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In just over a decade, Eco-id has emerged as one of the region's most in-demand design firms, producing work as varied as Metropolitan in Bangkok, the first W resort in the Maldives, and two new cutting-edge condos in KL.

How did your practice start and how did the two of you become partners?

Eco-id Architecture and Design Consultancy was founded by Calvin Sim and myself in 1996. We met in the army and then both went to the University of Oregon in the US. Calvin graduated in 1989 and returned to Singapore, while I went to the University of Liverpool in 1987 to complete my Bachelor of Architecture, then worked in London for five years for Michael Hopkins and Partners. After I came back to Singapore in 1992, I worked as Project Director for Alfred Wong Partnership until we set up Eco-id. We now have 40 staff in Singapore and about 15 in Bangkok.

Describe your company's design style.

I'd say we've adopted a progressive stance in the way we've developed our architecture and design, meaning to say we explore new, modern forms of architecture for residential projects, urban high rises and resorts. We're a fairly internationally oriented practice, with two-thirds of our work outside Singapore. Our focus is now on high-end, high-rise residences and hospitality projects.

Where has your work taken you?

Outside of Singapore we have projects in Thailand, Malaysia, India, Dubai, Brunei, China and Zanzibar. We're very happy with this international direction, because it's enriching for the kind of work we do and has helped us reach major clients, including key hospitality brands. We've done two W resorts in the Maldives for Starwood, pool villas for the Marriott Singapore, we're doing a Conrad in Koh Samui and exploring potential projects with Alila.

Are these brands approaching you or are you approaching them?

It's interesting, because when we grew our company, we were careful to choose high-end properties for clients, so when we started to do bigger jobs, it became quite easy for the brands to connect with our work. In fact, we've have never really marketed ourselves at all. What we bring to the table is that we understand brand positioning. From the architecture to the interiors to the image, we make sure we understand what the brand has done before, what sets them apart, what makes a Ritz-Carlton different from a Four Seasons. From that, we try to bring something new, take the architecture to a new level, give the brand a new perspective.

Which projects have put Eco-id on the map?

We've had a number that have earned us a lot of attention and awards, like the Metropolitan, Bangkok, which was our first city hotel and helped us expand into hospitality. The Sarojin, a resort in Khao Lak, in Phang Nga, was named Asia's Leading Boutique Hotel in the 2006 World Travel Awards and was a winner in the 2007 World Luxury Hotel Awards. The W Retreat and Spa (pictured) was in Condé Nast Traveller's 2007 'Hot List' of 65 best new hotels and was named Best Resort in Travel and Leisure's 2007 Design Awards. I'm rather proud of that.

What drives your selection of residential projects?

We're attracted to discerning clients, people wanting to do things a little differently, such as with our projects in Kuala Lumpur like Jalan Binjai Apartments (pictured) and Clearwater Apartments. It's the same for our two proposals for residences in Singapore for Hayden Properties, which is a new player in the industry and has very creative ideas.

What's your overall view of architecture in the region?

In my opinions, design has been very exciting in this region in the last 10 years. It's a combination of new, young blood trained overseas combined with the growing opportunities of working with big brand clients. Recently, there has been a convergence between hospitality and residential, with resort and hotel operators introducing branded residences, and residences incorporating lifestyle and resort elements. It's almost a 'free for all' in places like Thailand and Malaysia, where designers are allowed run with their ideas. It's also very clear that there's a huge international demand for Asia-based designers.

Eco-id offers its services to design bungalows at Sentosa Cove. Have you received many requests from plot owners?

A house is a very personal project, and it works best when there's real synergy between the client and the architect. We've accepted about six or seven proposals, and that's after turning down about 80% of the requests. These are relatively small jobs, so we pick the ones when the budget is right for us to do a good job.

Sentosa Cove has its own guidelines for house designs, to maintain a consistent design theme. Has that been restrictive?

Initially, the guidelines were quite stiff, dogmatic. They wanted to control the overall feel, expecting a homogenous tropical, Bali-type style of house. In reality, when owners started to demand what they wanted, Sentosa Cove started to relax its restrictions a little and there are now more varied designs. When you have rich Chinese, Indonesians, Indians, they're all going to have different tastes and ideas.