

## STARTING ANEW

MCT Bhd's flagship  
One City project is  
making a comeback  
with a major makeover





> 04

Hot Properties

Rooms with a view

Sunway Bhd's latest project strikes a chord with appealing designs and a strategic location

> 05

Behind The Scenes

Borrowing made simple

One man's belief that getting loans should be a hassle-free process has given birth to Loanstreet, which aims to simplify applications for all

> 08-09

Cover Story

Starting anew

MCT Bhd's flagship One City project is making a comeback with a major makeover that will add value to the surrounding area

> 10

Industry Spotlight

Rising to the top

Chester Group executive chairman Datuk Howard Chew shares what it takes to stand out from the crowd in the real estate sector

> 11

Industry Insights

Innovative home financing options

The implementation of stricter lending requirements has given rise to alternative financing targeted at helping homeseekers purchase their first property

> 12-13

Living Landscapes

Zen and the art of landscape design

Landart Design Sdn Bhd brings landscapes to life with an artistic approach grounded on urban planning principles

> 14

Design Distinctions

Designing talents

Young talents take the stage at the IJM Land Designer Award, which provides a platform for them to translate their creations into reality

> 15

Office Trends

Working on workspaces

Striking a balance between focus and collaboration in contemporary corporate interiors



14

Changing the game

IT'S said that the human body replaces itself every seven years, with poetic licence given for varying rates of cellular regeneration. The same holds true for the property market, and while a strict benchmark of seven years isn't necessarily in practice, some level of reinvention is necessary to stay relevant in any enterprise as time goes on.

This is seen in MCT Bhd's ongoing reimagination of One City in Subang Jaya, Selangor, revolving around the first two phases of the RM5 bil project. Known for the distinctive glass ceiling of its Sky Park, One City has yet to attain the celebrity status accorded to other integrated commercial developments in Klang Valley despite a bevy of associated pull factors, prompting its current makeover, which thus far has seen the introduction of a "wedding hub" as well as the repositioning of its retail component.

Adaptability in the face of adversity is also a factor in the rise of Chester Properties Sdn Bhd, which has gone from a single office in Kota Damansara to a regional agency with associate companies in Hong Kong, South Korea and China in less than 10 years. Looking back, founder Datuk Howard Chew attributes his success to a willingness to take challenges as learning points, adjusting his strategy with every setback.

Other facets of the property market which continue to evolve include its interactions with mobile technology, with a growing number of app developers such as Wonderlist Property Pte Ltd and Bumbung.co launching increasingly sophisticated solutions and services catering for homebuyers, developers and agents.

With that said, some aspects of the industry remain evergreen, particularly in the field of landscape architecture. Wordplay aside, the discipline is given over to artists who work in topographies, for whom flora and fauna are just another paintbrush. With Mother Nature as a medium, it's unsurprising that designs by firms such as Landart Sdn Bhd have withstood the test of time, as seen in its ambitious proposal for Cybersouth Central Park in Cyberjaya.

Also in this issue of *Living & Property* are the usual round-up of product launches, including Setia EcoHill 2 by SP Setia, Sunway Mont Residences by Sunway Bhd and more, as well as a behind-the-scenes look at Sunway Lagoon's design and resulting impact on domestic tourism. Till next time, festive wishes and Selamat Hari Raya to all!

ALIFF YUSRI

Living&Property, Senior Writer

aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com



08-09

> 16

Office Spaces

Welcoming workspaces

How does the idea of working in a Grade A office tower, but with significantly reduced overhead expenses, sound to you? If you're intrigued, read on

> 17

Themed Topographies

Into the blue

Sunway Lagoon maintains cross-demographic appeal through a combination of new attractions and a focus on fun

> 18

Tech Bytes

Raising the roof

Bumbung facilitates real estate transactions by connecting homebuyers with verified real estate agents

One-stop property shop

Wonderlist is a property listing mobile app backed by a healthy ecosystem of supporting services

> 20

Thriving Townships

Bringing nature back

The beauty of nature is the inspiration for SP Setia Bhd's latest township, which offers the best of air, earth and water



18

Finding peace of mind

KLK Land Sdn Bhd offers safety and security with Bandar Seri Coalfields, an integrated township in Klang Valley's north-west growth corridor

> 21

Industry Updates

Homes for the people

Selangor homebuyers will be further spoiled for choice with the launch of two new promising developments

> 22

In The News

Hype and happenings

A look around town at what's going on with developers, furnishings specialists and more

EDITORIAL

Senior Executive Editor: Yeoh Guan Jin

Associate Editors: Brian Cheong, Richard Augustin

Senior Writer: Aliff Yusri

Writers: Ang Hui Hsien, Grace Lim, Evanna Ramly, Angie Tan, Stephanie Aeria

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Senior Graphic Designer: Eunice Han

Graphic Designers: Nadia Sanford, Sujen Brahmam

SALES & MARKETING

Director: Alison Lim (012) 212 3442

Senior Managers:

Herman Lim (019) 276 4911

CK Wong (016) 778 4914

Robert Lee (019) 359 5165

Yong Wang Ching (012) 205 7928

Senior Account Managers:

Ng Ching Yin, Geetha Perumal

Account Managers: Krystle Lim, Khairul Amilin, Azreena Hamzah, Shekher Balasundaram, Owen Ng, Joane Tan

Sales Support Manager: Vigneswary Krishnan

Sales Support Executive: Parimala Devi

CIRCULATION & PRODUCTION

Head: Tang Chee Hong

Asst Managers (Circulation):

Kanna Matthew, Sumitra Munusamy

Prepress Asst Manager: Kuah Choon Eng

Prepress Senior Executive: Koh Too Wan

CORPORATE

Chief Executive Officer: Hng Hung Yong

CONTACTS

Tel: 603-7968 8668

Fax: 603-7968 2200

Advertising Enquiries: ext 186

email: sales@hckmedia.com

Circulation & Distribution: ext 188 & 190

email: circulation@hckmedia.com

Subscription: ext 188 & 193

email: subscription@hckmedia.com

Living&Property

is published by:

MW Magazines Sdn Bhd (1048577-T)

Corporate office:

No. 6, Jalan 19/1B, Section 19

46300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor

Distributed free via *Focus Malaysia*, *Anderson Analytics List* and *Editions Newsstand*

# Borrowing made simple

One man's belief that getting loans should be a hassle-free process has given birth to Loanstreet, which aims to simplify applications for all

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | [hhang@hckmedia.com](mailto:hhang@hckmedia.com)

**L**oans made easy — that is the tagline encapsulating Loanstreet's mission when it first set out to streamline loan application processes in 2012. Four years on, it has not lost sight of this goal, with founder Jared Lim explaining that they are slowly but surely moving closer to their goal.

**1 Many view Loanstreet as just a loan comparison website, which is what it initially started out as, but it is more than that. Can you take us through its other aspects?**

Loanstreet carries two brands. The first is the consumer financial portal [Loanstreet.com.my](http://Loanstreet.com.my), which carries consumer credit products like home loans and credit cards for users to compare. The portal also has financial tools such as calculators to convert flat interest rates into effective rates and editorials on topics related to personal finance.

In 2013, we stopped focusing on [Loanstreet.com.my](http://Loanstreet.com.my) to build our second brand, called Loanstreet Partners. Launched in 2015, this application provides loan eligibility checks on behalf of banks for people like property developers and real estate agents. The enterprise platform has different modules for different users, and we intend to roll out this interface for car dealers next.

**2 Now that your focus is on Loanstreet Partners, what will happen to Loanstreet.com.my?**

Towards the end of last year, we started refocusing on our consumer portal so we did a refresh, included credit cards and started launching gift campaigns. It makes a lot more sense for people to visit our sites to compare and choose the kind of cards they like rather than sign up with the first bank that approaches them.

**3 You have several banking partners on board with you. How do these partnerships work?**

Our collaborations with banks depend on two things — the product and the contract. Generally, what we have is a procurement partnership with banks. This partnership covers verification and filtering as well as a system that enables bank officers to receive cases on their phones to follow up and provide status updates.

**4 How has the arrival of Loanstreet changed the loan application process?**

Prior to this, it was all very chaotic. No one was ever clear about what was going on. Hence, our mission when we started was “loans made easy” — easy not just for the consumers but also for the banks and developers. Loanstreet started with the purpose of comparing product information but along the way, we went into filtering, eligibility advice and consultation for consumers.

We've streamlined the process so that consumers can get accurate information for every bank while property developers can serve their customers better by making recommendations that fit their customers' loan capabilities — all within a day.

**5 Why did you start Loanstreet and how has it evolved since?**

In 2009, my family was going through some difficult times, which prompted me to buy my first home. Naturally, I went online to search for information, but there weren't any back then. I decided to do something to fill in this gap.

I quit my job in 2010 to join a company that provides loan origination systems to banks. I was not from the banking industry, but I wanted to understand if its processes made sense to the consumers and also to the banks themselves. In understanding the process of how a loan is originated and how credit decisions are made, I realised that there were numerous deficiencies.

That's why I started Loanstreet, which was originally a simple mortgage comparison site. The initial idea hasn't changed, but we're getting closer to realising it.

