

# Living & Property

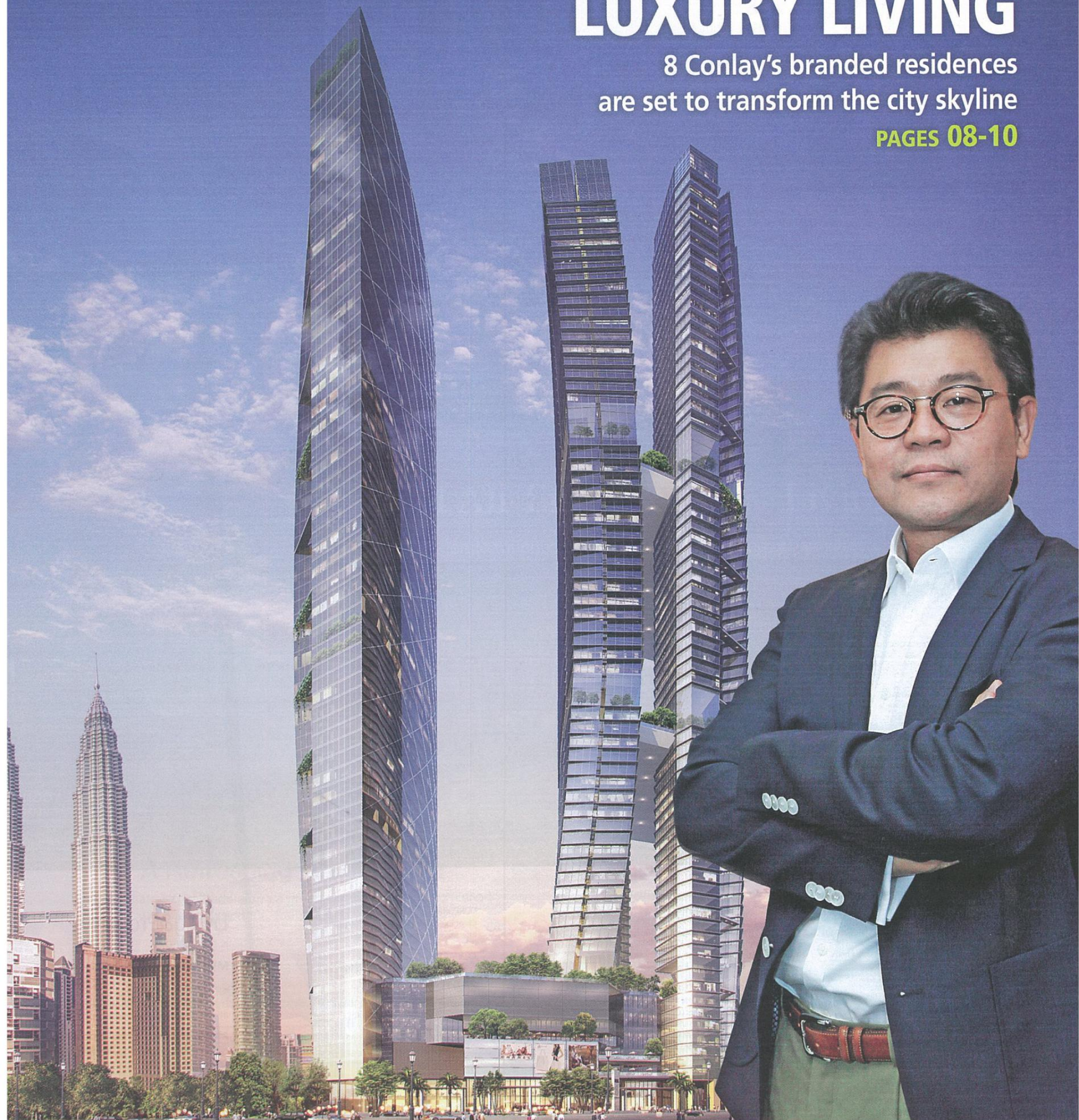
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Enabling a better life

