



**E**VERY RESTAURANT HAS A STORY TO TELL – AND IF IT ISN'T apparent at first glance, design and concept firm Avroko will make it clear. The New York-based company, which specialises in restaurant and bar makeovers, has made its name with a rigorous top-to-bottom approach to its emotionally charged designs. It creates, assembles and oversees everything down to the smallest detail, from the buttons on staff uniforms to the font sizes on the aperitif menu.

Avroko's projects do not follow a central theme, but instead work with a specific narrative in mind. Many of its projects draw on the location and history of the space and the surrounding community. The flashy "red top" tabloid headlines at Manhattan lounge and bar The Daily, for example, reference the old classic meeting houses and speakeasies of the prohibition era, along with the warm walnut paneling and understated menu boards of that period.

"The spaces that we make have an authentic resonance in the way they communicate with the guests and in the way of storytelling," says William Harris, who founded the company with Kristina O'Neal, Adam Farmerie and Greg Bradshaw; three friends from his time at Carnegie Mellon University. "We are all conceptual," adds O'Neal, "and like to bring a bit of history to what we are doing."

Avroko "came together" – they say it was not really formed – back in 2000, when Harris and O'Neal's design venture KO Media first worked on a project together with Farmerie

and Bradshaw's architectural company Avro Design. "We didn't have a business plan to start with, we just figured we would collaborate on a few projects. "We never intended to stay together for this long," says O'Neal.

They are certainly pleased they did. The company now has offices throughout the US, in Europe and in Asia, with projects underway in seven countries. New York restaurant Public, which features scavenged pieces of old municipal buildings, won them two James Beard Foundation Awards – the Oscars of the food world – in 2004, and the railway-themed RN74 in San Francisco won them another in 2010. They have been called everything from "tastemakers" to "new totalitarians," and are looking set to become one of the most innovative design firms on an international scale.

Harris describes the company as having a global focus, but admits that Asia has become especially important. Avroko designed Socialito and Lily & Bloom in Hong Kong, and most

#### DETAILED DESIGN

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The interior of Socialito in Hong Kong; Avroko's Kristina O'Neal, Greg Bradshaw, Adam Farmerie and William Harris

#### OPPOSITE

New Spanish-inspired restaurant and bar Catalunyia in Wan Chai