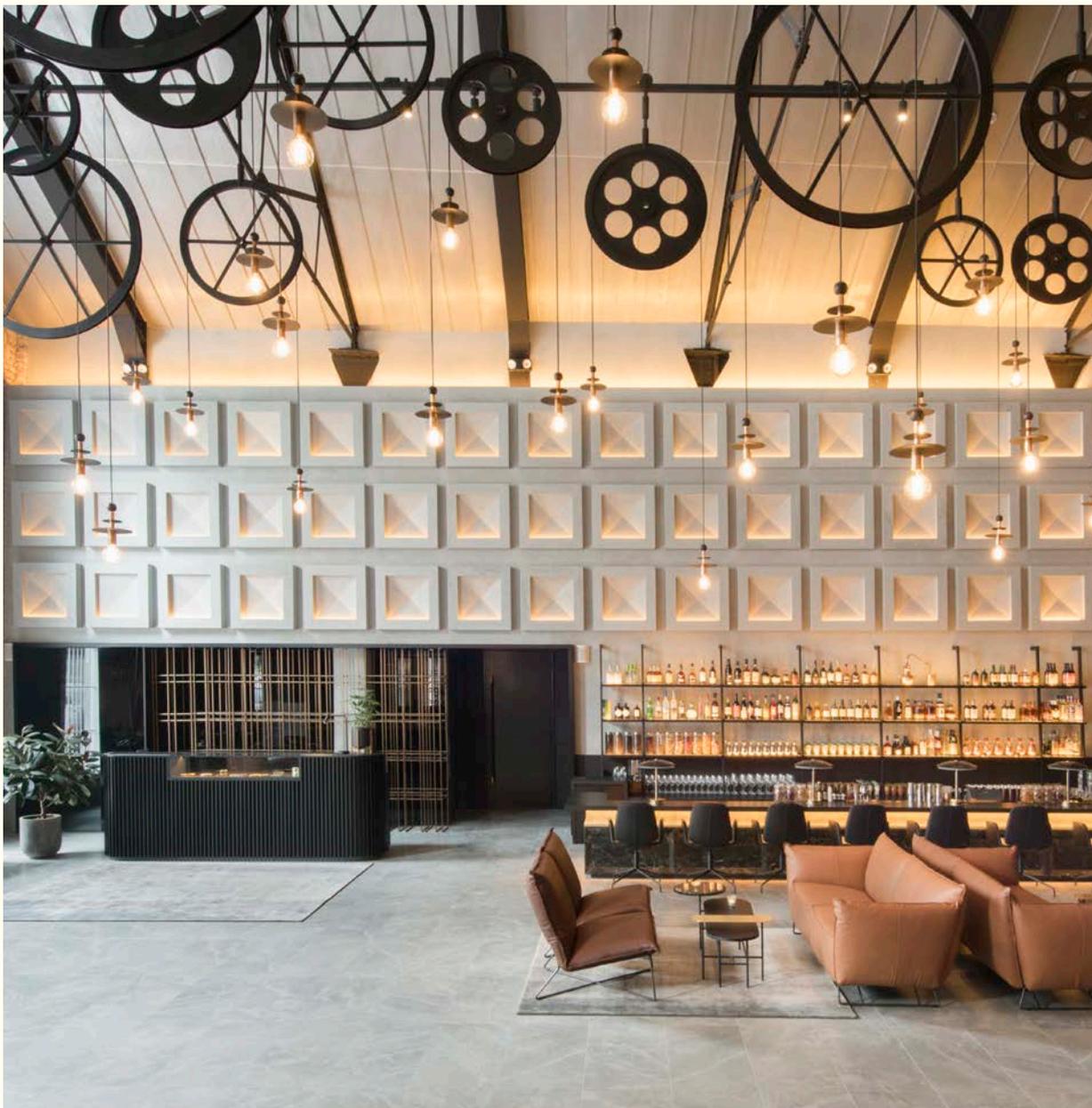


# Eastern Edge



**A symbol of Singapore's industrial heritage is reborn as the city's hottest new hotel.**

BY LAURA ITZKOWITZ

The lobby and bar at the Warehouse Hotel. (OPPOSITE, FROM TOP) The hotel's exterior. A guestroom.

"If you're old enough, you know this hotel as the old warehouse," Chris Lee, the head designer and founder of local firm Asylum, tells me over a flat white in the Warehouse Hotel's lobby. "It's an icon in Singapore." In the '80s it was a notorious disco, but its roots trace back to British colonial rule in 1895, when it was built by a Chinese businessman involved in the spice trade. Back then, it sat on Distillery Street, so called for the abundant illicitly distilled spirits that fueled a ring of Chinese secret societies. Opium (then legal) and prostitution (still legal) were rampant. The river was so filthy it took 10 years to clean it.

The modern Robertson Quay neighborhood is filled with cafés and boutiques, frequented by the large local expat community. Still, among the streets lined with sleek new construction, the 19th-century "godowns" serve as evocative relics of the area's dodgy past. "If you stay here, you feel that you're in Singapore, and these

days cities look so similar," Lee says. "I travel four times a month, and everywhere I go I wake up like, where am I? Shanghai? Tokyo? It's the same thing."

Dressed in head-to-toe black with round glasses and paint-splattered sneakers, the Singapore-born Lee epitomizes the city's studiously hip creative class. He even cites a quintessential indie-kid film, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), as inspiration for the Warehouse's look. The influence is apparent in details like the replicated pulleys hung with Edison bulbs from the ceiling's steel beams. Partnering with longtime collaborators at the Lo & Behold Group (which runs hotspots like the Michelin-starred Odette and the White Rabbit, housed in a converted 1930s chapel), Lee also took cues from brands like the Ace and the Hoxton hotel groups, known for imbuing their properties with a sense of place. "We tried to incorporate Asian and local designers into everything to get a truly unique

experience,” he says. The hotel’s other collaborations include working with furniture maker Gabriel Tan and gallery/shop Supermama, which sells Singapore-designed products made in Japan. Custom pieces such as a stained oak reception desk, a jade-green bar inset with terrazzo, and veined Calcutta marble tables, come along with carefully selected chairs by Shanghai-based Neri & Hu, minimalist lamps by London designer Michael Anastassiades, and side tables by Australian Nic Graham. The 37 rooms—awash in neutral grays with accents in steel, marble, and wood—are restrained. Thoughtful touches including USB ports, master light switches next to the bed, rain showers, and spicy seaweed in the minibar exemplify a new, subtler idea of luxury in one of the world’s wealthiest cities.

One evening, in the cool water of the rooftop pool, I watch nearby Clarke Quay buzzing with tourists and nightclubs. Across the river, blocky glass condos tower over pitch-roofed factories. The faint sound of jackhammers emanates from some corner of the urban sprawl—a constant in a city always under construction. It’s not the most euphonic of sounds, but it’s inimitably Singapore.

