

Living & Property

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For Sime Darby Property chief operating officer Datuk Wan Hashimi Albakri, sustainability is part and parcel of operational excellence

Budgeting for the future

THE presentation of Budget 2017 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has affirmed the government's support for the national affordable housing agenda while placing less emphasis on higher end products through its stamp duty exemption for homes costing up to RM300,000, as well as the increase of stamp duty up to 4% for property transactions in excess of RM1 mil from Jan 1, 2018.

Further addressing the needs of the younger generation of property seekers, the Budget as tabled included provisions for the construction of 10,000 homes in urban areas, to be utilised for rental purposes to eligible youths. While a step in the right direction, and an elegant short-term solution to the need for housing among younger working professionals, it remains to be seen whether the measure will resolve the larger socio-economic issues at play which have placed properties out of their purchasing reach.

Other affordable housing initiatives include the introduction of the MyBeautiful New Home scheme, which will see 5,000 homes constructed at prices of up to RM50,000, of which RM20,000 will be subsidised by the government, as well as the allocation of vacant land in strategic areas to government-linked companies and the 1Malaysia People's Housing Programme (PR1MA). Loan application woes have been considered as well, with a new end-financing scheme for PR1MA house buyers covering up to 100% of loan values, with substantially reduced rejection rates projected.

In terms of infrastructure, Budget 2017's allocation of RM55 bil towards the implementation of the East Coast Rail project connecting states on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia to their counterparts on its eastern shores is seen as a clear boon for the

construction sector as well as trade, with the 600km line set to boost connectivity across the nation as well as shipping to points across the South China Sea.

Property and construction players have generally responded to the Budget announcement favourably, citing an emphasis on people-friendly projects including the dedication of RM1.2 bil to improve 616km of village roads and bridges, though some quarters have raised concerns regarding the feasibility of meeting the national affordable housing target of one million units by 2018 without further land allocations.

The sweeping vision of the fiscal policy complements the long-term view of developers such as Sime Darby Property Bhd, whose chief operating officer Datuk Wan Hashimi Albakri prioritises sustainability and collaboration in shaping the direction of the industry giant, with these tenets apparent throughout its portfolio, including current residential launches such as Tiana in the City of Elmina and Persada in Bandar Bukit Raja, Klang.

Other stories in this issue of *Living & Property* include an exploration of the impact of Brexit on the United Kingdom's property segment — a key capital destination for many Malaysian investors — as well as a look at recent launches such as SP Setia Bhd's Isle of Palm enclave in Penang and Tan & Tan Developments Bhd's Stonor 3 luxury condominium in Kuala Lumpur. Till next time, dear readers, here's to interesting times to come.

ALIFF YUSRI

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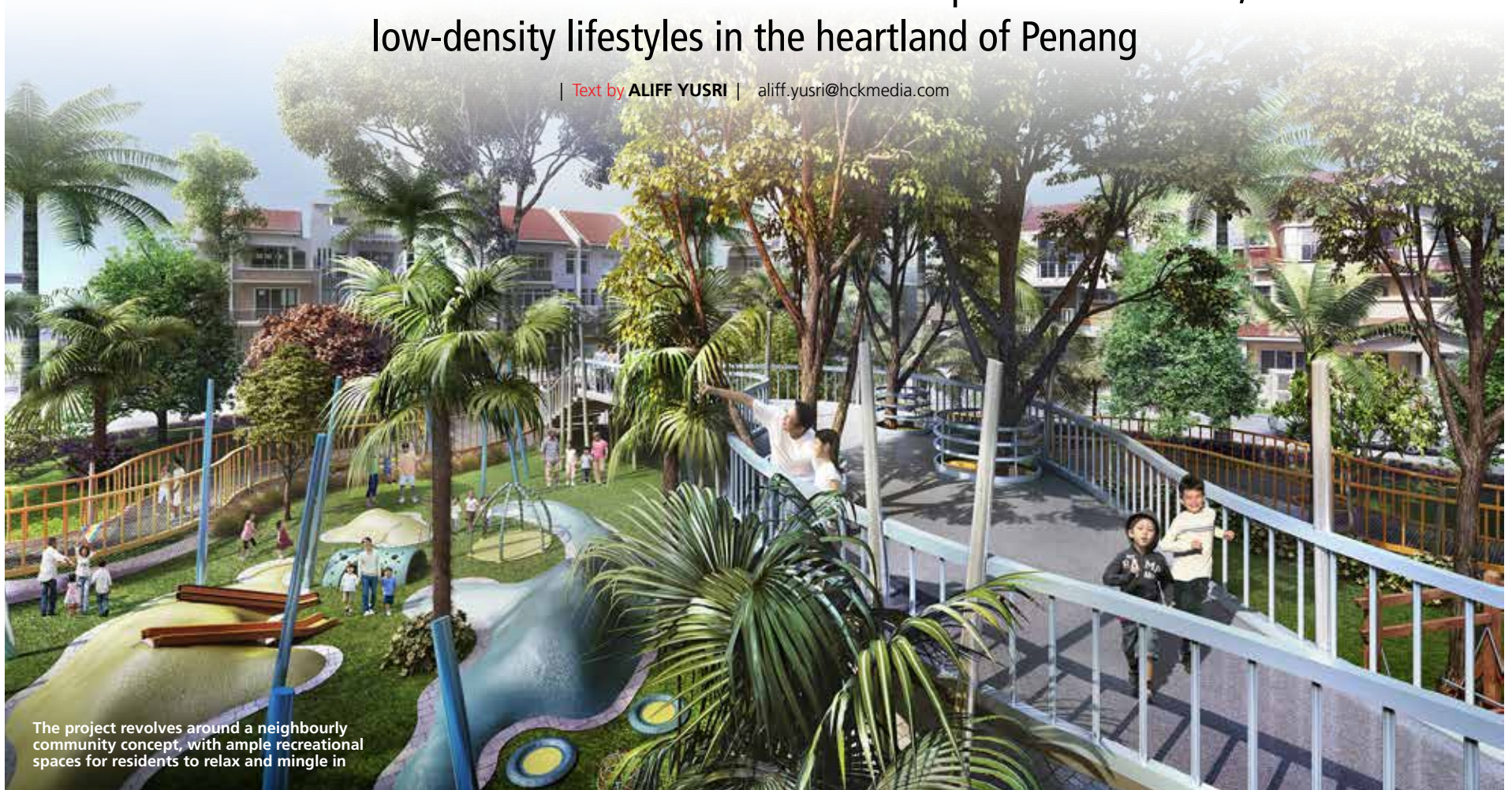
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Cultivating a community

SP Setia's exclusive Isle of Palm enclave emphasises exclusive, low-density lifestyles in the heartland of Penang

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



The project revolves around a neighbourly community concept, with ample recreational spaces for residents to relax and mingle in

Property transactions in the Pearl of the Orient have seen a dip this year despite strong secondary sales, leading to a scaleback in launches from developers along with a tighter focus on target segments. In addition, an abundance of projects on Penang Island itself has seen a movement towards mainland properties, as industry players leverage on cheaper land and growing demand for affordable housing.

However, there has never been a shortage of interest for landed properties in prime locations, a product category which has historically been inelastic to price. With this in mind, SP Setia Bhd has aimed Isle of Palm, its latest launch in the northern region, squarely at the affluent tier of the market, setting it apart from the crowd with a return to community values which have been largely lost in the shuffle of urban lifestyles.

Know thy neighbour

"Our plan for Isle of Palm is to develop it into an exclusive enclave, with a density of only 30 units of three-storey semi-detached homes, creating a neighbourly community lifestyle for residents. This includes a landscaped park where they can relax and mingle, emphasising the sustainability and liveability represented by every SP Setia development," says SP Setia general manager (property, north) Ng Han Seong.

The RM70 mil project is part of the larger RM1.09 bil Setia Pearl Island township, which sprawls across 113 acres in Sungai Ara with proximity to both the Penang Bridge and the Second Penang Bridge. Together with the Jelutong and Bayan Lepas

Expressways, these routes provide premiere connectivity to destinations across the island and on the mainland, offering residents the quintessential Penang experience.