**6 Do you intend to expand your editorials to cover more than personal finance?**

Our editorials have a wide scope, as long as they ben-

efit our consumers and do not cover topics that are too unrelated. There is always an angle that ties them back to personal finance. Our popular ones are the technical articles. Three of these have gone beyond 100,000 shares on social media, while others have been republished in print and translated into other languages.

**7 When it comes to comparison websites, most people would think of iMoney.my and RinggitPlus. How do you differentiate yourself from these sites?**

At first sight, Loanstreet looks like any other comparison site, but we are able to perform an eligibility check for customers and give advice on what to do during the application process. This is especially important for things like mortgages and personal loans, and this is where you'll find the difference.

**8 Is there a benchmark which you set to indicate that Loanstreet has succeeded?**

We have to be rewarded for our innovations, which is a bit tough in Malaysia as people are generally sceptical and less willing to try new things. The good news is that we're seeing a change now and people are willing to shell out money when they find that the product actually works.

We also want to leave a legacy — to see an industry that is streamlined and efficient, and which would not have existed in that state if Loanstreet weren't around. We would like to be recognised for what we have done.

**9 Is Loanstreet specifically targeted at the younger generation, who are more willing to try new things?**

As of now, the people who come to the website for comparisons are the people who are looking to make a purchase or get a loan as well as those who come for the editorials. So our visitors are mainly the more urban types.

We are targeting the young with the direct-to-consumer portal, but not for Loanstreet Partners, as the millennials are not the ones making the decisions. In fact, the enterprise portal audience takes more convincing, but I think if you have a good product, you just have to wait it out and word will spread eventually.

**10 Has Loanstreet been affected by the tighter policies on loan applications?**

The loan industry is a huge one, and Loanstreet occupies only a small portion of the pie. We don't feel the effect as much but we still feel it because transactions have dropped. Most developers and real estate agents are feeling it so by proxy, we feel it as well.

Despite the challenging economic conditions, however, we are still growing. The number of applications is still growing on a month-to-month basis, so we are still breaking internal records. ■

“ It makes a lot more sense for people to visit our sites to compare and choose the kind of cards they like rather than sign up with the first bank that approaches them. ”

— Jared Lim





A linear layout with a view from every room — this is the unique selling point of Sunway Mont Residences, a 38-storey condominium by Sunway Bhd. Sitting on a plot of freehold land measuring 2.88 acres in the affluent neighbourhood of Mont Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, the building's unique concept offers an unobstructed view of the outdoors from the living room, dining area and bedrooms in all 288 units.

Sunway Integrated Properties Sdn Bhd executive director (Central Region property development division) Ang Kee Ping says this has made the project very popular. "A linear layout is perfect for a condominium unit. It does away with conventional designs that only have certain rooms facing outside while the rest only have a borrowed view," he points out.

### At the heart of convenience

Evidently, homebuyers think so too, based on the positive response at the project's launch last month. More than 80% of the units were taken up, and Ang discloses that the sales are still coming in. Of all the customers, an estimated 80% are below 30 years old and comprise young couples as well as families.



An Eco Pond sits near the lobby and functions as a retention pond as well as a water feature

"There is an equal number of owner-occupiers and investors as Mont Kiara caters to both by offering the perfect location upgrade for the former and good rental yields for the latter. While a majority of the owners are locals, expatriates make up a large number of the occupants due to the international schools nearby," he says.

These institutions include Garden International School, which is directly accessible by foot from the condominium via a back road. Also located within the vicinity are Mont' Kiara International School and the French School of Kuala Lumpur.

With a gross development value of RM250 mil, Sunway Mont Residences sits near amenities such as Jaya Grocer at Verve Mont Kiara, which is situated just two plots away. A number of retail and commercial buildings in the area such as Plaza Mont Kiara, 1 Mont Kiara and Publika provide plenty of dining and shopping opportunities as well.

### Combining the best

Aside from its location, the appeal of Sunway Mont Residences also lies in its modern rustic concept and timeless architecture. Using fair-faced bricks and off-form concrete, very little maintenance is required, with paintwork rendered completely unnecessary.

The units come in five layout designs ranging from 1,122 sq ft to 1,906 sq ft, and are priced at RM800 psf — a steal considering its address and the track record of its developer. Ang reveals that the two smallest unit types — the 2+1- and 3+1-bedroom layouts — are the most popular among buyers, followed by the spacious dual-key units.

Each floor houses only 10 units, with five of them facing north, which has a view of the greenery of undeveloped land. The south-facing units, meanwhile, look out to the Penchala Link and Sprint Expressway, which lead to Kuala Lumpur and other parts of Petaling Jaya.

# Rooms with a view

## Sunway Bhd's latest project strikes a chord with appealing designs and a strategic location

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | hhang@hckmedia.com



PHOTO BY MUHAMMAD HAZIM



**ABOVE:** Landscaping is heavily emphasised in the project, as is customary for Sunway, says Ang

**LEFT:** The project's linear layout gives its bedrooms, living rooms and dining halls a view of the outside

Sunway Mont Residences is fully equipped with amenities including a 15-metre swimming pool and gymnasium in the facilities deck on the 7th storey, as well as a sky terrace on the 26th floor. Greeting visitors near the lobby is an Eco Pond that serves as a retention pond as well as a water feature.

"We put a lot of emphasis on landscaping in this project, which is a trademark of Sunway Property. If you have been to Bandar Sunway (in Subang Jaya, Selangor), you will no-

tice many signboards stating that the landscaping was done by us. It is how we differentiate ourselves from our peers," declares Ang.

Purchasers of Sunway Mont Residences are eligible to apply for the *Sunway Property Certainty Campaign* which runs until Sep 30. Offering three options, including guaranteed loans, deferred payments and voluntary exit plans, the campaign is designed to assist buyers who encounter complications in getting their loans approved. ■



# Starting anew

MCT Bhd's flagship One City project is making a comeback with a major makeover that will add value to the surrounding area

Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | hhang@hckmedia.com

**D**atuk Lim Kok Boon is a hardworking man. Despite having to work weekends — which would throw most people off — the executive director of MCT Bhd says that he doesn't mind it. "The thing with shopping malls is that most activities happen during the weekends, so that's when we need to come in. Besides, I'm at an age where my family is often overseas, so I can afford to do so," he says.

Known among his staff as a manager who has no qualms about getting involved at every level of operations, his quick thinking means that decisions can be made swiftly and projects can proceed in a speedy manner. This quality is crucial in the property market, especially as Lim is the person overseeing the makeover for phases one and two of One City, an integrated development in Subang Jaya, Selangor that also happens to be MCT's flagship project. The 77-acre project has an estimated gross development value (GDV) of RM5 bil and consists of several components including a hotel, offices and retail outlets.

Aside from the revamp, Lim also has his hands full with the third phase of One City, which is currently still in the planning stages. Projected to take at least five years to complete, the 17-acre plot of land dedicated to the phase will be populated with office towers, serviced apartments, two hotels and a mall measuring more than one million sq ft.

The project is being geared towards a park-and-ride concept due to its location near an upcoming LRT (light rail transit) station, making it convenient for commuters to leave their cars there and travel around. To capitalise on this, a pedestrian bridge connecting the new phase to the station and 11,000 parking bays are being planned, which will benefit Puchong, USJ and Putra Heights residents working in KL.

Lim's quick thinking ensures that decisions can be made swiftly and projects can proceed in a speedy manner



Adjoining The Square is the Urban Park, which is being positioned as an outdoor events area to support the digital mall

PHOTO BY ANWAR FAIZ



## Theming it up

Lim's enthusiasm shines through as he speaks about the makeover, stating, "We intend to make One City a destination, a place that people come to, to buy specific products and do specific activities," he explains, adding that a decision was made to transform existing retail components into thematic malls.

The Place, consisting of 78 retail lots, an event hall and a rooftop banquet hall, was the first to undergo the transformation when it was relaunched as The Wedding Hub in March. Conceptualised as a one-stop wedding centre, the idea came when Lim noticed that couples need to engage in a lot of groundwork to source for different items for their wedding.

He says, "Couples can now get everything they need for their wedding here, from gowns and accessories to videographers. They can even hold their ceremony and reception here, as the venue is equipped with a ballroom and a smaller event hall". MCT hopes to increase awareness of the hub and draw more customers in via the recommendations of existing customers and guests attending weddings here.

The developer also recently launched a shopping campaign which ran for a limited period at The Square, another commercial component comprising 124 retail lots. At that time, the Geek! Digital Fair was held for the first time ever, an event which is part of an initiative to turn the venue into a digital mall.

Highlighting the relevance of introducing such a mall to the social context of the surrounding area, Lim says, "Market research shows that Subang Jaya has a young Chinese demography, with 45% of the population between 20 and 39 years old. This is an age group with major demand for digital products, so there is plenty of potential in making The Square the go-to place for such products".

The venue's 19,000-sq ft atrium is also being promoted to retailers as an exhibition space, which plays an important role in retaining customers. "Customers who purchased a product during an exhibition can return to the same venue even after the event is over, because the retailers' outlets are also located there, which translates to repeat business for them," points out Lim.

