

THE PULSE OF SHANGHAI



M1NT brings the green to Shanghai

Helen Elfer gets a sneak peek at the city's new billionaires' club

“I’d never join a club that would have me as a member,” Groucho Marx once famously quipped. We’re sure he’d be pretty keen on M1NT, then: a private club which is shaping up to be the most ostentatious, elitist, possibly nauseating but – dammit! – most breathtakingly fabulous display of wealth Shanghai has seen to date.

They’ve got staggering Bund views, an internationally renowned cocktail mixologist and a rooftop terrace with Jacuzzi (doesn’t everyone these days?). But now read this and weep: They also have possum-skin furniture, a nine-meter Swarovski crystal chandelier and a limousine service that whisks VIPs in smooth dark secrecy to the venue’s basement on Fuzhou Lu, where they will be “seamlessly transferred” into an elevator sweeping them up into the sanctuary of the club. Staff uniforms have been exclusively designed by the legendary Shanghainese designer Lu Kun and 22 hammerhead sharks in a colossal fish tank greet you at the entrance. Upon leaving the venue, a Gucci-clad, Madonna-endorsed Malawian orphan will be presented to you for adoption, should you choose to accept. Paperwork will be taken care of on your behalf by the concierge.

OK, so the orphan bit is a flagrant untruth, but the hammerhead sharks are 100 percent for real. This piece de resistance, says Managing Director Andrew Lewis, is the “signature” of the M1NT empire,

a replica of the shark tank in the club’s extremely successful Hong Kong branch (pictured). So what does M1NT represent? “It creates excitement and an atmosphere – it’s about a whole lifestyle of fast cars, limousines, champagne,” says Lewis.

It’s all about glamour for glamorous people. So who are they? Rumor has it Jet Li, Rolling Stones’ Keith Richards, hip hop artist Zhang Zhen Yue, Kanye West and singer Coco Lee have all signed up to invest in the club. As for the rest of the “high net worth individuals,” they were only selected for invitation after rigorous financial profiling and other methods, which, according to Lewis, are closely guarded trade secrets. The majority of members are men, but where the high rollers are ordering magnums of bubbly, the ladies are expected to join the party and balance out the numbers. “The females will come,” predicts Lewis, taking a deep breath. “This is Asia after all...”

The unique appeal for the 500 shareholders is that their investment means they make their money back on whatever they spend in the venue and they also enjoy the bonus of reciprocal membership in various luxury venues worldwide, including, of course, other M1NT enterprises. (These “enterprises” include plans to purchase an entire island off the coast of Phuket, Thailand.)

If you’re inclined to balk at this kind of wanton cash-splashing, shareholder Marc van der Chijs puts it into perspective. As co-founder of Tudou.com and CEO of Spill Games Asia, he views the enterprise as being more valuable for business than socializing. “When I have high-level business guests from overseas, I need to bring them somewhere really impressive and a place like M1NT has been sorely missing in Shanghai.” Van der Chijs sees the club as making an important statement about the city. “It adds something to what Shanghai is and shows where it is heading,” he argues. “This is the business capital of China and it’s maturing quickly. People here are becoming rapidly sophisticated – and they will spend RMB12,000 on a bottle of champagne.”

Lewis concurs: “Put it like this,” he tells *that’s Shanghai*, “it won’t be about mixing with 21-year-old beer drinkers.” Boy, has he got that right. // M1NT, 318 Fuzhou Lu,

Soft Launch: 11 Oct, Hard Launch: 14 Nov

