

HOT HOTELS

By Graham Bond



LIFE IN SLO-MO

Whatever way you arrive at the Landmark Mandarin Oriental, it quickly becomes obvious you're entering elite circles. Take the short stroll from the bustling Star Ferry terminal and celebrity names will announce themselves from behind polished glass facades – Gucci, Vuitton. From the comfort of the pick-up limo, head along the vertiginous urban trench that is Queen's Road to view softly lit storefronts – Prada, Bvlgari. Rise from the seething subway system and the lobby is only accessible by first negotiating the Landmark itself, Hong Kong's most prestigious shopping mall – Dior, Dolce and Gabbana et al.

This is the land of luxury, occupying prime real

estate on Hong Kong Island. In a low-key opening last autumn, the Landmark Mandarin Oriental added extra value to an already moneyed neighbourhood, offering a superb base from which to access – or take sanctuary from – the consumer frenzy outside the front door.

There are designers without, and designers within. Romanian-born Adam D Tihany, the hospitality design legend, was responsible for the understated lobby area, as well as the ground-floor MO bar and 7th-floor Amber restaurant. Though the hotel has toned down the oriental aspects of the Mandarin brand, there are subtle suggestions of locale – a mahogany lobby staircase in the form of a Hong Kong

sailing junk, circular tile patterns hinting at the ripples of Victoria Harbour, the mesmerising Zen-inspired waves of Amber's enormous chandelier, made from 4,320 copper rods.

These opulent flourishes suggest a hotel keen to meet high expectations, but this is a place pulled between two instincts – the dutiful desire to be reliable and convenient, as befits a Mandarin Oriental property, and an obvious yearning to be exciting, chic and sexy. The result is neither 'brand bland', nor 'uber-chic boutique'; just like a Taoist master, it bends both ways while effortlessly maintaining its balance.

What the rooms lack in views, they make up for in interior comforts. Dressed in off-white



EVERYTHING ZEN: (opposite page, main) The giant copper-rod chandelier draws the eye at Amber; (this page, left) From street-level, the Landmark Mandarin Oriental appears to sprout out of the glass facade of the luxury shopping centre below; (below) Spaciousness and style are key themes of the L600 Landmark Deluxe rooms; (bottom) The huge Oriental Spa is pitched as a journey for both mind and body



and ebony tones by Peter Remedios, they are homely, spacious and pleasantly decadent. In the L600 room series, two huge flatscreen TVs have been built into the crescent-shaped wall wrapped around a spectacular circular bathtub, one facing the huge bed, the other the living area. A contemporary zeal is confirmed by the wall socket that connects your iPod to the stereo system.

There's a mystical, rather than technological, air in MO bar, the highlight of which is a hypnotic red circle that glows on the far wall. Like the black monolith in Kubrick's *2001 A Space Odyssey*, it suggests some hidden meaning, a possible portal to another time and place. Be sure to layer

the mystery with a few of MO's finest cocktails, served from a grand piano-esque drinks case.

Amber's French-trained, Dutch head chef, Richard Ekkebus, serves up fine modern European cuisine and the enormous two-floor spa offers a delightful part-Turk, part-Roman experience, so extravagant it will require at least three hours of your day. A yoga suite and state-of-the-art gymnasium round off the list of facilities, though a swimming pool will follow later this year.

In an attempt to be almost as select about its clientele as it hopes they are about it, the Landmark Mandarin Oriental was marketed mainly by word of mouth. There were no TV ads,

or billboards. News was spread by trendsetters from the world of fashion, film and the media invited in for a sneak preview, and a distinct aura of exclusivity remains. Perhaps this is no great surprise given the costs; even the local merchant bankers have been warned off putting this one on the company account. And given the temptations just outside the front door, it's unlikely the spending will end at the room tariff. So get saving. **Q**

Landmark Mandarin Oriental: 15 Queen's Road, Central, Hong Kong (+852 2132 0188; www.mandarinoriental.com; L450 Superior Rooms cost HKD 4,000, rack rate)