Adjoining The Square is the Urban Park, an outdoor area with a permanent stage, which is being positioned as an outdoor events area to support the digital mall by drawing the right crowd. Lim reasons, "The park is conducive for holding concerts and extreme activities — the type of events that can attract visitors of a younger age group who also fit the buyers' profile for digital products".

## Tying up loose ends

Undergoing the most change right now is the retail portion of One City's Sky Park, which Lim admits had a less-than-favourable tenancy mix in the past. Comprising four floors of retail, seven floors of offices, a hotel and an office tower, he says that this is a problem commonly faced by shopping malls.

Currently, renovations are ongoing to accommodate incoming tenants, while the development's e-Fitness gym is

being scaled down to almost half its former size to free up floor space for more tenants. The ground floor has also been designated for eateries to cater to office workers as well as shoppers, with Lim disclosing that MCT is targeting an international brand which will offer an intriguing product mix.

The most well-known feature of Sky Park is its sky roof, which is popular with local residents who like to visit the place at night to enjoy the cool breeze. The unique glass structure of the sky roof also makes it a popular spot for photography enthusiasts.

Lim reveals that the Sky Park is the only building within One City to have a Green Building Index (GBI) rating, describing it as resembling a shopping street, as opposed to a shopping mall, which is usually an enclosed space. Its high entrances ensure that the interiors remain breezy and comfortable even without air-conditioning.

"We also have a component called the Garden Shoppe, which consists of 62 units of four-storey shophots. It follows a courtyard concept so it has plenty of open-air areas which can be used for events like motor shows that require a covered outdoor exhibition space," says Lim.

A majority of the businesses occupying the shops provide lifestyle services, with some units transformed into learning centres, which Lim points out also fulfil the needs of Subang Jaya residents, many of whom are families with young children.

## Location is key

The only component that is not part of the revamping exercise, eCity Hotel is already raking in profits one year into its operations despite not being associated with any major brands. More impressively, it is MCT's first hotel. Lim attributes its success to One City's location next to the Elite (North-South Expressway Central Link) which provides excellent north-south connectivity.

"We're situated in the middle of two major transportation hubs — the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and Port Klang. This makes us very attractive to logistics companies, with many of their overseas staff choosing to stay in our hotel when they are here for business," he adds.

Sitting near the Elite and LDP (Damansara-Puchong Expressway), there is plenty of traffic passing by One City every day, which MCT hopes to convert into visitor footfall via the development's exceptional accessibility and abundant parking bays. As Lim points out, "If five out of every 100 vehicles that pass by turn into One City, that would amount to significant visitorship for us".

Its proximity to the Hicom Industrial Estate has also worked to One City's advantage. First of all, many multinationals (MNCs) have departments based in the development's office tower and office suites in order to be close to their factories within the industrial area.

Additionally, the entry of these MNCs has brought in expatriates who are posted here for work — many of whom have taken up residence in the two SOFO (Small Office Flexible Office) towers sitting on The Square. Naturally, these residents provide a ready customer base for the retail components in One City.

Lim says that One City is still a work-in-progress, and that they have engaged consultants to assist in the initiative. It is a huge responsibility to shoulder, but he remains unfazed despite having to juggle the revamp with the construction of the third phase. Rather, he seems to relish the challenge.

He says, "The area between the Elite and LDP is a growing corridor for property development and with this growth, there will be a new catchment comprising a young and educated population. There are no other integrated projects in the area, so what we need to do is capitalise on this advantage to make sure that One City becomes a success". ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Sky Park is the only building within One City to have a GBI rating

One City is a 77-acre project with an estimated gross development value of RM5 bil

The unique glass structure of the sky roof on Sky Park makes it a popular spot for photo-taking enthusiasts





Chew attributes the rise of Chester Properties to its positive management style and family-oriented approach



PHOTO BY ANWAR FAIZ

Looking on the bright side can pay off in dividends. It has certainly done so for Datuk Howard Chew, whose perseverance and positive outlook have been the driving forces behind the precipitous rise of the Chester Group of Companies from a single office in Kota Damansara to a regional agency with associate companies in Hong Kong, South Korea and China.

Established in 2006 as Chester Properties and having celebrated its 10th anniversary earlier this year in April, Chew recalls the group's humble beginnings. "We started out with 10 negotiators, and in less than three years we moved to our current location at the Strand, purchasing an entire block. Today, we have 13 branches nationwide and over 1,000 employees," he says.

## Building a business

Chew's interest in the sector started early, as the budding entrepreneur read widely on successful personalities, with international business magazines as his material of choice. One common thread he noticed running through many of their stories was the role that real estate transactions played in their accumulation of wealth and status.

Taking the lesson to heart, he decided to build a future along the same lines, starting Chester Properties with co-founder Sean Yong and principals Betty Kanapathy and David Cheong. In growing the company, he instilled it with his own values, with an em-

# Rising to the top

## Chester Group executive chairman Datuk Howard Chew shares what it takes to stand out from the crowd in the real estate sector

| Text by **ALIFF YUSRI** | [aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com](mailto:aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com)

phasis on family-oriented optimism.

"Even though we're doing well, it doesn't always seem so, because our company culture and management style is that we channel most of our resources towards our agents. They're family to us, and if they have any problems, we solve them together, which makes them feel at home," he says.

"We struggled when we first started out, but my philosophy is that everything that happens to me, happens for the good. Each challenge is an opportunity to learn, understand and resolve something new. Even in school, if I got poor results, I would take it as motivation to study harder and improve myself."

Part of Chester Properties' success can be attributed to Chew's warm approach and personal charisma, with a growing number of agencies expressing interest in joining the

group. To bring these potential partners into the fold, he anticipates the opening of more domestic branches, particularly in the Klang Valley area.

## Economies of scale

The 32-year-old bon vivant also attributes the group's achievements to its focus on bulk purchases with additional benefits from developers, supported by the financial backing of an extensive network of investors, allowing the firm to offer more value per transaction for its clients.

"The selection process for the properties in our portfolio is intensive. We choose the developer first, based on reputation and track record, so that there's an assurance that the project will be completed. From there, we focus on products with indicators of high market demand," says Chew.

Further setting it apart from other agencies, Chester Properties has gone the extra mile by venturing into property development itself through sister company Chester Development Sdn Bhd, with boutique bungalows in Setia Eco Park, Shah Alam comprising its maiden project. The experience afforded the firm a behind-the-scenes look at the industry, giving it a deeper understanding of the needs of its various stakeholders.

The firm took its first steps into the regional arena in 2009, leveraging on a slowdown in the South Korean sector to introduce Malaysian projects to investors in the Land of the Morning Calm. In maintaining its momentum overseas, Chew shares that the group is considering exploring markets in Melbourne and the United States in the near future.

"Property prices in Malaysia are still affordable compared to those in other countries, taking currency fluctuations and other factors into account. Australia is a particularly attractive opportunity, given its proximity in terms of distance and time. We hope to break into these markets in the second half of 2016," he says.

In terms of his outlook on the domestic market this year, Chew notes that landed and high-rise properties within Klang Valley are still sought after despite dampened consumer sentiment, though price has become ever more crucial as potential purchasers turn a critical eye to the growth prospects of any given product. ▣





PHOTO BY JONATHAN LOI

Developers have introduced creative financing options to help customers limited in their borrowing capacity

# Innovative home financing options

The implementation of stricter lending requirements has given rise to alternative financing targeted at helping homeseekers purchase their first property

| Text by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com

In 2013, Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) started putting in place tighter lending guidelines, which affected home loans as well, with the aim of curbing speculation and cooling down the property market. When the announcement was made, industry observers foresaw it would affect the younger generation disproportionately, with the older generation — many of whom have already invested in the property cycle — qualifying for comparatively higher loan margins.

Several years down the road, this prediction has come true, with many finding their dreams to own their first home dashed by the continuing rejection of their loan applications. This sentiment was echoed by Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association Malaysia (Rehda) president Datuk Seri FD Iskandar Mohamed Mansor, who stated that stricter loan requirements were contributing to a slower property market and denying potential first-time homeowners the opportunity to buy a house.

This statement was made during a briefing by Rehda earlier this year, during which the association released findings that the loan rejection rate for affordable housing was above 50% for the second half of 2015. Later on, this figure was refuted by the Association of Banks Malaysia (ABM) chairman Datuk Abdul Farid Alias, who countered that only 92,000 out of 456,000 housing loan applications submitted last year went unapproved, translating to a 20.4% rejection rate.

## Adversity breeds innovation

Regardless, news of loan rejections have garnered increasing attention due to the issue's relevance to young working professionals. Aside from stringent loan conditions, potential purchasers must also consider inflated property prices in metropolitan areas — though analysts predict that these will moderate this year.

This situation has not gone unnoticed, however, with help coming in the form of financial assistance programmes like the First Home Deposit Funding Scheme (MyDeposit) which was announced in Budget 2016. Noting that most first-time homeseekers cannot afford the 10% down payment for a house, the scheme is crucial in helping to kick-start their journey towards purchasing a house.

iProperty Group Ltd managing director and chief executive officer Georg Chmiel applauds the scheme, particu-

larly its support in helping the lower and middle-income groups take their first steps towards home ownership. However, he points out that this is also dependent on the value of the property itself, as the scheme only covers down payments of up to RM30,000. "If the property is priced at RM500,000, they will still need to fork out the remaining RM20,000, which is a lot of money," he says.

