

Destination: Dining

Two different looks at how sense of place can affect sense of taste.

Everest Base Camp? Pffft. Bill Bensley's latest hotel dishes up all the beauty of Nepal—with Champagne and charcuterie. By Katie Lockhart

A CRACKING SOUND echoes down from 6,400 meters while a white plume of mist explodes on the mountaintop. Avalanche viewing with a glass of champagne and a charcuterie board may be one of the most spectacular dining experiences in the world, but for guests at Shinta Mani Mustang, hey, it's lunch.

Opened in August, the country's most luxurious venture is a partnership of Sherpa Hospitality Group and starchitect Bill Bensley's Shinta Mani collection.

Located in Lower Mustang, this five-star, all-inclusive hotel complements Bensley's far-flung yet sustainable ethos.

"In conceiving the landscape at Shinta Mani Mustang, Bill Bensley channeled the spirit of the Kingdom of Mustang," says Jason Friedman, director of Sherpa Hospitality Group. "With Bensley, it wasn't just about the look; it was about creating a holistic, authentic experience for our guests."

To do so, Bensley upcycled furniture, painting old chairs and tables in traditional Tibetan hues to be placed throughout the hotel. Local materials like yak fur were sourced from nearby villages to adorn the suites' minibar, door and stools.

And when it comes to the food, it's as sustainable as it can get for a place as remote as Mustang. During the guest's daily local excursions, elaborate dining setups really put the "destination" in "destination dining."



▲ Sustainable farm-fresh fare, in the freshest of air, at Shinta Mani Mustang.

▲ Alpine glacial Chhyama Lake, at the base of Nilgiri Himal.

After an hour's hike passing through tranquil villages dotted with buckwheat fields and apple orchards, we arrive at a monastery. On the concrete rooftop, a table complete with cloth, silverware and 360-degree views await. If the sky is clear, as it is during my visit, the tip of Dhaulagiri, the world's seventh-largest mountain, is visible.

Here, a three-course meal of local vegetable soup, river trout and chocolate walnut cake is served while you gawk at the stunning sloping farmland and traditional Mustang villages surrounding this surreal dining setup.

In nearby Lubra, one of the world's few remaining Bon Buddhists makes a traditional lunch where almost every ingredient comes directly from the village. From buckwheat porridge to the lentil soup, it all blooms steps from the beautifully rustic wooden table and chair arranged on the roof of a local home.

"These are not just meals, but full-fledged experiences that combine delectable food with the thrill of exploration and the beauty of natural surroundings," Friedman says. "The ability to dine in a different, stunning location each day adds a whole new dimension." And, remarkably, adds up to a classic, maximalist Bill Bensley experience, with minimal Bill Bensley intervention required.

shintamanimustang.com; from US\$1,800 per night, double occupancy, all-inclusive, with a minimum five-night stay.



▲ Andre Fu's favorite teepees at Mr. Stork, high above Singapore.

▶ Bar Square is a sweet spot for sunset.



Singapore in a glass... tower? How André Fu plays on emotions to craft a culinary trapeze through the Lion City. By Jeninne Lee-St. John



▲ 5 On 25, a reimagined Cantonese supper club, at Andaz Singapore.

SINGAPORE IS A STUDY in architectural contrasts. While these days its most globally recognized building is a three-legged skyscraper whose rooftop seems to defy gravity, down at ground level you'll still find those iconic walk-up shophouses, some nearly two centuries old. As we all know, Singapore is also one of the world's great culinary melting pots.

What happens when you ask one of the world's top architects to create an aesthetic tour through Singapore through food and drink in one building? You get the light- and pattern-filled Andaz Singapore, a glittering, honeycomb tower in which the diverse restaurants and bars echo the country beyond and together are, its designer André Fu tells us, "a curation of experiences that share a common thread but each articulation has its own twist"—sort of like neighborhoods in the same city.

Fu believes our culinary experiences are linked to emotions and our surroundings provoke feelings, so he takes a holistic approach to F&B, starting by collaboratively planning the kitchen ("it is the heart of all restaurants") with the chef, then layering on colors, furniture and lighting in the public spaces, and giving visual guidelines to all the touch points, from cutlery to florals to music, "to ensure that the experience is considered as a whole."

Hotspot rooftop bar Mr. Stork "is considered a dreamscape, where we transport lush forestry up to the roof above Singapore's skyline." Here, Fu highly recommends scoring a teepee tent for outdoor lounging.

Seems like we could all use what the architect describes as "a seductive retro chamber centered around an open grill" in our lives. Look no further than steakhouse 665 (named for the temperature of its fire), and then look up, because Fu has crafted a matrix of glowing globe pendants suspended from the ceiling. Or book in the adjacent semi-private room, The Cellar, which takes the structure of a subterranean wine vault complete with curvilinear ceiling and skylights it up "to a whimsical penthouse with bold colors."

One reason to avoid even the best hotel bars is that they're often windowless boxes. But Bar Square "draws inspiration from the nearby Bugis area, where the energy of a shophouse courtyard is celebrated," Fu says. "The long bar is unconventional with its residential cabinet design; it has a strong interactive character to it." It also has a well-balanced espresso martini that packs the right punch.

Order one after lunch or before dinner across the hall in the newest Andaz eatery, 5 On 25, a Chinese restaurant where "we have researched floral patterns to depict the vignette of a re-imagined Cantonese supper club," Fu says. The high-gloss lacquer intertwining screen panel and the mismatched, Crayola-bright, patterned china plates will make your eyes dance and signature abalone tarts hit deliciously differently. "The use of patterns is a very vivid way to capture a particular cuisine context and its respective time and place," Fu says.

hyatt.com/andaz/sinaz-andaz-singapore; doubles from S\$420. 🌐

LEFT: COURTESY OF SHINTA MANI MUSTANG (2). RIGHT: COURTESY OF ANDAZ SINGAPORE (3)