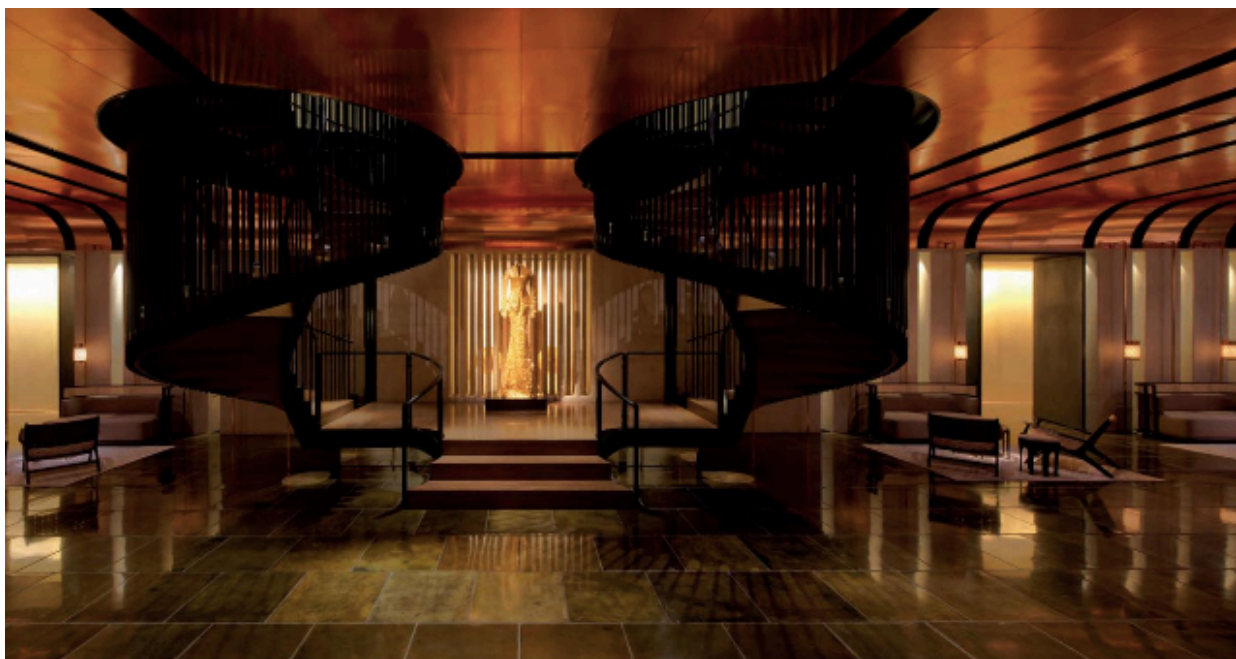




# UPSTAIRS DOWNSTAIRS

FORM OR FUNCTION? THESE SURREAL  
STATEMENT STAIRCASES BRIDGE THE  
GAP - LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY

Words: Anna Prendergast



**THE RUMA (left)**  
In Kuala Lumpur, MG Studio took design cues from Malaysia's mining history at The Ruma Hotel and Residences, with two symmetrical drill-like structures powering down through the lobby ceiling.

**CREIGHTON & SON (below and right)**  
The North West London metal specialist created the dramatic sweeps of steel at both 9 Jeffrey's Place in Camden and De Beauvoir House in Hoxney, where creamy interiors and blonde wood treads create a striking contrast.



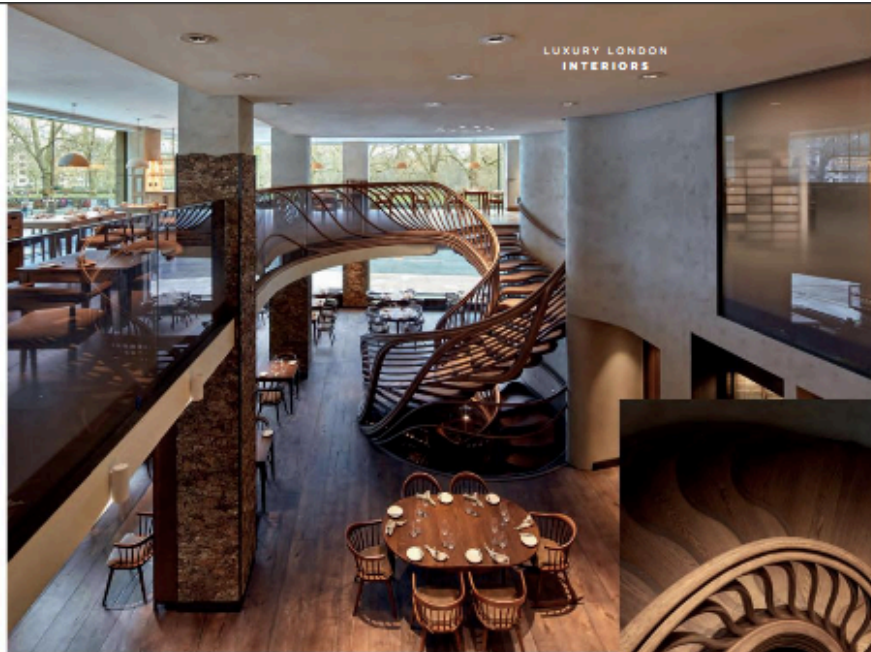
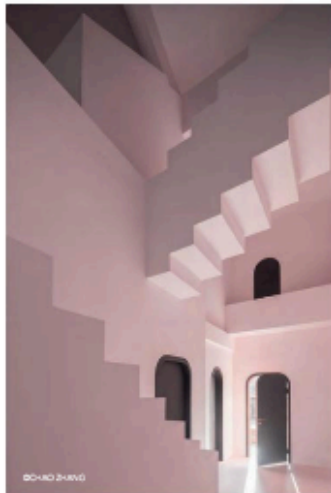
New York's latest tourist attraction, thanks to its appearance in *The Joker*, isn't a heritage building, or a skyscraper with a view, or a cultural pit-stop. It's a staircase. Since the film's release in October 2019, a flurry of Joaquin Phoenix impersonators have danced down the stairway that connects Shakespeare and Anderson Avenues in the Bronx. Meanwhile, over in Manhattan, Thomas Heatherwick's award-winning art installation *Yesel* in Hudson Yards was completed in the style of subterranean Indian stepwells (and features 2,500 steps itself).

