



elevated style

Only a handful of restaurants in the world can boast unrestricted panoramas. Orbit, the recently refurbished Sky Tower restaurant, certainly takes advantage of its lofty location and as Marie Cleland discovers, it's not just the breathtaking views of Auckland city that keep patrons coming back for more. Becky Nunes takes the photos.

A room with a view, that classic adage, has taken on greater meaning since the opening of the Sky Tower restaurant, Orbit. Five years on, plus a minimalist makeover, and Orbit is more than just a great place to see a great view – it's a complete dining experience that would work even without the spectacular scenery.

The cleaner, sharper look of Orbit is due to the award-winning expertise of architect Andrew Lister, and the industry experience of the new food and beverage manager for Sky Tower, Brendan Turner (former Sheinkin owner). The pair, who previously collaborated on the Sheinkin makeover, undertook a complete revamp of the space, marrying contemporary styles with features that complemented the established landscape.

And the 360° views of Auckland are not the only attraction. New decor, menu and wine list, uniforms, kitchen facilities and cutlery, have ushered in an international presence at Orbit and created a superior environment in which to dine.

Lister, an Auckland-based architect, wanted a first-rate setting for patrons: "People get dressed up to go there – you should give them something to dress up for." To achieve this, he used high quality materials, such as rechargeable lights on each table. A nifty innovation, they increase the feeling of intimacy, "like you are the only two people in the restaurant".

He also wanted the interior to relate to the restaurant's outlook. "That's pretty much where the design came from." The reception desk, which acts as a foreground in the view of volcanic Rangitoto Island, is of New Zealand bluestone. The minimalist style is also set off by a sumptuous colour scheme – deep blood-red walls and upholstery, and dark-stained wood tables.

Lister counts amongst the project's challenges, the limited 10-day period allowed to rebuild the restaurant, and the precision needed to fit the custom-made 30m radius carpet. This feature's concentric design is based on a theme of movement, to accentuate the revolving nature of the space – a pattern of shaded greys, it is reminiscent of rain drops in a time-lapse photograph.

Turner says there has been a positive response from the "large loyal base" of regular diners, as well as new visitors. He says that throughout the America's Cup, Orbit attracted overseas guests and competitors, including Prada, "Mr Louis Vuitton" Bruno Trouble, Alinghi and the crew of the Italian Navy tall ship, Amerigo Vespucci: "We've drawn quite a lot [of the action] up to the tower."

One of the best times to visit Orbit is at sunset, when you can watch the city transform into a bustling night spot. Alongside this ambience, the highlights have to be the impeccable service and eclectic menu. Indulge yourself with the Valrhona chocolate cake – it's divine.

Also revamped is the Sky Lounge, the new elegant retro look features white Vernon Panton chairs, chocolate carpet and funky bar stools (see below, left).

