

# [C]

## compasses

the architecture & interior design international magazine | middle east

### THE ART[IST]HOUSE

Focus: a quartet of art-houses  
Jimmie Durham & Maria Thereza Alves  
Giuliano Gori, Luca Pignatelli  
Studio M Abboud Malak

INSIDE



Kengo Kuma  
Westway Architects  
Exclusiva Design  
Renata Picone

Italo Rota  
Haworth Tompkins  
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## 024 THE ART[IST]HOUSE

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Decree of the Court of Naples  
n. 58 / 20-12-2016

### Cover Image

Courtesy of Studio M,  
Abboud Malak  
Maha Nasra Edde, 8th Street Studios

### Publisher

e.built Srl - Italy  
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[compasses] is a supporting member of



Compasses n.24 - 2017  
Printed in Italy  
by Rossi Srl  
Nola (Napoli)

March 2017  
ISSN NUMBER: 2409-3823

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# Karma Chameleon in Dubai: t[o]ned to the rhythm

## Studio Italo Rota

**Work**  
Chameleon Club  
**Client**  
Byblos Hospitality Group  
**Location**  
Dubai, UAE  
**Project Year**  
2010-2011  
**Architecture and Design**  
Italo Rota, Alessandro Pedretti  
**Architect**  
*Architect:* Italo Rota  
*Architects in charge:* Italo Rota and Alessandro Pedretti  
**Project Team**  
Riccardo Balzarotti, Carlo Ferrari, Luca Paris, Devis Venturilli  
**Engineering**  
*Coordinator:* Kambiz Azema  
**Size and total area**  
470 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Image credits**  
Gary McGovern [www.garymcgovern.net](http://www.garymcgovern.net)

When you think of the craziest night you could ever experience in your whole life, you might think of the blurred scenes of the famous late 1990s film "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas". Sight starting to fade, psychedelic colours swirling around, images turning into melted paint and merging into abstract figures are what you are probably expected to be thrown into. And if while sitting at a bar counter you would never think of getting caught into a wild scuffle in the middle of a "reptiles zoo" setting, then you have obviously never been at the Chameleon Club in Dubai.

The colour-changing reptile has in fact inspired the worldwide famous Italian architect Italo Rota designing his club with Alessandro Pedretti. Set in the uppermost level of the Byblos Hotel, the Chameleon Club is the architect's second success in the hospitality industry in Dubai, after the Cavalli Club. His capability of pushing creativity to the edge of imagination, still reaching an extraordinary balance at last, couldn't but burst into something stunning in such a challenging task. >



