

Wallpaper*

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INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE ART FASHION ENTERTAINING TRAVEL

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HOT SPOT

We go wild in the West Indies



CURTAIN CALLS

Below, fluid steel partitions delineate the spaces in the new Louis Vuitton store. Bottom, the towering Roppongi Hills 'city'



Towering over mid-town Tokyo is the 'intelligent city' of Roppongi Hills - a gleaming, hi-tech complex where you can live, work, play, holiday and shop 24 hours a day



Head for the Hills

Writer Jeremy Langmead

It seems extraordinary as you wander around the Roppongi Hills complex in mid-town Tokyo, buzzing with eager shoppers scuttling inside the numerous designer stores, sipping coffees in the lobby of the Grand Hyatt hotel or disappearing into the slick residential towers and gleaming hi-tech office blocks, that this vast \$2.25bn project only opened six months ago. Where else in the world could you create a 28-acre 'city within a city' in the middle of a severe economic crisis and then sit back and watch the tills start ringing? Roppongi Hills, with its wealth of shiny, new shops, restaurants, museums, malls, cinemas, hotels, offices and apartments, is already playing host to 100,000 visitors a day.

The man responsible for this audacious project is Minoru Mori, Japan's largest commercial landlord. For 20 years, the billionaire Mr Mori and his family »



TOWERING PRESENCE

Left, an aerial view of the development

Far left, artistic street furniture by Karim Rashid

Below left and right, the futuristic-looking Louis Vuitton boutique gives the development designer cachet

Below centre, Takashi Murakami's cartoon character of Minoru Mori



have been patiently buying up plots of land in Roppongi, formerly a hotchpotch of narrow streets playing host to a mix of bars and brothels, clubs and cinemas, waiting to bring their vision to fruition.

As soon becomes apparent to any visitor to Tokyo, the city is a sprawling, low-rise megalopolis. Tokyo's tradition of privately-owned, small-plot real estate means that hardly any of its structures bare any relation to their neighbours. Visit the futurist new Prada store, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, and all around it are scruffy low-rise shacks with their inhabitants asleep in the backyards on piles of empty cardboard boxes.

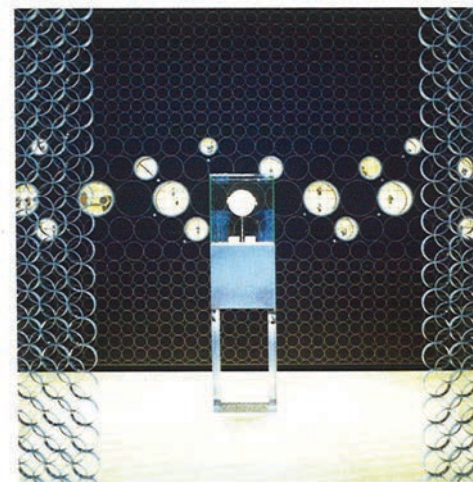
To address this dilemma, the Mori Building Co decided to create a cohesive, easy-access, pedestrian-friendly 'intelligent city', one where you can eat, sleep, work, shop, go to a movie or visit a museum almost round the clock. 'Roppongi-ites can live, work and enjoy themselves all within walking distance,' pointed out Mr Mori at the opening of the Mori Art Museum, located on the 52nd and 53rd floors of the Mori Tower, to be run by Mrs Mori. Evidently no shrinking violets, the Moris have even been turned



into cartoon characters by the cult Japanese artist, Takashi Murakami, perhaps best known in the West for his much-coveted Louis Vuitton handbag designs.

By no coincidence, Louis Vuitton is one of the latest high-profile labels to open a retail space in Roppongi. Mr Mori knew he needed the cachet of companies such as Vuitton if his vision was to be a success and was thrilled when Kyojiro Hata, president of LV Japan, which accounts for a third of the label's international sales, jumped at the chance to open a spectacular boutique in the development.

Vuitton immediately set out to create a store that made a strong statement. The team for this project was an international trio of the American architect Eric Carlson, joint head of the dedicated LV architecture department, the Italian architect Aurelio Clementi and the Japanese architect Jun Aoki. And when the three unveiled the new store design in September, they certainly didn't disappoint the hundreds of Vuitton fans who had camped overnight to be the first through the intriguing entrance. The store, a glass box in the shape of a classic Vuitton trunk, has a shimmering façade made from 30,000



glass tubes. The result is a chainmail effect that gives the passer-by only a teasing hint of what lies behind.

Inside, the two-storey, 900 sq m sales area, dominated by glass, bronze, stone and wenge, is divided into departments by partitions constructed from thousands of stainless steel rings. You have a large display area inhabited by strategically-placed mannequins bordered by a fibre-optic-lit staircase; a 'handbag bar' where you can take a seat on a plush leather stool and rifle through the latest goodies; and a luxurious 'luggage lounge' that is so comfortable you half expect a waiter to bring you a Martini – not too outrageous an idea when you consider that at weekends the store is open until 11pm.

Here is a corner of Tokyo where you can immerse yourself in luxury from first thing in the morning to last thing at night – even the street furniture in Roppongi has been designed by names such as Karim Rashid and Droog. It's a kind of designer Disney World and at the end of your visit it's highly unlikely you'll be walking away empty-handed. Mr Mori's Roppongi Hills project is a concept that developers and city planners all over the world will be keeping an eager eye on. ★