



# A vintage vantage point

## NEW SKYBAR SHOWS OFF LIVERPOOL'S BEST VISTAS

We don't have that many really tall buildings in this country, still fewer with bars, restaurants, or even viewing galleries in their topmost floors. I think this is a real missed opportunity, one that doesn't seem to happen in other countries, particularly the US. Surely skybars are instant destination venues?

There used to be the revolving restaurant at the top of London's Post Office Tower, and there was also a short-lived revolving restaurant in the top of what is now Liverpool's Radio City tower. RIP.

Now, as I count them, all we've got is

Galvin on the 28th floor of the Park Lane Hilton in London; the Vertigo champagne bar at the top of Tower 42 in the City (and Rhodes 24 half-way up it); and Cloud 23 on the – you guessed it – 23rd floor of the 301 Deansgate tower in Manchester. There's a stunning bar and restaurant at the top of the Gherkin in London too, but I won't count that as it is not open to the public.

So it's thanks to the builders of 301 Deansgate, the Beetham Organisation, that we can add another truly destination venue to the list, with Liverpool's £960,000 Panoramic. ➤



## VENUE

➤ Panoramic occupies the 34th floor of the 38-storey West Tower, an otherwise purely residential building, and it is to Beetham's credit that what was to be a residents' lounge is publicly accessible and, to boot, Britain's highest restaurant, offering 360° views from 400ft.

### GLOBAL NETWORK

To designer Richard Eastwood of R2 Architecture, putting a public venue here is all about thinking 'beyond Liverpool'.

He explains: "This puts Liverpool on a global network of places to be. Every time I'm in a new city I like to go to the highest place, and if it's got a bar all the better.

"This is a restaurant like you'd find in New York, and it makes Liverpool feel more like a city when you are up here."

It certainly does, and it's a beautiful city at that. I visited at night, and it was all twinkly lights against black, black skies, the Mersey cutting a dark swathe through it all. Nothing comes close to being this high when everything else is, well, not.

Apparently, during the day besides Merseyside you can see Cheshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester (even the tower on Deansgate, some say), and Wales.

Richard paid a visit to Tower 42 with the boys from Beetham – by helicopter, no less – to see what issues he faced.

"The whole thing about places like this is the view, and we learned this view was definitely better – we have great skies – I thought Rhodes 24 was lacking in atmosphere and warmth," he says. "There's a danger in modern structures that it becomes too clinical. I wanted a vintage feel and quality to it.

"We wanted it to be most romantic place where people would ask their girlfriends to marry them, but it also must work in the day and not feel like a night-time place that's open for lunch. In some ways it feels like we've rediscovered Liverpool."

A local paper described Richard's design as 'flirting with retro'. It's actually more of an overt embrace, shown through dark woods, antiqued mirrored panelling, patterned carpets and leather, in a gently curving environment, like a romanticised 70s airport business lounge, if they ever existed.

"This is the pinnacle for my feel of 'vintage'," says Richard. "It's got a sense that it's [always] been here and I think it will get better with age rather than worse."

### ATMOSPHERIC

It's a simple, understated design that feels classic and elegant, and at night it's very atmospheric. It's subtle and understated – but actually more complex than it first appears. For instance, there are no lights in the ceiling, to cut down on reflection at night that would obscure the view. Instead, the ceilings have been made a subtle feature, with coving made from perfectly moulded pre-cast glass-reinforced plaster, in shapes that follow the floor zones.

In the restaurant, the main light source comes instead from the tables themselves, lit from inside and covered by light diffusing Perspex – although Richard seems worried that we're going to look gruesome as they are set a bit brighter than they should be).



The sheer size – or rather lack of – adds to the destination nature of the venue. It's intimate, with just 34 dining capacity, another 30 in the bar. "I worried there would not be the critical mass," says Richard. "But there is a buzz when they have the right number of people."

The menu is kept deliberately simple. Chris Marshall, a former Gary Rhodes protégé – and reported to be afraid of heights – simply calls the dishes after their main ingredients, so there's 'pork', 'beef', 'monkfish'. Nicely accessible, I thought, nothing too poncey.

I was a bit surprised at the simplicity and predictability of the cocktail selection, just 10-strong, and with the staff refusing to go off-liste. I should point out, too, that at present, there's absolutely

Right: The bar has been given a vintage look  
Below: the magnificent view from the skybar at night



nothing in the way of signage or street presence in or around the ground-floor lobby. On the whole, these are mere irritations, but something's clearly going right. For one thing, it's so busy we had a lot of difficulty getting a reservation, and as for creating a place perfect for proposals, it notched up its first one on its second day. ■

### VENUE DETAILS

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