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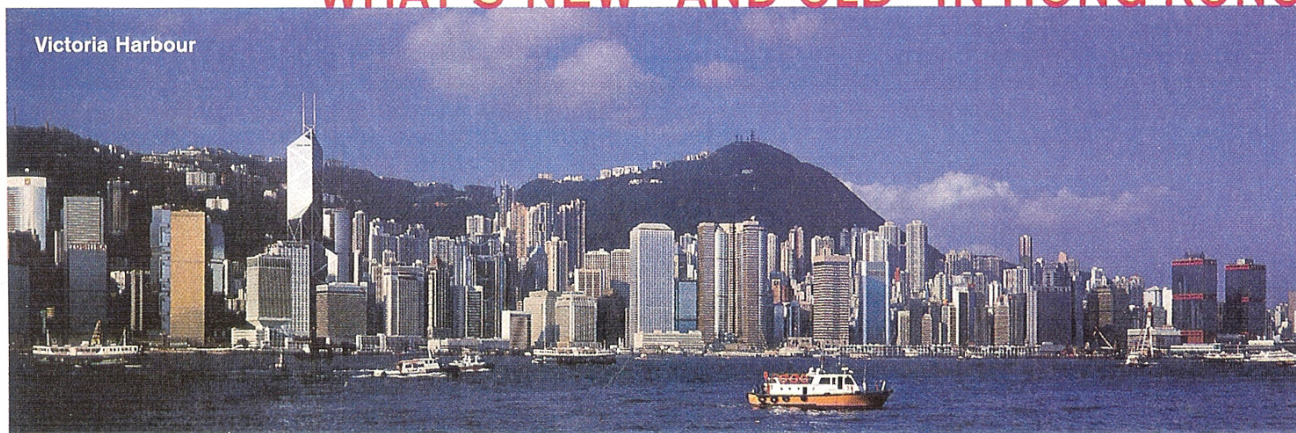
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Ralph Lauren

TRAVELER'S NOTEBOOK

WHAT'S NEW—AND OLD—IN HONG KONG



Five years after the handover from British rule, Hong Kong has changed—and has not. Residents feel the influence of mainland China, where the city's greatest number of visitors hail from today, as well as the specter of a more repressive government. In the 1990s, economists cited the city as a capitalist model, and its pastimes revolved around money: getting, spending and flaunting it. Back then, a luxury-goods tax—now being discussed—was unimaginable. Some businesses have left, but the best reason for a visit remains: you can experience the exoticism of the East with the amenities of the West.

Designer Priscilla Chen likens the city to the child of a Chinese father and a British mother: "When it was younger, it worshiped all things English; then it rejected that side of itself to embrace its Chinese side. Now it is learning to appreciate its duality." Appropriately for a city known for its skyline, one of the best manifestations of this may be the newly approved \$3.1 billion West Kowloon cultural center, where Chinese arts will be housed in a space designed by the British architect Lord Foster. So go for the mixes—of East and West, old and new.

HOTELS WHAT'S CHANGED: The Regent, that hive of windows that hangs over the harbor, is now an **Inter-Continental**. It still has spectacular views and rooms, but some of the magic is missing (800-327-0200). The big news is the **Four Seasons Hong Kong**; its towers are rising across the harbor in Central district. Scheduled to open in 2005, it should be the best place to stay on the Hong Kong side. WHAT HASN'T: **The Peninsula**, still my favorite, manages to merge tradition with the cutting edge, as witnessed by anyone who passes through the historic lobby to get to Felix, the hip, Philippe Starck-designed restaurant on the roof (800-223-6800).

CLUBS WHAT'S CHANGED: The most talked-about new spot is the **Kee Club**. Its jewel-tone walls were inspired by Parisian salons, and its rooms are filled with Bauhaus furniture and modern art. The business crowd lunches on dim sum; the dinner menu features such specialties as foie gras ravioli. Live bands perform after-hours. WHAT HASN'T: **The China Club**,

opened in 1991 by David Tang, is a sexy ode to 1930s Shanghai and still worth a visit. (*Concierges can get reservations at both clubs.*)

RESTAURANTS WHAT'S CHANGED: A new scene has emerged in the area south of Hollywood Road, now called SoHo, where shop houses have been turned into cozy bistros and sleek restaurants. **Aqua** (49 Hollywood Road) has a minimalist interior and Asian-fusion cuisine. At **Alibi** (73 Wyndham Street), there's a terrace upstairs, banquettes downstairs and a talented Australian chef in the kitchen. It's been packed since Nichole Garnaut opened it in 2000. WHAT HASN'T: **M at the Fringe** (2 Lower Albert Road), owned by Garnaut's sister Michelle, is still considered the most romantic. It serves superb Mediterranean cuisine in a Tuscan-farmhouse-like setting.

SHOPPING WHAT'S CHANGED: Today's best buys are in Chinese art and furniture and made-to-measure clothes, all of which, unless you are an expert, should be bought with the help of one. **Sandra Walters** (swalters@pacific.net.hk) is an American-born art consultant who knows all the dealers. **Asian Cajun** (011-852-2817-3687), founded by Helen Giss, a Louisiana native, is the personal-shopping service that many banks recommend to VIPs. Its guides will take you to the best tailors, outlets, dealers and jewelers—and arrange for shipping. One sign of the Asian recession is many new resale shops. Even in the Pedder Building, home of David Tang's Shanghai Tang, there are shops filled with last year's Prada and Chanel. WHAT HASN'T: Cashmere and jewelry are still bargains. **Pearls & Cashmere** boutiques (there's one in the Peninsula) have the best cashmere selection. A favorite jewelry source is **Kai-Yin Lo**, who once sold at Bergdorf Goodman (011-852-2521-0312). Some of the best shops are hidden away in office buildings; one is **Tayma Fine Jewellery** (011-852-2525-5280). Founded by a British expat, the boudoir-like showroom features gold and South Sea pearl pieces jazzed up with stones like kunzite and tanzanite. Wherever you go, if you don't see what you want, ask if it can be made. Quick customizing is another Hong Kong tradition that lives on.

M.B.B.

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