"It is also important to note that buying a home via this scheme does not mean you can buy a home cash-free. They will still need to ensure they have enough cash to pay for the legal fees and other miscellaneous costs, as well as the booking fee."

Despite praising the scheme as a good move, property financing expert and chief executive officer of Smart Financing Co Gary Chua points out, "The underlying issue that first-time homebuyers face is securing a loan from a bank to finance their purchase. Banks have more stringent policies governing loan approvals for this demographic, who are mostly young and have yet to draw high salaries".

As such, private property developers have introduced creative financing options to help customers who are limited in their borrowing capacity. For example, Sunway Property — the property arm of Sunway Bhd — is currently running the *Sunway Property Certainty Campaign*, an initiative which includes a guaranteed loan plan of up to 88% of the property's value for purchasers who fail to obtain a mortgage from commercial banks.

Land and General Bhd has also introduced a package for its Astoria Ampang serviced residences in Kuala Lumpur, with the *Astoria Power Pack* offering a low down payment

scheme of 1%, along with an interest-free easy payment plan over the course of 24 months, available with selected banks.

These packages have been well-received by buyers, especially those who are not eligible for schemes like MyDeposit, which is only open to those with a household income of below RM10,000. With regard to whether developers should offer such financing assistance — traditionally the domain of commercial banks — Chmiel notes that there should be no issues with such schemes as long as their guidelines fall within the regulations outlined by BNM.

Chua explains, "Discounts or rebates are always at the discretion of the seller (developer), as these are determined by market supply and demand. In terms of financing, there are already established regulations pertaining to margins of financing, which are usually stated along with the net purchase price".

## Tackling the issue

Although BNM's move in introducing tighter loan guidelines has been lauded by many, there have also been calls to relax the rules for first-time purchasers. Chua suggests, "Perhaps the banks can consider having a friendlier policy for such groups, such as allowing a higher debt service ratio cut-off, as it is one of the main reasons for loans being rejected".

"Banks these days have adapted their loan approval processes, making them more systematic and dependent on scores. To help more genuine customers, they could consider exercising some form of community banking, where they get to know and understand customers better to meet their needs for financing, rather than having a score card, which is more like a one-size-fits-all model."

Though it is comforting to note that the calls for financial assistance by new property purchasers are being heeded and that both the public and private sectors are implementing measures to help this group, perhaps the underlying concern is the ability of today's generation to buy a house — an ability which is impaired by costs of living and property prices rising faster than salaries. ■



**LEFT:** There should be no issues associated with alternative financing packages as long as they fall within BNM regulations, says Chmiel

**RIGHT:** Chua notes that first-time home buyers often have trouble securing a loan from commercial banks



The Cybersouth Central Park brief envisions the site as a communal space amid a sustainable forest ecosystem



Landart's proposal for the park utilises eco-friendly timber materials to engage users with nature

# Zen and the art of landscape design

Landart Design Sdn Bhd brings landscapes to life with an artistic approach grounded on urban planning principles

| Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com

The creative aspects of design are typically reserved for interiors and structures, but there also exists a thriving market for artists who view landscapes and greenery as a medium of expression. One such firm, Landart Design Sdn Bhd, has crafted topographies in Malaysia and overseas since 1998, with notable recent projects including MCT Bhd's Cybersouth Central Park in Cyberjaya, Selangor.

"I've had a passion for the arts ever since I was a student in primary school. It was an influence from my family, so I grew up in a conducive environment. I started out by drawing, then learned how to paint, often displaying my paintings in the back of the classroom. From there, I studied urban planning in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), where

I was first exposed to the beauty of landscapes," says Landart managing director Phua Chin Eng.

## Setting the scene

Drawn to the field, Phua devoted himself to learning more about how landscapes interacted with the social and geophysical elements surrounding them, complementing his diploma in urban and regional planning with a Bachelor's degree in landscape architecture at UTM — one of the first such qualifications offered by an institution in Malaysia at the time.

Concluding his tertiary studies in 1996, he began working with landscape architecture and planning consultancies in Singapore before eventually establishing Landart in Penang in 1998. Today,

with more than 18 years of experience — including 16 years as a corporate member of the Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia (ILAM) — the soft-spoken personality is a pillar of the industry, often serving as a judge at the annual Malaysian Landscape Architecture Awards organised by ILAM.

Along the way, he has remained active in the domestic arts scene, supporting local talents through a gallery in Acheh Art Row, Penang, along with the Locus art space in Publika, Solaris Dutamas, which houses the Kuala Lumpur branch of Landart as well. Though Locus has since changed hands, Phua continues to apply the sensibilities it espoused throughout the design firm's portfolio.

"Creativity, expression and storytelling are central to our approach, which is why we took the



Effective design needs to be interactive, practical and memorable, says Phua

name 'Landart'. UTM laid a foundation for my own approach to landscape architecture, and that has evolved throughout the years as I learned and grew, with the philosophy of design and ecotourism principles gradually having more emphasis," he says.

"These principles determine how we utilise existing natural resources in a given setting to bring out the potential of the landscape. I began exploring them at UTM during a six-month landscaping project along Sungai Jelai, Pahang, which was one of the inspirations behind our design for MCT's Central Park in Cyberjaya."

## A prolific portfolio

Since its establishment, Landart has contributed towards dozens of projects across Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates, including the Royal Perak Golf Club, Gurney Plaza and the Light Linear Park in Penang as well as the Pantai Cermin Water Theme Park in Medan.

One of these projects, the Bayswater Resort Condominium in Gelugor, is representative of Phua's approach as a whole, with Landart incorporating a "barcode" aesthetic into the topography of the development itself through the use of repeated linear elements to emphasise Bayswater's urban living concept.

"This was during the transition period when Malaysia was converting from a price tag system to the

barcode, which we wanted to commemorate. From planting trees to implementing paint patterns and the swimming pool design, we took about 12 years to complete the project, with Bayswater in Parcel A and E-Gate, Platino and Pearl Regency in Parcel B coming together in a grand design when viewed from above," he says.

While landscaping is its forte, the firm avoids overspecialisation within a single medium, supplementing its bread and butter with extensive works in the industrial and commercial segments, along with ventures into urban planning with undertakings ranging from the Jelutong Expressway and Bukit Tengah Roundabout on local shores to the Dammam Highway Interchange in the United Arab Emirates.

In addition, Phua added interior design to Landart's portfolio in 2003, with a separate team overseeing the continuity of its values and vision within interior environments and built spaces. These are evident in its design for Keysight Technologies Malaysia Sdn Bhd's Bayan Lepas facility, which pairs the factory space with pleasant grey and neutral tones as well as pervasive industrial geometries.

"Landscapes constitute about 80% of our work, with interiors accounting for the remaining 20%. I think the two complement each other, and all our designs, whether landscape or interior, begin with a storyboard. Because the architect takes the lead in almost every aspect of a project, if he or she doesn't have a story to tell, then that space will lack soul," he says.

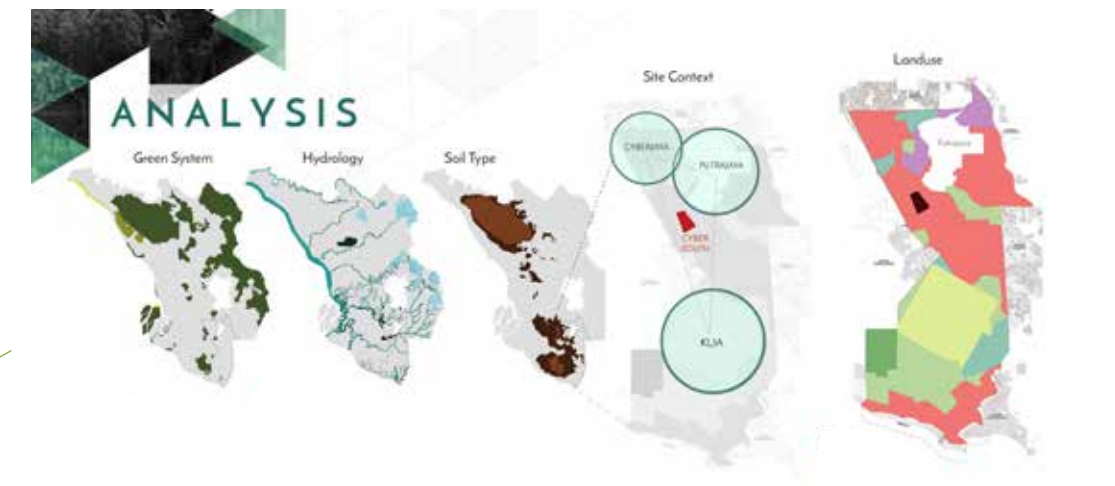
## Putting it into practice

At Landart, successful design is based on several core tenets, including interactivity, functionality and memorability, as Phua reasons that a space must engage its users or buyers in both practical and aesthetic terms to stand the test of time. In this respect, he was inspired by film director Ang Lee, who defined a good movie as something that a viewer watched for two or three hours but would remember for the rest of their life.