Isle of Palm represents the final parcel of landed properties in Setia Pearl Island, complementing sister enclaves ranging from the Isle of Life to the Isle of Conifers. Prospective purchasers can choose from no less than 17 layouts with built-ups ranging from 2,155 sq ft to 3,795 sq ft, with residences designed around a tropical aesthetic and the project as a whole scheduled for completion in 2018.

"SP Setia's developments are more than just a place to stay. We have always been at the forefront of innovation to ensure that our community always feels at home. From master-planning to conceptualisation and



SP Setia developments are more than just places to stay, says Ng



Isle of Palm sits within the larger RM1.09 bil Setia Pearl Island development

finally execution and construction, every step is taken to maintain an ideal balance between aesthetic design, harnessing natural resources, maximising and respecting the land's natural topography and enhancing residents' comfort," says Ng.

The changing landscape

The security and safety of residents is also a key priority, with Ng highlighting the inclusion of Setia Pearl Island homes within a guarded community featuring 24-hour security services, CCTV cameras and a double-layered security system. In addition, the township is patrolled by Setia's auxiliary police team, giving residents further peace of mind.

To date, 92.5 acres out of 113 have been completed within Setia Pearl Island, with the remainder reserved for upcoming projects such as the Isle of Discovery and whimsically-named Isle of Views. On a larger scale, SP

Setia's landbank on Penang Island encompasses some 140 acres, to be developed over the next 10 years.

Setia Pearl Island and its component enclaves also benefit from a range of ongoing initiatives by the state government under the Penang Transport Master Plan to improve infrastructure via extensions of current public transportation routes as well as enhanced connectivity with the mainland, along with programmes targeted at Penang's most recognisable lifestyle hotspots.

"The Gurney Wharf Project, which involves reclamation along the celebrated Gurney Drive to create a green park, also bodes well for our projects in the area, such as our exclusive sea-fronting high-rise residential development Setia V Residences. The proposed LRT alignment will pass through the Gurney area as well, which will increase accessibility for Setia V Residences owners," concludes Ng. ■

Sometimes it seems there's a mobile app for everything, from prominent politicians to augmented reality pocket monster simulations. This applies to the real estate market as well, with a number of robust platforms striving for dominance in the rapidly emerging space of digital property transactions.

Such circumstances are often conducive for innovation, creativity and competition — to the point that product differentiation can become difficult to achieve in the midst of a throng of diverse offerings. Cutting this metaphorical Gordian Knot, Gowu Portal Sdn Bhd rises above the crowd by thinking big, with an app already available in Malaysia, Hong Kong, China and Thailand and one million users targeted for 2017.

One-stop property shop

“Most property apps are advertising-based, focusing on listings or providing information and reviews on properties. Unlike those, Gowu is a comprehensive app that provides full property purchase and selling services. Buyers will enjoy in-app services which include selection of agents, making appointments, managing viewings, bookings, loan applications and legal services, as well as listings. For real estate agents and agencies, Gowu functions almost like a personal assistant,” says Gowu chief executive officer Kenneth Gan.

The app was developed over the course of a year, from conceptualisation, research and product development to launch, with influences from similar models in Singapore and Australia. In positioning the platform, Gan shares that the main focus was on the needs and issues faced by buyers, developers and agents. All three tended to be highly mobile, leading to a mobile distribution model instead of a web platform.

While designing the app, the Gowu team strove to create a hassle-free buying and selling portal for all stakeholders involved, working with partners across the legal, financial and real estate industries to streamline the experience. Pro-

Apropos app for property

Gowu Portal’s eponymous digital platform aims to create a seamless real estate community across Southeast Asia

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



(L-R): Gan, Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government Ministry deputy secretary-general (policy and development) Datuk Tam Weng Wah and Gowu COO Michael Lim

spective purchasers can search the app for available projects, then view a selection of available agents. From there, viewing appointments and meetings can be arranged, and users can even process the subsequent legal paperwork, loan applications and payments through the app.

“We are managing Gowu’s growth over several phases,

with Phase 1 (Dec 2016) mainly covering users and agents, Phase 2 (Feb 2017) covering agencies and developers, and Phase 3 (Mar–April 2017) covering e-wallet functionality. We also feature a referral programme that helps potential buyers accumulate credits which can be used towards their next home purchase,” concludes Gan. ▣

AD



Epitome of elegance

Tan & Tan Developments' Stonor 3 offers luxury homes in the heart of the city

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

Tan & Tan Developments Bhd — a wholly owned subsidiary of IGB Corp Bhd — is once again transforming the skyline of Kuala Lumpur with a new project jointly developed with Japanese company Mitsubishi Jisho Residence (MJR) Co Ltd.

The 41-storey Stonor 3 features 400 apartments in five layout types with built-up sizes ranging from 649 sq ft to 1,232 sq ft. Estimated to have a gross development value of RM650 mil, the one, two and three-bedroom units are priced between RM1.1 mil and RM2.1 mil.

Expressing his confidence at attracting serious buyers, Tan & Tan CEO Tan Boon Lee says, “Stonor 3 reflects the best of Tan & Tan’s rich experience in building high-end luxury developments and MJR’s flair for exacting standards and innovation. Each fixture, fitting, material and appliance has been handpicked to ensure the ultimate in comfort and luxury, creating KL’s first collection of luxury curated homes”.

He was speaking at the project’s official launch, which was commemorated with a traditional Japanese *kagami-wari* ceremony, widely practiced during important events in the Land of the Rising Sun. Representatives from both Tan & Tan as well as MJR broke open a sake cask with wooden hammers — a gesture believed to bring blessings of health, happiness and prosperity.

Touches of luxury

Also present during the launch was Tan & Tan senior marketing manager Cassandra Chong, who said that the detailing and personal touches in the units’ designs are instrumental in crafting a sense of superior living within their walls.

This eye for detail is most prevalent in the kitchen, which Chong describes as a “high-performance European kitchen”. Aside from the cabinets, additional features in-

clude a steam oven and an integrated fridge which is hidden within the cabinetry. The kitchen counters are also designed for optimal capacity to accommodate storage spaces on both sides.

Japanese influences can be spotted in the fittings, right down to the locksets by Kawajun, an award-winning Japanese interior hardware brand. The master bathroom also draws inspiration from the culture, featuring a semi-sunken tub and bench seat. Burmese teak is used for the flooring, except for the kitchen and washroom,

to evoke a more homely and comfortable feel.

Outside, there are three levels dedicated to shared spaces. The facilities available include a glass-enclosed cantilevered gymnasium, mini theatre as well as mini patios and pockets of space scattered throughout for residents to retreat to for some peaceful “me” time.

Reputation and location

Stonor 3 marks MJR’s first foray into the Malaysian property scene, and is the culmination of a joint venture signed with Tan & Tan in 2014. “Tan & Tan is a well-recognised brand with strong professional know-how, and we have learnt a great deal from working with them. I would like to thank them for providing us with the opportunity to collaborate on such an amazing project,” says MJR managing executive officer Mitsuhiro Maeda, who also expressed hopes for more collaborations in the future.

Addressing concerns that the luxury segment may not do as well in a time where affordable housing is being favoured, Tan & Tan executive director Teh Boon Ghee says that the pricing points for Stonor 3 are comparable to market prices, and that the project has attracted plenty of local interest. He disclosed that Stonor 3 has already recorded a take-up rate of about 30% since registration started in June.

One of Stonor 3’s primary draws is its location, being positioned near the iconic Petronas Twin Towers and Golden Triangle — KL’s commercial, shopping and entertainment hub. Amenities such as healthcare facilities and international schools are easily accessible in the surrounding areas. The development also sits near the quiet Jalan U-Thant, more popularly known as Embassy Row among the locals due to its concentration of embassies and consulates. ■



Stonor 3 sits near the Petronas Twin Towers and KL’s Golden Triangle



(L-R): Teh, Tan, IGB Corp group chief financial officer Chai Lai Sim, Mitsuhiro and Mitsubishi Estate Asia Pte Ltd managing director Shojiro Kojima during the kagamiwari ceremony

Building a better air-con

Acson Malaysia stakes a claim in the variable refrigerant flow space with the launch of two new product lines

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

Home and business owners feeling the tropical heat can keep their cool with Acson Malaysia Sales & Service Sdn Bhd's recently launched range of variable refrigerant flow (VRF) products, comprising the Carefree line of household air conditioners and Eco Plus series of cooling solutions.

