

# Bleu Blanc

## Renaissance Downtown Hotel, Dubai

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Words: Heleri Rande • Photography: Courtesy of Renaissance Downtown Hotel

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Filled with yoga studios, food markets, artisan coffee shops, stylish rooftop bars and even the UAE's first water homes, Business Bay is arguably the hippest area in Dubai.

The 12km-long waterfront promenade offers unparalleled views up and down the Dubai Water Canal, which links the Arabian Gulf with the Creek in Old Dubai. Nestled along the winding canal sits Renaissance Downtown Hotel, part of Marriott International's lifestyle brand. Opened in 2017, the 25-storey converted office building comprises 298 guestrooms, the luxurious Six Senses Spa Dubai and dining concepts by two star chefs.

One of those is LA-based David Myers, also known as the Gypsy Chef, under whose direction three unique concepts have been born: Bleu Blanc, Basta and Poppy. Myers exudes a sense of familiarity and warmth with everyone he meets – he might be a celebrity in the kitchen, but he's most certainly left his ego at the door – and it's clear that the chef's spirit translates through every touchpoint from design and service to music, lighting and of course food. "We wanted to keep it simple, there are no tweezers in this restaurant," he states half-jokingly.

The level of detail on display at Bleu Blanc, Basta and Poppy is testament to the input of both Myers and Claire Craig from WA Interiors, along with their respective teams, who had the vision to create three distinctive concepts that each tell a story of their own. The beverage programme has been developed by mixologist extraordinaire Sam Ross

from New York, with whom Myers has collaborated on all of his projects. A similar pattern follows for the menu and uniform, designed by LA-based studio Folklor.

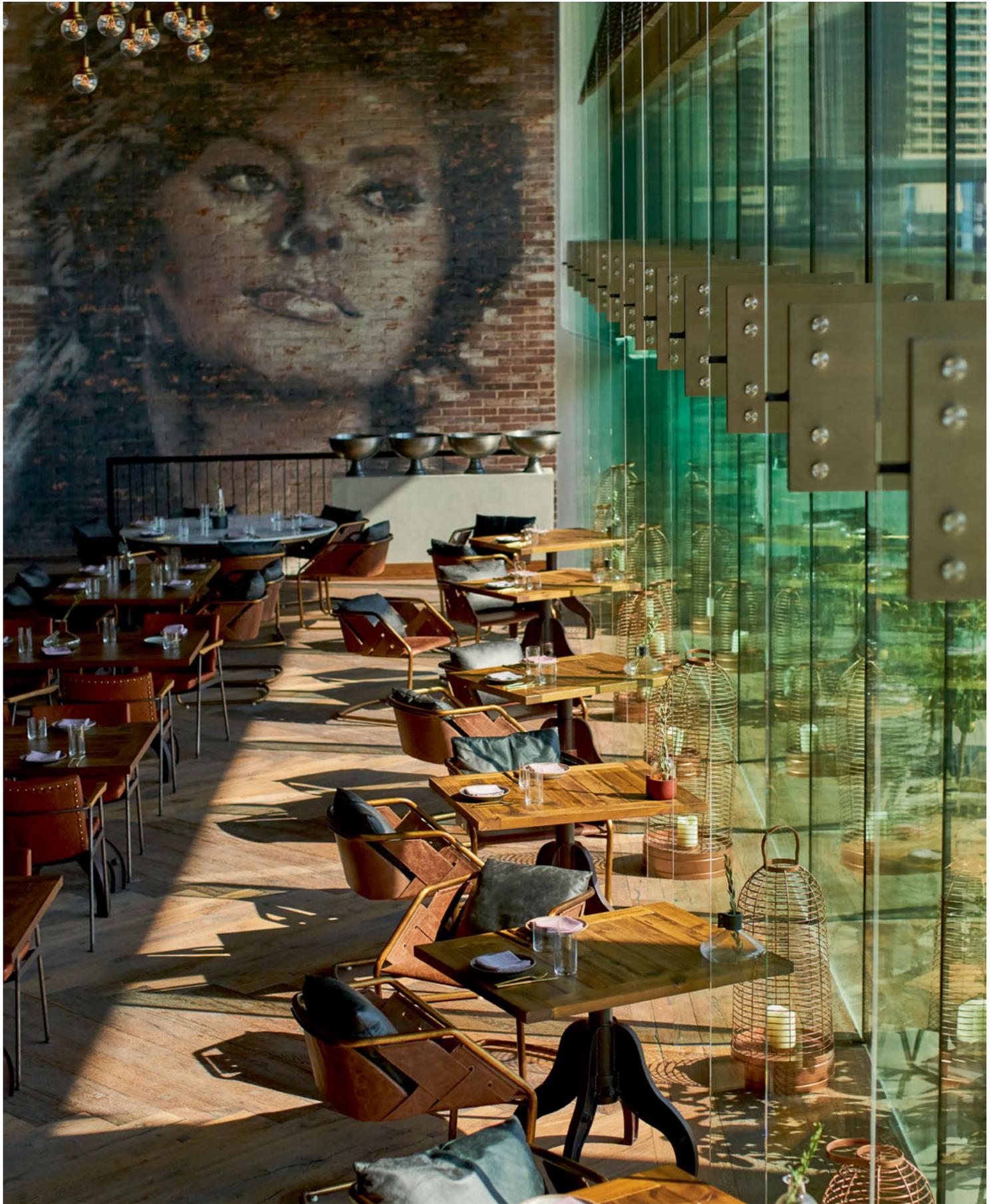
It's still early days of course but Bleu Blanc has already gained plenty of plaudits since opening; a French farmhouse-inspired concept that took the chef and his kitchen team to the southern borders of France and into Spain to explore local ingredients, try the best asadores, and experience the richness of the surroundings. "I wanted to create the feeling of home in the south of France," he says. "Cooking over live fire is a way of relaxing and it brings everyone together."

