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INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

EXPERIENCES OF SPACE

HOUSE 24 BY PARK + ASSOCIATES | GEYER SINGAPORE DESIGN STUDIO | SINGAPORE INDESIGN 2016
WOW ARCHITECTS | OASIA HOTEL DOWNTOWN BY WOHA AND STUDIO PATRICIA URQUIOLA

THE 'SOCIATEL' EXPERIENCE

CONCEPTUALISED BY MINISTRY OF DESIGN AS A 'SOCIATEL', COO PROVIDES BOTH PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SPACES FOR TRAVEL-SAVVY MILLENNIALS TO STAY, EAT AND CONNECT IN.

TEXT > ASH JENIE
PHOTOGRAPHY > EDWARD HENDRICKS
(COURTESY OF MINISTRY OF DESIGN)



Left: The building, situated along Outram Road in Tiong Bahru, was formerly a hostel so its structural bones could be retained



Above: Custom-made metal grilles, reminiscent of those found around the neighbourhood, frame the entrance



THE MAIN REASON FOR STAYING IN A HOSTEL used to be budget oriented. In exchange for sharing the facilities with strangers, one gets a rate that's considerably lower than a hotel. Sharing promotes more interactions, not only between guests and staff, but also between the hostel and its neighbourhood, and in the end these interactions cultivate a more sociable environment – an added value to the staying experience. That sociable environment adds colour and a touch of authenticity to the final cut of our holiday story reel, and often, it can be the reason to come back and stay in the same place again.

Nowadays the demographic for hostels is generally the millennials – a new breed of quick-to-share, digital-savvy travellers who are connected 24/7, value experiences over possessions, and are constantly looking for authenticity. COO is a new hostel concept designed to provide spaces, both physical and digital, for millennial travellers. Located in Outram Road, the hostel is the brainchild of Ministry of Design (MOD) and client Flying Potato Group.

“To [millennial travellers], travelling is no longer a leisure pursuit alone, but an opportunity to gain local insights and garner authentic experiences,” says Silas Lee, founder of Flying Potato Group and COO. The project is a first in many ways for client and designer. It is Flying Potato Group's first

hospitality establishment and MOD's first project in the hostel typology, as well as its first to cater to the millennial demographic. “The project was fairly small in size, but it has a very big idea – one that we can grow as a brand. We were very intrigued by it,” says Colin Seah, MOD founder and COO's 'brand architect' and designer.

“I've observed that there are three types of hostels,” says Lee. “First, the basic, open bunk-bed hostels. They have a cheaper rate and they are not the most comfortable – but often they have a great atmosphere that facilitates spontaneity and brings people together. The second one is the 'poshtels' or capsule hostels, which are designed to be very functional and to communicate a certain aesthetic. They are very posh, but at the same time, they've lost that spontaneity – it's almost like another boutique hotel.”

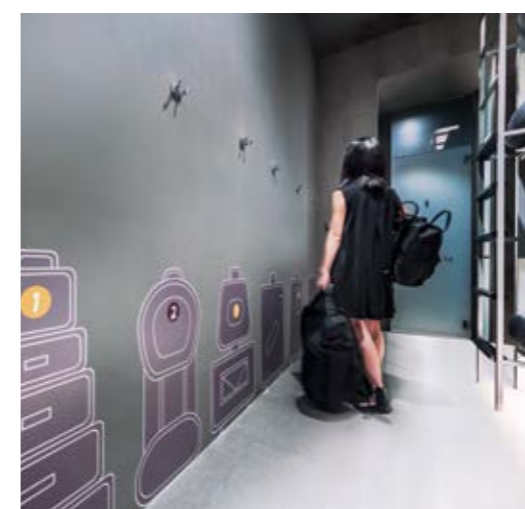
He continues, “The third kind is the emerging trend in some of the European countries, where you combine the two and you have a well-designed social space. That's the kind of space I aspired to create. It makes sense to build it in Singapore, but no one had!”

