



Setting a new benchmark in lighting design

by Leigh Darroll

Located at the south-west corner of Nelson Mandela Square, adjacent to the thoroughfare that leads from the open piazza into the shopping mall, the new Tashas Café claims its space as an authentic 'street-side' café. The outdoor terrace is open to the square and the outdoor elements. Inside, the café opens to the mall and the passing pedestrian traffic.

Pamboukian Lightdesign was appointed to undertake the lighting design for this new Tashas. Lighting designer Paul Pamboukian points out that this iteration of Tashas differs from others in the chain in that it includes a fine dining area (with its own separate menu), as well the bistro-type café and bar for which Tashas is best known. The fine dining area, known as The Flamingo Room, is set back from the open café and the passing parade, occupying its own defined space though clearly part of the unified whole and forming the pivot between the indoor café and the outdoor terrace.

"Essentially the restaurant encompasses four different zones: the outdoor terrace, the entrance area, the fine dining area and the café," says Pamboukian. "We undertook an analysis of these areas and developed lighting scenarios for each which we proposed to the client."

Pamboukian notes that Natasha Sideris, who conceived the original Tashas before selling it on to Famous Brands to become a limited franchise chain, where she is still the CEO for Tashas and very much involved, holds a strong personal interest in the Mandela Square venture. She maintains a hands-on approach in the business and every detail is considered.

Tashas already has a distinctive design ethos, with each café drawing inspiration from and responding to the context in which it is located. Regarding the Mandela Square project, Pamboukian says it was refreshing to work with a client who recognises the value of good design and

appreciates the importance of good lighting. He emphasises that lighting is particularly important in the hospitality environment. It can make the difference that invites people to sit down and feel comfortable and at ease in a restaurant rather than hassled and uncomfortable. "Natasha understands this," he says.

Consequently, the lighting design was very much part of the whole interior design process from the start. Nadine Bak was responsible for the interior design and Pamboukian Lightdesign worked closely with her as well as the other designers, artists and contractors involved in the project. "It was very much a cooperative process," says Pamboukian.

"The successful integration of lighting in any space needs this kind of cooperation, which makes the space work as a unit rather than an amalgamation of bits." In effect, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

The entrance

The entrance to Tashas from the thoroughfare to the mall is celebrated by an eye-catching almost fluid, sculptural installation, designed by Michael Hyam of Smelt Glass Studios. Conceptualised as a representation of the baobab in flower, with its curving branches formed in dark steel and the flowers in folding discs of opaque white glass, this is suspended above the entrance.

A lot of thought went into the positioning of this sculptural piece within the space and how it should be lit.