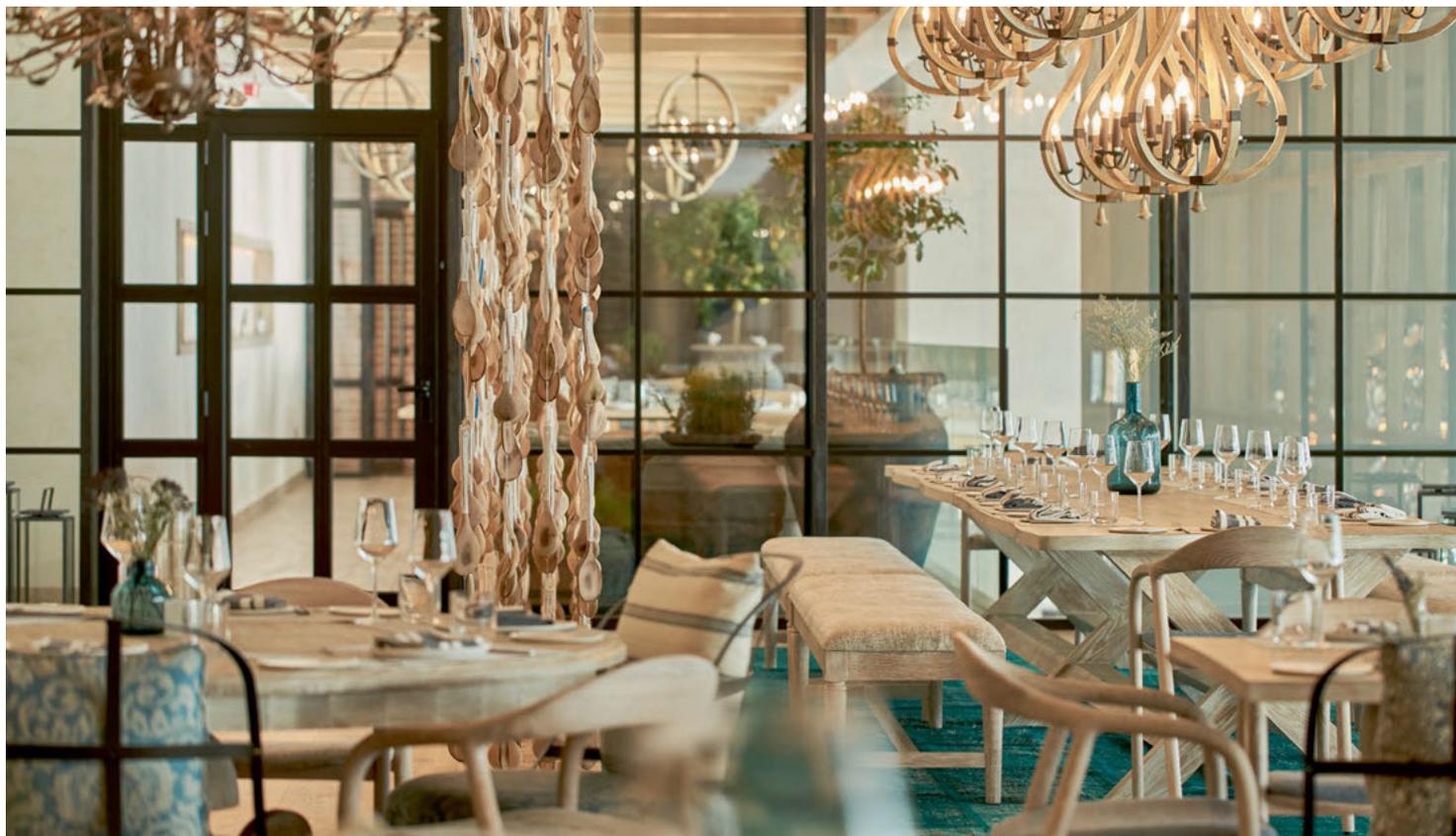
The eye-catching azure doors at street level are a visual representation of the French Riviera coastline colours, while the lavender wall and the smell of fresh bread excite the senses upon entering. The 146-cover restaurant space is masterfully divided, with the bar, sommelier's island, wood-fired grill and semi-private dining area all getting attention and speaking to the synergies achieved between Myers and Craig. "We were creating a movie here, all details had to be looked after," says Myers.