## LANDMARK IN LUXURY LIVING

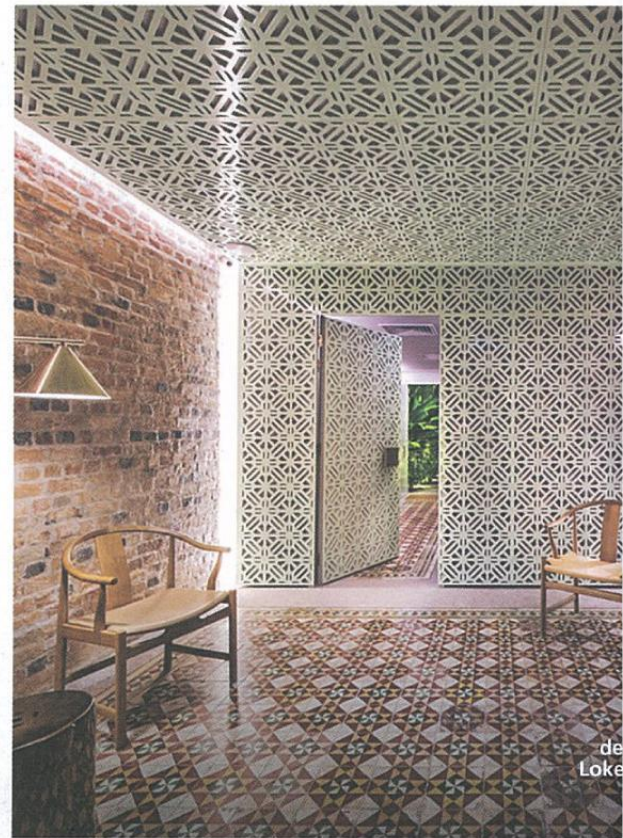
8 Conlay's branded residences are set to transform the city skyline

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The entrance to the Loke Thye Kee residences is reminiscent of the days of old



de Loke

# Heritage Redefined

The mushrooming of new hotels in Penang ranging from boutique to brand names and refurbished old buildings cements the island's appeal as a tourist's haven

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The residences suite in the Loke Thye Kee residences

With its white sandy beaches, historic buildings and one-of-a-kind delicacies, Penang is a melting pot of culture that attracts tourists by the thousands day in and day out. It is hardly surprising then that various types of hotels continue to spring up in the Pearl of the Orient.

Also attracting an international lineup of prestigious brand names, the Double Tree Hilton Penang that will be completed by late 2015 and officially opened in 2016 is another value-added addition to the island's illustrious string of hotels.

The design of the hotel is the result of a joint collaboration between locally renowned design firm, IDS, and the internationally acclaimed design practice called Hirsch Bedner Associates (HBA). Adding volumes of interest and novelty to the introduction of TeddyVille, a teddy bear themed museum and gallery located within the hotel showcasing the rich history of Malaysia told through teddy bears.

With Georgetown earning the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage City status in 2008, there have been many instances where older, historical buildings have been given a makeover in order to preserve them and make them relevant in today's context. Bestowing old mansions and buildings with a new lease of life has also been one of the aims undertaken by none other than award-winning Singaporean architect, Colin Seah.

As the founder and director of design for Ministry of Design (MOD), an integrated spatial-design practice headquartered in Singapore with studios in Beijing and Kuala Lumpur, Seah was trained in the US, and was fortunate enough to work for architectural geniuses including Rem Koolhaas and Daniel Libeskind. He considers the former to be a huge inspiration in terms of typological reinvention and cites Swiss architect Peter Zumthor as an inspiration for his timeless sensitivity to materials.

Dubbed the "Rising Star in Architecture" by *Monocle*, Seah has been at the helm of conceptualising the architecture of three important projects in Malaysia that include the Macalister Mansion, Eco Flow Gallery and Loke Thye Kee Residence — with the interior design of a new 280-room hotel in Penang currently in the works.

