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BY DAVID TYDA PHOTOGRAPHY BY IRVIN SERRANO



The interior design of the Mondrian Scottsdale is sinfully delicious. Join us for a walk through with designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz.



Opposite: Sitting atop the illuminated table in Red Bar is a bowl of glass apples. Are you tempted to take a bite? Left: The sofa in Red Bar is sink-in soft, and don't let the under-sized chairs deceive you, they're for adults. Below: In the lobby, life-size lamps depicting people reaching for light help express the "purity" theme.



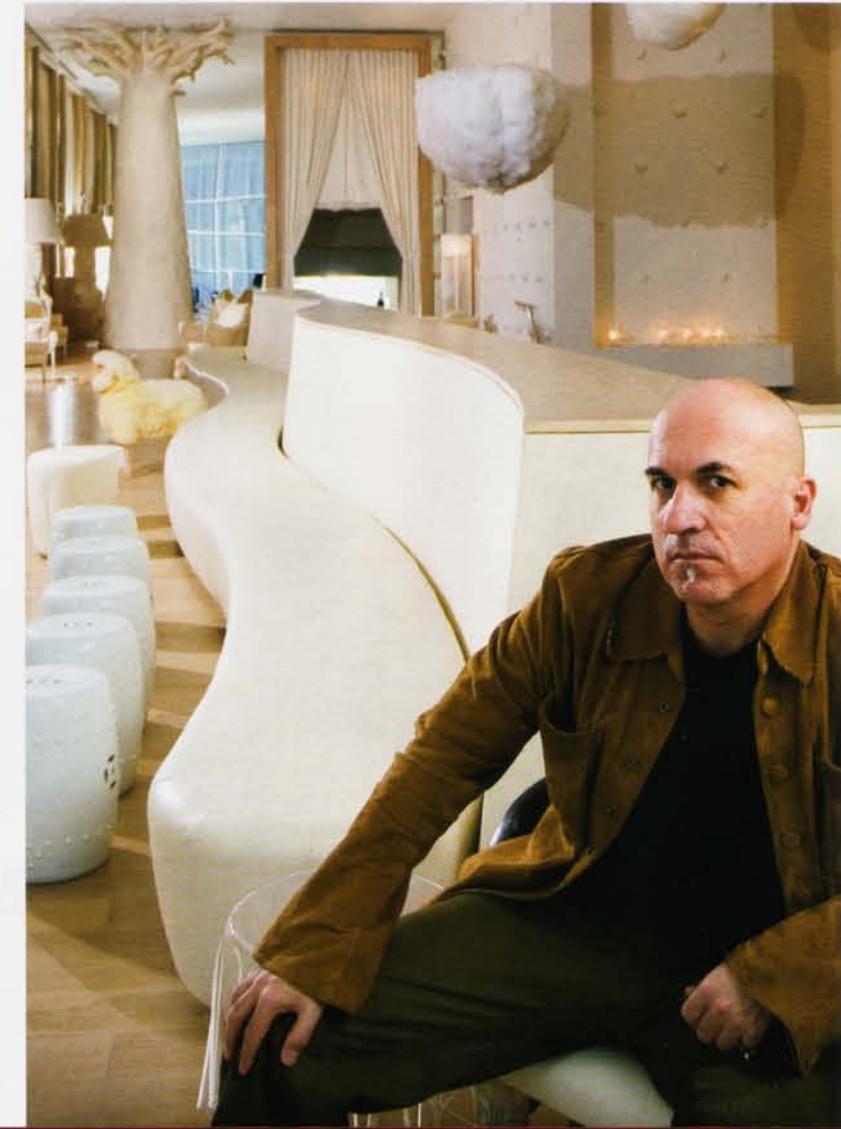
"SENSUAL." THAT'S HOW DESIGNER BENJAMIN Noriega-Ortiz described his upcoming design for the new Mondrian Scottsdale when he was interviewed by *Desert Living* six months ago. Now we learn that his answer was a tease because there's simply no way to wrap this place up into a single word. What we recommend: Use the ensuing walk through as your guide to understanding what Noriega-Ortiz has done because on the surface you might dismiss it as just another hip, modern resort; but underneath, this property tells a story.

