

Lighting up Mr. Chow Restaurant

SPECIALTY
ACRYLICS

by Reynolds Polymer Technology, Inc.

When the man who refers to himself as “The Famous Michael Chow” opened his first *Mr. Chow* Restaurant in London back in 1968, this self-designated “cultural ambassador” wanted to show Westerners two things: that Chinese cuisine was one of the remaining great cultural contributions of his China, and that it could be the centerpiece of an elegant restaurant. He chose the British capital in which to launch his new venture as it was the late '60s center of chic in music, art and fashion. *Mr. Chow London* was an immediate success and established the prototype for a chain of restaurants known for having exquisite dishes and being a stopping point for celebrities in London, New York City, Beverly Hills and Seoul.

Mr. Chow Seoul opened in 2004 in the Apgujeong-dong district of Seoul, South Korea, and has consistently hosted the elite aristocracy of film, music fashion and art. Glass windows look out over the street as an array of barbecued roasted ducks strung up Hong-Kong style look



Three giant scalloped R-Cast™ acrylic features shine bright on the outside of the Mr. Chow Restaurant in Seoul, South Korea.

out at passers-by. Above the dining area, one can enjoy an assortment of martinis in the Mr. Chow Club, a popular place to visit after dinner. But most eye-catching of all is the unique architecture and lighting that create a spectacular ambience that must be seen in person to truly appreciate.

When the “Famous Michael Chow” decided to create his *Mr. Chow Seoul*, he was already familiar with Reynolds Polymer Technology’s development, fabrication and application of acrylic. He approached the company with his design and visited the company in Grand Junction, CO, USA, to learn more about the possibilities. While there, he shared his vision with Reynolds Polymer Technology engineers who explained in detail the flexibility and durability of acrylic and how it could assist in creating a variety of lighting effects. Working with Mr. Chow, his designers and lighting consultants, Reynolds Polymer brought his design to reality after approximately four months of back and forth communication.

The *Mr. Chow Seoul* Restaurant was designed with illuminated acrylic as the architectural forefront and interior. “The benefits of using acrylic over glass are many,” explains VP of Research and Development, David Duff. “Acrylic is much more flexible. It can transmit light well and has superb clarity. You can control the color and light and it’s half the weight of glass, while it retains its clarity no matter the thickness.”

Giant scalloped acrylic features light and run the span of the outside of the restaurant, while the inside is laced with lighted acrylic squares, blocks and a host of other shapes of varying sizes. There are approximately 392 different acrylic panels in the restaurant weighing roughly 55,000 pounds, all illuminated. The three scalloped features lighting the outside of the restaurant are 37 feet tall with the end panels being 8 feet wide and the middle panel 12 feet wide. All of the pieces began as 4' x 8' sheets of acrylic.



The host at the Mr. Chow Restaurant greets patrons from in front of uniquely shaped R-Cast™ acrylic panels which are lit from the bottom.

“We created prototypes of all of the pieces and had all of the texturing done at the plant in Grand Junction,” said Duff, then engineer for the project. “All of the pieces then required a polished finish to prevent fingerprints, which also created the depth you see at the restaurant. This meticulous finishing process ensures that each individual piece holds the light just right.”



An overview of the Mr. Chow Restaurant shows how R-Cast™ acrylic was used throughout the restaurant to give a unique dining experience.



R-Cast™ acrylic blocks hang down from the ceiling of the Mr. Chow Restaurant in Seoul, South Korea.

The challenge for Reynolds Polymer was keeping track of all of the pieces, but the company's strict handling process ensured that the pieces stayed together. Then there was the issue of shipping. Custom packaging consisting of a flannel-type material was required to avoid scratches, and each piece had to be installed with cotton gloves. "We had to take extra care since these were such unique products," explained Duff.

To create the frosted look desired by Mr. Chow, Reynolds Polymer technicians administered a series of unique sandblasting techniques. For some of the pieces, it was necessary to sand them manually to create the different lighting effects visible today that literally make the restaurant glow.

The entire process took approximately one year, and today, restaurant visitors from around the globe vouch for its unparalleled ability to dazzle. "The Mr. Chow project is a stunning example of using acrylic to achieve unique architectural affects," said Reynolds Polymer CEO Roger Reynolds. "It is also a testament to the creativity and dedication of our entire team, from design and engineering to fabrication and installation. We're proud of our role in helping 'The Famous Michael Chow' realize his vision and we look forward to similar projects in the future." ■

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