COO was conceptualised as a 'sociatel' – a term MOD defines as an establishment providing accommodation, meals and other services that revolve around all things social. The hostel's brand DNA is built on three key touch points – glocal,

Above: The reception counter and lift lobby are demarcated by metal grilles that also encourage movement toward the bistro

“TRAVELLING IS NO LONGER A LEISURE PURSUIT ALONE, BUT AN OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN LOCAL INSIGHTS AND GARNER AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES.”

» SILAS LEE



Top left: A magnetic message board and the house rules are presented on a corridor wall, encouraging witty exchanges

Bottom left: Wall graphics within each room indicate where each guest should store their bulky luggage items

Right: Lockers for small valuables are built into each bunk-bed alcove. A numbered badge system correlates with the luggage storage area



“THIS IS JUST THE FIRST PROTOTYPE OF THE APP. WE HOPE THAT IN THE NEXT PHASE, IT’LL LINK YOU TO LOCALS WHO ARE INTERESTED IN BEING PART OF THE COO COMMUNITY, THEN YOUR REACH INTO THE CITY WILL BE EVEN GREATER.”

» COLIN SEAH



social and playful – while its brand experience comprises three main activities – stay, eat and connect.

COO occupies a four-storey building that was also formerly a hostel. MOD has retained most of the original hostel’s bones and built a fresh take upon them. COO’s personality is fleshed out with a combination of bold graphics, playful signage and carefully curated materials. The hostel stands out in its neighbourhood with a striking, black-and-white metal lattice that references the old estates in the Tiong Bahru area.

Inside, the metal lattice demarcates two distinct areas – reception and bistro. The latter is COO’s social heart. Here, the walls are finished with custom-design black wallpaper printed with the story of Tiong Bahru, presented in quirky illustrations, bite-sized pieces of trivia and newspaper clippings. Installed on the ceiling is a neon map of the neighbourhood. The homage to the locale is not limited to the interior and collaterals; the menu of COO bistro also draws inspirations from local cuisines.

The upper floors house 11 rooms, each accommodating four, six or eight bunk beds with a total capacity of 86 bunk beds. Guests are given an access key in the form of a water-resistant rubber bracelet with a sensor inside. An old-fashioned message board and the house rules are presented on a wall in the hallway. “Eight ways to stay COO,” it says. The rules include: “Mingling is strictly encouraged, but please read the signs to ensure your mingling is mutual,” and “Your mom ain’t here, clean up after yourself.”

Some rooms come with en-suite bathrooms while the rest shares communal ones. “We have the lowest guest per toilet ratio for a hostel. Most have a 12 to 18 ratio. Ours is 6 to 7,” says Lee. A terrace on the second floor houses the laundry room, a small pantry, and an open space where guests can relax and mingle.

Completing the COO experience is COO Connect – a digital interest-matching tool that is made available to guests from the moment they make their booking. “It’s harder for Asian

millennials to start a conversation with strangers. They’re friendly but a bit reserved and will not initiate a conversation. But they do it all the time via digital platforms. So why don’t we provide the digital platform for them to connect based on shared interests?” says Seah.

Via COO Connect, guests can create a profile based on key interests and connect with similarly minded guests during the period of their stay. They can also band together on the platform to take advantage of the programmes offered by the hostel, like the Supper Club or the Breakfast Club. Seah elaborates, “This is just the first prototype of the app. We hope that in the next phase, it’ll link you to locals who are interested in being part of the COO community, then your reach into the city will be even greater.” The brand has plans to expand to other neighbourhoods in Singapore, and eventually, overseas.



COO HOSTEL

CLIENT Flying Potato Group Pte Ltd
INTERIOR DESIGNER Ministry of Design (MOD)
PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS Colin Seah, Patricia Segado, Angie Ng, Madeline Lim, Sandra Goh, Anna Langier, Richard Herman, Rais Rahman, Norberto Olegario
BRAND AND STRATEGY Ministry of Design (MOD)
BRANDING, INTERIOR DESIGN, ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHICS, SIGNAGE, COLLATERAL DESIGN, WEBSITE ART DIRECTION Ministry of Design (MOD)
MAIN CONTRACTOR Alric Engineering Pte Ltd
WEB & APP DESIGNER BBH Asia Pacific

