



WHITE WASHED

It looks old and jaded."

These words set off the ongoing makeover at the capital's Le Meridien Hotel. Hence, gone are the various facets – the dark wood, the granite flooring, the plush traditional French armchairs and the massive reception counter, a throwback to the rack system days – that characterised the lobby. The rooms too have been stripped off their regular features: the thick carpet flooring, plush sofa chairs, 21-inch television sets and carved wood furniture. Even the immensely popular sit-out Aloha Bar, with its Polynesian thatched huts, is now a forgotten chapter, having made way for the trendy bar and lounge, Eau.

Sleek design, clean lines and a modish interior meet the eye instead, and don't be surprised if you feel that you have walked into one of those futuristic movies, where the opening line is 'Welcome to the Future'. The new interiors done up in 'Tech & Art Style' by designer Bobby Mukherjee are a tangible realisation of the simple philosophy of putting together a modern functionalist global hotel, says COO Tarun Thakral. Voilà! A rather aged-looking building has turned into the nuevo Le Meridien.

The First Step: Lobby

As you walk past the glass doors into a swish lobby area, crisp lines and contemporary tones flow smoothly to create a minimalistic greeting and meeting space. And if you're wondering whether the old lobby, which was replaced by this suave setting, was smaller in size, then look again. It's the play of light on white and the sharp lines that makes the Meridien's très grande lobby appear larger than its actual size.

At the end of the lobby is a low reception desk, with the wall behind carrying the pride of place – a cylindrical glass sculpture – the sole embellishment in the lobby. Interestingly, Thai sculptor Stephen Gromely's creation finds its mirror image reflected on the glass panel on the left wall. Also, to keep the lobby clutter-free, the travel desk and the Duty Manager's help

THE BIG EYE

by DISHA RATHORE

desk have been moved to the sides.

The minimalistic finish rolls on to the business centre, which has been moved two storeys down to the lobby level expressly for guests' convenience. Housed on the right side of the reception area are the business centre and the meeting room, separated by a glass screen. The relocated business centre with its geometric self-designed walls is equipped with hi-fi Internet facility, fax, LCD plasma screens and projectors and overlooks the lobby. Adjacent to the meeting room is a sit-out area tucked behind 'The Flower Wall', a chrome finish installation that serves as a partition.

The glass staircase that leads to the banquet rooms at the lower level is sure to amuse you with its optic fixtures doing a playful tap dance of their own in all the colours of the rainbow until you're off the last step.

Inset: Rooms

Nothing remains of the erstwhile wall-to-wall carpeted rooms, which have been stripped bare and redone to create clean lines embellished with contemporary details. While the size of the rooms still remains 300 sq.ft, the usage of wood, leather, steel and glass have created a clutter-free, spacious and warm interior. The new, fully automated rooms have wooden flooring, Barcelona chairs, specially engineered beds and mattresses, Plasma LCD Televisions and mood lighting.

The old bathrooms with bad plumbing have been replaced with the signature Philip Stark finish.

The 90 Royal Club rooms on the 20th level were the first of the 358 rooms to get the new look, followed by 138 rooms, while the remaining 130 rooms are up for renovation soon.

Why not? If a hotel is going contemporary to serve the new age traveller, than what better place to start than its club floor? Apparently before the final design was decided upon, four mock-up rooms with different designs were created and tested by guests for a couple of months.

Aside from the rooms, the lounge, business centre and the meeting room on The Royal Club floor, have been redesigned along the same contemporary theme by employing digital lighting and minimal décor.

The Last Impact: The Restaurant, Bar and Lounge

With the night-clubbing culture hitting the capital big time, Le Meridien has done away with regular bar fare – read Aloha Bar – for a sleek bar and lounge which has been christened Eau. Designed in a subtle contemporary style with wooden flooring, mood lighting and minimal décor, Eau features a white curtained open sit-out area, furbished with low seating along the wall, a chic bar counter and a massive dance floor.

The Bar and Lounge was later joined by an equally chic Monsoon restaurant, which serves Mediterranean cuisine. The genesis of Eau and the Monsoon Restaurant came from the increasing competition in the city, where a new stand-alone restaurant or nightclub pops up at a drop of a hat. The Monsoon Restaurant bears a white stone finish, mood lighting and is furbished with deep red chairs which have clean and sharp angles, with a glass wall serving as a look-out.

The famous Atrium with its shopping stores now has a sit-out area, right in the centre, on an elevated platform which lets you enjoy a view of the hotel in a more relaxed manner.

Next up for remodelling is the porch, and the remaining 130 rooms. The redesigning of the other restaurants and the banquet facilities will follow next year.

With the remodelling, the new-look Le Meridien promises it won't be just any other hotel in this or any other city. ♦