

The Sign of the Don



We were commissioned to undertake major elements of this restaurant fit out in central London by owners Robyn and Robert Wilson. The new restaurant, including a bistro and bar, is located in what were once the Sandeman port and sherry cellars, next door to - and partially underneath - the Wilson's existing popular restaurant, 'The Don'.





The cellars had been empty since the 1940's and required sympathetic refurbishment. The designs by David du Boulay incorporated plenty of Portuguese cork along with the aged wood from up-cycled Sandeman port vats and port barrels. We were careful to retain the look and feel of both materials, creating banquettes and a feature basket-weave wall from the vat staves which were carefully flattened or planed as required, before being finished and waxed to bring out the natural beauty of the wood.

Our work with Portuguese cork specialists Amorim on the 2012 Serpentine Gallery pavilion led directly to our recommendation for this project. The Herzog & de Meuron and Ai Weiwei designed pavilion was a partially subterranean structure, requiring us to work closely with Amorim in realising the multi-levelled cork lined interior. For the Sign of the Don, Amorim created the restaurant's cork floors and also provided the huge slab of cork from which our 5 axis CNC machine shaped the 9m long bar before it was hand finished. A warm toned, high-gloss bar top was formed from 100 year-old oak vat ends and staves.



Wood from aged barrels and vats were recycled in various ways. As well as the basket weave wall, floors were made from chestnut vat staves that we machined into 120mm by 22mm thick planks. In the upstairs bar, we used barrel ends to form 26 round table tops, machining, regluing and lacquering the wood before affixing it to existing table legs.

Ceiling lights were made from 22 quarter barrels, hung with chain and in the Bistro, the 20+ metres of banquette seating were formed from lightly sanded and waxed barrel staves. These were applied to a CNC'd plywood carcass before leather cushions and backrests were added. Shelves were also made from half barrel tops; metal rings from vats were used to form decorations and ceiling sculptures while a modesty panel to disguise the entrance to the kitchen was made from steel clad with cork.