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DESIGNER AFRODITI KRASSA AND CURZON CEO PHILIP KNATCHBULL AT CURZON VICTORIA, THE FIRST IN A NEW LINE OF CURZON CINEMAS

LONDON'S CURZON VICTORIA HAS FIVE SCREENS, THREE OF WHICH HAVE 3D AND CONFERRING FACILITIES

THE CINEMA HAS NO TRADITIONAL BOX OFFICE BUT USHERS WILL BE ARMED WITH IPADS TO CONFIRM RESERVATIONS

ALL SCREENS USE SONY 4K TECHNOLOGY. SEE PAGE 097 FOR MORE ON 4K



Hot ticket

As Curzon raises the curtain on a new generation of boutique cinema screens, we're booking our extra-comfortable reclining seats

Pessimists have been predicting the demise of cinema-going ever since the advent of digital technology; yet just one glance at Curzon Cinemas' future plans should be enough to convince cynics of the opposite. The British chain, specialising in art-house films, was established in 1934. The listed Mayfair flagship was designed by Sir John Burnet, Tait and Partners, and features an illuminated coffered ceiling by Victor Vasarely. Now Curzon has 25 new and existing complexes currently in design, renovation, planning or construction all over the UK, and the brand is also interested in expanding abroad.

Four new spaces are slated to open this year. Curzon Victoria is among them and the first one to open its doors this May, although this outlet is not your usual cinema. Created by London-born Greek industrial and interior designer Afroditi Krassa, Curzon Victoria is located within the new Zig Zag Building (designed by architect Patrick Lynch) on London's vibrant Victoria Street, and it promises a radical approach that places the cinema viewing experience back at centre stage.

Krassa – whose work includes interiors for the Itsu sushi chain and Heston Blumenthal's new restaurant in Heathrow Terminal 2 – was introduced to Curzon»



WORKING ON THE NEXT CURZON CINEMA, TO BE LOCATED IN A FORMER VICTORIAN WAREHOUSE IN CANTERBURY. THE AIM IS TO BRING A HOMELY, MEMBERS' CLUB FEEL TO THE INTERIORS, AND THERE ARE PLANS FOR A DRIVE-IN THEATRE

CEO Philip Knatchbull through a previous client and friend of Knatchbull's. This commission swiftly followed. 'Philip said it should be a representation of the brand, which is far bigger than the cinema,' recalls Krassa. 'It should be a physical space where people experience the brand, but it's beyond selling tickets. They also had many innovative ideas about the experience. For example, it's almost paperless.'

'Today everything seems to be homogenised,' says Knatchbull. 'As a quality brand we needed to bring a design element, then overlay that on a standard architect's approach to building a cinema. Afroditi was one of several people we looked at and her design concepts were really in tune with where we're going.'

Indeed, Victoria is no ordinary cinema complex. 'It's the first in a new phase of where the Curzon brand is going, and it's a completely new style of cinema that no one has ever really done before,' says Knatchbull. Its digital marquee is a good example. Sitting right above the front entrance, it playfully marries the old and the new, showing digital images of an analogue, traditional marquee, interchanged with animations.

Curzon Victoria has five screens (ranging from 25 to 75 seats) but no traditional box office. There's also a lot more public space for the customers. Walking in from the street, the visitor is led straight into a bar area, where tickets are available together with drinks. A second bar, a flight of stairs down, is one step closer to the auditorium. The chain is promoting advance booking, so ushers armed with iPads will be present to confirm reservations. The interior is designed to be lighter closer to the entrance, but gradually darkens towards the screens. A tile pattern on the floor subtly refers to the Curzon's bracketed logo, while rich materials such as stained oak wood and customised furniture enhance the space's luxury feel.

'We wanted to make it more of a cultural hub rather than a cinema,' says Krassa. The space is flexible, so events can also be held there. A boutique home cinema room for a maximum of 12 guests, in what was formerly a disused corridor, will now be rented out separately; it's a space that also promotes Curzon Home Cinema, the company's virtual subscription passport to watching new releases at home or on the go.

It may be true that the world of cinema-going is changing, but for Curzon, it's still firmly all about the



VICTORIA

THE GOAL AT CURZON VICTORIA IS TO CREATE A CULTURAL HUB. A MEZZANINE LEVEL, JUST ABOVE THE ENTRANCE BAR, WILL HOST A LIBRARY AND ARCHIVE SPACE WHERE MOVIES, INTERVIEWS AND INFORMATION ON CURZON'S COLLABORATORS WILL BE ON DISPLAY

viewing experience, a fact Krassa worked hard at translating into space. 'Curzon is a purist in its approach,' she says. Everything in the screening rooms is designed as minimally as possible, while reclining, extra-comfortable seats promise to keep 'even the tallest of people' happy. 'It's all about not distracting the viewer's attention from the film,' she adds.

The project was not without its challenges, the biggest of which was its footprint. Due to the large concrete foundations of the Zig Zag Building, the floor plan was incredibly complex and fragmented, and it was impossible to create large screening rooms. Additionally, there were a lot of technical requirements to incorporate, relating to sound and projection, for which Krassa collaborated closely with Unick, a specialist design firm.

This was Krassa's very first cinema project and Curzon's first in a brand new building. While the company has some 50 screens in the pipeline (by various designers), every single complex will be created with its own character. With Victoria opening this month and Curzon Canterbury due to go on site soon, Krassa's new designs are heralding a new era for the much-loved cinema brand. ★

www.afroditi.com, www.curzoncinemas.com