The new range is aimed squarely at the high-end residential and commercial segments, leveraging on projected demand for VRF products in these spaces. The manufacturer has targeted a double-digit share of the VRF market in years to come, following on its introduction of the range in Indonesia and China.

A blend of technologies

"Our VRF products are fully designed and manufactured by our sister company McQuay in Shenzhen. Currently, the Carefree series delivers up to 8 HP, while the Eco Plus line offers up to 54 HP. We remain committed to developing new products to supplement these series in the near future," says Acson general manager Lee Nam Chuan.

Both the Carefree and Eco Plus lines feature a variety of concealed ceiling, ceiling cassette and wall-mounted designs, as well as inverter technology to control compressor motor torque for optimal cooling efficiency. Other innovations include noise reduction through redesigned fan blades and air outlet grilles, optimised pipelines and multi-layer sound insulation, as well as smart room card functionality for the Eco Plus series catering for multiple usage profiles.

Acson's VRF range is ROHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances) compliant, utilising environmentally friendly R410A refrigerant gas for maximised cooling performance without any trace of chlorine, making it harmless to the ozone layer and to the human body.

The manufacturer also makes it easy to choose the right cooling solution with a recommended product guide for specific layouts. For instance, owners of studio apartments with two halls can opt for the Carefree A5VR030DRM outdoor unit, with a choice of A5VCK045V or A5VCK028V indoor units depending on room type.■



PHOTO BY JONATHAN LOI

(L-R): Daikin Malaysia R&D Centre operating manager Lim Soon Kiong, Malaysian Air-Conditioning & Refrigeration Association president Andy Kwan Teck Hian, Lee, American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers Malaysia chapter president Andes Quek Lim Seng, and Daikin Applied Solutions Indonesia and McQuay Indonesia vice-president Toly Chandra

AD

Taking the long view

For Sime Darby Property chief operating officer Datuk Wan Hashimi Albakri, sustainability is part and parcel of operational excellence

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

A household name over successive generations in Malaysia, Sime Darby Bhd has been a dominant force on the national stage since its establishment as Sime, Darby and Co Ltd in 1910. Starting out as a player in the rubber plantation sector, it has since greatly expanded and diversified its business activities, particularly after a 2007 merger with Kumpulan Guthrie Bhd and Golden Hope Plantation Bhd.

As the property arm of the larger Sime Darby group, Sime Darby Property Bhd has developed nearly two dozen residential enclaves across four corridors extending southwards from Selangor to Johor, with Subang Jaya and Taman Melawati as the earliest examples of its craft. Coordinating development of this magnitude while continually striving to improve operational excellence is no easy feat, but Sime Darby Property chief operating officer Datuk Wan Hashimi Albakri is more than up to the task.

First steps forward

“I’ve headed operations for Sime Darby Property since coming onboard in 2008. Given my background in the industry, the learning curve was not so much one of unfamiliarity but of unprecedented scale. It included working with vast acreages of land, multiple townships and numerous projects, taken end-to-end from planning all the way down to handover and customer management,” he says.

Wan Hashimi’s experience in the interrelated fields of construction and property began with the Public Works Department (JKR), where he was posted as a geotechnical

engineer specialising in soil erosion in 1984. From there, he joined Pengurusan Lebuhraya Bhd in 1988, where he supervised the geotechnical aspects of the Ipoh–Bukit Kayu Hitam stretch of the North–South Expressway during its construction.

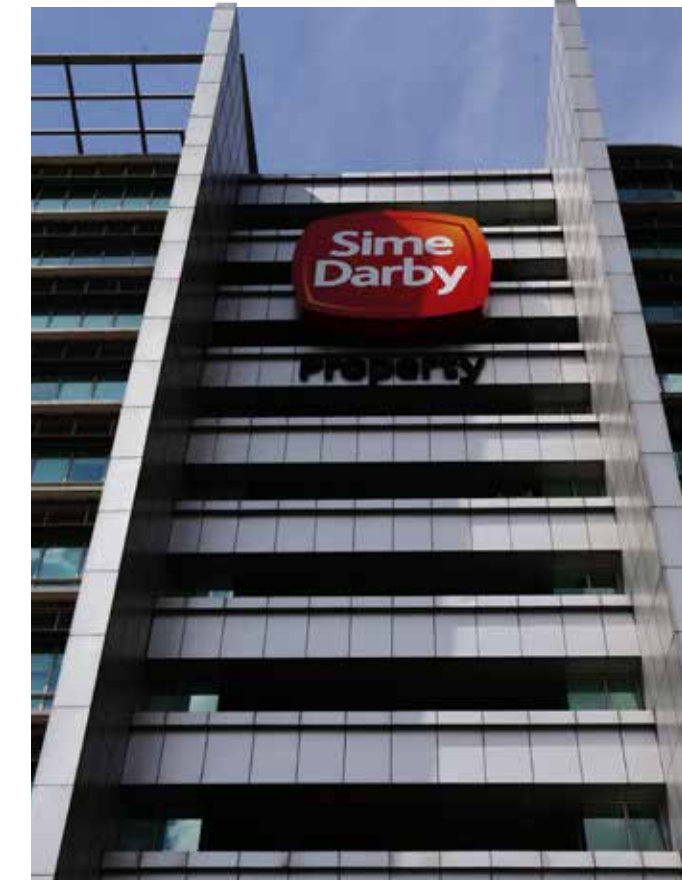
Despite the challenges posed by Malaysia’s climate, slopes and soil conditions, the route was finished 15 months ahead of schedule. Having made his mark in infrastructure, Wan Hashimi turned to property development in 1992, joining the ranks of what was then known as Island & Peninsular Sdn Bhd, to which he credits the expertise and authority he would later command within the segment.

“Subsequently, I was offered a position to head a construction company, returning to my construction roots but specialising in buildings. From there, I broke out and formed my own project management company in 1996, called Irat Management Services Sdn Bhd. After that, following a six-year stint with Putrajaya Holdings Sdn Bhd, I was finally recruited into Negara Properties (M) Bhd in 2005, which would eventually form part of the Sime Darby group,” says Wan Hashimi.

The language of success

Ascending to the role of operations head, Wan Hashimi’s first priority was the human element: ensuring the right talent was present in the right places and working towards the same goals. This was particularly a concern given the 2007 merger, which had led to the creation of a provisional corporate structure based around the developer’s townships.

Compounding the issue was the different working cultures of personnel from the various parties involved in the merger. To fuse these disparate elements into a sin-



Sime Darby Property has developed 23 townships along four corridors extending from Selangor to Johor

gle working organisational entity, Wan Hashimi placed utmost priority upon collaboration and communication, implementing a campaign to inculcate the values of mutual cooperation, open expression and integrity towards the breakdown of silos that had formed in the wake of the corporate exercise.

“Results have always been the bottom line, so the first challenge was to get everyone to work together as a team towards that end. Even today, we continue to look at that cultural aspect, changing mindsets towards collaboration. Innovation is about getting things done. You can’t just have ideas, you need to convert those into reality. You have to own the process. If you see any problems, you need to own those too, to come up with solutions and to resolve them,” says Wan Hashimi.

“Communications, whether external or internal, play a critical role in fostering that kind of corporate culture,

because it’s all about having conversations. Teamwork boils down to communication, even if it’s just meeting and greeting each other, because every interaction is an opportunity to stoke that fire. If you don’t talk to each other, you’re not a team.”

Shifting to a higher gear

Aside from the human element, Wan Hashimi also oversees the smooth operation of Sime Darby Property as a well-oiled machine in terms of delivering the right product mix at the right time while achieving the expected speed to market. As such, he constantly strives to find new ways to build better, faster and cheaper, with a view to reducing operational costs throughout the whole value chain — including vendors, suppliers, consultants and contractors — to deliver better returns to end-users as well as shareholders.

Here, his focus is to improve efficiency without compromising on functionality, quality or other desired outputs, taking particular pride in Sime Darby Property’s emphasis on building information modelling (BIM). All of the developer’s consultants are required to work on the BIM platform in order to visualise the entire construction chain, along with its associated operational processes.

“When it comes to modular construction — also known as precast or industrialised building systems — we know that volume is the key. As such, we are re-strategising the way we procure our tenders and contract packages, with an eye on volume. With that as leverage, we can work towards driving those costs down, because building expenses account for up to 60% of the final costs in the construction business,” says Wan Hashimi.

