

By Jim Lochner

# IMMERSED IN DESIGN

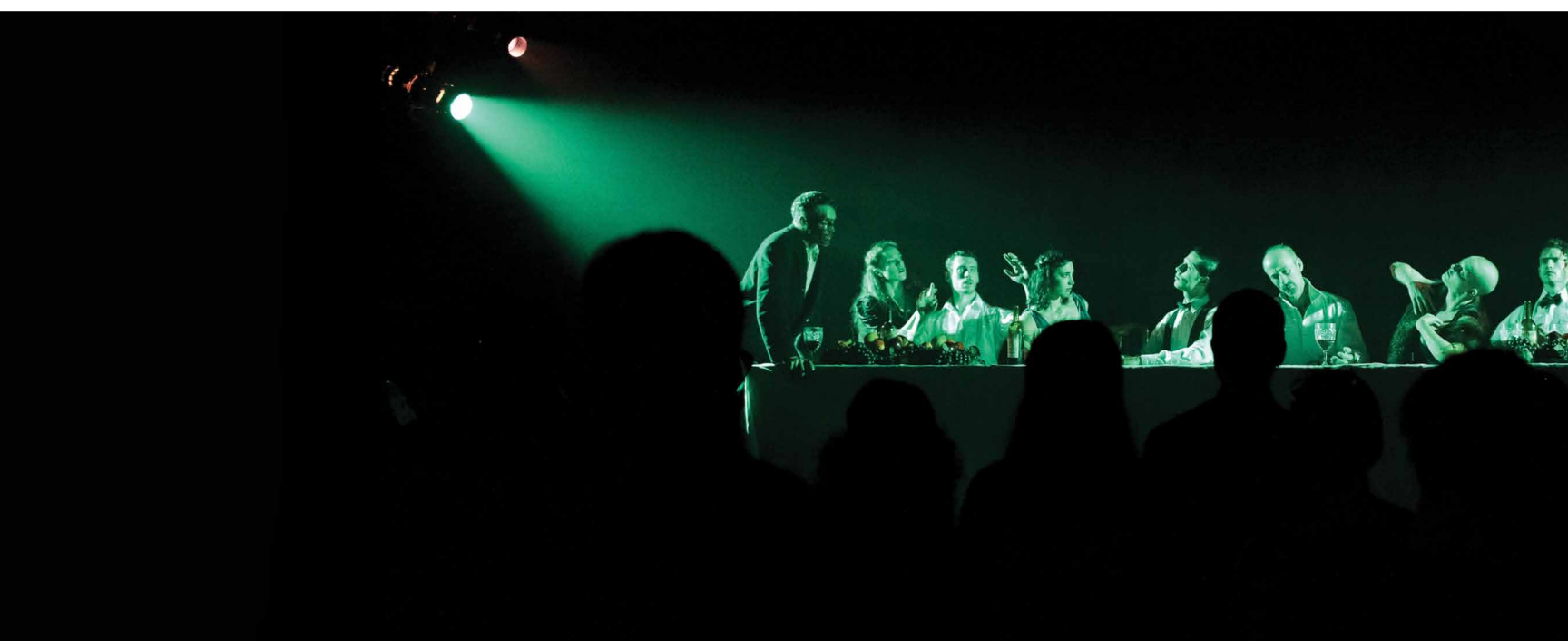
THE TEAM BEHIND *SLEEP NO MORE* EXTENDS THE SHOW'S  
THEATRICAL DESIGN INTO A PAIR OF NEW RESTAURANT/BARS.



