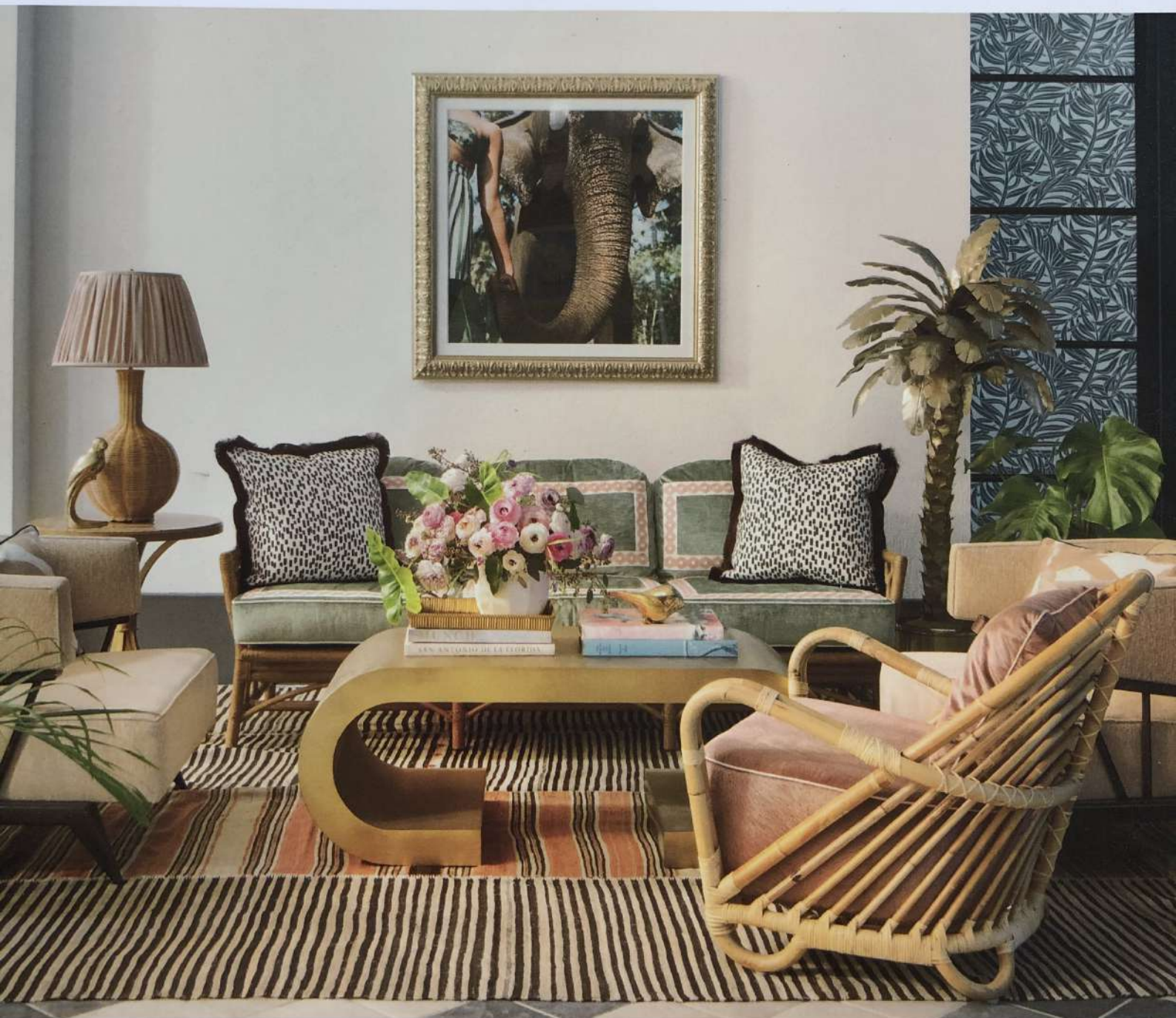


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Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates SensAsia Stories Spa

DUBAI

Taking cues from Pan-Asian architecture typology, Roar creates a new flagship spa for SensAsia.

Words: Eleanor Howard • Photography: © The Oculis Project

Since opening its doors on Sheikh Zayed Road 15 years ago, Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates has prided itself on offering innovative experiences. From providing direct access to both sand and snow, to launching an immersive 3D dining concept, the 392-key hotel continually demonstrates its dedication to enhancing the guest experience. Most recently, the operator enlisted SensAsia – the largest independent spa group in the UAE – to upgrade its wellness offering.

Following the success of its Urban Spas, SensAsia has launched its latest concept, Stories – a flagship destination comprising eight treatment rooms, a couples' suite, a hammam, experience showers, herb saunas and therapeutic relaxation areas complete with heated beds and virtual reality headsets.

Conceived as a more luxurious venue than the rest of the SensAsia portfolio, the new addition's serene interior was envisioned by Roar, a studio founded by Pallavi Dean. "The design process for SensAsia Stories was an exercise in restraint for me," explains Dean. "We have purposefully not overpowered the senses; instead this is a place of quiet, respite and reflection. The interior scheme – dark and light hues of grey, complemented by a warm wood finish and strong stone slabs – allows one to just 'be'."

The interior concept is rooted in SensAsia's Pan-Asian origins, evoking traditional architectural elements from the region. "We cast the net wide to understand the architecture

of the region looking at countries such as Thailand, Bali and Vietnam for inspiration," reveals Dean. "Arches kept appearing in our research as key features of this architectural typology, and it soon became apparent that this shape would influence our design. We have used large, illuminated arches above the male and female lobbies and incorporated arch-like decorative elements around the reception area's shelving to compose a dramatic, theatrical effect."

Spanning 4,000ft², the spa takes guests on a sensory journey through Asia, combining tactile natural materials and a muted colour palette. "We played with just three main materials and colours. Grey stone and slate, brown tones within the luxury vinyl flooring, and natural textures such as wallpaper with hessian finishes," says Dean. "The interiors revolve around the material palette – it's layered with texture. This helps with the acoustics as well as tactility: the touch and feel; it's a space designed for all senses."

Completing the sensory experience is a carefully curated lighting scheme that sees LED strips line the archways in what has become a signature element of the space. And not one to miss a design opportunity, Dean has paid special attention to the areas up above. She explains: "We also celebrated the ceilings; they are often neglected but in a spa, clients spend a lot of time on their backs! So we clad the ceiling with a captivating bronze mesh structure. Each room has a unique pattern creating a new experience for every visit."