TIME TO COMPLETE 8 months
TOTAL FLOOR AREA 752 sqm

MINISTRY OF DESIGN (MOD)
 (65) 6222 5728 modonline.com

FINISHES

In bistro, wall finish is custom-designed digital print wallpaper with decorative vinyl supplied by Newmor Singapore; custom-designed digital-print curtain supplied by Innovasia Singapore; flooring is cement

screed. In counter and kitchen area, flooring is grey homogeneous tiles supplied by Surface Stone with black laminate skirting supplied by Admira. On custom-designed banquette seating in bistro, polyester upholstery supplied by Titch Singapore and stainless-steel base supplied by Polaris Archimetal. On custom-designed bistro bar counter, Equitone fibre cement board fascia and stainless-steel counter top. On bistro servery, black and bronze laminate supplied by Admira. Wall and ceiling paints supplied by Nippon Paint Singapore. Wall finish in shower is purple metal sheet in chrome finish supplied by Polaris Archimetal. In corridor, flooring is grey cement tile supplied by Goodrich Global. On guest terrace, artificial grass outdoor rug supplied by Advance Sports Technologies; smokey grey WPC decking supplied by Goodrich Global. Graphic stickers supplied by Youprint Productions.

FIXED AND FITTED

At entrance, custom-design painted metal lattice supplied by Metalworld. In guestrooms, two-stack luggage ledge is custom-designed with powder-coated steel structure and EPDM top; curtains are custom-designed double-layer polyester with sports

mesh fabric in two colours with black-out backing supplied by Innovasia Singapore. On corridor wall, custom-designed magnetic board in black stainless steel. In reception, custom-designed neon Tiong Bahru map supplied by The Signmakers International. At reception counter, solid-surface counter top supplied by Luxx Newhouse Design Centre, black laminate in cabinets supplied by Admira, and external metal cladding supplied by Polaris Archimetal.

LIGHTING

In bistro, downlights, pendant lights, wall sconce and track lights supplied by Bizlink Associates Singapore and Alric Engineering. Black recessed downlights in corridors and wall-mounted lights in staircase and guest terrace supplied by Bizlink Associates.

FURNITURE

In bistro, custom-designed dining tables, with laminate tabletops supplied by Jennings Trading Enterprise and stainless steel supplied by Polaris Archimetal. At guest alcove, banquette seating, poufs and ottomans are all custom-designed.

Admira Pte Ltd (65) 6368 0123 admira.sg
Advance Sports Technologies Pte Ltd (65) 6553 1540 greenturf.asia
Bizlink Associates (S) Pte Ltd (65) 6747 7116 bizlink-lighting.com
Equitone asia. equitone.com
Goodrich Global Pte Ltd (65) 6788 6868 goodrichglobal.com
Innovasia Singapore Pte Ltd (65) 6352 6030 innovasia.com
Jennings Trading Enterprise Pte Ltd (65) 6363 1111 jennings.com.sg
Luxx Newhouse Design Centre (65) 6324 6860 luxxnewhouse.com
Metalworld Pte Ltd (65) 6446 6188 metalworld.com.sg
Newmor Singapore Pte Ltd (65) 6634 8238 newmor.com
Nippon Paint Singapore Co Pte Ltd (65) 6265 5355 nipponpaint.com.sg
Polaris Archimetal Pte Ltd (65) 6261 9751 The Signmakers International
Pte Ltd (65) 6455 2988 signmakers.sg
Surface Stone Pte Ltd (65) 6281 7800 surfacestone.com.sg
Titch Singapore Pte Ltd (65) 6281 2222 titch.com.sg
Youprint Productions Pte Ltd (65) 6297 0325 youprint.com.sg

Top: In the bistro, talking points can be found in the facts and trivia about Tiong Bahru that are presented on the walls and ceiling

Bottom: A neon map casts a glow over the bar, and makes for discussions about sights and landmarks to see in the area

Above: The laundry area morphs into an outdoor terrace where guests can socialise in a relaxed setting