



Replacing the previous Versailles-themed restaurant, Asia de Cuba complements the mien of the adjacent Redwood Room: The paneled columns, vel-

vet draperies, and wood-grain-patterned carpet continue the "elegant forest" motif. Starck's etched-mirror cruciform table brings patrons together.

Philippe Starck and Ian Schrager elevate the glamour quotient at the **Clift** hotel in San Francisco



Without signage at the entrance, a pale violet vestibule signals the new Clift (left). The refurbished wood paneling with marquetry in the Redwood Room (below) is a warm backdrop for Art Deco-influenced furnishings.



By **Therese Bissell**

They got off to a shaky start: the cosmopolitan city that cleaves to its romantic past versus the high-concept, too-cool-for-school brand that is Ian Schrager Hotels. When ISH bought the venerable Clift Hotel in 1999, San Francisco mobilized—focus groups, editorials, vigils, even a Web site warned the ISH triumvirate (Schrager, star designer Philippe Starck, and president of design Anda Andrei) to go easy. The Clift was home to the legendary Redwood Room, for decades the cherished haunt of thirsty sophisticates, rated by even the titanium scooter crowd the sexiest bar in town. ISH got the message. Their \$40 million renovation notwithstanding, the Clift aura wasn't to be sacrificed on the altar of hipness.

ISH sparked the boutique hotel trend in 1984 with New York's Morgans. The drill is this: For a fixer building, Schrager devises a theme (cheap, young, luxurious, etc.). The staggeringly fecund Starck (he does everything from faucets to uniforms for the hotels) sketches out details, often from his home in France. "We create together," says Andrei, who, with an executive architect—here, Freebairn-Smith & Crane—prepares drawings from Starck's faxes and makes it all work. "The point is the integrity of the design as opposed to who stamps and signs."

"I love that San Francisco is old-fashioned and wood and cigars

Therese Bissell, the former architecture editor of Architectural Digest, writes frequently on architecture and interior design from San Francisco.

and elegant, and that it is also cyber kids with no history and no rules," Starck enthuses. His lobby for the historic, George Applegarth-designed, Italian Renaissance-style Clift addresses that duality. Ceilings are again their original 25-foot height; the shell—cool, gray, polished Venetian plaster walls and Pietra Serena limestone floors—is Old World and rich. (Schrager's signature: no exterior sign and the name shortened to "Clift.")

Amid the studiously placed lobby pieces is the requisite ISH big-buzz item, but Starck's bronze Louis Quinze-style Wonderland chair is more gimmicky space-waster than provocateur. The real theater lies in the 18-foot-high, cast-bronze fireplace mantel and Starck's space-manipulating use of contrasting materials in the door frames and reception alcoves.

The fear was for naught: As renovated, the Redwood Room will surely be tryst central for the ages. Designed in 1933 and sheathed from a single, 2,000-year-old redwood tree, it is now largely monochromatic (red-

Project: Clift, San Francisco

Client: Ian Schrager Hotels

Designer: Philippe Starck, overall design; Bruno Borrione, designer

In-house architect: Anda Andrei, president of design, Ian Schrager Hotels; Cono DiZeo, Larry Trexler, Kirstin Bailey, Masako Fukuoka, Dan

Stewart, Melissa Sison, Kelly Behun, Lara McKenna, Kim Walker, project design team

Executive architect: Freebairn-Smith & Crain/Levikow Associates

Consultants: Johnson Schwinghammer (lighting); Gerard Gerouste (art installations)