These tenets are visible in recent Sime Darby Property projects such as Tiana in the City of Elmina and Persada in Bandar Bukit Raja, comprising 80 semi-detached twin bungalows and 230 double-storey link homes respectively. Persada in particular targets Klang Valley’s western growth corridor, which is seen as having large amounts of pent-up demand for quality landed properties, while Tiana offers semi-detached units with a triple frontage concept.

The developer is also considering a procurement approach which draws contractors up the chain to the design stage, allowing them to give input in terms of delivery, buildability and costs in the early stages of a tender. This proposal is still under review, though Wan Hashimi stresses the group will naturally target contractors with a certain track record and level of reputability to partner with.

The bigger picture

On a larger scale, he also sees a need for the industry as a whole to focus on eliminating inefficiencies as well to take the domestic property segment to the next level. Serving in the role of vice-president at the Real Estate and Housing Developers’ Association (Rehda) Malaysia as well as chairman at Rehda’s Wilayah Persekutuan branch, he works with the body in engaging government agencies to ensure that policies put in place continue to foster a favourable environment for developers.

Wan Hashimi stresses the importance of collaboration and communication in striving for operational excellence



The developer’s current launches include Persada in Klang Valley’s western growth



Sime Darby Property focuses on improving operational efficiency without compromising on functionality, quality or other desired outputs in its projects



Tiana in the City of Elmina features semi-detached twin bungalows with a triple frontage concept

Sime Darby Property’s commitment to its values is visible across townships such as the City of Elmina

“We do get proposed policies and statements that require discussion from time to time, with feedback coming from the grassroots, so to speak, including small and medium-size enterprises which are represented in Rehda’s ranks. For instance, we’ve suggested a more flexible community-based banking approach to Bank Negara Malaysia in place of the current blanket regulations on lending guidelines, as some banks are stronger in terms of balance sheets than others,” says Wan Hashimi.

This includes the recent suggestion to allow developers to act as loan providers for purchasers, which Sime Darby Property will review with due consideration before deciding whether to adopt, amid more widespread concerns regarding the sustainability of the proposal. This is typical of the developer’s perspective, which takes a longer view of the ecosystem surrounding its projects and developments, including both social and environmental elements.

“We should avoid living in bubbles, without any awareness of what’s happening in the world around us. This includes issues such as overpopulation, diminishing natural resources, the growing energy crisis and the impact of all this on the environment. On the social front, while Kuala Lumpur is being branded as one of the most livable cities in the world, you can still find children within a half-hour’s drive of the city who go to school every day without the money to even buy breakfast. These are pressing concerns and everyone must do their part in addressing them while moving forward,” he concludes. ■

Heaven-made match for haven

Bön Estates partners with Malaysia's largest banking institution to deliver its maiden venture in the Klang Valley market

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



The Estate, comprising 328 condominium units in two 46-storey towers, emphasises well-crafted living and value creation



(L-R): Liew, Goh, Hamirullah and Maybank Business Banking managing director Datuk Henry Goh Jioh Vui

PHOTOS BY MUHAMMAD HAZIM

Complementing its vision of developing well-crafted living spaces, Bön Estates Sdn Bhd has signed a RM300 mil financing facility with Maybank Bhd for its flagship project in Kuala Lumpur, aptly named The Estate. A relatively fresh face in the central region, the boutique developer's partnership with Maybank affirms its commitment to shaking up the domestic property landscape.

Formerly known as PPM Realty Sdn Bhd, Bön Estates has turned heads with its debut offering, a 3.68-acre freehold lifestyle condominium in the rapidly growing, up-scale enclave of Bangsar South. Comprising 328 units in two 46-storey towers, the RM650 mil project emphasises value creation, featuring luxurious, low-density layouts with four units per floor, private lift lobbies, four carpark allotments for owners and an emphasis on multi-generational households.

Youth and experience in synergy

"We are impressed with Bön Estates' vision to create homes that are built to last. Their attention to detail in value creation will be beneficial to the growing community residing within Bangsar South and we are indeed happy to support them," said Maybank Community Financial Services head Datuk Hamirullah Boorhan.

Up till now, the developer's projects in Malaysia have focused on the Penang market, with residential offerings such as Minden Gardens, offering 94 terrace and semi-detached houses, and White Lily, featuring 73 three-storey terrace homes. Overseas, its portfolio includes the US\$300 mil (RM1.26 bil) Show DC mall in Bangkok,

Thailand, as well as Reem Island, a 1,606-acre mixed development in Abu Dhabi.

Bön Estates is headed by managing director Goh Soo Sing and senior project director Liew Kok Earn. The 32-year-old Goh's background prior to establishing the company in 2009 focused on corporate finance, with an eye on mergers and acquisitions, restructuring activities and joint ventures.

Bringing a fresh perspective and refreshing candour to the table, Goh's youthful energy is balanced by Liew's extensive industry credentials, which include an academic grounding in civil engineering as well as site supervision and management experience on numerous commercial and residential high-rise projects. ■

Financing help for property seekers

End financing remains a major barrier to home ownership, though recent provisions in Budget 2017 have closed the gap for purchasers of affordable housing

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



(L-R): Rehda vice-president Datuk Khor Chap Jen, Iskandar, deputy president Datuk Soam Heng Choon and immediate past president Datuk Ng Seing Liong

Help has arrived for home seekers who face end-financing challenges, in the form of provisions in Budget 2017 implementing a special scheme for up to 100% of loan amounts for 1Malaysia People's Housing Programme (PR1MA) buyers.

According to Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association Malaysia (Rehda) president Datuk Seri Fateh Iskandar Mohamed Mansor, discussions for the drawing up of policies and guidelines to assist first-time home buyers and purchasers of houses below RM500,000 have been underway for some time, with some of the concerns explored ultimately addressed in the Oct 21 Budget announcement.

He was speaking at a media briefing to present the results of Rehda's Property Industry Survey 1H2016 and Market Outlook for 2H 2016, which was conducted from January to June this year. A total of 157 respondents consisting of Rehda members in Peninsular Malaysia took part in the survey.

Iskandar's comments came in relation to findings which revealed end financing issues and loan rejection as the top rea-

sons for unsold units in the market for the first half of 2016. A majority of respondents (74%) reported having up to 30% of units in their developments unsold during that period.

This, Iskandar reasons, stems from the fact that house buyers are unable to obtain their desired margin of financing from banks.

He also points out that the main issue is because this margin of financing has dropped to between 75% and 80% for some segments. With the end-financing scheme introduced in Budget 2017, these concerns have been allayed somewhat, though the policy applies only to purchasers of properties under the PR1MA programme.

The briefing also revealed a slowdown in project launches, with only 32% of respondents launching properties in the first half of 2016. This dampened sentiment is set to continue into the remainder of the year, with only 45% revealing plans for launches.

Not all seems bleak though, as many expect the real estate industry to gradually improve, with 21% of respondents voicing optimism for the first half of 2017. ■

Malaysian investors are no strangers to the potential of overseas assets, with the United Kingdom, Australia and selected emerging markets around the region such as Vietnam popular as investment destinations for domestic property seekers as well as government and industry players.

However, the UK's decision via a closely contested referendum in June to leave the European Union sent shockwaves through the global community, casting doubts on the long-term viability of the market amid economic concerns and currency fluctuations as the pound plummeted to a 31-year low following Brexit.

Windows of opportunity

Despite, and perhaps even because of the move, analysts such as London-based real estate advisor Savills have pointed out that the current situation represents a rare opportunity for those who were previously on the fence to venture into the UK, as several of the primary barriers to entry into the segment have been lowered by an appreciable degree.

“I think the decision took us all by surprise, and there was definitely a period of uncertainty as to how it would affect our market. We’ve seen prices come down a bit, and the pound has dropped 20% relative to the ringgit since the start of the year. Developers are more willing to negotiate, so if an investor can come in and get a 5% discount from asking prices pre-Brexit, and benefit from currency variations in addition to that, that presents a compelling opportunity at any price point,” says Savills development director Tim Whitney.

