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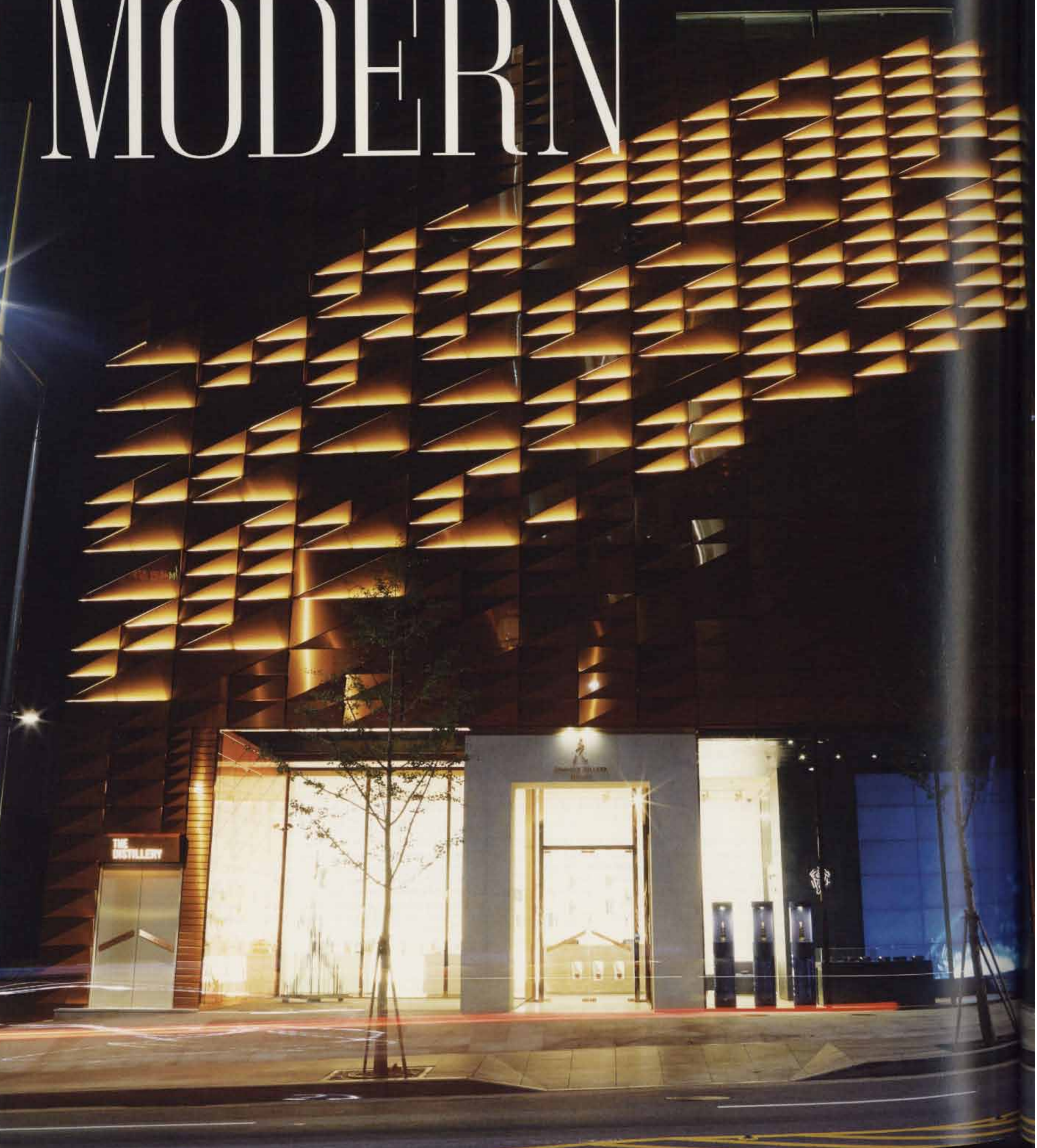
INDESIGN

INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

K2LD ARCHITECTS' ECCENTRIC KIT-OF-PARTS

FARM | NAMLY HOUSE BY CHANG ARCHITECTS | HOUSE AT VICTORIA PARK BY IP:LI ARCHITECTS
NATIONAL DESIGN CENTRE BY SCDA ARCHITECTS | RIVER SAFARI BY DP ARCHITECTS

MODERN



UNLIKE THE BEIJING AND SHANGHAI EDITIONS, THE NEW JOHNNIE WALKER HOUSE SEOUL IS DESIGNED BY LOCAL CREATIVE AGENCY ASYLUM WITH THE FUTURE, AND NOT THE PAST, IN MIND.

SEOUL

When lit, the facade displays Johnnie Walker's iconic diagonal label, injecting a sense of movement into the facade.