For Morgans Hotel Group, the operating company behind the Mondrian Scottsdale and a host of other hip hotels (Morgans, Royalton, and Hudson in New York City, Delano and The Shore Club in Miami Beach, Mondrian in LA, Clift in San Francisco, and St Martins Lane and Sanderson in London), the story started with The James Hotel, a property that was already put into modern motion by a team of entrepreneurs that included Stephen Hanson of B.R. Guest and Danny Errico of Equinox Gyms. They made transforming a squat, bland Holiday Inn into something cool seem easy, with its Barragan-esque color palate and funky design touches—rusty fences, meandering couches, poolside daybeds, and simply stated guestrooms. Morgans, on the other hand, made the transformation seem magical. (Repeat visitors can be heard saying: "I can't believe this is the same lobby!"

At the driveway entrance, two 25-foot steel gates covered in lush vines (they're fake to avoid a scorching death, not a reference to the chests that fill SKYBAR on weekends) appear half-cracked, as if opening. They look best at night, when in-ground spotlights give the vines an elegant shimmer. They



Opposite top: The bar at Asia de Cuba. Below: Looking back toward the entrance, seats meant to resemble tree trunks provide a great spot for guests to admire the illuminated clouds and skulls, which reference the Southwest. This page: Designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz sitting on a chair sourced from Gilbert Ortega in Old Town.



also represent the gates to a garden of earthly delights, and beyond them, the story of creation, temptation, and sin plays itself out. That's where the Mondrian's story, as narrated by Noriega-Ortiz, comes in.

He began by applying a subtle floral motif into the pavement leading up to valet—"It's my version of a red carpet," he says. The buildings themselves have been painted stark white and the facade of the main building is covered in white, sheer curtains and heavier white drapes. Because of the dangling fabric, the *porte-cochere* now feels more like a carriage house—only this one's reserved for Bentleys and Maseratis. The water feature installed for The James still exists, but now curtains hang from the ceiling to cover the top half at night, "adding a sense of mystery and enticing you to walk further," says Noriega-Ortiz.

Before entering, look left. That panel of rose-colored glass was added "because life looks better when you look at it through rose-colored glass," he says. "Your beautiful reflection prepares

you to enter Heaven—the lobby."

Here, white, all white, with touches of beige wood, is all you see. White chairs, white lamps, white walls, white sculptures, a room-length white sofa, illuminated white clouds, and of course, a big white egg directly ahead on the patio of Asia de Cuba (more on that later). "This is the Garden of Eden," says Noriega-Ortiz. "It's pure, it's naked, it's pre-sin. The benches to your right represent a forest of tree trunks where you can gather your thoughts before exploring. The chair to the left represents furniture that's 'becoming' and the lamps are designed with human forms that are reaching for the light ... meanwhile, the curving sofa is like a snake that slithers through the space, enticing you to follow."

Whereas guests formerly walked halfway through the lobby to reach reception, the desk has been pushed forward so check-in and check-out can happen mere feet from the front door. A new boutique has been added, carrying handbags, candles, jewelry, swimwear, lotions and potions, and other items you might need



Opposite top: A cocktail server delivering a drink to one of the four pool-side cabanas. Bottom: Ornate, sculptural lamps with inverted shades sit atop the "apple of temptation" display in each guest room. This page top: A guestroom bed in front of a curtain-lined wall. Below: Cutouts in guest bathroom doors depict a likeness of Albrecht Durer's "Adam & Eve."

during a weekend by the pool. This space, along with reception, is cast with a subtle pink hue, providing visual transition from white to red—the former J-Bar has been transformed into the Red Bar, where Noriega-Ortiz says the first major temptation happens. Now painted entirely in red, one wall is hand-painted with Cupids flying through the air looking for love-victims (only these pudgy cherubs carry cell phones and iPods because, hey, even Cupid's gotta stay connected). What appear to be children's chairs face the wall-to-wall sofa but Noriega-Ortiz points out that it's a visual trick – the seats are actually the same height as the sofa seat. The room is peppered with orange Louis Ghost chairs by Philippe Starck and a central, low-profile picnic-like table that glows from within.

On the Red Bar patio, the long, sleek fireplace remains but daybeds have been added. "I'm from Puerto Rico, so I love it when people are just laying around, relaxing," he says.