While preferences in terms of capital destinations vary by region, Savills notes that the majority of investors still favour Central London, with specific regions such as the Middle East favouring other areas of the UK. In total, international investors have acquired over £2.19 bil (RM11.1 bil) in the city in the period extending from Brexit to September in commercial properties alone, with Asian investors accounting for £695 mil (RM3.5 bil) and players from Southern China and Hong Kong particularly active among these.

These figures are indicative of the UK's enduring pull factors, which include landlord-friendly leasing structures, market transparency and, of course, English competency. Even so, current appetite is focused on core assets with stable income rather than investments with leasing or development risks, though Savills notes that this could change as sentiment warms back up.

Going the distance

“A lot of the major developers included provisions in their pre-Brexit contracts allowing buyers to pull out in the event that the vote went as it did. To our surprise, not many of those purchasers did avail themselves of the opportunity to do so, which is encouraging,” says DAC Beachcroft partner David Manifould.

Possible entry points for investors seeking residential properties outside of London include Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Bristol, with prime areas in these cities offering price points significantly lower than those found in their counterparts in the capital.

In terms of market segments, says Whitney, Brexit has had the most impact upon projects in the mid-tier range, with offerings at the top end of the market continuing to sell without significant differences in price and consistent local demand for cheaper housing under £1,000 (RM5,030) per square foot.

With regard to office spaces, Grade A investments, constituting recently refurbished buildings with good governance, are



Journey to the West

The United Kingdom remains a viable destination for investors in the aftermath of its exit from the European Union

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

showing yields of 3.5% to 4% in London's West End, with prime offices closer to the city centre ranging from 4.25% to 4.75%. Outside of London, this can go up to as much as 6%, though this comes with commensurate risk.

Prospective investors into the UK will join an influx of

fresh faces who have previously steered clear of the market, with pricing and competition cited as primary concerns. While promotional activities for UK properties in Malaysia have cooled somewhat this year, Savills notes that interest among high net worth individuals is on the rise. ▣

ABOVE: London remains the primary destination for inbound investment, with Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Bristol as entry points for fresh faces

BELOW: Currency variations and forgiving developer outlooks present compelling propositions for investors into the UK, says Whitney



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Fusing form and function

Royal Selangor Design Week explores the interplay among creativity, commercialisation and contemporary design with international talents such as Grafunkt’s Nathan Yong

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

The disparate worlds of practicality and aesthetic perfection were the focus at Royal Selangor International Sdn Bhd’s inaugural Royal Selangor Design Week, the pewter manufacturer’s recently launched platform for leading industry luminaries to elucidate, explore and exchange ideas and gain insights into the trends prevalent in the design space today.

The capstone of the event was a cross-disciplinary conference held at Aloft Kuala Lumpur Sentral on Oct 25, which brought together designers from across the globe in a series of talks and panel sessions addressing how businesses and organisations can leverage on design thinking to get ahead of the curve.

On the shoulders of giants

“Royal Selangor International’s team of artisans constantly expand the limits of pewter design, all while staying true to our heritage of craftsmanship. With this in mind, we have assembled some of the greatest authorities in the industry of design to share with us some of their thoughts on the field. Hailing from the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, China, Singapore and Malaysia, they have collectively received more than 100 international design awards for their achievements,” said Royal Selangor International executive director Yong Yoon Li.

Participating speakers included Nathan Yong of Nathan Yong Design and Grafunkt, and Jarrod Lim of Jarrod Lim Design representing Singapore, Kan & Lau Design Consultants partner Freeman Lau from Hong Kong, and Ian Macready and Voon Wong, directors of British firm Viewport Studio, with Veritas Architects senior principal Lilian Tay and Bilamana founder Katrina Taib bringing Malaysian design perspectives to the table.

Highlight sessions ranged from Lau’s *Chairplay – Between Standing Up and Lying Down*, examining the significance of the chair from social points of view, to *The In-Between State* by Macready and Wong, discussing the cultural influences of London and Singapore in its multidisciplinary portfolio, as well as two panel forums themed *Design and Innovation* and *Design and Discovery*.

“The industry has reached the point where it is saturated with interchangeable products, partly due to today’s un-



precedented access to information. So if everyone’s doing the same thing, how can we differentiate ourselves? Design is one of the answers, and you do see it becoming a cyclical process, with constant reinvention necessary to stay relevant,” said Lim, citing Apple Inc’s precipitous rise as an example of how companies can get ahead of the competition by approaching design as a holistic strategy.

Staying within the lines

Other core topics included the perennial dilemma between creative expression and budget balancing, as well as the extension of design sensibilities to new frontiers, such as Viewport Studio’s experiential design on behalf of Delta Air Lines, Inc, which challenged the London-based specialist to showcase the carrier’s customer journey to key stakeholders across Europe including exhibits in Zurich, Rome, Madrid and Prague.

“We like working within a budget. If a client has a budget, that gets things started by way of defining what you can do, so that you can fully utilise your imagination within those limits. Of course, if different expectations come into play regarding what can be done with a given outlay, that’s when your powers of persuasion come into play,” said Macready.

Favouring the practical side of the form-function dichotomy, Nathan presented eloquently on the role lateral thinking plays in product differentiation during Royal Selangor Design Week’s *Design and Innovation* panel discussion. One of the most accomplished participants at the event, his own design philosophy is deeply grounded in industrial practice, based on studies of production techniques and crafts in India, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia conducted as a buyer engaged in product development earlier in his career.

Nathan’s rise to fame began in 2006, when he took home Singapore’s prestigious Red Dot Concept Design Award for his conceptual work on a mass-produced casket, addressing issues that arose in the wake of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004. He is also known for his Line Collection of consoles, credenzas, bars and pedestals, which was picked up by Stamford-based distributor Design Within Reach and subsequently became one of its best-selling series.

He has also previously collaborated with Royal Selangor International on its Vapour collection of premium tea caddies, bowls, vases and tumblers, which draws inspiration from the changing properties of liquids in various states. As such, fine vertical linear elements feature prominently in Vapour’s design, calling to mind the trails left on surfaces by water condensation while showcasing the precision of the manufacturer’s pewter production technology.

“Tableware design was a new experience for me, as I’ve



tended to focus more on the structural aspects of the field. Vapour’s linear elements have the effect of catching the light when you turn a piece, a little like the facets of a gem. Pewter as a material is malleable and soft, and it can’t take heat very well, so its applications need to be considered with these factors in mind,” says Nathan, who incorporated touches of walnut and marble to add layers of complexity to the collection.

“I work with a lot of European and Asian companies, and what I like a lot about Royal Selangor International is its professionalism in documenting the design process, from blueprints to first samples and so on, with every stage accounted for and signed off on. It does give the designer a certain assurance that their contribution is being treated with respect, while being archived for possible future uses, and it’s rare to find this even with clients overseas.”

A regional perspective

In designing the series, Nathan leveraged on his experience in diverse fields, from furniture and product design to work on interior spaces and architectural projects. This is reflected in the various enterprises he helms, with Grafunkt serving as a retail outlet and Nathan Yong Design focusing on design



consultation. He also established Folks Furniture to export his wood furniture products to international markets.

While based in Singapore, Nathan makes extensive use of domestic artisans based in Kluang, Johor as well as Penang, citing a lack of comparable facilities in the island nation as well as the relatively advanced state of technology available in Malaysia. He also notes a certain reluctance among the younger generation of Singaporean designers to venture out of the country, though his own travels around the region have ensured he has no such trouble.

“I use a lot of solid woods and metals in my furniture pieces, and Malaysian craftsmen can deliver more quality assurance in that space, compared to Indonesia or even Singapore, which has little in the way of such facilities. At this point I do enjoy working with marble a lot, because while ornate, it’s also a material that lasts. I can’t imagine what it would feel like to have someone finding one of my pieces a thousand years from now; it’s like leaving a legacy,” he says.

When it comes to his personal design approach, Nathan shares that he starts with function, and while he acknowledges the importance of aesthetic appeal, he considers it subordinate to the utility of a particular piece. He also values honesty in presentation, turning the limitations of a particular material into assets while stripping them down to their essentials.