TEXT
IMAGES

► ILIYAS ONG
► COURTESY OF ASYLUM



YOU WON'T FIND dark mahogany and opulent leather couches in the Johnnie Walker House Seoul. The new chapter of the Scotch brand's "whisky embassies", designed by Singapore creative agency Asylum, consciously departs from the elements de rigueur of whisky bars. It is clean, contemporary and looks nothing like its lavish Beijing and Shanghai cousins. The reason for this is simple: Johnnie Walker doesn't want to be mired in the past. It wants to leap into the future.

Such was the brief Asylum received from Diageo, Johnnie Walker's parent company. Where the Chinese editions of the House focused on the proud history of the brand, the Korean iteration was designed with the next generation of dram-drinkers in mind. Which means the components, furniture, fixtures, materials and technological gadgetry in the six-storey House had to be every inch as hip and luxe as its neighbours in Seoul's modish Gangnam district. As with the other two Houses, Asylum worked on this together with Manchester-based LOVE Creative.

"We wanted this to be a very cool place, and not like a museum or a bar for dads," laughs Chris Lee, founder of Asylum. According to him, the target demographic for House Seoul isn't as mature as those of Houses Beijing and Shanghai. "With that in mind, Seoul had to be a lot more modern, which is great because then we can look at how we can take a brand like Johnnie Walker and repackage it for a younger crowd."

This was also the first time Asylum not only designed an entire Johnnie Walker House – rather than the interiors alone – but chose the site itself. Lee reveals that it took two trips to Seoul to scout several locations before settling on this top-tier address. "It's Gangnam," the 42-year-old designer says matter-of-factly. "You're next to all the big boutiques: Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Gucci... And you also have your hip brands there, too. It's probably the trendiest place in Seoul."

Given the neighbourhood's stylish airs, House Seoul had to make a bold yet elegant mark on its



Top: The House's stunning copper facade breathes new life into Seoul's prestige Gangnam district

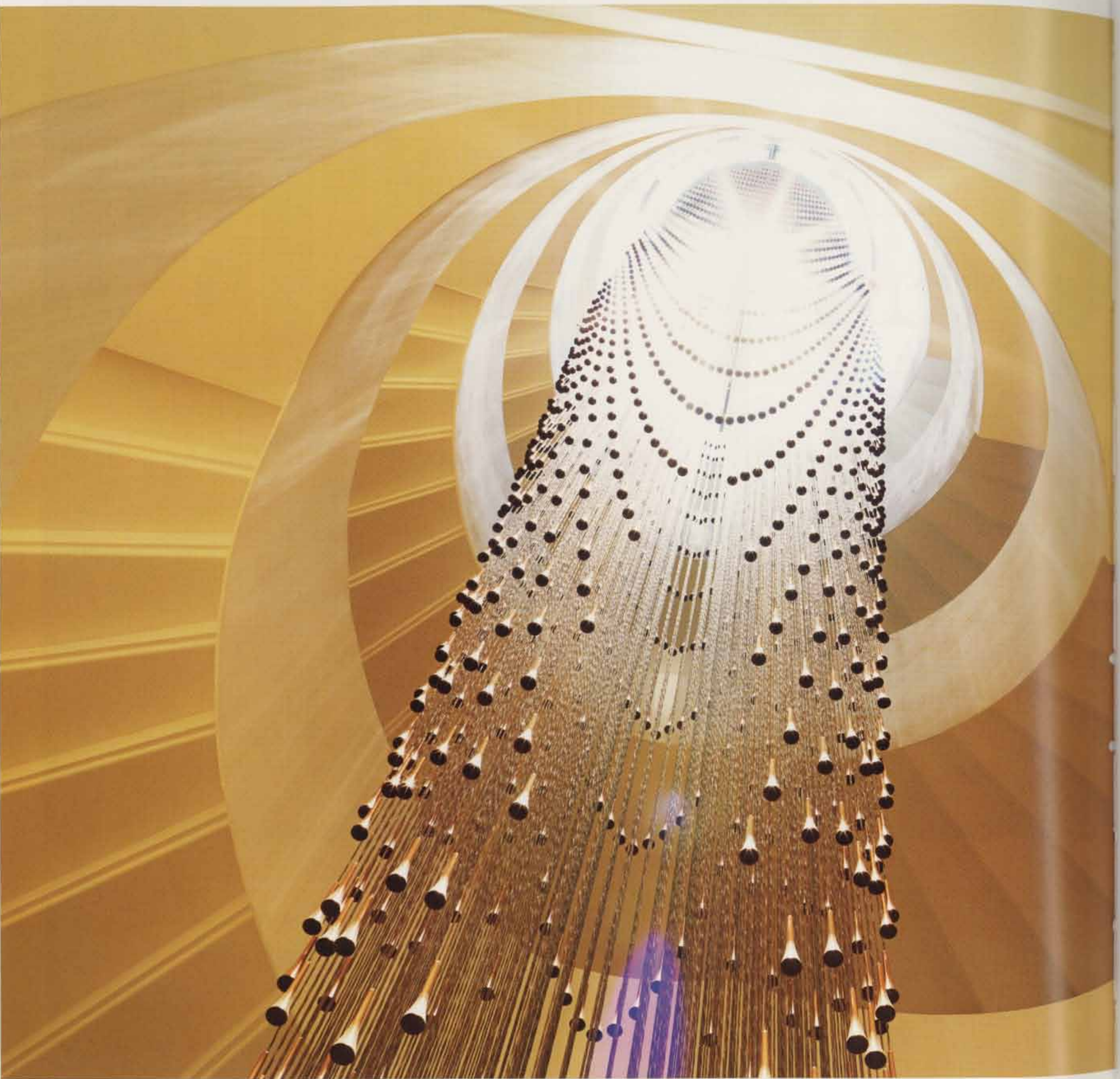
Bottom: LED screens in the basement distillery bar can be programmed to display graphics suitable for any event held there



