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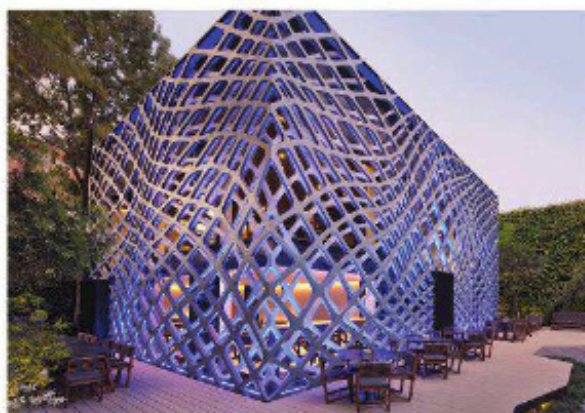
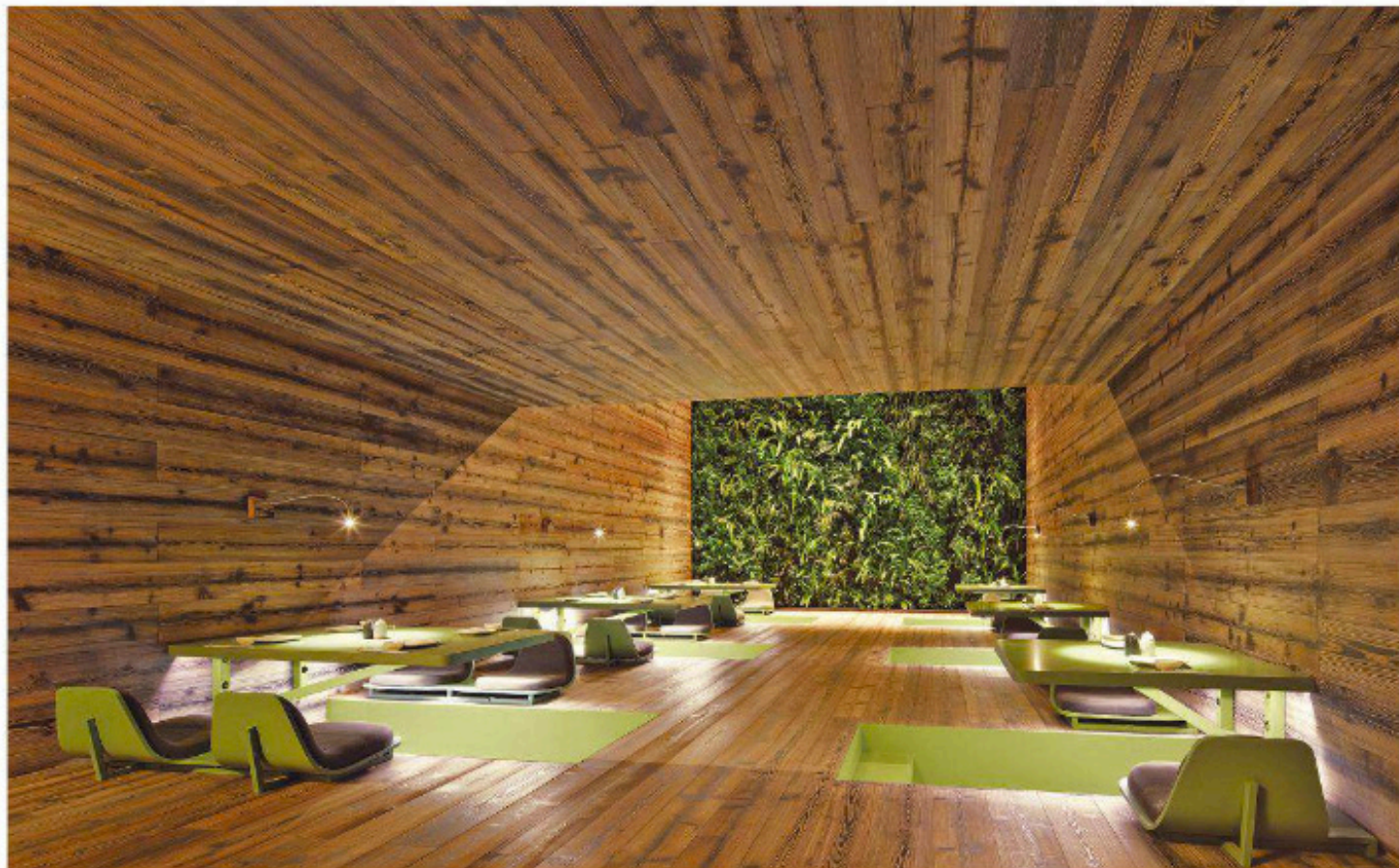
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JAPANESE FUSION

In his design for a sushi restaurant in Mexico City, Michel Rojkind contrasts a high-tech exterior with a warm interior that bows to tradition

BY NIKI NAKAZAWA



↑↑ Tori Tori's private Tea Room is clad entirely in wood and furnished with low seating and tables. It opens into an airy double-height space with a skylight and a garden wall.

↑ The restaurant's double skin was digitally designed, then crafted out of metal by local blacksmiths and ironworkers.

IN MEXICO CITY'S POSH POLANCO NEIGHBOURHOOD, a new iteration of the popular Japanese restaurant Tori Tori shows off local high-tech fabrication. After stripping an existing house down to its bones, architect Michel Rojkind and interior designer Héctor Esrawe overlaid it with a double-layered brise-soleil. The skin was digitally designed, then its CNC-cut steel plates were assembled on site by a team of over 40 blacksmiths. As Rojkind explains, "When we approached the design, we thought about what can be done here, and one thing Mexico has is great blacksmiths." For dramatic effect, the facade is painted in two tones of grey, lending it a sense of depth that's accentuated in the evenings by programmed backlighting. Set against the surrounding green wall, the building gives off a vibe that's part nightclub, part urban oasis.

The al fresco dining and lounge areas are soberly furnished with Esrawe's angular patio chairs and low tables, in durable tzalam wood. Meanwhile, the interior decor, with its black mirrored walls and gold lamps, echoes the facade's sleekness. Rojkind and Esrawe invited young Mexican artist Marco Rountree to make subtle interventions in the dining rooms, as well as on the rooftop, which will eventually house a sake bar. The most effective of these is a series of zigzag white square tiles applied to black walls. But the standout space by far is the wood-clad Tea Room, a private space on the second floor where the designers put a high-concept spin on Japanese-style seating. They devised low-to-the-ground chairs and tables of wood lacquered in seafoam green, and cut out sections underneath to let diners stretch their legs. Even the room's volume expresses a new perspective: The front section sits under a low ceiling that opens into a bright double-height space, top lit by a skylight and ventilated by an interior garden wall. The ambience is sure to keep diners ordering gyoza and maki till closing time.