In terms of the market outlook for industrial design moving forward, the soft-spoken personality is cautious, citing larger economic concerns around the region. “When things are slow, manufacturers tend to avoid investing so much in research for new products, though they might relaunch existing items in new colours and so on,” he concludes. ■



The Vapour Collection incorporates fine vertical elements to catch the light and showcase the precision of Royal Selangor International’s manufacturing technology

Growing a business

Tropicana Innovative Landscape is making waves in the competitive landscaping segment through its uncompromising attention to detail and commitment to the highest standards of quality

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

The property and construction sectors are seeing a period of consolidation this year, with industry players vying for fewer projects as launches are staggered to account for dampened sentiment. It's no small feat, then, for a relatively fresh face in the landscaping segment to rise above the crowd, but for Tropicana Innovative Landscape Sdn Bhd, it is a fait accompli.

Even more impressive, despite its recent entry to the segment, is its delivery of projects for a number of major developers in the domestic scene — particularly considering the firm is a subsidiary of Tropicana Co Bhd, which also plays in the same space as some of Tropicana Innovative Landscape's clientele. Sitting down with *Living & Property*, executive director Herman Tan explains that this is a testament to the ever-present appetite for reliability and quality on the market.

A polished pedigree

"We're primarily a contracting firm, though we do design for Tropicana residents from time to time. The market is definitely slower this year but landscaping is still popular as a value add to any project, especially as developers move out of urban areas and focus more on townships, and we're seeing more and more domestic players approaching us to participate in tenders," he says.

The business grew out of Tan's familiarity with the management and maintenance of Tropicana Golf & Country Resort, whose rolling greens and sculpted scenery have



Tropicana Innovative Landscape leverages on Tan's years of experience with the operation and maintenance of Tropicana Golf & Country Resort

accumulated a veritable treasure trove of awards and accolades over the years. Leveraging on his experience, Tropicana Innovative Landscape was spun off into a separate entity in 2013, with its established track record and association with Tropicana Co acting as a seal of assurance for prospective clients.

Starting out, the company's initial project line-up consisted of Tropicana Co developments, though it was still required to bid for the relevant tenders in the interests of transparency. As word of mouth spread and its own brand matured, however, the fledgling firm began taking on work from

other developers, including MK Land Holdings Bhd, Hua Yang Bhd, the Shanghai-based Greenland Group (a Fortune 500 company), Sunsuria Bhd, PPC Glomac Sdn Bhd and Mah Sing Group Bhd.

"Expectations have changed. Every property player wants an impressive entrance statement for their developments now, and they're allocating space for landscaping from the get-go, instead of leaving it as an afterthought. Landscape contractors need to plant mature trees which will develop into canopies and provide adequate shade in one or two years, and these recreational spaces are expected to serve as interactive platforms for community and fitness activities as well," says Tan.

Building a reputation

In just three years, the Tropicana Innovative Landscape team has grown to encompass 12 staff, as well as 95 general workers. In terms of formative projects, Tan cites Tropicana Innovative Landscape's work on The Rafflesia's Central Pond in Damansara Perdana as well as the Greenland Danga Bay show gallery in Johor Bahru as turning points in the firm's history.

The latter was notable for the scope of the project, which was undertaken on behalf of the Greenland Group to the tune of RM10 mil, and Tan recalls heads turning when the firm landed the lucrative contract, which also helped establish its credentials in the industry. This was reinforced by its implementation of The Rafflesia's Central Pond, which subsequently won Best Infra-

structure — Small Project recognition at the Malaysian Construction Industry Excellence Awards (MCIEA) 2016.

The company also won honourable recognition in the Contractor category at the Malaysia Landscape Architecture Awards 2016 for its work on Tropicana Heights Central Park, Kajang.

In staying relevant and keeping abreast of developments in the industry, Tropicana Innovative Landscape keeps an eye on landscape trends as they evolve. Due to the nature of the field, a fair amount of foresight is necessary, as the environments they craft can take years to reach fruition. Towards this end, the firm maintains nurseries and pre-nurseries to maintain a steady supply of suitable specimens.

"You need a sense of what species of trees and foliage will be popular, say, three years down the line, so you can purchase them now and give them time to grow. For example, *tristania* and *cratoxylum* trees are sought after right now. There's a cycle going on there too, as certain species drift out and come back into fashion as time goes on," says Tan.

Tan also shares that constant communication among all parties involved in a contract is essential to its successful completion, and that he is constantly striving to take this aspect of operations to the next level. Moving forward, hardscapes will be a growing focus for the company, including paved areas, driveways, retaining walls and other similar elements, complementing its current emphasis on softscapes. ■

The firm's work on The Rafflesia's Central Pond, undertaken on behalf of MK Land Holdings, earned accolades at MCIEA 2016



Shopping malls are a growth industry in Malaysia, to the point that some neighbourhoods in Klang Valley have transformed to include a retail development on literally every corner. Cheras is the latest address in line for this commercial makeover, with industry players such as Boustead Ikano Sdn Bhd, Sunway Bhd and Ekovest Bhd all throwing their hat into the metaphorical ring.

In striving to leverage on the potential represented by Cheras's burgeoning demographics — the area boasts a population of more than 800,000, greater than that of Petaling Jaya — Boustead Ikano is taking the shopping experience back to its roots by focusing on its most important stakeholder: the customer.

The science of shopping

"The days when you build a shopping centre just to sell are over. I think everyone has realised that you can't just look at customer footfall by itself now. The reality is that you need to look at the entirety of the customer's journey through the day, from getting dressed in the morning until they get back home and park their car, and how that intersects with your development," says MyTown general manager Joakim Hogsander.

MyTown Shopping Centre, developed as a joint venture between Boustead Holdings Bhd and Ikano Pte Ltd, is a retail and lifestyle mall with 1.1 million square feet of net lettable area situated at Jalan Cochrane in Kuala Lumpur. It is anchored by the largest Ikea outlet in Malaysia, whose sister branch under Ikano in Kota Damansara — along with Boustead Holdings's management of The Curve — is largely credited with the enclave's subsequent success.

In crafting the journey of visitors through MyTown, Hogsander and his team examined the habits of 19 different customer profiles, including fledgelings (youths), working professionals, families and more. This yielded insights into the movements and preferences of these disparate groups, allowing the developer to better design the flow of the mall with regard to tenant placement as well as amenities such as refueling stations and toilets.

"We're targeting a yearly customer footfall of 28 million, and a lot of effort has

Bringing craft to the customer experience

Boustead Ikano aims to prove that retail therapy is about the journey as well as the destination with MyTown Shopping Centre

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



MyTown Shopping Centre will include 1.1 million square feet of net lettable area, with about 460 retail units over five stories

gone into letting everyone know who we are and where we are, to build the kind of instant brand recognisability which will bring people from Cheras as well as surrounding areas to the mall as a leisure and lifestyle destination in its own right," says Hogsander.

Catering for the market

Tellingly, addressing congestion both in terms of traffic and parking spaces was

a key priority for the development team, acknowledging the reputation of Cheras's bottlenecks and extended crawls among residents. Towards this end, MyTown incorporates 6,500 parking lots into its layout, including basement, podium and rooftop allocations, and Boustead Ikano has invested into the widening of Jalan Cochrane into six lanes, along with the construction of a ramp ingress directly from the Maju Expressway.

The development is also just 150m away from the upcoming Cochrane MRT station, linking it to Klang Valley's rapidly growing metropolitan public transportation network. In short, this is one mall that customers should have no trouble getting to, parking in and navigating through and from — all of which are matters frequently raised by shoppers today.

"If you don't get input from customers, then you're only looking at one side of the coin. Many of our tenants have personnel-heavy operations, for example, and manpower is currently a concern. This is because unemployment in Malaysia, and especially in Kuala Lumpur, is very low, which means that retention is higher than usual, which poses challenges for recruitment. Issues like these need to be considered," says Hogsander.

Set to open in the first quarter of 2017, MyTown will encompass approximately 460 retail lots over five stories, with a semi-covered pavilion and sunken garden with step seating outdoors as well as an



Boustead Ikano is targeting a yearly footfall of 28 million for MyTown, with major efforts going into brand recognisability, says Hogsander

indoor atrium acting as spaces for events. The development will also include three towers featuring both residential and office components, catering for the current demand for high-rise properties in Cheras, which has traditionally emphasised landed properties. ■



The retail and lifestyle mall incorporates a semi-covered pavilion and sunken garden with step seating into its design

From humble beginnings as a two-room operation in 1983, Emkay Group has grown over three decades into an industry leader with projects worth over RM20 bil to its name. Throughout its numerous achievements, the developer has stayed true to the principles and family values of its founder and group chairman, Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal.

