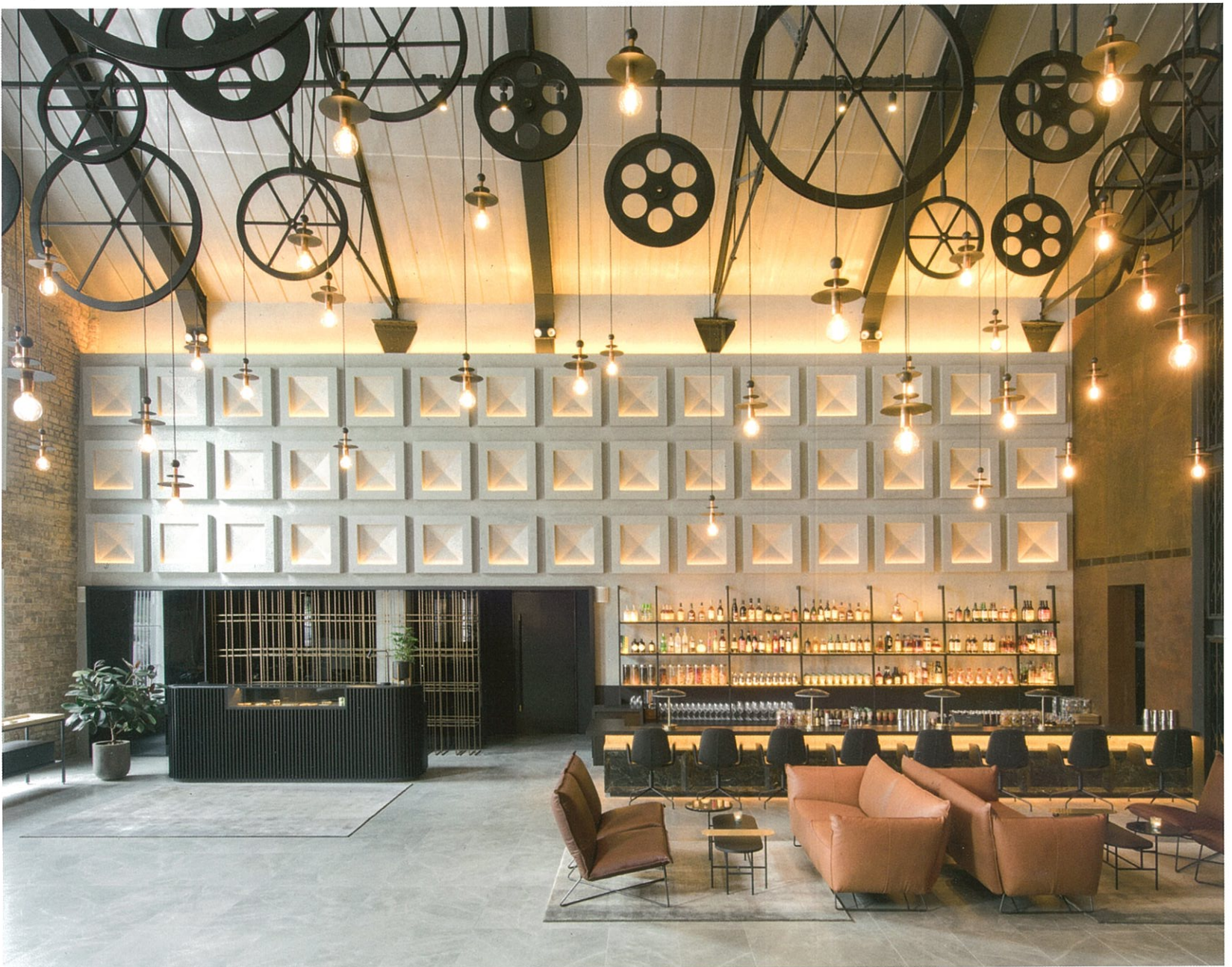


# SLEEPER

GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

MAY | JUNE 2017



## The Warehouse Hotel

Industrial heritage takes centre stage at The Lo & Behold Group's Singapore debut