“WHEN IT COMES TO SEOUL, THEY’RE OKAY WITH MIXING CLEAN ELEMENTS WITH DETAILED ONES.”

— CHRIS LEE

Above: Joinery in a retail space on the first floor echoes the sense of movement found in the facade



Above: A chandelier-like art installation draws attention to the dynamic verticality of the spiral staircase's core.

street. Hence, the building's striking facade. Copper panels, which are cut at sharp angles, are pieced together to create a three-dimensional frontage. When lit up, it subtly displays the iconic Johnnie Walker diagonal label – the only allusion to the brand on the exterior. Unlike the conspicuous branding in the entrances to the Chinese Houses, Seoul is deliberately low-key.

"Koreans and Japanese share a very similar aesthetic," explains Lee. "It's a bit more restrained [than in China]. White, for example, was a big no-no in China. But when it comes to Seoul, they're okay with mixing clean elements with detailed ones. And that's great for us, because then we can really flex our creativity. Else, it'll always be the same – a one-trick pony."

With restraint as their watchword, Lee and his four-man team pared the House down as much as they could. The colour palette was the first to be tweaked. Instead of the dark, velvety colours of the Chinese Houses, Seoul has a muted light one. Wood and copper remain the "key ingredients for a Johnnie Walker House", Lee says, but in this instance he chose brighter shades and toyed around with unexpected areas in which to use them. For example, wood panels add a warm, subtle accent to the inside of the VIP booths on the basement mezzanine level. That Seoul has strict fire safety regulations for buildings also limited the amount of wood that could be used.

But the danger then, Lee notes, is losing the essence of the Johnnie Walker brand and ending up with a generic upscale bar. There had to be a few elements of continuity from China to South Korea. Asylum managed this by implementing a 'roof' design motif across all three Houses; in Seoul,



REFERENCING THE LENGTHY PROCESS OF DISTILLING THE ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE, THE ARTWORK IS MONUMENTAL IN SCALE YET SOBER IN DESIGN.

you'll find it framing the VIP booths and in the glass house, which contains a mock mini-distillery, perched on the rooftop.

Asylum commissioned three South Korean artists for House Seoul. The centrepiece, Byoungho Kim's *The Progression of Silence*, hangs chandelier-like from the glass house and through the central column of a spiral staircase, which links all six floors together. Referencing the lengthy process of distilling the alcoholic beverage, the artwork is monumental in scale yet sober in design.

Strewn about the other levels are RFID-equipped tables, touchscreens, and programmable LED screens that constantly project gorgeous video art. As Koreans tend to be tech-savvy, Lee wanted the House to be chockfull of gizmos – although not

Above: A mural depicting the journey from Cardhu to Seoul lines a wall in the VIP Lounge



so much that it begins to appear gimmicky. “So we only insist on technology in areas where there’s a purpose of doing so,” he clarifies. “We didn’t want to go too crazy with tech.”

Diageo also buttressed Asylum’s modern design language with a future-mindedness. The British firm included a bartending academy on the third storey – white and sterile as a laboratory – whose mission is to train up-and-coming barkeeps on the art of cocktail mixing. There’s even a library stocked with books on the craft.

“[Diageo] is becoming more and more ambitious,” says Lee. “To see something of this scale getting bigger, and to see them executed like this...I think we’re truly blessed to have a client like that. So the challenge would be to create something new rather than repeating what we have. And I think we’re getting pretty good at it.”

JOHNNIE WALKER HOUSE, SEOUL

CLIENT Diageo Seoul
DESIGN FIRM Asylum Creative Pte Ltd
PROJECT TEAM Chris Lee, Michelle Tan, Simone Koenigshausen
BUILDER Kukbo Design Co. Ltd
PROJECT MANAGEMENT Parsons Brinckerhoff (Seoul)
LIGHTING CONSULTANTS SWITCH (Singapore) and EON SLD (Seoul)
LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR GP Design
BRANDING AGENCY LOVE

TIME TO COMPLETE 13 Months
TOTAL FLOOR AREA 1486.5sqm

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FINISHES
 Façade Tecu® Copper Cladding from KME

KME kme.com

Top: The modern Sky Bar echoes the ‘roof’ motif and compass floor mural found in the China Houses

Bottom: Wood-paneled alcoves instill warmth to the mezzanine above the distillery bar