These tenets are present in the firm's proposal for Cybersouth Central Park, which took home first prize as well as the landscape consultancy contract for the project following a five-month ILAM competition. The contest encouraged participants to submit designs focusing on the park as a recreational hub amid a sustainable forest ecosystem while retaining existing site features.

"The site itself spans about 19 acres of land, with water features occupying 10 acres. We wanted to immerse the park's users in the present, past and future by creating a palimpsest, while acknowledging Starbucks founder Howard Schulz's idea of the third place — a community space between work and home, which represent the first two places that everybody needs in their life," says Phua.

The Landart team's palimpsest concept — which



Phua and his team studied diverse aspects of the Cybersouth Central Park site while planning their design strategy



The firm's design for Cybersouth Central Park includes separate contour, water and planting roadmaps to address corresponding aspects of the project



Landart's vision for Cybersouth Central Park encompasses years of development from ex-mining site to thriving ecosystem



The firm's Bayswater design incorporated a "barcode" aesthetic into the topography of the development itself

refers to a work that has been reused or altered while preserving elements of its earlier form or characteristics — highlights the natural and cultural identity of the Central Park site by tracing its roots as tropical peatland and secondary forest, developing through a period of habitation by Temuan orang asli tribes as well as 80 years of tin-mining operations and subsequent disuse.

## Looking to the future

"We also studied the routes of migratory bird species from China to Australia, with the site acting as a 'springboard' to help them in their journey. To ensure project viability, we laid out five- and 10-year planting strategies, while exploring things like how water discharges from the surroundings into the lake and combining two bodies of water into a single biomimicry pond as part of a holistic ecosystem," says Phua.

Landart conducted precedent studies on similar sites throughout the nation to plan their strategies, including the Forest Research Institute Malaysia's Tin Tailing Afforestation Centre in Bidor, Perak, which developed cost-effective tree planting techniques on former mining land, along with Taman

Wetlands, Putrajaya and Ara Damansara Eco Park, Petaling Jaya in Selangor.

In preserving the cultural heritage of the orang asli formerly extant in the area, Phua and his team included extensive references to the crafts favoured by the Temuan tribe, who often wove processed screwpine leaves into distinctive baskets. These weave patterns are duplicated in the flow of the park's pathways, as well as its pavement and shelter designs, which also use eco-friendly timber materials to emulate the tribe's closeness to nature.

Aside from Cybersouth Central Park, the firm's current portfolio includes projects in the central and northern regions, including Kedah and Langkawi. Moving forward, Phua remains sanguine about market prospects, though he shares that Landart's Kuala Lumpur branch sees more opportunities compared to its Penang office in terms of project sizes and budgets.

"In the end, what I want to accomplish with Landart was to establish a shared platform for people who love the arts, who are passionate about design and would like to create better living environments. If that sounds good, we look forward to working with you," he concludes. ■



## Design Distinctions

The winning entry, "Rhythm of Life", used batik designs to evoke a sense of nostalgia



# Designing talents

Young talents take the stage at the IJM Land Designer Award, which provides a platform for them to translate their designs into reality

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | hhang@hckmedia.com

It is often said that the young are the future. Evidently, this sentiment is a guiding principle for IJM Land Bhd, which recently concluded its IJM Land Designer Award (iLDA) 2016 with a ceremony to crown its two top winners. Leo Wong and Goh Sow Yee were announced as Gold and Silver winners respectively at the event, held at the developer's Bandar Rimbayu township in Telok Panglima Garang, Selangor.

IJM Land managing director Edward Chong was invited onstage to present Wong with a cash prize of RM18,000 and a MacBook Pro, while Goh took home RM12,000 and an iPhone 6s Plus. The winners were determined by a panel of judges, whose decisions held a 70% weightage, as well as public voting (30%) carried out during the two-day "Happy Family Day" event in Bandar Rimbayu.

Gold winner Wong also won the Media's Choice Award — presented by Bandar Rimbayu Sdn Bhd chief operating officer Shuy Eng Leong — through on-site voting that was conducted with media representatives attending the ceremony.

### Young and talented

The iLDA is a design contest that is open to all young and

aspiring interior designers who are required to design a show unit, within the constraints of a limited budget. The inaugural edition of the competition received more than 100 entries from participants below 30 years of age, who submitted their design ideas for Penduline — the latest development in Bandar Rimbayu's Fauna precinct.

Regarding the motivation behind iLDA, Chong says, "This is not the only effort that IJM Land has undertaken to nurture young talents. We have worked with other partners for other programmes focusing on young students and thought it would be a good idea to bring it to the next level."

"Many of the design competitions are limited to concepts on paper, so we thought, why don't we, as developers, provide our show units for them to bring their designs to life?"

He explained that they chose the theme "Reliving Nostalgic Memories" for this year's competition because it tied in with Bandar Rimbayu's concept of a neighbourhood that brings people back to the carefree days of old, when children were allowed to roam free on the streets — a privilege that today's children often can't enjoy.

Judged by a six-man panel, the submissions were short-listed to the top 20 for the second round. These 20 partici-

pants received the chance to take part in a product workshop with iLDA 2016 sponsors, namely Signature Kitchen Sdn Bhd, Urban Culture Sdn Bhd by Fella Group, Philips Malaysia Sdn Bhd, Jotun Paints (M) Sdn Bhd and Inovar Resources Sdn Bhd.

For their efforts, all five sponsors — which provided a budget of RM150,000 to each participant — received a small token of appreciation during the award ceremony, as did the panel of judges.

Chief judge Fendarie Su admitted that iLDA 2016 was one of the toughest events she had taken part in throughout her eight years of experience as a judge in local and international competitions. Su, the director of Santa Fe Interior Architecture Sdn Bhd, revealed that there were plenty of debates happening behind closed doors among the judges, especially when it came to the entries of the two finalists.

"Both of them have been amazing throughout the competition. It is not easy to complete designs in such a short time and on a limited budget, but they did very well. I believe that they have lots of potential, especially for them to have achieved this level of design at such a young age," she says.

One of the things that the jury looked for during the judging process was the incorporation of the competition's theme into the designs. Su highlighted the importance of nostalgia in bridging the gap between generations, as it helps the young understand their elders' way of life by reliving the days of old.

### Nostalgia for the win

Wong, an interior designer graduate of Saito College, won for his unique design concept based on cassette tapes to act as representations of human activities. Calling his design "Rhythm of Life", the 26-year-old incorporated the traditional art of batik to create a feeling of nostalgia. Describing his joy at the achievement, the Gold winner says that he was proud to see his designs come to life and expressed his gratitude to IJM Land for making it happen.

Runner-up Goh, who currently works at a local design firm, also expressed her happiness at being able to bring her designs to reality, stating that the highlight of the competition was the sponsors' workshop. Her entry — "Nostalgic Courtyard" — drew inspiration from the traditional Peranakan house, where the bedroom on the lower level was deconstructed and combined with the dining and kitchen area to form a courtyard. ■



PHOTOS BY ANWAR FAIZ



# Working on workspaces

Striking a balance between focus and collaboration in contemporary corporate interiors

| Text by **ALIFF YUSRI** | [aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com](mailto:aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com)

The modern office is a highly controlled environment, with almost every imaginable variable regulated by specific guidelines with the goal of maximising productivity. Towards this end, an increasing number of office furnishing specialists such as Yokohama-based Okamura Co Ltd are designing their products to satisfy the evolving preferences of users.

## Making connections

“Corporate cultures dictate office designs, which succeed based on how they support creativity, reduce costs, and enhance business efficiency, corporate brand image and human resource development,” says Okamura interior designer (project design division) Masahiko Kanaya, speaking at The Gardens Mall’s outlet of its primary distributor in Malaysia, Xtra Furniture Sdn Bhd.

He says that while offices serve as communal spaces where employees gather to achieve corporate goals, it is increasingly



difficult to make meaningful connections in the workplace, with diverse backgrounds, outsourcing and competition among co-workers all serving as factors

to impede communication.

To address these concerns, the clear segregation of spaces into “focus” and “collaboration” zones is necessary, with the former

offering privacy for individual introspection and activities, and the latter promoting group discussions and efforts. Both are essential to company operations, with individual competencies having a positive impact on team performance.

Other challenges in the office environment include ergonomics, with long hours spent in front of computer screens, standardised furnishings and cost-cutting on amenities often taking a toll on employee well-being.

## Breaking it down

Okamura outlines six different types of office environment — from “focus” to “collaboration” and everything in between to cater to activities from “innovative” to “routine”.

To cater for these varying usage profiles, the manufacturer has introduced its Muffle partition system, offering premier flexibility in terms of office layout. Muffle panels are composed of a metallic core and lightweight honeycomb structure with an outer façade of complementary fabrics, giving them both resilience and aesthetic appeal.

In addition, its SW series of workstations offers optimum positioning, allowing users to select the height of working surfaces to adjust their posture and stance throughout the day. This, along with the line’s sloped edges and other ergonomic factors, reduce repetitive stress, promoting well-being in the office. ■

18 x 7



# Welcoming workspaces

How does the idea of working in a Grade A office tower, but with significantly reduced overhead expenses, sound to you? If you're intrigued, read on

| Text by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com

Imagine being able to work out of a premium office in a prestigious business address, with a team of skilled support staff ready to assist you, all at a reasonable price. The only catch is that you do not own the workspace, but are merely “borrowing” it for as long as you want to.