These tenets are readily apparent in Mercu Mustapha Kamal, the group's most recent addition to the Damansara Perdana skyline and the last component of its 7.64-acre integrated Neo Damansara development. Spanning 1.2 acres, the RM425 mil commercial offering is also the third stage in Emkay Group's long-term seven-building strategy towards creating sustainable sources of revenue through the construction and management of commercial landmarks.

Safeguarding the future

"I want to leave a legacy for the nation and for my children, so Mercu Mustapha Kamal's two towers will be named after my son, Ahmad Khalif, and my grandson. The property segment sees boom and bust cycles, and Emkay's seven-building strategy addresses the need for alternate income sources when residential properties are facing challenges in terms of sales," says Mustapha.

Mercu Mustapha Kamal encompasses a total of 450,000 sq ft of net floor area, with the 32-storey Tower 1 comprising 280,000 sq ft and Tower 2's 21 storeys accounting for the remaining 180,000 sq ft. Both towers sit on a 10-storey carpark podium offering 1,009 carpark bays for tenants and visitors, with office units available for lease at RM5.50 psf and space in Tower 2 available for sale at RM880 psf.

Environmentally-friendly design is a key part of the project, which has been certified with a Green Building Index Gold rating. It includes energy-saving features such as energy-efficient lights which can be automatically controlled via daylight and motion sensors, water-efficient fixtures and wastewater management to reduce consumption, solar panels and charging stations for electric cars.

IEN Consultants Sdn Bhd, the appointed green consultant for Mercu Mustapha Kamal, has also broken new ground for domestic design by incorporating light troughs into the project. Consisting of strips of reflective materials strategically placed near window spaces, the troughs propagate ambient sunlight further into the office interior, saving lighting costs by maximising natural light.

Premiere accessibility

Mercu Mustapha Kamal includes integrated retail units, a banquet hall with a seating capacity of 730 dubbed deWan, disabled-friendly lifts and ramps, and a surau, along with sky gardens on every other floor. It leverages on the facilities of the larger Neo Damansara development, which include service apartments as well as food and beverage outlets.

"The project follows on the construction of Menara Mustapha Kamal, Damansara Perdana in 2009 and Wisma Mustapha Kamal, Cyberjaya in 2011 to be the third pillar in our seven-building strategy, with four more developments planned over the next five years," says Emkay Group executive director Datuk Fazwinna Mustapha Kamal.

The office building design complies with the requirements of MSC Malaysia, as rec-

Fashioning a legacy

Emkay Group's latest project in Damansara Perdana showcases its commitment to green innovation

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



The project was conceived as part of Emkay Group's commitment to sustainability and family values, according to Mustapha



Mercu Mustapha Kamal joins Menara Mustapha Kamal and Wisma Mustapha Kamal as the third stage in the group's seven-building strategy, says Fazwinna

ognised by the Multimedia Development Corporation, making it suitable for information and communications technology (ICT) tenants and ICT-related businesses, with the developer also targeting small and medium-size enterprises and the government sector.

It also benefits from a strategic location amid a network of major routes which include the Damansara-Puchong, Sprint and North Klang Valley Expressways, and is surrounded by numerous upscale townships such as Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Bandar Utama, Mont Kiara and Sri Hartamas.

"While the retail and office segments are facing challenges this year in terms of high incoming supply, the condition of existing office developments in and around the area is a consideration. With the facilities and MSC-compliant status Mercu Mustapha Kamal provides, we're offering a win-win proposition for existing enterprises as well as upgraders," concludes Fazwinna.



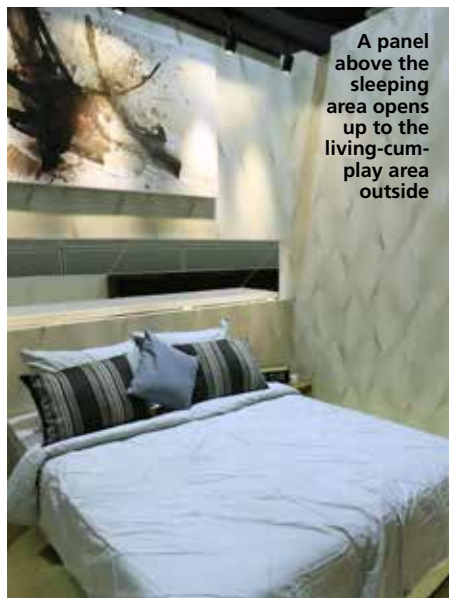
Mercu Mustapha Kamal benefits from the facilities and connectivity of the larger Neo Damansara development

PHOTOS BY SHARIL AMIN

Home Highlights



A slide connects the children's bedroom to the grandparents' bedroom located directly below



A panel above the sleeping area opens up to the living-cum-play area outside



The side counter in the dining area slides out to transform into a dining table

Homes for generations

The latest Home Décor and Design Exhibition Showhome brings three generations together under one roof

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

As the highlight of the Home Décor and Design Exhibition (Homedec), the Homedec Showhome has turned the spotlight on current trends in living spaces since its debut in 2012. The sixth and latest in the series, the 3-Gen Living and Design life-size show unit was the result of a collaboration between event organiser CIS Network Sdn Bhd and Essential Design Integrated (EDI) Sdn Bhd.

The 4,133-sq ft, two-storey unit was on display during Homedec's dual session exhibition over two consecutive weekends, and focused on the trend of multigenerational living. Its design revolved around the ideal that a house should act as a space for the individuals in a household to bond while also providing them with personal spaces

to pursue their own interests and activities.

To fully realise this concept, EDI developed the idea of integrating the household spaces primarily used for shared activities, namely the kitchen, dining area and living halls. Following this design, family members would stay in constant visual range of each other for longer periods throughout the day, as their schedules took them through the integrated rooms.

A visual tour

Upon going through the showhome's entrance, a staircase to the right provides access to the upper level without disrupting ongoing gatherings in the living room. Alternatively, a lift next to the staircase offers convenient access for the elderly and those with walking difficulties.

The living room itself opens out to a patio, while a green wall behind acts as a backdrop. Sofa seating in the middle serves as the focal point of interaction, where members of the household can gather to watch television or chat with each other while still being able to engage with anyone out on the patio.

Next to the living area is the kitchen-cum-dining area, a layout which allows for the former to serve as an extended seating area to the latter if needed. The dining area consists of an island, with a side counter that can be used as a table to grab quick bites. During family meal times or weekend barbecue sessions, this counter can be brought out slightly to transform it into a dining table, or slid out all the way to the patio, which the dining area overlooks.

Separated from the kitchen and dining area by an open shelf storage structure — which also doubles up as steps up to the first floor — is the grandparents' room. The use of this structure in place of a solid wall allows for the room to still be connected to the dining area and to a further extent, the living hall.

Levels of connectivity

The grandparents' bedroom is connected to the children's room situated directly above via a slide that starts inside the latter's wardrobe and ends outside the former. A ladder next to the slide provides easy access for the children to climb back up to their room, which also has a window within direct line of sight of the parents' bedroom on the other end of the upper level.

Located in the centre of the house, the parents' bedroom features an integrated bathroom, wardrobe and study area. A panel in the sleeping area can be opened up into a bench, extending into the living-cum-play area right outside the room.

This living-cum-play area uses a large nylon net in place of a floor, creating a hammock for the adults to lie down and for children to play in. Suspended above the kitchen-cum-dining area, it allows family members to interact with each other even if they are on different levels. ▣



A nylon net is used in place of a floor to provide visual connectivity with the kitchen-cum-dining area downstairs

State of the art hospitality

citizenM embraces technology but at the same time, steadfastly holds on to the most basic tenet of hospitality: guest satisfaction

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

Since its first hotel in Amsterdam in 2008, the citizenM chain has continuously challenged traditional views of hospitality. Fresh from its Asian debut, founder and chief operating officer Michael Levie shares how the brand takes a fresh look at the industry.

1 How does the citizenM brand set the standard for “techno-forward budget luxury”?

citizenM is for the worldly and tech-savvy urban traveller. It aims to give guests exactly what they are looking for in a hotel, without the unnecessary extras. They experience the same, if not higher, level of technology than they have at home and at work when staying at a citizenM hotel.

