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bar

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Developing premium bar excellence

Escape to paradise

Kukui brings the tiki revival to Oxford

Inside: design behind the bar - visual display - soft drinks - cachaça - low-alcohol drinks



Paramount

Tom Dixon's Design Research Studio and restaurateur Pierre Condou have transformed the top floors – and the image – of London's landmark Centre Point tower

Towering above London's West End, Centre Point has become a landmark for disoriented visitors and locals alike but it has had its share of controversy since it was built in the mid-1960s at the height of concrete brutalism. The office building stood half-empty for many years, a centre point for drugs and rough sleeping, and condemned by architecture writer Nikolaus Pevsner as "coarse in the extreme". But more recently, it has been slowly gaining respectability with the arrival of some prestigious tenants and recognition of Richard Seifert's design with a Grade II listing.

The latest stage in its rehabilitation is the opening of members' bar and club, Paramount, on the top three floors, in the wake of the building's acquisition by commercial property firm Targetfollow and plans to redevelop the surrounding area for Crossrail. It has been conceived and overseen by Paris-born restaurateur Pierre Condou who previously owned London's Bistrot Bruno and L'Odeon and for the last seven years has been running private members' club Century in Shaftesbury Avenue.

The new 15,500 sq ft venue covers the 31st, 32nd and 33rd floors – plus space in the basement for back of house, kitchens, cold rooms, wine cellar and storage. Therefore,

all three levels offer unrivalled 360-degree panoramic views of the capital from Docklands to Primrose Hill.

The venue is accessed from the street up an external staircase on the north side of Centre Point, leading to a dedicated entrance on the first-floor mezzanine level. Guests are welcomed by Paramount staff behind a copper reception desk, inspired by the work of sculptor Barbara Hepworth, in a space that also features original 1960s monochrome terrazzo flooring. People are then taken up by lift to the venue itself.

On Level 31, there is a self-contained 4,550 sq ft events space, with a 10-metre-long bar facing the west side, catching the afternoon sun as it sets. This area can accommodate 350 people standing or 160 seated for private events such as launches, dinners, screenings, meetings and presentations.

One floor up on Level 32 is the heart of the members' club, featuring a bespoke copper bar designed by Tom Dixon, whose Design Research Studio is behind the interior design of Paramount. This floor also has relaxed dining and lounge areas, a more formal restaurant and a private dining room, with a modern British menu conceived by chef James O'Connor. At the top of the building is Level 33 and the viewing gallery, which features a members' ▶



The dining room

venue profile



The west bar

champagne and cocktail bar, taking up the full circumference of the building with floor-to-ceiling windows.

The drinks served in the members' lounge and viewing gallery include a five-page list of cocktails at £10 each (£13 with champagne). Under bar manager Eline Bossman, there is a comprehensive choice of classics, many with a contemporary twist, covering cognac, tequila and whiskey as well as vodka, gin and rum – plus the alcohol-free “chauffeurs' choice” cocktails.

Design Research Studio's team, led by senior designer Helene Bangsbo Andersen and working with architectural practices Murphy Philipps and Mark Way, has gone for the “raw and stripped-down aesthetic” that Tom Dixon has developed over recent years, aiming for “genuine longevity and timeless style”. It features both bespoke furniture and vintage pieces that reflect the building's modernism, including furniture supplied by Twentytwentyone.

The bar operation across all three floors was developed by Cantilever Bars, working closely with Dixon and Murphy Philipps. Cantilever delivered three stunning bars in brass, copper and zinc, resolving Dixon's striking geometric designs and creating a fluent operational set-up for each of the bars. Simon Knowles, project director at Cantilever, adds: “Delivering the three bars, each with its own very different operational brief and special challenge, is Cantilever at its best. Our team of designers were uniquely able to deliver the complex design of each bar without operational compromise.”

Dixon also worked with lighting design practice GIA Equation. “The biggest challenge for us was to minimise the reflections in the surrounding glass windows to allow for maximum views over the London skyline,” says Mark Hensman, managing director of GIA Equation. “By creating a classic and flexible lighting design solution, we were able to achieve a high visibility rate, providing arguably the most stunning views over the capital.”

Dixon adds: “We approached it with two principles in mind. First, the view is ‘paramount’, keeping the lighting levels low and moody. Then we wanted to create something that feels that it has been always part of the building without being nostalgic.”

While the events space is available to non-members, Paramount is otherwise proudly

“exclusive” to people who represent the higher echelons of the City and the creative industries, aiming for a “progressive and lively new community of Londoners”. Its membership committee is headed by Alan Parker, chairman of corporate communications giant Brunswick Group, and writer and actor Stephen Fry, with representatives covering sectors such as film, law, media, academia, fashion, publishing, finance and theatre.

Dixon describes the creation of a bar at the top of Centre Point as a “dream job”. “It's a building so iconic and so mysterious, that has been argued and discussed and reviled and now celebrated, and we get an opportunity to design a space that all Londoners know but almost none has visited. Luckily, the cycle of fashion is on our side, with brutalism and the radical system architecture of the late 60s being re-assessed.”

Key notes

Where to find it

Paramount
Centre Point
101 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1DB
Tel: 020 7420 2904
Email: level3 | @paramount.uk.net
www.paramount.uk.net

Who did it

Architect: Murphy Philipps and Mark Way
Interior: Research Design Studio
Bars: Cantilever Bars
Lighting: GIA Equation
Front of bars/panels: Random Products
Furniture: Twentytwentyone



The view from the private dining room



The east lounge