Welcome to the concept of serviced offices, where companies with small and medium staff strengths can rent workspaces of different sizes to best accommodate their needs. Servcorp Ltd — an Australia-based provider of serviced and virtual offices — recently opened its third such facility in Malaysia.

According to Servcorp country manager (Malaysia) Joanne Tan-Rocca, all three locations in Kuala Lumpur target similar clients, a majority of whom are from the IT (information technology) and telecommunications industries, followed by oil and gas companies. Other sectors represented in the service provider's client database include the investment, pharmaceutical and recruitment industries, among others.

The difference among the three Servcorp facilities is in the size. “Nu Tower 2 and Ilham Tower are fairly similar, whereas Menara Citibank's offices are relatively larger and have more take-up space. At present, the occupancy rate for Nu Tower 2 and Menara Citibank is 85% each, while Ilham Tower, being relatively new, is at 40%,” Tan-Rocca says.

## This space for rent

Servcorp's portfolio isn't limited to just providing workspaces, as it supplies comprehensive office solutions as well, tailored to meet the needs of each client and support-

ed by the latest in technology. Tan-Rocca states, “Servcorp is recognised as a world leader in telecommunications. Our strength comes from proprietary software designed specifically to benefit our clients”.

To gain a first-hand experience of the provider's services, I recently had the opportunity to work from one of its serviced offices for a day, where I was offered a private office in Nu Tower 2 at KL Sentral. As expected, getting there was a fuss-free affair — save for the usual morning rush — as Servcorp's strategy of targeting locations near integrated transportation hubs means that they are easily reachable by public transport.

Meals were not a problem, as the nearby Nu Sentral shopping mall provides plenty of food options along with other conveniences. Hotels such as Aloft KL Sentral, Hilton KL and Le Meridien KL — to name just a few within the same area — offer even more dining choices as well as lodgings.

Tan-Rocca says that factors like these come into play when Servcorp chooses where to set up its offices. “The location of the building, which must be a Grade A office tower, is extremely important in terms of accessibility. Eateries ranging from the affordable to the high end should be within the vicinity as well, as should hotels, to accom-



**Tan-Rocca stresses that Servcorp is about providing a total business solution for anyone interested in utilising its network**

modate outstation clients,” she adds.

Working in a building with Grade A facilities definitely has its advantages — one of them being security. Access to the office floors can only be gained via an entrance card that is registered to the owner's name and identification number.

Servcorp's Nu Tower 2 facility is located on level 23, and each room is furnished with office desks, chairs and filing cabinets. Internet connectivity is available via a LAN (local area network) cable. The monthly rental for an office that accommodates up to three people starts from RM1,800, with rental varying according to different packages cus-

tomised to meet specific requirement profiles.

With the flexibility of upgrading or downsizing room sizes — the largest can comfortably fit up to 10 people — clients can tailor their office spaces to their needs. They are also given a key to their office, which allows them to enter at any hour of the day for the duration of their rental. Some long-term clients even take to personalising their workspaces by hanging up art and painting the walls.

Tucked within a section of the facility is the virtual office, where clients essentially rent a desk and dedicated telephone extension for a certain number of days or hours. Servcorp's worldwide presence enables clients to work from any of its virtual offices in other countries.

## Putting people first

Servcorp also provides a team consisting of a secretary, a receptionist and an office assistant who perform a range of tasks for a fee — a service that helps companies cut costs in hiring and training manpower. “No one trains their team like we do. We guarantee the highest standards of services, delivered in a timely and professional manner,” Tan-Rocca stresses.

These tasks range from simple duties like filing and photocopying to more complicated errands such as market research and creating invoices. Typically charged in 10-minute blocks, Servcorp also offers these services at fixed monthly rates.

The full price list of the services available can be found on Servcorp Online, an exclusive platform for clients which can be used to book meeting spaces and boardroom facilities across the provider's floors. It also allows them to give instructions to Servcorp receptionists regarding what to say when answering calls.

It is this attention to detail that gives Servcorp the upper hand when it comes to providing a total office experience. As Tan-Rocca puts it, “We do not just provide an office space, but a total business solution for anyone who is interested in utilising our network. Our offices are equipped with the very latest technology, supported by the global and local Servcorp teams. Walk straight in and start work at any of Servcorp's worldwide locations — we will take care of everything else”. □



PHOTOS BY SHARIL AMIN

Servcorp's worldwide presence enables its clients to operate from any of its virtual offices in other countries



# Into the blue

Sunway Lagoon maintains cross-demographic appeal through a combination of new attractions and a focus on fun

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | hhang@hckmedia.com

**T**hink of theme parks, and Sunway Lagoon in Bandar Sunway, Selangor will spring to mind for many Malaysians. As one of the first — and possibly the largest — water theme parks in the country, it is likely that every Malaysian has, or will, visit the attraction at least once in his lifetime.

Established some 24 years ago, Sunway Lagoon continues to be a top leisure destination for families, friends and corporate groups alike. As one of the biggest tourist attractions in Selangor, it has drawn roughly 20 million visitors since its opening, with international tourists making up approximately 12 million of them.

However, Sunway Lagoon in its current state may never have come to be were it not for the perseverance of the founding team. Its premise as a water park consisting of rides and attractions was quite a novel concept when originally proposed, with the mere mention of it often raising eyebrows. Securing financing for the park proved to be quite a challenge as well, as banks did not find the business proposition appealing.

Fortunately, after multiple rejections, the theme park succeeded in acquiring financing and the rest, as they say, is history. Today, the theme park comprises six zones, namely the Water Park, Amusement Park, Wildlife Park, Scream Park and Extreme Park, as well as the recently-opened Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon.

## Drawing the crowd

The 88-acre themed attraction is owned and managed by Sunway Lagoon Sdn Bhd, and its general manager Sean Choo explains that common themes can be found in all six parks. “Elements of the Mayan culture are present throughout the parks, which are designed to evoke the look and feel of a lost civilisation. The end goal is to create a mystical adventure,” he says.

Despite its wide range of attractions, the theme park’s focus remains very much on its water zones. The Water Park follows a “Waters of Africa” theme, with rides like the Congo Challenge, Cameroon Climb and Vuvuzela — the biggest water ride in Malaysia as certified by the Malaysia Book of Records 2013.

Its newest attraction — the Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon — is a 10-acre water park with a total construction cost of approximately RM100 mil. Situated on formerly disused land,

it is built around trees to recreate the feeling of being in a jungle, with rides that feature cartoon characters from the eponymous television network, including the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and SpongeBob SquarePants.

The Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon is one of the investments that Sunway Lagoon has made to maintain its position as one of the most recognisable tourism hotspots in Malaysia. Choo highlights the importance of constantly introducing new draws to the park, saying, “We need to have novelties to stand out in the market, which is why we have the first Waterplexx 5D theatre in Malaysia, as well as the largest surf pool and longest suspension bridge in the country”.

Unlike international theme parks, Sunway Lagoon is not associated with well-known brands such as Disney and Universal Studios. Although Choo admits that they brought in Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon because of its strong brand-name recognition, it was still necessary to take a different approach in order to stay relevant.

“International theme parks tend to focus on major amusement attractions such as roller-coasters and motion rides. What we are doing here is adding more fun elements. That’s why we have more parks, one of which is a Wildlife Park, which not many of the international theme parks have,” he states.

He adds that they are also currently in the midst of planning a celebration featuring parades, music and dancing, centred around a recreation of an erupting volcano, which is projected to be up and running in the second half of 2016 with the objective of giving visitors a “best day ever” experience.

These investments have paid off, as Sunway Lagoon draws an average of 1 million to 1.5 million visitors per year. Its most popular rides are the aforementioned Vuvuzela and Waterplexx 5D, as well as the Monsoon 360. However, Choo believes that it is not a particular ride that attracts the crowd, but a combination of the different parks that provide a fun and different experience, which keeps them coming.

He adds that Sunway Lagoon is particularly popular with visitors from the Middle East, which represent one of its larger markets, adding that 50% of tourists arriving from the region will visit the theme park. Travellers from India and within the region are also key markets.

In terms of Malaysians, Sunway Lagoon sees a high volume of locals passing through its doors during the peak months of November and December. Choo says, “Surprisingly, (domestic) visitorship has been encouraging despite the slowdown in the Malaysian economy. In fact, we’re doing better than last year. It could be because the weak ringgit means more people are travelling domestically”.

## Bigger, better and newer

Based on the number of local and international travellers they draw in, it is easy to see how theme parks play a major role in boosting a country’s tourism industry, and they can also add value to the national economy as a whole. Choo cites Sunway Resort City (popularly known

as Bandar Sunway) in Subang Jaya, Selangor as an example to illustrate this point.

“Sunway Lagoon was the first major component in Sunway Resort City. From there, it started developing to what it is today — an integrated township which includes retail, hospitality, education, healthcare and residential components. This example of a theme park serving as a catalyst for growth demonstrates how it can lead to many things,” he relates.