Opposite: An abandoned train station is the “last outpost” for Gallow Green’s verdant rooftop bar. (Photo by Paul Wagtuicz)

*Sleep No More*: The McKittrick Hotel (top), where you can check out any time you like but you may never leave. A stuffed buck stands guard over Macbeth’s internal machinations (bottom). (Photos courtesy of The McKittrick Hotel)

Nestled among the designer showrooms, boutique restaurants, and grime-covered warehouses of Manhattan’s burgeoning Chelsea neighborhood stands the foreboding, fictional McKittrick Hotel. Named in homage to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, the site has been the home for the past two years to *Sleep No More*, the hit immersive theatrical production created by British theater company Punchdrunk. Loosely based on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the actors move silently—and often swiftly—among the floors, conveying the story through choreography, while audience members, hidden behind anonymous white masks, are encouraged to create their own theatrical experience by following the characters from room to room or exploring the space on their own. But the show provides more than a disturbing collection of decaying Art Deco, desiccated animal remains, and decapitated dolls. **ON THE BUILDING’S UPPER FLOORS, THE UNIQUE DESIGN HAS BEEN INCORPORATED INTO TWO COMPLEMENTARY BAR AND RESTAURANT SPACES—GALLOW GREEN AND THE HEATH—EXTENDING THE SHOW’S HAUNTING ATMOSPHERE ABOVE AND BEYOND THE PERFORMANCE.**





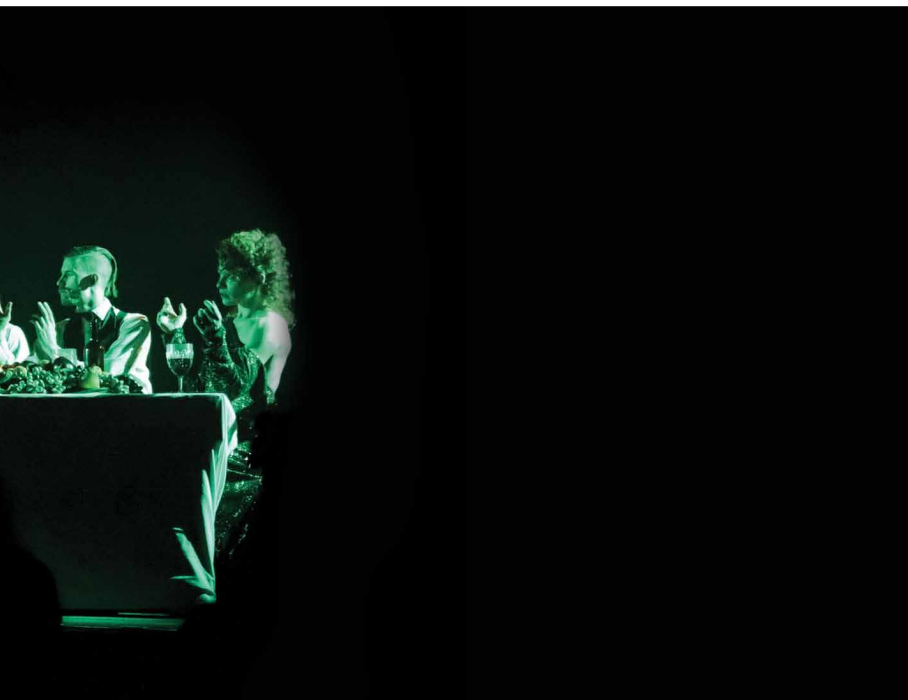
Gallow Green, the building's verdant rooftop bar, which opened in 2012, has become a popular pre- and post-show watering hole. The focal point of the space is an aged, abandoned train car built from barn wood, its yellowed, tattered, diaphanous curtains ghostly billowing in the breeze. "The idea of a train station was interesting to us," says designer Livi Vaughan. "The town [of *Sleep No More*] is very contained—there's no way in or out of it, no obvious roads, and no cars. The train station is the furthest point you need to get before you could be away and elsewhere—it's the last outpost."

Though this outpost is not technically part of the *Sleep No More* story, the space was designed in the same "visual world." The show's rusty medical implements are mirrored in the tarnished farm tools hanging in Gallow Green's water closets, while the coded messages chalked onto the asylum's cold metal ceiling echo in the snippets of Shakespeare sonnets carved into the bar's weathered wooden benches.



