



At Embassy Diplomat Screens, every seat comes with an adjustable light, a call button for 'butler service', a bag hanger and a phone charger outlet. An all-you-can-drink minibar complements the experience.

## MORE THAN A MOVIE

The Embassy Diplomat Screens isn't just a cinema — it's an experience

STORY: NAPAMON ROONGWITOO

A lot of anticipation was built when it was first announced that Central Embassy would include a "luxury" movie theatre complex called Embassy Diplomat Screens. It's admittedly an unfathomable concept that makes you wonder — how luxurious can a cinema be? Diego Gronda, managing and creative director of Rockwell Group Europe, a globally celebrated design company, said it's the kind of movie theatre that does not sell movies — it sells the experience.

Gronda, an international designer with more than 20 years of experience in high-end hospitality, said that when Rockwell Group Europe was first tasked with the project, they imagined not a cinema but a homely screening room — and an ultra-luxurious one, at that.

"What we envisioned was deeply related to the constraint of the project — Central Embassy only allowed us to create five small cinemas. We decided, if we were going to do only five theatres, let's go purely high-end rather than going for regular ticket prices," he said.

But Gronda was not talking about exquisite leather seats or state-of-the-art projectors, as he believes any player in the market could come up with that.

Here's what you can expect after you've paid for tickets at Embassy Diplomat Screens, which cost around 1,800 baht for two. There are five small theatres, each with around 30 seats. All of the seats are different, ranging from large, cosy couches and reclining daybeds to cocoon-style individual seats. Every cinema has its own fully stocked all-you-can-eat minibar — one even has its own wine cellar. Every seat comes with its own adjustable light, a call button for a butler, a bag hanger and an electrical outlet. According to Gronda, chargers for all kinds of phones are available. Should you find the movie a bit boring, the soft duvet blanket and pillows come in handy.

"We started to develop, with our client's input, a new kind of complex. It is not a movie theatre; it's more of a screening room. The inspiration pretty much came from how high-end hotels around the world are starting to have a screening room for

their guests, so they can rent the space to do a product launch, a special gathering or a birthday party."

This concept also has his personal inspiration behind it. After receiving a movie as a gift for his 40th birthday, he rented a screen projector and invited his friends to watch it with him. He also noticed that movies and video clips are being incorporated into many events.

Gronda said the trend right now is to blend all of these together and design not a place but an experience.

"We are architects, interior designers and branding experts. It's quite interesting how in the 21st century we are still talking about architecture and decoration in such systematic way. We are fragmenting the experience. There are designers for this and that. The truth of the matter is that a guest who comes to the hotel will basically combine how he's greeted at the reception, how the lobby looks, whether the bed is comfortable, whether the room smells good and so on. We're talking about many senses that will create only one experience. It all comes down to whether the person will come back or not," he said.

It took Rockwell Group Europe roughly a year to create the cinema concept. Gronda said that it was very important for the company, which also focuses on branding, to work closely with its client on how to position the project, from the name to what's would be served.

"There were some battles we didn't win because we were asking our client to do something that's not their expertise," said Gronda, adding that he had initially proposed an in-theatre sushi bar.

He said the Embassy Diplomat Screens is not competing with other cinemas because it offers an experience found nowhere else.

"Movie theatres in Bangkok mix VIP into a non-VIP experience, and those who are not VIP guests can see it and think that one day maybe they will try it. There is no such a thing with the Embassy Diplomat Screens. All guests will be VIPs. I think it's a new market and I do believe there's a demand for that right now," he said.

He also expects the venue to attract private parties, product launches and exclusive celebrations.

The cinema selling point, therefore, is not the movies. Gronda asserted that the experience is not about the latest movie or the best visuals and sounds.

"It's not that you can watch it better here than at other theatres. It's really how comfortable you feel. We're not going to focus on improving the quality of the projection and sound — we always know that some competitors can always come up with better technology. We don't believe the race goes to where the best projector is, it goes to where you want to mingle. That's a lesson taken from hospitality. With hospitality, it's not how expensive the room is or how big the room is. High-end hospitality is whom



you're sharing the hotel with. It's more than just a bed and a beautiful view," he said.

That's why every element has been carefully designed to offer the most pleasant feeling possible.

To offer privacy between seats, for example, Gronda designed beautiful lamps instead of putting up screens or curtains, as he believes the homely component of a residential environment will make people feel more comfortable.

Touches like the exquisite lounge with a fireplace and living room-style set up are meant to extend guests' stays.

"If they come for a two-hour movie, we want them to spend four hours. They can maybe arrive one hour earlier and our butler can get them anything they want. They can rent one of the VIP rooms afterwards and mingle with friends for another hour. The experience is beyond the movie itself."

Gronda is confident the concept will be warmly received by both Thais and foreigners, even though the complex debuts at a difficult time and political pressure.

"People still need to be entertained. Having a private place is one of the benefits of this place. I am sure that the mall itself will create a new kind of crowd in Bangkok. Definitely this experience is going to be quite interesting, but not at the level that it is going to create a competitor," he said.