



LIGHT

RICARD  
CAMARENA  
RESTAURANT

  
*Francesc Ripé*

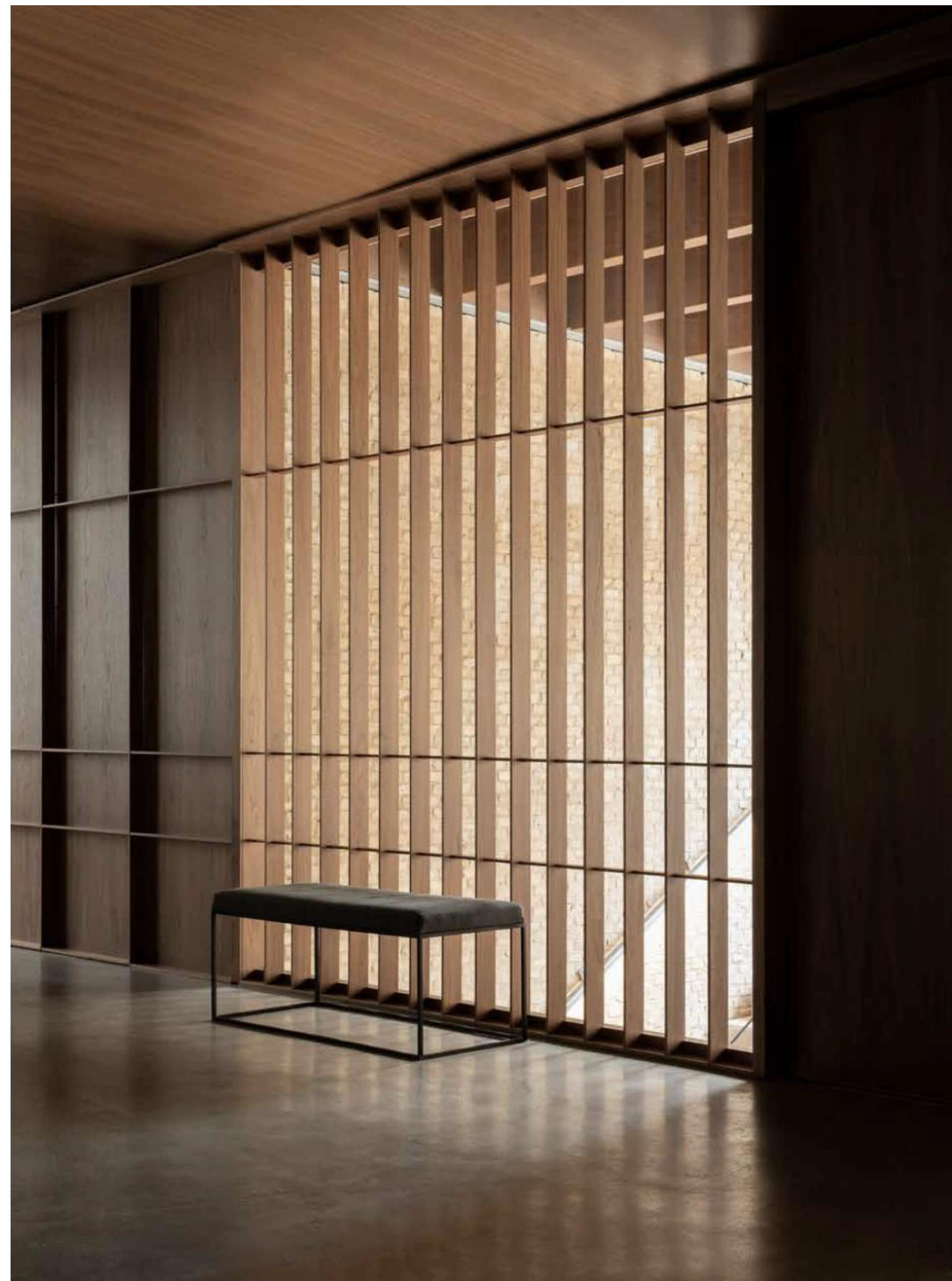
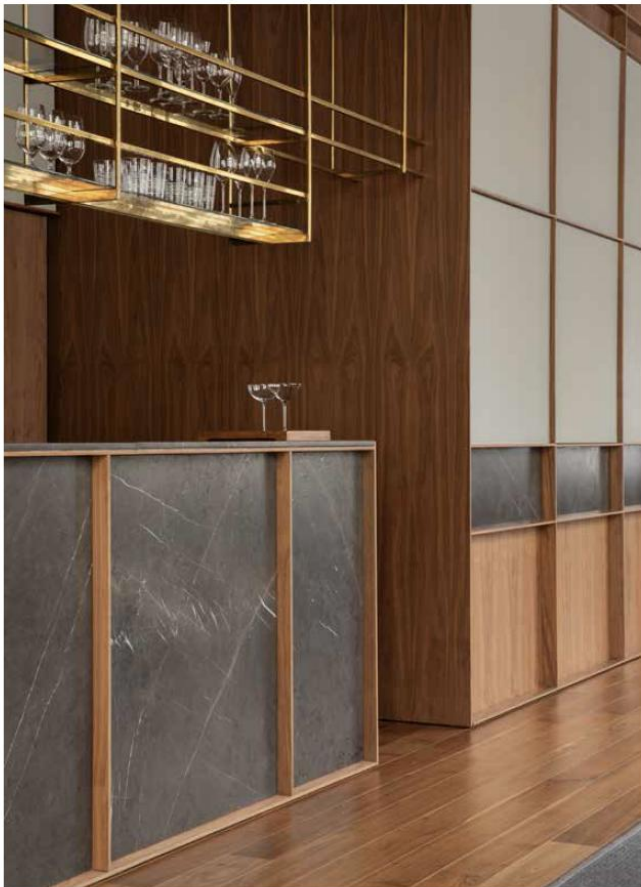
RESTAURANT. VALENCIA, SPAIN