Vaughan and co-designer Beatrice Minns had never designed an outdoor space, **"SO HAVING SOMETHING THAT WAS TOTALLY EXPOSED AND HAD TO WORK IN THE DAY OR NIGHT WAS A CHALLENGE."** Gallow Green incorporates the show's combination of open and cozy, intimate spaces, "so you feel like you still have your own place within the bar that you can settle somewhere. You don't want to reveal the entire space in one go. You should be able to be in a space and feel it for what it is."

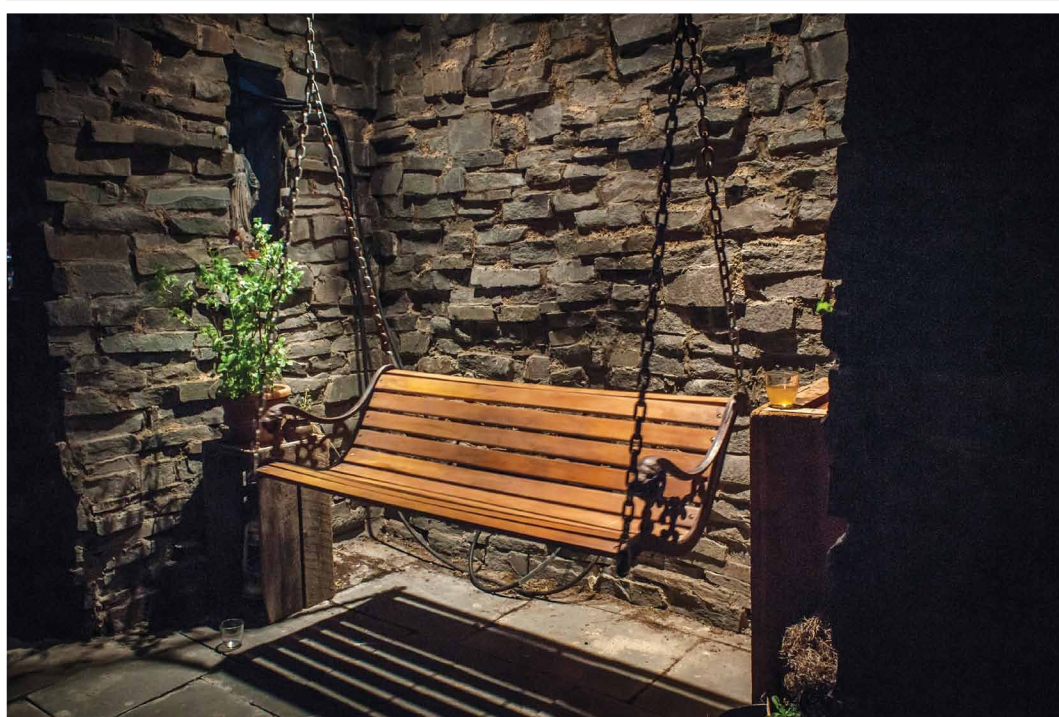
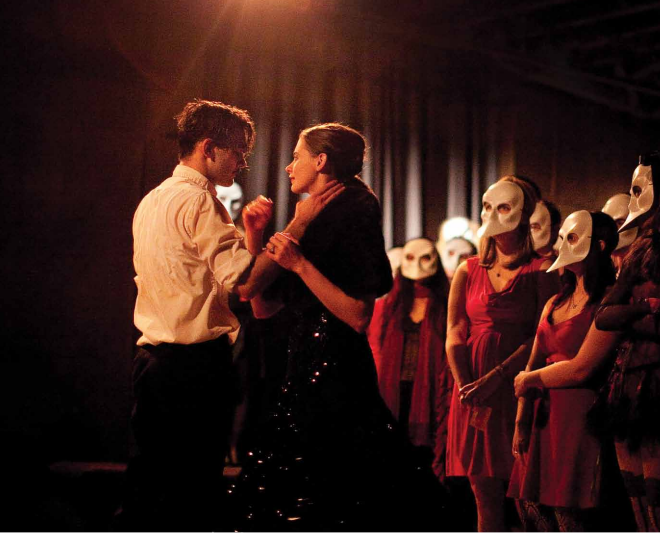
Every space was also designed "so that it always feels alive," says Vaughan. "From a designer's perspective, it makes it so much more of a challenging job, between interior design and set design, in a way, because everything has to be real." Wisteria vines climb the weathered trellises and concrete columns to form a canopy, threatening to eventually poke through the worn canvas ceiling and overtake the space. "Real" materials, such as the gray flagstone floor, terra-cotta pots, and the proliferation of overgrown flora, allow the space within Gallow Green to breathe. **"IT IS LIKE BUILDING A SERIES OF COMPLETE WORLDS, AND EVERYTHING HAS TO HAVE CONTENT WITHIN IT. WE WANT PEOPLE TO EXPLORE AND TOUCH."**



