Local Motion

For a car-industry city, a designer employs optical tricks to create a space that evokes movement.

BY ELLA RILEY-ADAMS

The interiors of the Ritz-Carlton in Wolfsburg, Germany, express the concept of “nature in motion,” says Paris-based designer and architect Elliott Barnes. The hotel’s elegant natural details are especially visible in its ground-floor Newman’s Bar, designed by Barnes’s eponymous firm. The theme of movement references the nearby Volkswagen headquar ters and the carmaker’s Autostadt exhibition complex. One of the boldest features of Newman’s is a wall of amber pharmaceutical glass tubes, which distorts views of the space and, according to Barnes, achieves the effect of sitting in a speeding car. “The view [through the wall] is blurred as if you’re going through the countryside, looking out your window,” he says.

Softened lines appear as recurring design elements throughout the bar. Curtains of Cascade Coil, a shiny brass fabric made in Oregon, define a central room-within-a-room. The meandering, racetracklike bar top protects its brass inset with a rounded leather border, on which guests can rest their elbows.

Beyond the central curtained space is a smoking area, divided in two by a cigar salon with papyrus-lined walls and a fireplace. Barnes designed one side for cigarette smokers, with low tables and an open, communal atmosphere; the other side plays host to cigar lovers, with thick armchairs designed by Jean-Michel Frank and re-editioned by Ecart International. Deeper into the bar, visitors find more alcoves with banquette seating and earth-toned chairs. Barnes sees romance in Newman’s niches: “If you want to be intimate,” he says, “you should be able to slip away and not be seen. If you want to steal a kiss, you should be able to.”

Aside from encouraging late-night endearments, the bar aims to make space for small business meetings. While designing, Barnes was inspired by the old-boys clubs of the 1960s, an influence evident in the stained walnut parquetry on the floors and walls. The local industry demands similarly refined yet comfortable meeting grounds. “Autostadt is the communication platform for the Volkswagen group,” Barnes says, “so Newman’s is a place where people come together, communicate, and exchange ideas.”

Cocktail by Tomas Delos Reyes

INSPIRED BY NEWMAN’S BAR

To match the warm color palette and elegant lines of the bar, I chose to combine the spice of chai tea with the oak and peppery finish of Milagro tequila. Adding an egg white makes the drink a take on classic flip cocktails and gives it the smooth creaminess of the armchairs and sofas. The whiskey barrel-aged bitters add a finishing note that recalls the heat of a fireplace.

2 ounces Milagro Reposado
1 ounce chai tea
3/4 ounce lemon juice
1/2 ounce agave
1 egg white
2 dashes of whiskey barrel-aged bitters

Tomas Delos Reyes is a mixologist and partner of the gastropub Jeepney in New York’s East Village.