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The **fashion** *issue*



Alphenberg's leather tiles adorn a bar (top) and a restaurant ceiling (above).

SOMETHING NEW

Vanessa Yung

Under the skin

"The skins come from animals that lived in the country, [were killed for their meat] and processed with environmentally friendly tanning stuffs," Dutch brand Alphenberg promises on its website.

That guarantee helped persuade Winston Lam Wing-heng, founder of Kitchens + Interiors, to import Alphenberg's water-buffalo leather tiles for use on walls, ceilings and floors.

"Alphenberg's leather tiles have that warm feel, which offers a good contrast to Hong Kong's ultra-sleek and contemporary designs," Lam says. "This is particularly important for homes and places where a dose of warm atmosphere is desirable, such as in an office, shop or restaurant."

The toxin-free tiles are coloured with natural dyes and are available in two finishes – Tundra (a matt, suede-like

finish that is scratch resistant) and Pampas (a glossy finish that is protected against stains and other marks) – each of which comes in four shades.

Lam says most other leather tiles are made from reconstituted leather but those from the Dutch brand are made from strips of water-buffalo leather, which is supple, soft to the touch and "alive".

He suggests mixing and matching the tiles with wood and stone as "the grains in the leather and the dark or light shade give a vintage look that is also very trendy, again producing a sharp contrast".

Leather conditioner will keep the tiles in optimal condition. Good ventilation is recommended to combat the city's heat and humidity.

Alphenberg leather tiles are available at Kitchens + Interiors, Ruttonjee Centre, 11 Duddell Street, Central, tel: 2810 0979.



Illustration: Henrik Drescher

RANT

Pavan Shamdasani

Going hungry on mean street

A friendly back-and-forth argument about street food hawkers has played out on the *South China Morning Post's* letters page in recent weeks, following an article about the harassment by control officers of vendors in Tung Chung.

The licensing of food hawkers has been discussed on and off since the government banned street food in the 1970s. These days, only a late-night sojourn to the dark side in Kowloon reveals the last of this breed.

Some say we should do a Bangkok and return to the down-and-dirty days, when people paid their money and took their chances when it came to street food.

Others say we should follow the example of squeaky-clean Singapore, where air-conditioned hawker centres are starting to resemble American fast-food courts.

I say we look at another city altogether: New York. The stereotype is hot dogs and bagels but anyone who's spent a significant amount of time in the Big Apple knows there is much more. From Brooklyn to the Bronx, thousands of carts and trucks sell everything from basic snacks and soft drinks to entire boxed meals.

I lived in New York for four years and can't imagine what life would've been like without these vendors: they offered the ideal grab-and-go for my morning coffee and the opportunity to enjoy the summer outdoors with a basket of southern fried chicken and mash.

New York encourages street food vendors and, in return, its people are given a sense of camaraderie and culture that is sorely lacking in our ubiquitous 7-Elevens and microwaveable dim sum.

Pictures: Kitchens + Interiors

Picture: David Wong



CITY SCOPE

Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore in Beijing

The art of the impossible

Among the topics discussed at the annual Communist Party's Central Committee meeting this month were ways to cultivate "soft" power and promote Chinese culture abroad.

It is ironic, then, that Beijing's soft power has again been wielded with sledge-hammer subtly. For a country attempting to dictate its cultural might to the masses, the mainland performed a spectacular own goal with the sudden "postponement" of the opera *Dr Sun Yat-sen* at the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

The world premiere was held in Hong Kong instead, on October 13. What promised to be a small-scale affair turned into the must-have ticket of the month after international media got wind of the story.

The arts centre cited "logistical reasons" for the cancellation but "banned in Beijing" comments abounded. The opera, composed by Chinese-American Huang Ruo,

concerns the private life of Sun, regarded as the father of modern China and a character who the party views with mixed feelings, due to his ties with Taiwan.

So what might have been a dime a dozen production became, well, sexy. Even if *Dr Sun Yat-sen* were the opera equivalent of stinky tofu it would hardly have mattered. Viewing any art that has apparently felt the stinging back-hand of the Chinese state is a tantalising prospect.

Predictably, mainland media

has remained quiet on the subject. Despite this, questions about the role of the government in dictating art for the people have flared yet again.

"If a government can't treat an art work in a rational and reasonable way and forbids good works for political reasons, it is sad for art and the citizen," a young art student at Peking University's School of Arts says. "It's a great pity I can't watch it."

Chen Yufan, a contributor to the micro-blogging site Sina

Weibo, was more candid: "The Communist Party has been in office for more than 50 years but there is not one leader who can be compared with Sun Yat-sen. Because they are ashamed of their own inferiority, they censored the performance of this opera. They are afraid an expansion of Sun Yat-sen's commemoration will hurt the prestige of the party."

In May, the *China Daily* interviewed Huang for what can only be described as a gushing piece lauding the upcoming opera.

"As a younger generation Chinese composer, it's good to see colleagues and teachers getting acknowledgment [in reference to Zhou Long's Pulitzer Prize for the opera *Madam White Snake*]," Huang enthused. "It made me feel that anything is possible in this country."

It's unlikely he was considering the last-minute cancellation of his own play as a possibility.



The cast of *Dr Sun Yat-sen* rehearse the opera, which was intended to mark the centenary of the 1911 revolution.