The 100-year old Macalister Mansion has been reinvented to become a luxurious, heritage boutique hotel complemented by modern amenities to make the stay here an endearing one. The name of the mansion is a tribute to Sir Norman Macalister, one of the first British Governors of Penang, which is also the street name on which the hotel is situated.

"Our designs give these older buildings (which are often disused or abandoned) a new lease of life. This allows them to be part of a living heritage, and not merely something resigned to the static past.

"We believe in drawing from the past in a quirky, contemporary way. In Macalister Mansion, we drew from Penang



The dining area of the Macalister Mansion is a vision of whites, blues and pinks. Its crisp appearance is reflective of the luxury it exudes



Each corner of the mansion is creatively and purposefully designed

l British heritage and integrated not only the existing architectural cues, but also the tale of Norman Macalister as an underlying quasi-historical narrative. In a way, the mansion itself has been 'adaptively reused,' Seah explains.

Seah goes on to relate how multiple meetings were held to discuss the major infrastructural effort required to restore the mansion — such as retaining and reinforcing original walls, staircases and archways, removing plaster to reveal original brick walls and wall cornices as well as repairing and underpinning the original windows for contemporary use.

Seah stresses that the design concept of Macalister Mansion was not meant for a conventional boutique hotel with dispensaries and restaurants, but more about conceiving it as a place of lifestyle-rich pleasures.

From this starting point, MOD developed the project in a multi-disciplinary fashion, allowing a single concept to be applied and applied across architecture, landscape, interior, branding and uniforms.

The team's take on a memorable lifestyle experience blends both modern design into a singular layered experience. Each key element marries art and design in an installation-like manner. For example, this is reflected in the video art in the reception

area, sculptural art throughout the interior and landscape, as well as a host of paintings, poetry, fabric art and photography in the rooms," he adds.

As with the success of the Macalister Mansion, it was only natural then, that Seah and his team would be very much sought after. A new client reached out to them with the idea for another project — the Loke Thye Kee (LTK) Residences, also in Penang. The brief was simple — which was to redesign the space so that it captures the essence of its 100-year history, but still provides all the benefits and luxuries of modern living.

"They didn't want the use of antiques or vintage items as dressings, and they wanted the building to speak for itself, which is exactly what we would have wanted to do. In addition to this, we both wanted the property to be a juxtaposition against the hard concrete structures within Georgetown and be an 'Oasis in the City'," Seah divulges.

He continues by explaining that he was very much inspired by the romance of Penang in the 1900s, describing the mood and design of the bygone era as "beguiling".

"We wanted to recall a similar charm in our design for the LTK Residences, but with an added contemporary twist that would modernise the experience and make it relevant for to-

day's lifestyle. Living Heritage is a continuum: It is dynamic and it evolves with the times.

"Our design isn't a throwback to the past; neither does it attempt to preserve it. Instead, we used the past as a point of inspiration and a starting point, eventually creating something that's rooted in heritage but (which is) still relevant and contemporary. In the way that heritage elements are abstract and contemporary, we designed the contents of the box containing the 'in-room' information. Much of the collateral is styled to respond to the heritage of LTK," he says.

He describes designing for both Singapore and Penang as a delightful experience, as he considers the architectural and design scene in this part of the world as "lively with pockets of truly exciting developments". Seah notes that both Penang and Singapore share an openness to fresh ideas, as both port cities are familiar with the constant flow of change and newness.

Seah describes his projects as "visually or experientially arresting" and are designed to leave the viewer with "a strong memory (of the space), using architecture and interior design merely as tools to express a concept, narrative or desired experience".

"These concepts or narratives underpin and guide all our designs. So in a way, we are design thinkers first, and architects and interior designers second." ■



The grandeur of Macalister Mansion is a feast for the eyes