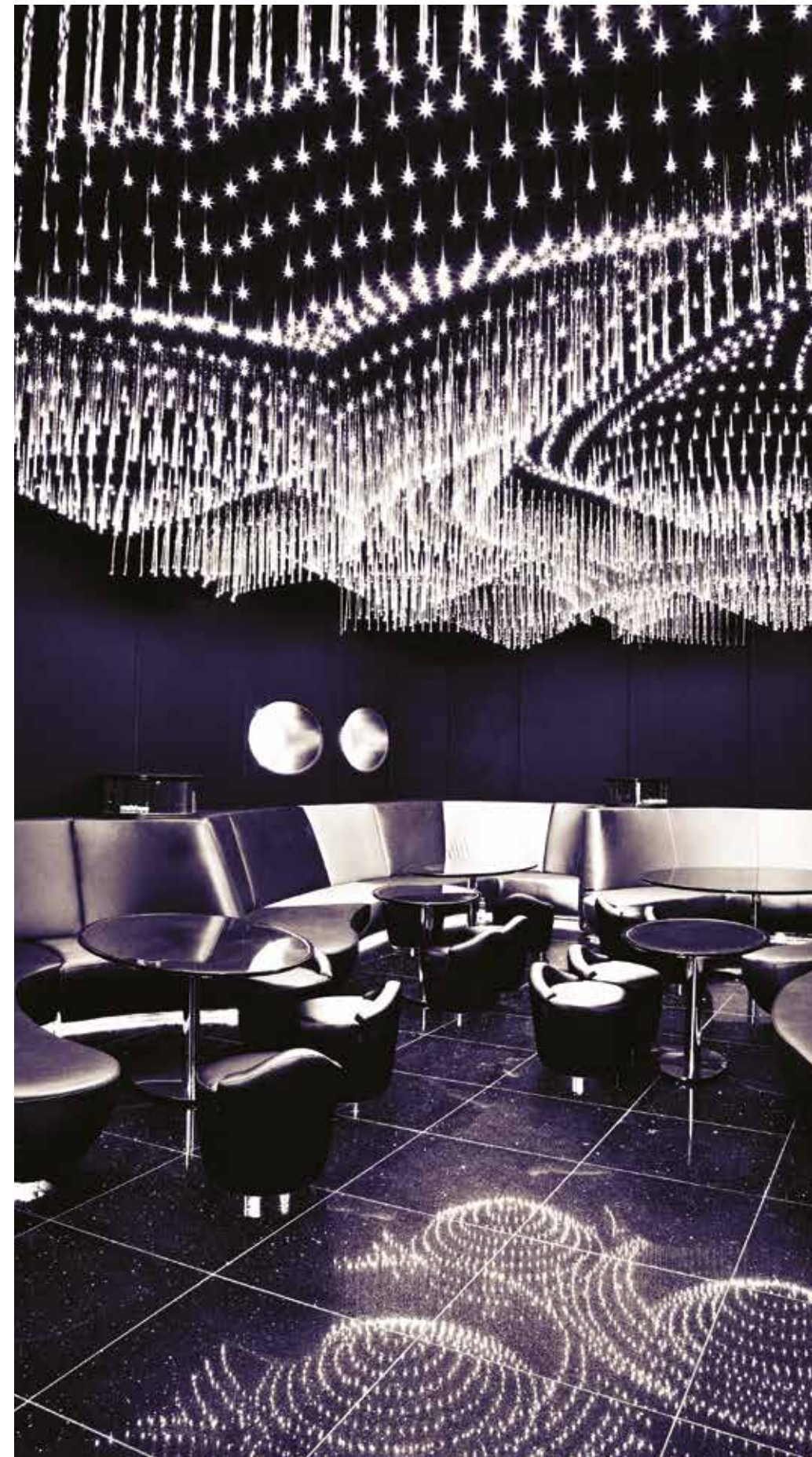


All of his somehow magic works seem to break conformity with irony bringing fancifulness and absurd into reality.

Moreover, starring this middle eastern spread reptile, Rota has swept away other competing animals - such as scorpions and dragonflies, after which several clubs around the world have been named over time - choosing it as the perfect animal to host night lovers. His hulking chameleon holding on to a giant heart placed at the back of the dance floor, actually is the club's patron, welcoming nocturnal creatures in his breathtaking crib with his 13 meter long outstretching tongue. Quizzing Rota why among many badges of amusement he has chosen a chameleon, he answers: «The image of the chameleon changing colour inspired me and then around it I designed this kaleidoscopic and fantastic place». He definitely achieved his goal! A scales-like cladding dresses all vertical and horizontal surfaces as if reptiles' skin had been unfolded over every wall and ceiling. This irregular pattern of different sized bulging solids fills the space and while lending it its unique character, it magnifies the disco light atmosphere. At night in fact, when the DJ from his booth pumps up the volume to get the right vibe, the 60.000 LED lights start blazing, shifting from one light colour to another and flashing in sync with music. Definitely in Chameleon Club Dubai, dancing is not just a one-sense matter, yet it is an all-sense perception! Rhythm is not just to be heard, but to be seen - thanks to the amazing lighting arrangement - and to be somehow touched as the music vibrations coming from its art sound system make people's hearts flutter. As if that weren't enough, most surprisingly, here you can also eat while flavored by music!

As a matter of fact, the club also displays a restaurant where a menu of international and Japanese cuisines is served. You can choose among a wide range of courses going from traditionally dressed pasta to a great variety of pizzas, topped as you please. Finally, to get the party started, stylish energy drinks are served. After leaving the exclusive pre-club diner area, you may want to go for the narrow planned dance floor to mingle with the crowd, or if you're more of a calm person looking for a lounging situation, the VIP area with its sparkling chandeliers dropping from the ceiling is the one place which best suits you. However, throughout the club, the eye contact with the real night's idol can never go lost, for the giant 6.5 meters by 5.5 meters chameleon glows all across the club boasting its LED dotted multi-coloured shell. Getting up the stairs to the mezzanine floor, you may also take a closer look to it or even try to grasp the large tip of his tongue.

Unlike other clubs or discos flaunting more ordinary black furnishings, plainly considered more appealing to venues hosting nightly events, the Chameleon goes for a totally different approach. Its psychedelic ever-changing appearance leaves its guests in astonishment and, just as a disco idol, the nightspot worshippers are cursed, falling into a music addiction status. Within this dreamy state,



between reality and giddiness, heart shaped ceiling arches all over recall the love-giving atmosphere of the 1980s chameleon song. The nightclub function is thus conceived in a totally new way, for the rapture of its music and the lively dynamism of its costumers doesn't just fill the space, but builds it up. Architecture actively participates to the party experience converting impalpable excitement and vibrations to a flamboyant and fitted design. In a few words, the Chameleon Club in Dubai synthesizes luxury, fun and extravagance. The club doubtlessly resembles the reptile's nature not only in its features, with its ever-changing colour claddings, but mostly in its services, adapting to any request or desire. In the Chameleon Club, energy pervades the air becoming electricity that lights up the club and, of course, its house master reptile!

*Damiana Treccozi*