It's not just free Wi-Fi, but also high speed connectivity with convenient access points and complimentary content on television combined with Apple TV and Miracast as well as an iPad to navigate room functions like temperature, lighting and window treatments.

2 In your opinion, what should hospitality be about?

True hospitality is given from one individual to another. citizenM ambassadors focus on human interaction and are fully empowered to ensure we exceed guest satisfaction every time.

The rest of the organisation is focused on supporting the ambassadors with their tasks. We combine that with contemporarily designed living environments and art, music and scents to create the perfect setting. This is quite a unique proposition for hotels and citizenM's guest satisfaction surpasses most four and five-star hotels.

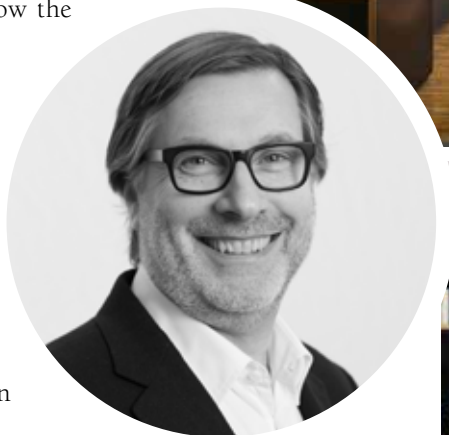
3 How does technology bring hospitality to another level?

Technology is an enabler and is best not noticed. It enables smooth bookings with just a few clicks on the web and mobile. A solid system infrastructure allows for fully functioning room features and the storing of repeat guests' personalised settings.

These do not replace, but enhance human interaction. Combining technology like user-generated content logons, which store guest preferences, with check-in and door-lock functionality allows for seamless reservation-to-room processes.

4 How does the brand incorporate superior guest services, state of the art technology and iconic design while still being able to offer “smart” prices?

As described, it is the combined setting and offerings that make guests feel so comfortable in the living room lobby, societyM creative meeting rooms, cloudM bar and so on. The streamlined services and use of space allow citizenM to sell effectively and below its direct competitors — in line with our slogan “affordable luxury for the people”.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Levie believes that true hospitality focuses on human interaction

Streamlined services and use of space allow citizenM to sell effectively and below its direct competitors

The brand combines premier hospitality with contemporary designs and art

5 How does citizenM remain relevant to future hospitality trends despite the ever-changing nature of the travel and tourism industry?

It takes an entire company to be forward-thinking and have a constant quest for improvement, along with passion and determination. A lot of companies claim this, yet only a few stay ahead of the rest. The huge number of repeat guests and brand loyalty indicate that we are on the right track.

6 How do you think the brand will fare in Asia, which is a different ballgame altogether from Europe and the US?

citizenM is built for global citizens, so Asia is part of our home. Being at home in local cultures and understanding their investment and business climate is equally important, for which we are happy to have teamed up with Artyzen Hospitality Group, a subsidiary of Shun Tak Holdings Ltd.

7 Why did you select Taipei and Shanghai as your first Asian destinations and which market are you targeting next?

Both Shanghai and Taipei are key gateway cities for us to establish a regional presence. We are excited with the progress of Asia's first citizenM development in Shanghai's new MixC complex. As one of the region's most fashionable and dynamic cities, creating an identity here is important.



We do have further regional expansion plans. We are in the final stages of signing for our Kuala Lumpur property, and cosmopolitan capitals such as Hong Kong and Singapore are high on the agenda.

8 In what way will having a presence in the hospitality scene in Asia add value to citizenM's portfolio?

Asian cultures and hospitality go back many centuries, and are something that citizenM is honoured to be a part of. At the same time, we will embrace local cultures and be available for our new neighbours to visit.

9 Would you consider citizenM a success or do you feel that there is still more to be done?

Success is relative and only relevant if measured against a benchmark. Ours is guest satisfaction, both for present and future guests. We will work diligently to ensure that their experiences are up to expectations.

10 Do you think that the hospitality industry still has room to evolve further?

The hospitality industry is definitely not the most forward-thinking of all, but one that is slowly changing. As such, there is plenty of growth possible and room for creativity to take place. citizenM will continue to play gladly in that space going forward. ■



New partner on board

Japan-based Mitsui Fudosan Asia will have a 50% stake in a joint venture company that will own and operate the retail mall component of Bukit Bintang City Centre (BBCC) in Kuala Lumpur. The real estate conglomerate joins the shareholders of BBCC Development Sdn Bhd, including Eco World Development Group Bhd, with BBCC Development holding the remaining 50%.
The RM1.6 bil retail mall will be developed under the Mitsui Shopping Park Lalaport brand, with world-class facilities, a Lalaport-concept indoor shopping mall and an outdoor Lifestyle Street. Connectivity to the site is enhanced by nearby monorail, LRT (light rail transit) and upcoming MRT (mass rapid transit) stations.

Fun run in the sun

IC&P Group Sdn Bhd celebrated the 10th anniversary of its Alam Impian township in Shah Alam recently by hosting Fun Run Alam Impian 2016. Open to the public, the 5km route took participants along the development's housing zones as well as a 1.3km painted pathway, which has entered the *Malaysia Book of Records* as the longest doodle art drawing on a footpath in the country.



More than 1,500 participants took part in the run, with cash prizes awaiting winners at the finish line. Visitors were also entertained with a line-up of programmes including art activities, walkway mural painting, roller blade rides, musical performances, booth activities by the event's co-sponsors and a demonstration by the Shah Alam police department's canine unit.

Paving new roads

Joint venture partners IJM Land Bhd and Amona Development Sdn Bhd commemorated the start of construction for the RM52 mil Pantai Sentral Park Interchange in a recent groundbreaking ceremony. The link is expected to take 18 months to complete and will facilitate access into Pantai Sentral Park — a mixed-use development in Kuala Lumpur — from the New Pantai Expressway (NPE).
Residents of Pantai Dalam also stand to benefit from the new interchange, which will provide an alternative



route to destinations like Petaling Jaya, KL, Bangsar and Mid Valley City. It is also expected to improve traffic conditions in surrounding areas by diverting traffic away from existing roads.

Symphony of activities

The Symphony Walk, a stretch of al fresco food and beverage outlets at IOI City Mall, Putrajaya was abuzz with activities during the Formula 1 Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix. Live screenings of the races were held along the Walk, and a set of car simulators were also made available for patrons to experience the thrill of racing.



Every weekend, The Symphony Walk is also transformed into Sunset Market, a marketplace where patrons can eat and shop with musical fountains and lively entertainment serving as accompaniments. On Sunday mornings, the stretch is also used to host free hour-long work out sessions themed Shape Up Sunday — organised by the mall management to encourage healthier lifestyles.

Looking to the skies

Despite its recent entry into the property segment, SkyWorld Development Sdn Bhd has already made a splash in the market, judging by the take-up rates of two of its Kuala Lumpur projects. Located in Bukit Jalil, SkyLuxe On The Park has an 80% take-up rate while the first and second phases of SkyArena in Setapak — Ascenda Residences and Bennington Residences — have recorded 95% and 91% uptakes respectively.
SkyLuxe On The Park consists of 477 condominium units across two towers spanning 1.85 acres. Priced from



RM600,000 onwards, the project is within walking distance of the Bukit Jalil Recreational Park and Bukit Jalil Golf and Country Resort.
Meanwhile, a topping off ceremony was held for Ascenda Residences, which is due for completion three months ahead of schedule. Comprising 650 condominium units, it is the first phase of the 28-acre integrated SkyArena development. Work to construct a new flyover and widen an existing road will also take place to improve access into the development.

Building brand presence

The China-listed Midea Group has set its sights on dominating the small home appliance market in Malaysia via its local subsidiary Midea Scott and English Electronics (MSEE) Sdn Bhd. In an official press conference, the group spoke about its prospects in the country as well as its key strategies in positioning MSEE as a leading player in the industry.
These include the strengthening of advertising and promotional activities involving annual allocations for research and development, large-scale product exposure, a Merdeka-themed “GilangGemilangMidea” contest and the continuous organisation of redemption programmes, exhibitions and roadshows. The group is also in talks for products under the MSEE brand to enter local and international chain stores such as Harvey Norman and Aeon.

