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New London Interior

MERRELL





Soba restaurant, Soho Street, W1
JAS Architects

The noodle restaurant has become a genre all its own, usually implying a vaguely minimalist interior to encourage a Zen-like stoicism in the face of paying a fortune for sometimes quite minimal portions. Architect Juan Salgado's version of this aesthetic – at the very reasonably priced Soba restaurant on Soho Street – is one of the best, taking the reductive calm of Wagamama and adding a certain theatricality and urban intention.

The restaurant is situated in an old and very grand post office and incorporates many features from its heritage as a Neo-classical/Art Deco building. A row of columns still stands outside, for example, and inside, Salgado elected to retain the ornate ceiling. He cleared away some of its classical details, and has hung new elements in the space to temper the rather grandiose height. Cork-clad floating panels incorporate lighting and add to the intimacy of the restaurant.

Salgado has also kept an awkward stepped section, which was intended to demarcate private areas in the former public building. Other finishes and pieces of furniture help to defuse the institutional feel of the original. Table and bench tops are finished in bands of mahogany, and the floor is finished in slate tiles: grey in the seating areas, with a single red strip showing the circulation routes.

The dominant visual element is also the one that gives the restaurant a striking presence on the street. A screen of cork-clad poles, fixed to the back wall at varying intervals, reflects light from uplighters and complements the measured rhythm of the stone-clad columns on the exterior. For the casual passer-by, the space of the street seems to extend into the depth of the restaurant thanks to this expressive back wall.

