



Min Jiang Restaurant, London

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WHEN AN EXCLUSIVE LONDON HOTEL WANTED TO REVAMP ONE OF ITS RESTAURANTS, IT TURNED TO HUMBLE ARNOLD ASSOCIATES TO DESIGN THE MULTI MILLION POUND PROJECT THAT WAS FAR FROM A PICNIC, AS SARAH ALLEN REPORTS

The Royal Garden Hotel is a grand building located in Kensington, one of London's most prestigious districts.

The privately owned, opulent hotel has two sister properties in Singapore: Goodwood Park Hotel and York Hotel.

The owners wanted to add a touch of the Orient to the establishment and decided to try to replicate the success of Min Jiang restaurant at Goodwood Park Hotel.

This would replace the existing French restaurant on the tenth floor, offering authentic Chinese cuisine in a fine dining environment.

The tenth floor offers a spectacular panorama of London with immediate views over Kensington Garden and Kensington Palace.

When the owners felt the restaurant needed renovating they turned to Humble Arnold Associates, a long established foodservice design consultancy whose reputation precedes it.

Previous projects include Wagamama in Streatham Street, Barclays HQ in Canary Wharf and The National Gallery, to name a few. Current clients include Hilton, Zuma, Hyatt, City Inns and Starwood.

Humble Arnold Associates was commissioned in September 2007 to complete a fully detailed design and specification package for December 2007.

Co owner Stephen Arnold FCSI led the £2.5m project as design director working alongside Ed Bircham to design the kitchen, support areas and the restaurant bar. Both worked on schematic matters as well as detailed design and specification.

The consultants advised the Royal Garden Hotel on their selection of specialist equipment, tender submission and analysis, contract supervision and factory visits and were closely involved in final inspections.

The kitchen layout was developed in conjunction with The Royal Garden Hotel's Executive Chef and Vice President of the Craft Guild of Chef's Steve Munkley and Deputy General Manager Jonathan Lowrey.

For the bar layout, Humble Arnold Associates worked closely with the hotel's Food and Beverage Manager Tim Fryer.

In order to ensure the authenticity of the cuisine and to replicate the high standards of the first Min Jiang, the hotel even flew in some key members of the Goodwood Park team to help operate the new Min Jiang restaurant.

The catering supply and installation package was tendered in January 2008 and the kitchen was ready in early June.

However, the project wasn't all dim sum and spring rolls as Humble Arnold Associates says it encountered a few challenges along the way, the Chinese cooking equipment specification being one of them.

“There is very limited availability of approved heavy duty Chinese cooking equipment in the UK,” says Bircham.

The company selected YPT International's Flame Mate range of cooking and steaming equipment. But the range did not meet the European standards of approval.

Although this was not part of Humble Arnold Associates' agreed scope of work they were in close liaison with the Chinese cooking equipment manufacturer and certifying body as the equipment was not already CE marked. The ventilations system also required significant upgrading.

“A certifying body was appointed to attend the Hong Kong based factory to achieve CE approval of specific items imported for the project,” Bircham explains. “Many of the items were special orders rather than standard units.

“The change from French to Chinese cuisine demanded a significant increase in extraction volumes. The available ceiling void was very limited making co-ordination difficult. This was further complicated by the consultant's recommendation that a water wash system be incorporated.”

Customer Satisfaction

With all problems conquered and all needs met, what are the client's thoughts on the end result?

“The transformation of our traditional European restaurant operation into an authentic Chinese restaurant presented challenges in all aspects of the design and build process, but the result is a resounding success,” says Lowrey.

“The implications of designing a Chinese kitchen into the original space presented many difficult obstacles. With the innovative design of Humble Arnold Associates and commitment of the fit out team, we are pleased to now have a Chinese kitchen that our Master Chef Chee Vooi Lan is proud to cook in.”

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