

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

Blakes Amsterdam

In 2002, when **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors first visited **Blakes Amsterdam**, this was clearly the place to be: an avant-garde boutique hotel filled with urban sophisticates. Stepping through the gates on the Keizersgracht this year, our expectations were very high and we wondered: would Blakes deliver the goods a second time?

The first thing we noticed on entering Blakes from the bustle of Amsterdam was the special sense of serenity and quiet—partly the genius of the decorator and partly the result of the attentive yet very discrete service. Sitting down for a moment in the lounge before going up to our room, the deep cushions on a white sofa seemed to envelop us, and two steaming cups of tea later, the stresses of the city had fully evaporated.

Our room was dominated by two color tones: red (either strawberry or burgundy) and neutral (either vanilla or stone). Strawberry, burgundy and white stripes covered nearly all the room's surfaces, the for-

mal geometric rigidity of the pattern countering any tendency towards decorative chaos; all stripes except those on the ceiling ran along the vertical. Sliding wooden screens, hanging fabrics, mirrors, and lattice partitions created diverse layers of visual perspectives, breaking the space into a series of spaces. The bed, with its flamboyant canopy of folded and draped striped fabrics, was both attractive and private. Lighting too was pleasing, if a little dim and somewhat tricky to figure out.



Black and solids and parallel lines: spaces within spaces at Blakes Amsterdam. Below, Blakes' excellent restaurant.



This year, culinary creativity remains much in evidence at Chef Schilo van Coevorden's restaurant, which is intimately set in what was once an 18th century bakery (the iron oven doors remain intact to this day). The tableware—layers of plexiglass, slate and black lacquered trays that are stacked one atop the other—is striking. The cuisine is similarly multi-layered, echoing the presentational complexity: consider, for example, a warm sweet potato emulsion with cold caviar eggs in the center and crème fraîche ice cream on the bottom—perfectly timed by the kitchen, the temperatures in this superbly layered dish ran from hot to cold.

A cucumber-vodka-cream drink featured whole cucumber blended with lime juice, vodka, a touch of ginger and lightly-salted whipped cream. Presented

it in a long, thin tube, it seemed a kind of “space-ship” food from some a 1960s sci-fi movie!

The seafood bento box contained a very tasty quartet—each item teasing and tantalizing. There was lobster on black-and-white sesame toast with sushi roll; seared tuna sushi rolled in red and black peppercorns with flying fish eggs; crab-and-pomelo salad in coriander sauce, and soft shell crab with spring onions.

Our wine, a *premier cru* 1999 *Domaine de la Vougeraie*, Le Clos Blanc de Vougeot Monopole, was straw yellow in color. It displayed notes of smoke, minerality, and a touch of rather cloying sweetness as it stuck to the palate with overrich honey—but the finish was impressively long.

Yet more of the kitchen’s creativity showed in its highly aesthetic dessert tray, with bright and colorful touches like mango pudding, green apple and cardamom sorbet, and a chocolate “comma” made of chocolate mousse.

Blakes remains an beacon of civility and style in the midst of Amsterdam.

This article was written by Jeffrey Riggs, Senior Contributing Editor to *Cognoscenti Magazine*. Photo page 1 courtesy of *Leonardo.com*.

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The dessert tray: a feast on the eyes and on the palate

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