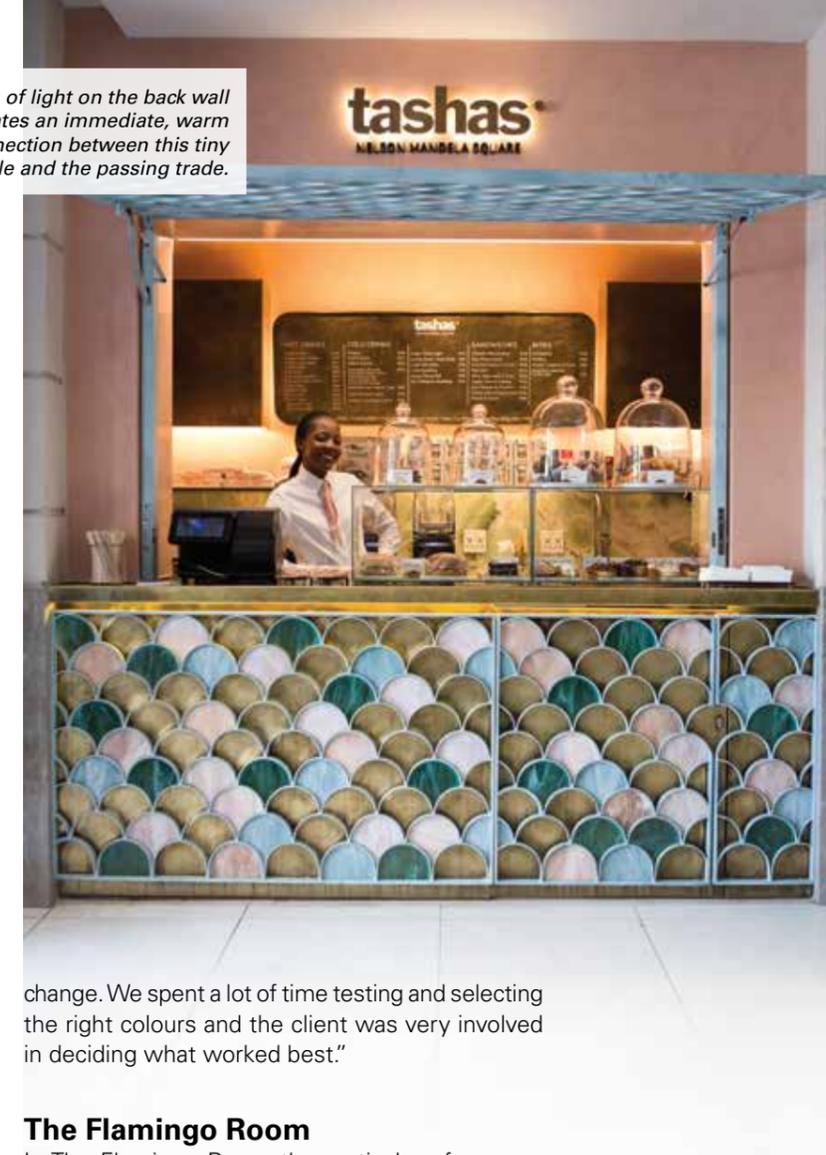
"We used profile spotlights which are mounted in niches high up on the walls (seven metres up in this double volume) and focused across the space to light up the installation," Pamboukian explains. At first glance, the sculpture itself appears to hold the light source, but it is catching and reflecting the projected light.

During the day, this is complemented by natural light coming through the clear glazed entranceway to the mall and the glazed arches at the upper level of the building's façade.

"We also used gobos here, which break up the light," Pamboukian adds, "so that at night the projected light from the profile spotlights throws shadows as well as light across the entrance installation and creates the effect, for people in the restaurant, that they are sitting under a tree."

"Very softly coloured light is introduced – a soft steel blue and pastel pink – to emphasise the shadowy effect and add to the night-time mood

A wash of light on the back wall creates an immediate, warm connection between this tiny cubicle and the passing trade.



change. We spent a lot of time testing and selecting the right colours and the client was very involved in deciding what worked best."

The Flamingo Room

In The Flamingo Room the vertical surfaces are emphasised, lighting up the walls to create an intimate space enclosed by warm light. Low glare pin spots are positioned over each table.

All the lighting in the restaurant is programmed to an astronomical clock, so that the interior lighting is aligned with local solar time and adjusts accordingly though the day – from the brighter morning to midday light, through the softer afternoon to dimmer evening and night-time light. Pamboukian explains that this tracking or alignment with the natural circadian cycle of light is very comforting. The human body's natural rhythm is attuned to it and it is therefore especially inviting and relaxing in a restaurant environment.

The pin spots were selected to accentuate the intimate feel for each table, avoiding a general wash of light and rather punctuating the space with focus points, making each table come alive. The pin spots are positioned for a set table arrangement and even if this changes for particular sittings, the distribution of the spots is designed to work effectively.

Pamboukian emphasises that warm light has been used throughout the restaurant, with colour temperature at nothing less than 2700 K and accents up to 3000 K. "Warm light is essential to creating a space where people can relax," he says.

“In this context, it is especially important in differentiating the restaurant space from the shopping mall where cooler white light predominates.”