## Kerry Hill

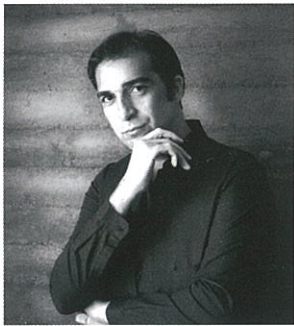
AHEAD Asia's outstanding contribution winner talks exactitude and authenticity

## Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar

Traditional architecture triumphs at Atelier Pod's mountaintop resort in northern Oman

## Guest Book

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### LOTFI SIDIRAHAL

Born in Casablanca and educated in Paris, Lotfi Sidirahal is founder of Atelier Pod, an architecture and interior design studio launched in Paris in 1999. His latest project – Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar – is perched high up on a ridge on Oman’s fabled Green Mountain and takes inspiration from the local mountain communities as well as the nearby forts of Birkat Al-Mawz and Jabreen.

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### COLIN SEAH

“We recognise that millennials want a meaningful getaway, where active experience trumps passive consumption. They want value, authenticity and constant connection,” says Colin Seah of COO, a new hostel concept in Singapore. The Ministry of Design founder was tasked with creating interiors and branding for the ‘sociatel’, which scooped the Visual Identity of the Year award at AHEAD Asia.

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### CHARLIE MACGREGOR

Overcoming early reluctance from investors, the collapse of two financial backers, and rigid government regulations, Charlie MacGregor debuted The Student Hotel in 2008. The innovative hybrid – half hotel for students, half for the student-at-heart – has recently opened in Amsterdam where it combines traditional hotel elements with inspiration drawn from university accommodation.

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### PALLAVI DEAN

A trained architect and sustainability specialist, Pallavi Dean founded her boutique design studio in Dubai in 2013. With a portfolio of commercial, hospitality and residential projects across the globe, she now brings her keen eye for visual delight to the AHEAD MEA judging panel. Dean is currently designing the interiors for Delano Dubai, due to open on Palm Jumeirah later this year.



## COO

### SINGAPORE

Flying Potato Group and Ministry of Design create a new hostel concept that focuses on all things social, seeking to engage guests both physically and digitally.

Words: Luo Jingmei | Photography: © CI&A Photography

How does a hostel extend from simply providing budget accommodation to becoming a community for like-minded travellers? It is a predicament that many an operator has faced as they seek to attract the next generation of guests in an increasingly competitive sector. And while European developers have arguably been the driving force behind the design-led social hostel, Asia is beginning to follow suit with a handful of independently run properties that cater specifically to millennials.

COO, a 68-bed hostel with casual bistro, is a new venture that combines well-designed spaces with engagement through mobile

technology. Its branding and interiors have been developed by Ministry of Design (MOD), also a partner in the endeavour. “We recognise that millennials want a meaningful getaway, where active experience trumps passive consumption. They want value, authenticity and constant connection,” says Colin Seah, founder of MOD. The team coined the term ‘societal’ to describe COO, where all things social – social spaces, social media and socialising – heads the way accommodation, F&B and other services are approached. Once guests have made their booking, they can access COO Connect – a digital platform – and chat with like-minded guests with overlapping



Above: Public spaces feature an eclectic mix of graphics, locally inspired metal screens and lighting by BizLink Associates

stay dates and matching interests. “We thought this would be a great way to embody the convivial spirit of an old-fashioned backpacker community while harnessing the millennial generation’s love for digital connectivity,” continues Seah.

This experiment was mooted by the client, Flying Potato Group, whose owner Silas Lee left his veteran banking post to pursue what he felt was a niche in the local market, despite having no hospitality experience. “The inspiration behind COO is the emergence of millennial travellers who are willing to take the road less travelled,” he explains. “To them, travelling is no longer a leisure pursuit alone, but an opportunity to gain local insights and garner authentic experiences. We want COO to be a homegrown brand with a regional reach and grounded with Asian sensibilities.”