Choo predicts that the entry of newer theme parks and water parks will result in bigger and better attractions along with improved customer service and safety standards. The theming will also get more creative, and more technology will be introduced in many ways.

“The latest technology in the industry right now is virtual reality, and is already being implemented in several theme parks in the United States. It is an interesting concept but locally, we are studying the safety aspects. Our focus now is on delivering an interactive experience, which I think will be the next big thing,” he concludes. ■



**Choo predicts that the entry of newer theme parks and water parks will result in bigger and better attractions**

PHOTO BY MUHAMMAD HAZIM

**Spread over 88 acres, Sunway Lagoon has attracted roughly 20 million visitors since its opening**



PHOTO BY ANWAR FAIZ



# Raising the roof

Bumbung facilitates real estate transactions by connecting homebuyers with verified real estate agents

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | hhang@hckmedia.com

Finding a roof to put over your head can be an arduous process. Just ask Claire Berneron, who had to comb through page after page of online listings when she was looking for a place to stay a few years ago. Her ordeal continued even after narrowing down her options, as she had to put up with property agents who were late or simply did not turn up for property viewings.

In 2014, Berneron met entrepreneur Gadiy Lim while they were both working in Singapore. Together, she and Lim — who also had his own horror story of searching for a home — realised that what homeseekers like them needed was a platform that would connect them to licensed real estate agents.

Expanding on this idea, they embarked on a journey to develop this particular platform, which culminated in the launch of Bumbung in May 2016. The online platform works on the premise of matching homebuyers with selected properties that



match their criteria, instead of bombarding them with numerous listings of middling relevance to their search.

“Our proposition is to create a bridge between homeseekers looking for their dream homes by matching them with the best agents in the area who have the property that best fits their requirements. Towards bridging that gap, our goal is to ensure each viewing process is convenient, transparent and time-saving,” says Lim.

Drawing from the experiences of its co-founders, Bumbung is designed to be easy to use for the average homeseeker. Users merely need to key in their search criteria on the Bumbung website, which uses an algorithm to match them to the top five relevant listings. Once the users have selected a property, the representing agent will get in touch

to schedule a viewing of the said property.

As a security measure, all real estate agents that list on Bumbung are licensed by the Board of Valuers, Appraisers and Estate Agents (BOVAEA). The company also prides itself on a system which allows users to rate the agents. These ratings are publicly displayed on each agent’s profile, along with their Real Estate Negotiator (REN) registration number.

Bumbung is also unique in that it addresses problems faced by the real estate agents, as unlike most property websites, it allows agents to list properties for free. Once users confirm their selection, the agents will be notified via Bumbung’s mobile application — which is only available to them. Using a credit system, agents are only charged when a viewing is confirmed. ■

PHOTOS BY JONATHAN LOI

In a market with a growing number of mobile apps designed to help homeseekers find the right property, Wonderlist stands out from the crowd with an extensive feature list and support system that includes agent rankings, in-app chat and a calendar of complementary educational events for users to learn more about the property market.

The brainchild of entrepreneur Ray Chung, it leverages on his extensive experience in the segment, which began in 2003 when he first started learning the ropes as a real estate negotiator with MetroWorld Realty Sdn Bhd before taking on project marketing and consulting roles, as well as development planning.

## Setting the standard

“Through it all, even as early as 2003, technology continued to shape the market. Today, things are leaning more towards social connections and mobile platforms, as the Internet is yesterday’s news. One of the issues out there right now is that there’s a lot of property agents and not enough control, so when we developed Wonderlist, we made sure to include peer reviews for negotiators,” says Chung.

He went on to establish Wonderlist Property Pte Ltd in 2014, subsequently launching the app itself in 2015. In the space of a few months, Wonderlist had already attracted 30,000 downloads, with more than 5,000 agents subscribing to its services, drawn to its utility and market reach.

Chung’s team has also grown from four

# One-stop property shop

Wonderlist is a property listing mobile app backed by a healthy ecosystem of supporting services

| Text by **ALIFF YUSRI** | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com



The Wonderlist team has grown and evolved with the app, including departments dedicated to property agent management, events and service providers

initial founding members to its current staff of 25, with various departments dedicated to property agent management, events and service providers, among others. The app has evolved along the way, with future plans including the introduction of a value supply chain platform with service listings for everything from house cleaners to renovation contractors.

A companion app called Houzcare has been launched as well to assist users in evaluating property prices by tracking transaction values in the market, whether by sale or by auction, along with auxiliary tools such as mortgage, return on investment and valuation calculators.

Wonderlist has already gone regional, with Chung tying up with partners in other markets to expand its reach while providing legal and tax advice for property seekers venturing overseas. Looking forward, he plans to venture into Australia by the end of the year, supplementing the app’s existing presence in Singapore, South Africa and Malaysia as well as China, where the app is available in Chinese. ■



Nature takes centre stage at Setia EcoHill 2 in Semenyih, Selangor, which includes highlands, woodlands and wetlands among its many ecological features. Measuring 1,010 acres, the natural elements of air, earth and water are also highlighted in the township's master plan, which preserves the area's original undulating landscape.

One of two key launches announced by SP Setia Bhd early this year — the first being Setia Eco Templer in Rawang, Selangor — Setia EcoHill 2 has an estimated gross development value (GDV) of RM5 bil. Its maiden phase was launched in June 2016, and is expected to follow in the footsteps of its predecessor and neighbour Setia EcoHill, which recorded good take-up rates during its launch in 2013.

The first phase of Setia EcoHill 2 consists of 258 double-storey terrace houses and 96 linked semi-detached units, with construction slated to begin in July 2016. Its completion has been targeted for mid-2018, with the price range falling between RM553,000 and RM668,000. Interested buyers can take advantage of the Setia 10:90 programme, a build-then-sell scheme which only requires a 10% down payment upon purchase and the balance when the units are finished.

Taking advantage of its rich resources, the green township has allocated more than 80 acres of its land for green parks and approximately 17 acres for the wetlands. Eight themed gardens with more than 300 species of flora and fauna are also in the pipeline, as is the planting of 10,000 trees throughout the development. There are also recreational opportunities aplenty along the slopes leading up to the nearby Bukit Tempurung.

The entire Setia EcoHill 2 project is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. More than half of its land space has been designated for landscaping and infrastructure, while residential units and commercial properties will occupy 38% and 11% of the land respectively.

In August 2015, residents began enjoying better connectivity between Setia EcoHill and the Kajang–Seremban Highway (Lekas) with the opening of the Lekas–EcoHill Link, which allows them to bypass Jalan Semenyih. Its construction was undertaken by SP Setia, which invested RM80 mil as part of its commitment to deliver optimal accessibility to its developments.

The developer is investing another RM50 mil for the extension of the link to Setia EcoHill 2, with work having begun in April this year. ■

# Bringing nature back

## The beauty of nature is the inspiration for SP Setia Bhd's latest township, which offers the best of air, earth and water

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | [hhang@hckmedia.com](mailto:hhang@hckmedia.com)



The natural elements of air, earth and water are the highlights of Setia EcoHill 2

# Finding peace of mind

## KLK Land Sdn Bhd offers safety and security with Bandar Seri Coalfields, an integrated township in Klang Valley's north-west growth corridor

| Text by **ALIFF YUSRI** | [aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com](mailto:aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com)

Stretching to the north-west of the Klang Valley metropolitan sprawl, Sungai Buloh, Selangor benefits from a location within an easy commute of Kuala Lumpur while maintaining a healthy distance from its urban congestion and hectic lifestyles.

The sub-district's potential as a growth corridor is reflected by the entry of major property players in the area, such as Eco World Development Group Bhd, which recently purchased more than 2,000 acres in neighbouring Ijok, with an initial estimated gross development value (GDV) of RM15 bil over 15 years.

### First in foresight

However, one developer has been established in the location as early as the 1990s. KLK Land Sdn Bhd — a wholly owned subsidiary of plantation multinational Kuala Lumpur Kepong Bhd — having debuted Sierras as its first township in the area, launched Desa Coalfields in

2002 and its current launch, Bandar Seri Coalfields, moving forward in 2011.

Spanning over 1,000 acres, the RM6 bil integrated township encompasses commercial and residential components, with the latter ranging from semi-detached, super-link and terrace homes to bungalows. It makes up part of KLK Land's 6,500-acre landbank in the north-

west corridor, stretching from the City of Elmina to Rawang South.

The Bandar Seri Coalfields master plan emphasises a low-density lifestyle with ample leisure amenities, including a 50-acre central park, football pitch, clubhouse, and jogging and cycling tracks, as well as a dedicated shopping zone.

The developer's recent launches in

Bandar Seri Coalfields include the first phase of its commercial hub, BSC Central 1, featuring two- and three-storey shop offices, along with the final phase of Ixora Residences, comprising terrace houses with built-ups from 2,281 sq ft to 3,033 sq ft and prices starting from RM630,000.

"Landed property below RM700,000 in the current market is a good buy, and security is the key. We have, on our own initiative, provided patrolling services to the township as well as two years' security services for newly completed precincts. KLK Land has handed over 1,200 homes to date, with the occupancy rate reaching 60%," says KLK Land managing director Datuk David Tan.

