

SINGAPORE TATLER  
**HOMES**

LIFESTYLE MEDIA OF THE YEAR



**MAGIC MIX**

INSPIRING HOMES THAT PUT A FRESH  
SPIN ON THE ART OF THE CRAFT

SINGAPORE TATLER HOMES

LIVING REDEFINED

OCT - NOV 2019





# SMOKE AND MIRRORS

*Colin Seah, founder and director of Ministry of Design, dabbles with illusions for The Prestige Hotel in Penang*

“Tropical Victorian” may sound like a misnomer, yet these contrasting elements seamlessly come together in The Prestige Hotel, a new boutique establishment in Penang, Malaysia. Nestled among 19th-century Victorian-style buildings in the Unesco World Heritage site of Georgetown, the hotel blends into the historic neighbourhood with its colonial-inspired facade.

The work of Singapore-based practice Ministry of Design (MOD), this hotel holds plenty of visual surprises within. Enter through its intricate glass doors and you’ll be dazzled by its imaginative decor, which takes its cues from illusionists and magic props. These include a mirrored reception desk that appears to balance on chromed spheres and mechanised light features that cast shadows of intricate latticed patterns on the corridors. Inside the rooms, the beds even appear to levitate off the ground.

“We added elements of visual surprise through notions of illusion, as design devices to animate spaces, while taking cues from the movie *The Prestige*—also set in the Victorian era—which features the art of magic,” shares Colin Seah, design director of MOD. Here, he reflects further on the hotel’s design.

**LEFT TO RIGHT**

The clever use of glass and mirrors enhances the sense of space and creates visual interest throughout The Prestige Hotel in Penang; the Premier deluxe suite features an edgy see-through bathroom and a levitating bed; Colin Seah, the design director of Ministry of Design



**Tell us more about the design concept.**

The Prestige Hotel’s architectural design (by local architect KL Wong) drew inspiration from the colonial history of its surrounding buildings in Old Town Penang and Church Street. MOD designed the interiors, branding, signage and art, and our intention was to transpose heritage by combining both the traditional and the modern, innovating spaces while remaining rooted in culture and location. One example would be the abstraction of traditional wainscoting, using angular trapezium-shaped lines to contemporise it.

**What were the biggest challenges of this project?**

The difficult condition of the site—its long, narrow proportions—potentially made navigating the hotel a monotonous experience. To overcome this, the studio alternated dark and light colour schemes along the guestroom corridors.

Mechanised light features were placed at regular intervals to rotate and cast shadows of intricate latticed patterns to animate the guest’s journey.

Elements of visual trickery and surprise were also introduced throughout the 162-room hotel; ranging from the transformation of familiar heritage floor patterns to hidden doors in guest rooms that open to reveal toilets and pantries. The theme of optical illusions and trickery was thus borne out of a response to the unusual specificity of the site.

**MOD has designed several custom pieces for the hotel—which is your favourite?**

The custom-designed shower and wardrobe in the Premier deluxe suite, crafted with champagne bronze-tinted metal and glass. This hero piece takes aesthetic cues from the elaborate props used in magic performances, such as Houdini’s escape box.

**What’s in store for your next hotel project?**

We’re working on a wide variety of hotels—one is a ski resort for the Marriott brand, while the other is a hot spring resort for InterContinental Hotels Group. We’re also starting a new hotel project here in Singapore which we’re extremely psyched about. Coming back home to design something for the local scene brings a sense of familiarity and excitement; especially since MOD began its design trajectory with the New Majestic Hotel in Singapore, it’s like coming full circle! 🇸🇬

[theprestige.my](http://theprestige.my)

BY CHLOE PEK IMAGES COURTESY THE PRESTIGE HOTEL