The first COO location at Tiong Bahru is apt, considering millennials’ choice of travel experience eschews mainstream tourist haunts. A gourmet market, independent bookstore, yoga studios, hipster cafés and restaurants sitting alongside colloquial coffee shops and family-run sundry stores, all housed in low-rise, elegant pre-war structures, guarantees a unique blend of encounters where old meets new, east meets west and local meets global. “Choosing Tiong Bahru for COO’s first property was an easy decision when we were considering neighbourhoods that embodied the quintessential local experience,” continues Lee. “It is after all one of the coolest

neighbourhoods in Singapore while also simultaneously known for its rich heritage and culture.”

COO occupies a four-storey shophouse that was previously a hostel, though its reincarnation looks nothing like what stood before. For one, an eye-catching decorative metal screen portal heralds the entrance, alongside a door decorated with colourful depictions of the classic spiral staircases found behind some of Tiong Bahru’s shophouses. The former leads into a 60-seater, all-day dining bistro, the latter to reception. Both enter into a darkened space, casually divided by the same decorative metal screens. With flashes of neon and colourful graphics on the walls and ceiling, the vibe here reads more hip club than budget accommodation. The eclectic mix of travel inspired and local Singapore icons embrace the ‘glocal’ characteristic of the brand, and form a connection with COO’s online presence. The graphics, poems and historic phrases depict associations with Tiong Bahru such as its modernist architecture and traditional ‘kueh’ (sweets), while the screens reference the patterns found on the door and window grilles of local housing. Above the bistro bar counter, an abstract map of the vicinity in neon takes centrestage.

This playful spirit emanates throughout the entire hostel. In the corridors, a magnetic board with alphabet magnets – a form of low-tech social media – encourages guests to leave messages for one another. Upstairs, tongue-in-cheek house rules are emblazoned on



Above: The 68 bunks feature new double-layered curtains with a youthful sports mesh, supplied by Innovasia

walls while amenities such as shampoo dispensers display instructions in a humorous manner.

Spaces have also been designed for both privacy and connectivity. In the bistro for instance, the screens act as casual space dividers creating semi-private corners; in the 11 guestrooms featuring four, six or eight beds that accommodate 68 guests at full capacity, the existing bunks feature new double-layered curtains with a youthful sports mesh, supplied by Innovasia. Within each bunk, the cabinetry flips up to reveal a face mirror, while ambient lighting accompanies functional illumination to create a relaxed mood. These considered features elevate the room-sharing experience.

On the second storey, an open-air terrace houses a pantry and lounge where guests can laze on white Acapulco chairs to meditate, work on their laptops, or wait for their laundry to be done in the adjacent washer/dryer room. Custom-designed coffee tables made from plastic palettes add to the casual ambience.

Seah is no stranger to designing hotels; the popular New Majestic

Hotel in Singapore and Macalister Mansion in Penang, Malaysia, both bear his signature direction of incorporating lively and colourful narratives within an historic structure. Still, COO proved a challenge to design. “It required a real shift of mindset,” Seah explains. “We’re used to more high-end, boutique designs for hotels; in this case, we were designing for the discerning premium budget market. Also, other than designing the interiors, we created a brand, so it needed to be both unique and sociable.”

Despite the challenges, COO has already had an impact on the industry with the team scooping the Visual Identity of the Year award at AHEAD Asia. Judges commended MOD for its creation and expression of the brand DNA, which is set to be rolled out to new properties in Singapore and beyond.

From booking to stay, COO has a seamless, engaging identity. While inspired by similar design-led hospitality concepts in other parts of the world, Seah has localised and improved the experience with both physical and digital connectivity.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT: 68 beds | 1 restaurant | 1 lounge | [www.staycoo.com](http://www.staycoo.com)

Owner: Flying Potato Group Pte | Interior Design: Ministry of Design | Branding & Graphics: Ministry of Design | Main Contractor: Alric