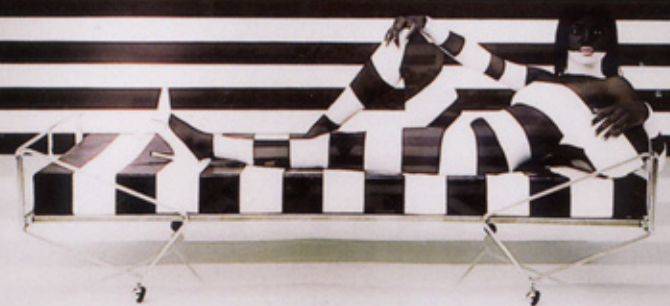


# INTERIOR DESIGN

FEBRUARY 2003



opposites attract



walkthrough



## home of the elk

IN A CITY WHERE WILDLIFE tends to come in small packages, it's not every day that one encounters an elk's gaze while tossing back a scotch and soda. But Totem Bar isn't your typical New York hot spot. Architects **Minsuk Cho**, **James Slade**, and **Anthony Fontenot** drew inspiration from the Pacific Northwest's hunting traditions.

The three architects connected two adjacent storefronts to form the 1,000-square-foot space, where totem poles appear as a central motif. Carved-plywood reliefs by British artist Alex Binnie extend along one wall. Framed by acrylic light boxes—the lower doubles as a drink ledge—the zoomorphic graphics are painted in a combination of red, black, and teal. A complementary shade of red paint covers other walls and the original concrete floor.

Mounted above the 32-foot-long bar, topped in mother-of-pearl, is the aforementioned elk head. The Totem concept was still a glimmer in owner Charles Boday's eye when he purchased the trophy, but the de facto mascot turned out to fit perfectly with the interior's theme, if not the low ceiling. "The antlers were so long that, if we'd hung the head on the wall, it would've been staring at seated customers," explains Slade.

With the head mounted on the ceiling instead, the antlers point guests toward the adjacent lounge, where the totem-pole idea continues to develop. "Our design translates the art and act of carving," explains Slade. The architects used plywood panels to curve the side-walls and wrapped the undulating surfaces and ceiling in beige felt, creating the appearance of a tunnel carved from a block of wood. The trio also designed angular multipurpose furniture forms. Covered in felt with two painted plywood ends, the 20 pieces flip to serve as either seats or tables. Positioned near the ceiling are three more carved artworks, imposing guardians watching over the 20-something crowd.

—Sheila Kim

BAR STOOLS: CHAIRS & STOOLS ETC.; LIGHT BOX: ACME PLASTIC (ACRYLIC); INTERNATIONAL LIGHTS (FIXTURES); UPHOLSTERY FELT: AETNA FELT CORPORATION; GENERAL CONTRACTOR: CUSTOM DESIGN CENTER.

*Clockwise from top: An elk head surveys New York's Totem Lounge. Architects Minsuk Cho, James Slade, and Anthony Fontenot installed an acrylic light box below carved-plywood artwork by Alex Binnie. Felt and plywood surfaces allow furniture forms to function as both seats and tables.*