

# News Clipping



## IN HIS ELEMENT

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A natural progression

Sim Boon Yang successfully combines his love of nature with architecture. By Geoffrey Eu

**Sim Boon Yang**  
**Founding partner, ECO-ID**

IT'S not exactly the call of the wild, but the outdoors beckons strongly nevertheless to Sim Boon Yang, an architect who finds inspiration - as well as perspiration - in nature. Sim, a founding partner of local design firm Eco-id, is an entrenched urbanite who successfully combines his love of nature with his work, much of which involves designing site-sensitive, environment-friendly hotels and resorts around the region.

Sim, 46, who once drove a beat-up old Land Rover from London to Singapore on not much more than a whim and a prayer, has been going on regular trail runs, mountain bike rides and family eco-holidays - his way of communing with nature - for close to 20 years.

'It's just a recreational release for me, and I like the outdoors a lot,' says Sim of his weekly excursions onto the various nature trails in Singapore. He has more than a passing interest in flora and fauna - years ago, he seriously considered an alternative career as a marine biologist.

He carries a notebook to record thoughts and drawings of interesting things and natural patterns he finds along the trail, some of which eventually translate into designs for an architectural project. 'I find patterns in nature that relate to my work,' says Sim.

For instance, he turned the fungal growth rings he discovered on some trees in the forest into the design for a landscaped terrace of a resort in Koh Samui. 'Organic growth patterns become the basis for an architectural idea - it opens up dimensions and avenues that lead to fresh ideas,' he says. While hitting the nature trail is a solitary effort much of the time, Sim and wife Angela introduced their three children to the outdoors when they were babies, carrying them on jungle walks and various nature-related activities. 'It's good for the kids to sweat, get them out of their comfort zones,' he says. 'Now, they are more appreciative, although we may have to promise to take them to an air-conditioned restaurant after.'

He adds, 'I grew up in small towns in places like Sabah and Kelantan, so the rural aspect of things is quite ingrained in me. The urban-rural thing gives me perspective in my work - the idea is not just being in nature, but a removal from the city environment to a mood and place that's peaceful and poetic - it's getting away from it all.' One recent morning, after a night of heavy rainfall, BT Weekend followed Sim on a jungle walk, venturing off the beaten trail in the MacRitchie Reservoir area in search of the remains of an unmarked Shinto shrine that dates back some 70 years. It didn't take long for us to feel like extras in an episode of Lost - one heavily-forested area looks pretty much the same as another - but that's just part of the thrill, says Sim, who is not your typical white-shirt-and-leather-briefcase kind of architect.

'The resorts I work on are sited at places of natural beauty and being able to work sensitively comes from a love of these settings,' says Sim. 'When I visit our overseas projects, in places like the Maldives, Bali and Thailand, I will walk the terrain or dive offshore to check out the marine life.' He adds, 'The clients like it when they see that but I'm not doing it to impress them - it's actually my lifestyle.'