The street-side café

In the general seating area of the café, which is really an extension of the mall, more general lighting is used, creating a soft wash of light over the tables. Some spotlights light up plants at corner placements and other elements which help to demarcate the café space. The table lamps on the bar counter, standing on brass feet with hooded shades in the same opaque white glass as is used in the entrance sculpture, were designed by Bak.

“We persuaded the shopping centre’s management to link the warm light selected for Tashas across the thoroughfare to the restaurant strip that runs along the southern edge of the square,” says Pamboukian. This ceiling-level ‘bridge’ of warm light, especially noticeable at night, unites the hospitality suite alongside the square and implies a transitional space – inviting people to slow down – between the bright white light of the shopping mall circuits and the outdoor piazza.

Though very subtle, the physical effects of light and lighting are very real. “This is why colour and intensity are such critical factors,” Pamboukian notes.

The outdoor terrace

The terrace has a garden feel to it, with soft light, feature panels on the walls and planting. It invites people to experience the outdoor space, the sun-

light, night-time and the changing weather, rather than shutting itself off from the elements.

Every detail

At Tashas it seems that nothing is left to afterthought, every detail is carefully thought through. Even the bathroom, tucked away to a corner of the outdoor terrace, invites patrons to a walk outside experience and the bathroom itself Pamboukian describes as “something of a fantasy space”. It is thoughtfully appointed with sophisticated finishes, subtle lighting, a wall of artworks and a collection of small sculptures.

The Tashas takeaway kiosk, which is positioned around the corner from the main restaurant, also received its share of attention. Here the lighting is very simple – a wash of light up the back wall and LED backlighting to the shopfront signage. This emphasis again to the vertical planes creates an immediate connection between this tiny cubicle (about three metres square) tucked into the wall and the passing trade at this entranceway to the shopping mall. “Lighting the vertical surfaces contains the space and creates a friendly, connecting ambience,” says Pamboukian.

Technical specifications

Joao Viegas of Pamboukian Lightdesign was the project leader for the Tashas project, handling all the lighting specifications, sourcing the right lights in terms of colour, intensity, beam angles, dimmability, ensuring that they were compatible with the

control system and working with the consultants and contractors through the installation on site.

In the Flamingo Room, for example, Viegas worked with the ceiling contractor to create cones in the ceiling panels that would allow for the pin spots to be pulled into the ceiling space in order to limit the beam angle and reduce glare to an absolute minimum – even with the high quality, low glare lamps specified here. Pamboukian flags glare as a critical factor to be avoided in restaurants.

As the project proceeded a lot of time was spent on *in-situ* testing and fine-tuning the lighting with the interior design team and the client, testing different colours and different colour combinations to create the desired effect. “In the profile spotlights, for example, after testing stronger and more highly saturated colours, which proved too harsh – creating a kind of Hollywood effect, we finally decided on very subtle colour, which works,” says Pamboukian.

He also acknowledges Imperial Electrical, the electrical contractors that handled the lighting installation. “They were already tuned into the Tashas philosophy and the design demands of the project and were part of the cooperative process. They went beyond the normal scope of work in testing, adjusting and fine-tuning the lighting with us. It’s very rare to find a contractor willing to go to such lengths to get the job right and do it well,” he says.

In the final analysis, Pamboukian says, “The lighting works well, but it’s not noticeable – it’s not a stand-out feature – and this is as it should be. It just feels right. It’s not offensive or obtrusive. It’s dynamic, adjusting with the changing natural

light; it’s alive, not static. Fortunately technology is progressing to the degree that makes it economic and feasible to change the colour and intensity of lighting through the day, as we have done here at Tashas.” LID



Profile spotlights mounted on the walls project subtly coloured light across the sculptural installation.



General lighting creates a soft wash of warm light over the tables in the open seating area.



In the Flamingo Room light is used to emphasise the vertical surfaces.



Subtle lighting reveals the sophisticated finishes.