Even more imperative than the physical details of the restaurant, like the mismatched cutlery handpicked from a vintage store in East London, is the focus on staff training and motivation. Myers has established a strong leadership team here with Executive Chef Alex Szkaradkiewicz and General Manager Juan Van Huyssteen at the helm. "Character is the most important aspect of recruitment, I









need to know whether they actually care,” explains Myers. “And from our side, we need to treat them well and be able to offer our staff a growth plan.”

Complementing Bleu Blanc’s offer is Basta, an amalgamation of three Italian staples – pasta from Rome, bistecca from Florence and pizza from Napoli. Myers travelled around Italy together with Head Chef Nicola Fontolan, and the menu was literally written between train rides around the three cities. As a result, handmade pasta dishes, pizzas straight from a wood-burning oven and steaks from an open wood-fired grill make up the seasonally-driven menu; the carefully curated dishes are served on plates by East Fork, Jono Pandolfi USA and Kinto Japan.

Meanwhile, the open-plan kitchen in the 135-seat restaurant conveys the theatricality of Italian cooking, and the use of bricks, wood and touches of marble add sleekness to the ambience. “I wanted to create a buzzy atmosphere,” says Myers. “But it should still have familiarity and feel like someone’s home in Rome.”

The most eye-catching element of this restaurant’s décor is the huge handpainted artwork of screen icon Sophia Loren in her pomp on the back wall, undoubtedly the most Instagrammable shot in the entire hotel. “We will also add a projector above to play old Italian flicks,” explains Myers, just in case the mural of the grande dame of Italian cinema is not la dolce vita enough.

Myers’ third concept at Renaissance Downtown Hotel, Poppy, is tucked away between the two restaurants. The wooden shutters, large comfy chairs and waist-level bar island, with guests invited to mix their own drinks with the bartender, again creates an accessible and welcoming atmosphere. The dimly lit speakeasy, where music is played from vinyl turntables, has been inspired by cocktail bars in Tokyo, and the glass and barware is predominantly of the handmade Japanese variety. “Think of it as a South-East Asia meets the Middle East vibe,” explains Myers, whose other restaurants are all located in Asia, the region from which he draws much of his inspiration. “When I first visited Tokyo, I fell in love with the place,” admits Myers, “I am certain that I came from Japan in some other life.”

Of course, new hotel F&B concepts are launched in Dubai all the time, but there can be no doubt that securing the services of Myers is a real coup for Renaissance Downtown Hotel; the initial buzz around Bleu Blanc, Basta and Poppy speaks volumes. The Gypsy Chef has gained a well-deserved reputation for pushing boundaries, rewarding team members and honing new skills through his seemingly endless travelling in recent years, and it’ll be fascinating to see how his latest foray takes root in the UAE.

[www.bleublanc-dubai.com](http://www.bleublanc-dubai.com)

**IN A BITE** Covers: 146 (Bleu Blanc), 135 (Basta) • Owner: RDK • Operator: Marriott International • Architecture and Interior Design: WA International • Signature Chef: David Myers • Executive Chef: Alex Szkaradkiewicz • Tableware: Haand; Sheldon • Glassware: Schott Sweisel; William Yeoward; Match Pewter; Riedel • Barware: Koriko; Yukiwa; Cocktail Kingdom • Cutlery: Laguiole Rossignol • Catering Equipment: Sheldon; Match Pewter; Mauviel 1830 • Menu and Uniform Design: Folklor