In addition, the developer recently obtained approval to set up its own auxiliary police team in Bandar Seri Coalfields through KL-Kepong Country Homes Sdn Bhd, further enhancing safety in the township. ■



Bandar Seri Coalfields spreads over 1,000 acres, with a GDV of RM6 bil



# Homes for the people

Selangor homebuyers will be further spoilt for choice with the launch of two new developments that feature contemporary designs in promising locations

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | hhang@hckmedia.com

The Selangor State Development Corporation (PKNS) is well-known for building houses in strategic locations that not only incorporate contemporary designs but are also reasonably priced — a demonstration of its commitment to meeting the demands of Selangor residents for homes that are within their means and do not compromise on quality.

For 2016, the state agency shows that it is staying true to this vision with the rolling out of two new residential developments located in townships with ample growth potential and numerous pull factors.

## Stylish affordability

The first project, Azhara, is located within the borders of Antara Gapi, which is also developed by the state agency. The township is situated in the vicinity of Serendah, Selangor, which is rich in natural features and which boasts outdoor recreational activities aplenty through surrounding amenities such as the Serendah Golf Resort, Eagle Nest Outbound Adventure Eco Resort and the famous forest retreat Sekeping Serendah.

The 23-acre development contains 146 units of semi-detached homes, all sporting premium fixtures and finishings. Billed as an ideal living enclave, the houses are inspired by the urban lifestyle and feature modern, practical and inventive designs.

Homes in Azhara come in two layout types, with type A, numbering 66 units in total, having a land size of 2,797 sq ft, and type B — with 80 units — measuring 2,714 sq ft. Both types feature 4+1-bedroom layouts.

Launched in January 2016, pricing for the units starts at RM875,000 and



RM835,000 for type A and type B respectively. Accessibility-wise, the residential development is situated near the Serendah KTM station, one of the stops along the KTM West Coast Line. It is also reachable by car via the New Klang Valley Expressway (NKVE), among other routes.

The second project, Puteri Daffina 2, is located in Kota Puteri — another PKNS township development — within the dis-

trict of Gombak, Selangor. The houses incorporate the concepts of convenience and comfort along with elements of nature, with each sporting its own unique design to fulfil the varied needs and choices of customers.

All 92 of the two-storey link units come with pillar-free car porches to maximise parking space. The interiors feature high ceilings for an enhanced sense of spacious-

ness as well as wide window openings that optimise ventilation and natural light, both of which, when combined, result in conducive common spaces where families can gather in comfort.

The 4-bedroom units, measuring between 2,085 sq ft and 2,340 sq ft, were launched in March, with price points starting from RM472,440. A network of highways such as the Kuala Lumpur–Kuala Selangor Expressway (Latar Expressway) and Guthrie Corridor Expressway (GCE) connects the township to surrounding neighbourhoods like Shah Alam and Subang Jaya.

Kota Puteri is also known as Bandar Baru Batu Arang and falls under the administration of the Selayang Municipal Council. There are 12 sections in the township, with Puteri Daffina 2 located within Section 2.

## The right audience

The projects target owner-occupiers who work within Klang Valley and draw a net income of approximately RM8,000 per month, as well as investors interested in expanding their property portfolio. As of January 2016, the completion rate for Azhara was at 72%, while Puteri Daffina 2 is 90% finished. Both are developed on leasehold land, with the term set to expire in 2104.

The overall sales value for Azhara has been estimated at RM125 mil while that of Puteri Daffina 2 has been calculated at approximately RM47 mil. ■



**ABOVE:** The 146 semi-detached units in Azhara sport premium fixtures and finishings

**LEFT:** Puteri Daffina 2 incorporates the concepts of convenience and comfort along with elements of nature





IJM Land senior general manager Hoo Kim See (third from left) at the launch of the *Beli Rumah, Jom Umrah* campaign

Devoted to coffee

MORE than 150 java connoisseurs were treated to a screening of the documentary *The Coffee Man* during Good Coffee Day, organised by IJM Land Bhd at the ICE Gallery, Pantai Sentral Park, Kuala Lumpur. The 80-minute feature follows World Barista Champion Sasa Sestic on his journey across the globe to find the best coffee in the world. As part of the event, 2008 Latte Art champion Tristan Michael Creswick conducted a filter coffee workshop to educate participants on the finer points of coffee culture and appreciation.

In other news, the developer recently launched its *Beli Rumah, Jom Umrah* campaign providing financial assistance for Umrah pilgrimages to Bumiputera buyers of its Seremban 2, Seremban 2 Heights and Seri Binjai projects in Negeri Sembilan, in collaboration with Andalusia Travel & Tours Sdn Bhd. Available until July 31, the promotion offers a 12-day trip to perform the pilgrimage for every unit purchased.

Honour for green project

MAH Sing Group Bhd's Ferringhi Residence development in Batu Ferringhi, Penang took home the Green Mark GoldPlus Award at the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) Awards 2016 held at Resort World, Singapore. Recognising excellence in the built environment space, the ceremony gave accolades to the green innovations incorporated into the project, which is currently in its second phase comprising 632 condominium units across three blocks.

"Sustainable developments have been a key focus for Mah Sing, where buildings and layouts are designed to create conducive and green surroundings, with innovative environment-friendly features to ensure a healthy lifestyle for the people," says Mah Sing chief sales officer (C-suite) James Bruyns.



Bruyns (fifth from right) notes that sustainable developments are a key focus for Mah Sing



Hilding Anders Malaysia managing director Michael Teoh (right) and Vono Malaysia Ambassador Maya Karin (left)

Watching your back

THOSE looking for more in the way of lumbar support can rejoice, as Hilding Anders Malaysia Sdn Bhd has launched the latest in its Vono ErgoBed series of back care mattresses, dubbed ErgoBed Blue. Developed by ergonomists, the line incorporates innovations to provide optimal support to seven zones of the body, with a proprietary Intalok spring system that delivers increased spring counts for movement absorption.

Three variants were introduced at the launch. They were the Ergo Accent II, a 12.5-inch thick mattress with ample firmness, the ErgoBed Comfort 1, an 11-inch thick model that comes with a quilted pillow top, and the ErgoBed Comfort 2, a 12-inch thick model which tops the quilted pillow with an extra layer of padding. The new mattresses are on display through the Vono Blue Truck, a mobile showroom which will be travelling through Klang Valley up till August.



The People's Choice Awards saw 100 submissions in 2015, with 84 shortlisted in 15 categories

Property and the vox populi

NOMINATIONS are open for iProperty.com Malaysia Sdn Bhd's People's Choice Awards 2016 up till July 15, with the platform giving property buyers and investors a chance to highlight their preferred developers and projects. Shortlisted entries will be evaluated by a panel of industry experts across 16 categories, including Developer of the Year, Best Waterfront Development and Best Value Development.

The judging panel includes Chur Associates founder and managing director Chris Tan, Malaysian Institute of Interior Designers president Chris Yap and Malaysian Institute of Architects president Mohd Zulhemlee. The People's Choice Awards saw 100 submissions in 2015, with 84 shortlisted in 15 categories.

Steaming up the kitchen

MIELE Sdn Bhd has introduced the DG 6800 built-in steam oven, catering for the time-honoured technique of steaming widely used in Asian cuisine to lock in flavour and colour. Boasting a 38-litre cooking chamber and stainless steel interior, the oven makes both food preparation and clean-up a simple task.

Other features include MultiSteam technology for fast and even heat distribution, a new M Touch display for intuitive operation and an automatic cooking menu. Based in Gütersloh, the German manufacturer's portfolio includes home and kitchen appliances ranging from hobs and cooker hoods to washing machines, wine cellars and vacuum cleaners.



The DG 6800 utilises MultiSteam technology for fast and even heat distribution



From strength to strength

IT has been a bumper year of awards for SP Setia Bhd, with the group clinching its seventh Fiabci Prix d'Excellence accolade to date in Panama, followed by a Platinum award at the Reader's Digest Trusted Brand Awards Malaysia and recognition as one of the country's top 10 developers at the BCI Asia Awards.

In addition to these accolades, the developer also announced encouraging first quarter results at its 41st annual general meeting, with RM908 mil in revenue supported by sales of three-storey terrace and linked semi-detached homes in Setia Alam. Upcoming SP Setia launches this year include Setia Eco Templer in Selayang, Selangor, KL Eco City in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, and Carnegie in Melbourne, Australia.

Shine bright like an amethyst

GIVING homeseekers a taste of the good life, Worldwide Holdings recently partnered with BMW dealership Auto Bavaria and Malayan Banking Bhd to offer test drives of selected members of the Mini family, including the Mini Cooper Countryman, while immersing participants in the luxurious lifestyles of its Ametis semi-detached homes in Shah Alam.

The launch is the latest in the 450-acre township of Sungai Bestari, comprising 20 exclusive units with built-ups ranging from 3,284 sq ft to 3,743 sq ft and prices starting from RM1.8 mil. The project has already seen uptake in excess of 40%, with features such as double ceiling heights for living rooms, three-car parking and solar water heaters with booster pumps.

Ametis features semi-detached units with double ceiling heights for living rooms