Opposite, top: The Heath\* offers a new entertainment venue seemingly far removed from the dramatic scenes, such as Macbeth's banquet, of *Sleep No More* (bottom). (Photos by Giafrese\* and courtesy of The McKittrick Hotel)

This page, top: Weathered wood and overgrown greenery greet you at Gallow Green's entrance. (Photo by Paul Wagtouicz)

Middle: The dusky Art Deco glory of the Manderley Bar. (Photo by Allan Zeped)





The Heath, which opened this summer, provides the missing link between the shadowy drama of *Sleep No More* and the forsaken beauty of Gallow Green. Here, the show's saturated reds and darker color palette provide a rich backdrop to the vibrant dining and performance space, while its functioning dining car mimics the grand, bygone era of luxury trains. (Think Gallow Green in its heyday.) The Heath features live dance music by the Heathens, the venue's house band, and has so far hosted concerts by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band and the release party for Lady Antebellum's new album.

At both Gallow Green and the Heath, audience members can ease into the atmosphere of *Sleep No More* (and perhaps steel themselves for the experience with a little liquid fortitude) and gather after the show to compare notes. "I think people really want to talk afterwards and tell stories. They want to decompress," Vaughan explains. **"PEOPLE WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN SOMETHING AND THEY WANT TO BE PART OF A WORLD,**

**WHATEVER THAT IS. I THINK THERE'S MORE OF THAT AROUND IN DIFFERENT DINING EXPERIENCES. AND IT'S REALLY NICE TO FEEL LIKE WE'VE COMPLETED THE BUILDING AND DONE EVERYTHING WE COULD WITH IT."**

*Sleep No More* recently celebrated 1,000 performances and its success has since set the stage for other immersive productions in the area. As immersive theater continues to grow in popularity, its influence will no doubt further challenge the boundaries of storytelling through design and may even impact future eating and drinking establishments. "I hope audiences who have a chance to explore *Sleep No More* really feel like they can create their own story and discover this world that we've made," Vaughan says. "The design is there to support the world."

For more information on *Sleep No More*, Gallow Green, and the Heath, visit [sleepnomorenc.com](http://sleepnomorenc.com).

Previous page, counter-clockwise from top left: The haunting world of *Sleep No More*: Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in a deadly pas de deux\*; withering memories; "Out, damned spot!"\*; audience members observe the action from behind their masks; Gallow Green incorporates a combination of open and cozy, intimate spaces, "so you feel like you still have your own place within the bar that you can settle somewhere." \*\*; The Preservation Hall Jazz Band performs at the Heath\*.

Above: *Sleep No More*'s coded messages left by the dead.

(Photos by Robin Roemer\*, Paul Wagtuicz\*\* and Giafrese+; all others courtesy of The McKittrick Hotel)