As well as the obvious motifs stairways allow cinematographers and artists to explore (think Alfred Hitchcock's tension-building in *Vertigo* or James Cameron's blurring of class and power boundaries in *Titanic*), our fascination with staircases is practical, too. They pose a challenge for architects, who must consider functionality within the restraints of space, structure, safety and design.

That said, it's the most impractical that have been garnering attention lately. The Other Place hotel in Guilin Litopia, China, has flipped convention on its head, taking inspiration from Penrose's 'impossible steps' (as immortalised in M.C. Escher's illusory *Ascending and Descending* print). With steps >



The sinuous Dalí-esque design at London restaurant Hide became just as much of a talking point as Ollie Dabbous' food



**THE OTHER PLACE** (above)  
Studio 10 designed four out of the 10 guest rooms at The Other Place, including Dream (above) and Maze (page 72). With double-height ceilings and mezzanines, the angular stair-like features add texture and bend perspective in the uncluttered spaces. [theotherplace-guest@topia.com](mailto:theotherplace-guest@topia.com)

**EDITION BARCELONA** (above right)  
As guests descend the sculptural staircase from the Punch Room at Edition Barcelona, they're greeted by a reproduction of Salvador Dalí's Leda chair. [editionhotels.com](http://editionhotels.com)

**ALEX MACARTHUR** (right)  
A beautifully patinated iron spiral staircase from France (circa 1890) in antique dealer Alex MacArthur's showroom. Based in Rye, MacArthur specialises in conversation-starting, eyebrow-raising statement pieces. £6,950, appointment only. [alexmcarthur.co.uk](http://alexmcarthur.co.uk)

**HIDE RESTAURANT** (opposite)  
The vine-like stairwell by Atmos Studios coils around the bar on the basement floor of Hide. Ask to be taken to the trap door, which connects to sister-company Hedonism Wine. [hide.co.uk](http://hide.co.uk)



► appearing upside-down, leading to nowhere, and casting zig-zagging shadows, the angular 10-bedroom hotel has a surreal quality at odds with Yangshuo County's traditional nature. Like Ricardo Bofill's 70s housing project La Muralla Roja in Spain, it's got more in common with the cashbahs of North Africa, with their crenellated walls and corrugated stairwells. A century after the Surrealism movement peaked in Europe, it's being slowly built back into homes and hotels across the world by architects such as Studio 10, which created The Other Place, and Atmos Studios, whose sinuous Dalí-esque design at London restaurant Hide became just as much of a talking point as Ollie Dabbous' food in 2018.

While popular styles have moved away from the grandeur of imperial staircases or the romance of a spiral, cutting edge architects have stamped their own identity using boxy geometries and industrial shapes in oxidised metal, dark oak and matte palettes, without an intricate banister or an Art Deco carpet in sight. Feature staircases play a key part in the visuals at Studio 54-founder Ian Schreger's hotel groups Edition and Public, which have developed their own cosmopolitan brand of cool, and no one can resist a holiday snap of the lobbies and landings through which they twist and turn.

Residential properties, too, are centering their designs around staircases that are solid and perennial, rather than rococo. Dramatic folds of unpolished metal or unfurling

ribbons of patinated steel, such as bespoke creations by Creighton & Son, create contrast and fluidity between levels. "An architect will usually approach us with an impossible idea," says Charlie Creighton. "It's our job to physically make it and keep it functional without losing the original idea. The best part of building staircases like these is returning to the site once the space around them is finished – sometimes when you focus on one really challenging part of a building, you can forget how it will all come together in the end." ■