AN ASIAN OCCASION

If you’re looking for chichi boutiques and genteel tea parlors, well, best to head to La Jolla or Coronado. But for those willing to take a chance on San Diego’s most confusing confluence of freeways and frontage roads, Morena Boulevard is emerging as a treasure trove of unique, Asian-inspired design.

When you have only two pennies left in the world, buy a loaf of bread with one, and a lily with the other.
—Chinese Proverb
GENGHIS KHAN HAD GOOD TASTE

“Made in China” has gotten a bad rap lately, but turn back the clock a few hundred lunar calendars and you’d find some of the world’s finest cabinetry, sculpture, ceramics, silks, rugs and furnishings — all fit for an emperor. The Wang family opened the doors of Genghis Khan Furniture 30 years ago, before moving to its present, expanded location on Morena Boulevard 10 years later.

Steeped in long-held superstitions, ancient tradition and near-mythic history, it’s easy to understand China’s love of grand ceremony. Best known for his winner-take-all plunders, the ferocious Khan bemoaned his short life, and thus his inability to conquer the entire world. The split-level showcase of his modern-day namesake houses a gallery of Chinese, Mongolian and Tibetan antiquities, worthy of any emperor’s home.

“The appeal of Asian furniture is not only its craftsmanship and lineage, but also its ability to blend into any setting,” says Sandra Johnson, GK’s sales manager. “It’s prized for its chameleon-like capabilities.”

Ornate cabinets, inscribed in intricate engravings or exquisite carvings, are paired with unusual artifacts and delicate ceramics. A fat-bellied Buddha, carved from the gnarl of an enormous black walnut tree, laughs from his perch — a primitive wheelbarrow.

Scattered throughout the multilevel showroom, are ancient stalactites, stalagmites and enormous crystal formations harvested from the bowels of the earth, along with petrified wood pedestals and blossoms of quartz crystals. Like Emperor Qin’s terra-cotta army, dozens of solemn statuary maintain constant vigil among the beautiful antiquities, while the deities impart a subtle sense of calm.

GENGHIS KHAN. 619/275-1182.
GKFURNITURE.COM

FENG SHUI IN EFFECT

If feng shui had a showroom — it would be Circa a.d. The former Hillcrest furnishings studio moved to its new digs off Morena Boulevard four years ago, and has since helped solidify the area as a bona fide design destination — one especially worthy of exploration if your taste tends toward the Orient.

“We were Hillcrest pioneers,” says Circa a.d. owner Rob Horby, “and we were just as intrepid in this neighborhood. But it made sense — we were paying high rents, and exorbitant storage fees for merchandise that should have been on display. Oh, and parking was nearly nonexistent.

“Now, we’re close to major transportation corridors and several different shopping centers,” adds Horby, a former Naval officer who spent his tour serving throughout the Pacific Rim. “Like the rest of San Diego, this neighborhood continues to evolve — it was worth the move.”
Circa a.d.’s inventory reflects its proprietor’s appreciation for Eastern sensibility, aesthetics and fine craftsmanship.

“Many of our pieces are one of kind, and the rest are custom-designed, then manufactured to our specifications in Indonesia,” says Horby, “while our floor treatment is designed and made here in the U.S.”

The enormous showroom is filled with sublime combinations of timeless design elements — like solid wood cubes made from sustainable materials, paired with minimalist to highly decorative Asian-inspired décor. Gorgeous silks, luscious bedding and whimsical pillows (embroidered with seashells and intricate beading) make up the housewares selection — while lotus-blossom-inspired dishware, sitting atop place settings in natural bamboo, complement shiny tables encircled by soft, brushed-suede seating.

**DEEP SEA SAVE**

Among the showroom’s endless niches and tableaus, the ever-popular and highly functional, stair-step tan-sus from Japan (a diminutive Buddha
beams beatifically from his lacquered perch), share space with decorative Korean bedding chests, adorned with intricate, hand-wrought hardware.

Housing an extensive collection of indigenous masks, rustic, rough-hewn furniture and life-sized doll sculptures from the South Pacific, the store has dedicated an entire corner of the showroom to this recent acquisition. Of particular note is a cabinet stocked with ceramic dishes, in near-perfect condition, recovered from a Chinese shipwreck, lost at sea centuries ago.

SANCTUARY

Festooned with multi-colored banners snapping in the wind, Circa a.d. is located a couple of quick turns off Morena. The two-story roll-up garage doors are open to the breezes, creating patio space for a clique of deities in various states of repose. Surrounded by a symphony of trickling water — the high note to an unobtrusive bass beat, the air is redolent of sandalwood and myrrh. If you’re looking to turn your home into a tranquil sanctuary, breathe deeply and relax — you’re only just steps from Nirvana.

CIRCA A.D., 619/293-3328, WWW.CIRCAD.COM

MOSEYING AROUND MORENA

THE FOODIES NEXT DOOR
If fresh, fast, and made to order is your kind of dining, then the Urbane Café is a great alternative to your favorite fast-food place. Serving house-made soups, fresh salads and sandwiches made on focaccia bread baked fresh every hour — the wee cafe recently opened in the Morena area to the cheers of locals, business owners, and students taking a break from the books.

URBANE CAFÉ
5375 NAPA STREET
619/543-9700
WWW.URBANECAFÉ.COM

THE TRADITIONALIST
A favorite among oenophiles, Le Cave Rouge provides San Diegans and San Diego’s finest restaurants with classic wines from Bordeaux, Barolo, Burgundy and beyond, produced in the traditional manner. Le Cave Rouge’s selection of exceptional crus from small wineries will expand your wine realm beyond Merlot...

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BRICKS AND BURGERS
OUT THE BACKDOOR
Although not as strange as Keely Smith singing a duet with Kid Rock at the Grammys, the restaurant/bar collaboration between Lot 81 and Brick by Brick is sweet harmony for the bifurcated business district — and to those with a penchant for loud and fast. In the middle of the wishbone that is Morena Boulevard (and W. Morena Boulevard) is the neighborhood’s nod to good food and good times. Lucky you! Lot 81’s cubist exterior gives way to a clean, modernist room in shades of bright orange where updated Mexican cuisine and juicy burgers are served for lunch and dinner to diners on both sides of the wall. Try the backstage menu next door at Brick by Brick — it’s sure to be a hit.

LOT 81
1129 WEST MORENA BLVD.
619/275-6881 (27LOT81)
WWW.LOT81.COM

BRICK BY BRICK
1130 BUENOS AVE.
619/275-LIVE
WWW.BRICKBYBRICK.COM