A formerly underutilized walkway behind the fireplace allows for free flow between Red Bar and SKYBAR down below, where "fallen angels go to sin the night away." This all-black space inhabits a portion of the former Fiamma restaurant and has its own entrance that's guest-list guarded. Wicker egg chairs in black and white mix with ornate candelabras and all-black cocktail furniture. On the patio, guests lounge on daybeds in front of the fireplace or order bottle service in one of the four cabanas.

"We attached sofa seating to the perimeter wall and placed smoke-colored glass behind it, so people walking around the property won't see you making out," he jokes.

The small bank of four cabanas by the pool, which previously functioned as The James' outdoor spa treatment rooms, has been redesigned to fit the black and white palate as well. Not only can they be closed with a white curtain but cabana guests can sneak a peak into the neighboring cabana through a shared gas fireplace.

Underneath the shade structure by the pool bar, a pool table has been done away with in favor of a giant bed that runs over 20 feet long where wooden tables, pillows, and surrounding chairs encourage groups of any size to sprawl out and get to know one another. The gym is less of a focus now and has actually been reduced in size to add three spa treatment rooms and





Left: The main public bathrooms feature an oversized depiction of Albrecht Durer's "Adam & Eve," also referencing the illustration on guest bathroom doors. Below: One-of-a-kind glass chandeliers hang over both ends of the community table in Asia de Cuba. Opposite: The boldest punch of color in the resort appears in Asia de Cuba—a wall-sized rooster painting.



“There is no art here. It's more about the space. I believe interiors should be works of art in themselves. A walk-in still life. **”**
—Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz

a small product boutique. The most refreshing change by the pool, however, is the now-all-white buildings peeking through the trees.

Guest rooms are designed entirely (read: entirely) in black and white. White sheer curtains line walls while built-in shelving, chairs, and bed frames are all black. Louis Ghost chairs and clear side tables let the two dominant colors, well, dominate. "This is where the battle between good and evil is played out," Noriega-Ortiz says in a 'catch-my-drift' tone. Every room also has a single red apple placed in an open steel box. "It's temptation," he points out. And yes, they're okay to eat. Mondrian staff changes them regularly. Two ornate lamps—a replica of a 1940s design—add a touch of sculpture to every guest room. Because they are on dimmers, they do wonders to the sheer curtains, creating that "tempting" mood he was talking about.

But the most tempting part of the property happens in Asia de Cuba, with its references to farm life and abundance. The experience begins as you descend the stairs to the hostess station, walking on a brown carpet runner (which Noriega-Ortiz likens to a dirt road) with a mirrored wall on one side decorated with frost-ed silhouettes of people. ("You ever notice there are always people alongside a dirt road?" he asks. We haven't, but then again, we don't walk down many dirt roads. Maybe they're paparazzi?)

Regardless, Asia de Cuba is a study in white as well, but in a nod to the restaurant's culinary heritage, Noriega-Ortiz integrated references of bounty—fruit piled high and painted white, light fixtures that resemble ripening bananas, actual rice integrated into the bar top, and of course the eight foot-tall fiberglass egg on the patio – which Noriega-Ortiz designed to complement the surrounding sculpture park in Scottsdale Civic Center Plaza. The star of the show is the designer's taxidermic rooster—he took pictures of it from various perspectives and the images appear in panels around booths. He says, "the rooster is the king of the farm," so it's a fitting reference.

The punch of color in this stark room is just enough. It's whimsical, relevant, and attention-grabbing ... Just like the Mondrian itself. What's up next for parent company Morgans? They recently purchased the Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas and have plans for a Mondrian South Beach with hotel residences. For Noriega-Ortiz? Keep tabs on the Mondrian Los Angeles—he's begun a redesign of that property proving temptation isn't such a bad thing after all. ■

More: 7353 E. Indian School Rd., Scottsdale, AZ; 480.308.1100; www.mondriancottsdale.com



Above: The all-black SKYBAR is a moody and suggestive space. Opposite clockwise: Beyond the entry to SKYBAR, a chair has been covered in tar and a lamp is set askew in the ground. The community sink here expresses one of the deadly sins, Vanity, with multiple, mobile mirrors hung from the ceiling. Candelabras are covered in tar as well; this one is set in front of a wicker Egg chair.

One of the four bottle-service cabanas on the patio at SKYBAR.