

HAVEN

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by **THE EDGE**
SINGAPORE

Industrial chic

Made of concrete and steel; this house exudes warmth through furnishings the owners collected from their travels around the world

Personalities

8 Designers and architects on evolving home and space to balance personality and function

Home essentials

Furnishings and décor styles that inspire



Beauty in simplicity

BY PAULINE WONG

Founded in Bangkok, with offices in Singapore and Shanghai, BLINK Design Group is an award-winning luxury hospitality architecture and design firm behind some of the most breathtaking hotels and resorts in the world. Their pursuit of the minimalist is explained by BLINK Design Groups' managing partner, Rengy John.



ALL PICTURES ARE OF
ANDAZ XIAMEN, CHINA

ALL CREDITS: BLINK DESIGN GROUP

PERSONALITY

Tell us about BLINK Design Group's design ethos and principles

BLINK has a very simple approach to our design. Our founder Clint Nagata has a very Zen and minimalist outlook; our designs are very architectural but also uncluttered. We are always looking for ways to simplify the hotel's operations and the guest's journey such that they feel a sense of calmness as they walk through the property. We seek inspiration from the site itself, we want to root the actual design in the location, draw from its history and traditions, its architectural details and local craftsmanship, its sense of materiality— all of which go into making the property, from its building materials to its furnishings.

Crafting an unforgettable and distinctive experience has always been top of mind for BLINK. This means the tangible and the intangible must come together to express the best of a destination's local culture while executing our client's vision to the fullest.

Sustainability is also something we like to incorporate into our work and the challenge that remains is how to educate operators and incorporate long-term solutions into the conceptualisation.

Even within the hospitality space, we are in agreement that the industry generates plenty of waste. As guests grow more mindful of their consumption, sustainability has rightfully risen to top priority for the hotel companies we work with.

For example, Hyatt with whom we are collaborating for the Andaz Xiamen, worked to introduce initiatives and conservation efforts to offset its hotels' carbon footprint. For our part as designers and architects, we will strive to look to energy-saving technologies, careful sourcing, and use of materials to complement and drive our vision without compromising our surroundings.

What are some of the projects you've done?

We have been hard at work and fortunate in securing projects and collaborations, spearheading the conceptualisation of hotels and resorts across the region, notably the Raffles Maldives Meradhoo, which is Raffles Hotels and Resorts' first property in the country.



We have also recently completed work for the newly-opened Andaz Xiamen in China and the Regent Phu Quoc in Vietnam for next year. For Andaz Xiamen, we envisioned the design of the hotel as a modern mansion and the city's sobriquet as a 'Garden by the Sea', in reflection of a rich historical tapestry over generations of this coastal town. The hotel's interiors are accented with fascinating details and artefacts – just as treasures from voyages past would fill the Xiamen colonial mansions, inspiring guests with a feeling of wonder and sense of adventure.

The design of the entrance is inspired by the native bird of Xiamen, the Dalmatian Pelican with the artwork realised using a traditional wood burning technique.

Throughout the hotel, an abundance of speckled terrazzo, timber louvres, tactile wicker and rattan and graphic tiling and carpeting create continuity between spaces and reinforce the Nanyang feel.

Ceilings have been inspired by pergolas and trellises to evoke an outdoor atmosphere and much of the artwork features tropical flora and fauna. All the artwork at Andaz Xiamen were procured from artists either from Xiamen or with a strong connection to the city and the hotel will actively nurture local talent, offering a platform for emerging young artists.

Clearly local culture is a big part of the design ethos. Why?

I have been fortunate enough to have travelled and lived in different parts of the world. I am originally from Africa, travelled and worked in the Middle East, Europe and have been here in Singapore for a very long time. It opens your eyes to the intricacies of other cultures and undoubtedly expands your horizons.

The appreciation of culture and how one can enjoy different cultures was important in my early years and when I stepped into hospitality design, the Asian hospitality brought everything together. There is so much beauty and culture to understand. In applying that to different parts of the region, we develop a particular sensitivity to be respectful and pay homage to this beauty.

Hospitality design as we practice it now, it itself is very unique. We have the ability to work in amazing locations, each one gives you inspiration for the next one. We reassure clients and operators of this connection, of how you can have timeless and memorable experiences and make sure we are inherently involved.



How do you see the future of design changing over the next few years as we recover from Covid-19?

Guest experience is what is going to drive how a hotel is designed – we are guided by this, the checking-in process and welcome journey that is essential to the journey. Many of the resorts we design are between 30 – 100 key so an intimate experience is to be expected.

We are continuously working with operators to create an experience that is more discreet where you truly feel you are on your own.

Whilst we don't anticipate a radical change in design elements – the fundamental principles of a hotel or resort won't change – we are more focused on the functional design for the “behind-the-scenes” operations that come with it and produces a seamless and luxury experience for the guests.

What has helped is we are looking a lot more at the use of materials – longevity in terms of durability of being cleaned multiple times throughout the day. We are looking increasingly at ways to weave sustainability further into our design as well as it is part of BLINK's aspiration and something we are passionate about.



PERSONALITY



What are some of the most exciting opportunities in Singapore in terms of design/architecture/interiors?

Clint and I agree on the point that we have seen a strong growth in the hospitality industry. Singapore was always a good destination, though think the challenge in Singapore is from an architectural

standpoint, we haven't had the opportunity to create very unique buildings or projects. There is a huge opportunity there as there are only a handful of spectacular exemplars – such as the CapitaLand's The Interlace condominium and Norman Foster's Capella Singapore – considering how many buildings we have here. Of course, this is not to say that there's a lack of great hotels in the country.

Design has been at the mercy of practicality and financial efficacies. There are some iconic projects with so much opportunities in Singapore and I do feel that Singapore is going to grow so much more from the design perspective and I am excited to see really creative design in the near future.

Our opinion, which has raised eyebrows, is that hospitality projects in Singapore are missing in flavour. What is the Singapore identity and how do we celebrate that? Whether it has attributes to the Malay, Peranakan, Chinese or Indian cultures – maybe it's all of it or none of it. For BLINK, incorporating a local feel into a hotel means being adept at capturing the unique spirit of a destination. This is evident in its Singapore properties, which include the Conrad Centennial and Capitol Kempinski. We have so much amazing talent and a lot of our designers just need the opportunity. We need to find what is the Singapore identity and how we can create a synonymous design style.

