### MID-20TH CENTURY VIBES

The short flight of stairs leading up to the lounge feels like a time tunnel of sorts, teleporting customers into a particularly cool 1950s living room. Mismatched vintage furniture, celadon wall tiles, and a beautifully crafted timber bar set the tone for elegant shenanigans.

The architects say they had lots of fun departing from their spare, rigorous aesthetic for something unapologetically over-the-top. The lavish waving banana palm leaves wallpaper is a kitschy yet appropriate touch, putting revellers in the frame for a Mai Tai. They say it is the same iconic wallpaper that decorates the Fountain Coffee Shop of the Beverly Hills Hotel.



EMPHATICALLY LO-FI AND LINGUISTICALLY  
RETRO, THE CLATTER OF A BEADED  
CURTAIN AND STRAINS OF OLDIES  
ACCOMPANY COCKTAIL HOUR



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Sourcing for each and every piece of furniture was a labour of love, and Adela reveals that both architects spent a significant part of the project knee deep in flea markets and second-hand stores.

"We enjoyed putting detailed touches which have the undertones of the era like fluid handkerchief vases, and posters of the legendary singer Rose Chan. We even managed to track down this old craftsman who still makes cane peacock chairs," she recalls. "It wasn't easy but it was an interesting exercise because we were determined to make the upstairs a tribute to the bygone glory of Taman Weng Lock."

Despite the huge contrast between both floors, a motif inspired by an Escher pattern runs through the whole project. Mesmerisingly repetitive, the hypnotic pattern shows up on as a sticker on the giant glass front door, in the custom-made grille shielding the open double-volume space, and on the floor of the upstairs toilet.

In true Studio Bikin inventiveness, Adela and Farah drew the Escher-inspired pattern on a template, and personally supervised the worker who painted it on the polished concrete floor. And the remarkable result is indicative of the love Studio Bikin poured into the project.

Adela puts it best: "This project is not something we've done before, and it was nice to go a bit wild with the interiors. The process that went into encapsulating the spirit of the times is what made it immensely interesting for us."

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The bathroom is a quirky combination of concrete, timber, and brass. The walls are painted in a vibrant green, and the floor is checkered with black and white tiles.

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