2017



RICARD CAMARENA RESTAURANT — In Valencia, a once-forgotten part of an old industrial building has been repurposed into a rave-reviewed restaurant. The triangular space has been given a second skin through which light pours in on simple interiors—proving there's no such thing as a bad space, only a lack of imagination.





**FOOTNOTE** — Francesc Rifé and Ricard Camarena also joined forces on Habitual, another restaurant in Valencia owned by Camarena, which serves Mediterranean comfort food.

"Restrictions produce innovations." It's a classic design aphorism and one that allowed architect Francesc Rifé to turn a seemingly constrictive and oddly-shaped area of the Bombas Gens Centre d'Art in Valencia, Spain, into the Michelin-starred Ricard Camarena Restaurant.

The restaurant, completed in 2017, is situated in a mostly triangular space on the ground floor of a former hydraulic pump factory that has retained its 1930s Art Deco details. What would normally be considered impediments, such as tight corners and the lack of an intuitive location for the kitchen, were instead seen by Rifé as invitations to enact drama.

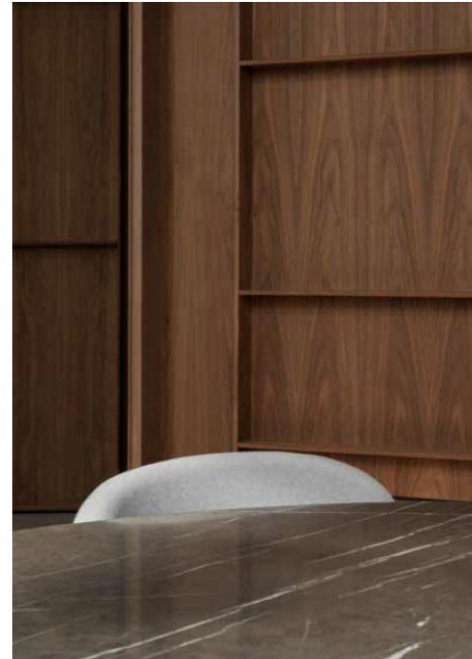
A narrow, artwork-lined passage leads from the petite reception area into the dining room—which then surpris-

es with its expansive proportions. Illusion dominates the latter space; a latticed wall made of walnut wood—the principal material used throughout the restaurant's design—stands one step away from the factory's original brick wall. This second skin paradoxically opens up the restaurant by introducing an abundance of natural light through the gap between the two walls. Large, panoramic glass doors sitting on a pivot also flood light into the room.

"The fundamental ingredients for my projects are simplicity, order and emotion," says Rifé. "Light, both natural and artificial, is one of the most important tools to achieve these objectives. Reliance on natural light during the day means that the space is constantly changing—and therein lies its magic."



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Diners are primed to notice these transformations by the ubiquity of the walnut, as its constancy helps make visible details of color, contour and grain that would otherwise be lost in an overstimulating setting. This subtle canvas also draws attention to the swirling maze of worn grooves in the surrounding brickwork, whose deterioration provides a necessary counterpoint to an otherwise minimalist environment.

Such simplicity, in turn, harmonizes with Camarena’s cooking, which focuses on respecting and highlighting locally produced ingredients without sacrificing creativity. The food remains the focal point here, and is illuminated

by the artificial light that emanates from concealed fixtures above the tables.

The kitchen itself is also prominently featured in Riffe’s composition of light. From every table, diners can peer through a series of letterbox-like apertures that expose the restaurant’s heart, comprised of multiple connected rooms. These openings create a fitting visual metaphor that aligns cooking with one of the most alchemical and temporal—as well as light-based—art forms: film. In this way, drama and surprise continue to unfurl long after diners are accustomed to their surroundings. —