

IT'S ALL ABOUT MAGIC

An enjoyable stay at The Prestige Hotel in Penang is no illusion

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IF THE LATE illusionist and stunt performer Harry Houdini were still alive today, and on a vacation in Penang, he would feel very much at home at the newly opened The Prestige Hotel.

It's hard to believe that this newly-built 162-room hotel, located near Church Street in Georgetown, was once a former godown that was too run down to preserve. But now, the five-storey building has been restored to new glory with a regal colonial demeanour, thanks to its design by Malaysian firm KL Wong Architect, with the interiors and branding by Singapore firm Ministry of Design (MOD).

MOD founder Colin Seah is no stranger to designing hotels in Penang, having put his touch to Macalister Mansion and Loke Thye Kee Residences. In fact, The Prestige Hotel's owner Tommy Koay liked the Macalister Mansion so much, that he hired Mr Seah to design his first hotel.

Mr Seah named the development, The Prestige Hotel, to conjure brand imagery of elegance and sophistication, and the hotel's design also takes its cues from the movie of the same name, which was set in the Victorian era and revolves around the illusory art of magic.

But how did the concept of using magic and illusion in the design all come about? Mr Seah explains the idea came to him when he was presented with the building's floor plan, which

(1) The Prestige Hotel is traditional and modern at the same time. (2) A contrast of light and dark along the corridor. (3) The cage-like shower and wardrobe enclosure is a highlight of the premier deluxe suite. (4) The Glasshouse restaurant is a garden conservatory for breakfasts, lunches and dinners.

THROUGHOUT THE PRESTIGE HOTEL, DESIGNER COLIN SEAH INTRODUCED ELEMENTS OF TRICKERY AND SURPRISE.



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showed long guest room corridors. "No one likes walking down a long corridor, especially if your room is right at the end," he says.

To break down the potential monotony of the corridor experience, Mr Seah alternated dark and light colour schemes along them. Together with lights placed at regular intervals, the corridors instantly appear shorter, and the experience of navigating the guest rooms becomes more pleasant.

Throughout the hotel, Mr Seah introduced elements of visual trickery and surprise. For example, a mirrored stainless steel reception desk appears to magically balance on chrome spheres. Inside the lift car, what looks like a Persian rug on the wall is in fact a polished tinted metal wall, decorated in a pattern featuring the unique icons of Penang that reminds you of Victorian-style wallpaper.

Guests have a pick of four room types: Deluxe; Premier Deluxe; Loft, which has a generous lounge on the ground floor and a separate bedroom on the mezzanine level; and Deluxe Trio, which comes with a smaller bedroom.

Some of the magical elements in the rooms include beds that seem to levitate and hidden doors that reveal toilet cubicles, and pantries. Even the vanity mirror is not what it seems - it appears to float in front of a mirrored wall, but actually, is just a frame.

While all the rooms are comfortable and stylish, it is likely that Mr Houdini would feel most at home in the Premier Deluxe suite. The hero piece in this room is a custom-designed shower and wardrobe enclosure, crafted with champagne bronze tinted metal and glass. It appears like a more glamorous version of Mr Houdini's Chinese Water Torture Cell, in which he was suspended upside-down in a locked glass-and-steel cabinet filled to overflowing with water, holding his breath for more than three minutes. Thankfully, guests using this shower don't have to make any harrowing escapes.

Outside of their rooms, guests can enjoy the use of a gym, a rooftop infinity pool, as well as the all-day dining restaurant, The Glasshouse, which feels like a garden conservatory. The highlight of the menu is Nyonya Ulam Rice, which has roasted chicken, salted egg, *pappadam*, cucumber, eggplant, anchovy crumb and chili shrimp paste on the side.

Guests who want to indulge in other Penang dishes, will be glad to know that while the hotel is in a quieter part of Georgetown, it is still within walking distance to gourmet hotspots.

The writer was a guest of The Prestige Hotel.