

News Clipping

Property Report Singapore- Malaysia - Indonesia - September 2007 - News

The screenshot shows the Property Report Asia website interface. At the top, the logo reads 'PROPERTY REPORT ASIA' with the tagline 'The Region's Real Estate Portal' and the website URL 'www.property-report.com'. A navigation bar includes buttons for Home, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, and Australia. Below the navigation bar, there is a 'Latest issue' section featuring a thumbnail of a magazine cover with the headline 'Changing face of foreign owners'. To the right, a search bar is labeled 'Property Report back issues: Search by month'. The main article is titled 'Clearwater fuses 'live, work, play' concept' and includes a sub-headline 'In a property world dominated by large developers, the boutique Clearwater residence in Damansara Heights is proving a surprise success by offering a holistic 'live, work and play' concept, with spa, health and wellness the focus of the 'play' aspect. Revenue wise, 70% of the 108-unit residence has been sold so far, with a portion of units held back for a Singapore road show targeted for later this year.'

Clearwater fuses 'live, work, play' concept

In a property world dominated by large developers, the boutique Clearwater residence in Damansara Heights is proving a surprise success by offering a holistic 'live, work and play' concept, with spa, health and wellness the focus of the 'play' aspect. Revenue wise, 70% of the 108-unit residence has been sold so far, with a portion of units held back for a Singapore road show targeted for later this year.

Clearwater was conceptualised by Malaysian Dian Lee, the 20-something eldest daughter of Country Heights Holdings founder Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew, and Singaporean Sim Boon Yang, a founding partner of architectural firm Eco-id (interviewed in 'Designer', August issue).

The pair had a meeting of minds when they were introduced two years ago at the Metropolitan hotel in Bangkok, for which Eco-id was the lead design consultant. Lee is a fan of the hotel's Glow organic restaurant and the Como Shambhala spa, and the two soon found they shared interests that evolved into a common vision.

"Both Boon and I are very creative and we clicked. We shared this idea of a holistic residential community and creating a lifestyle-concept residence, although this is an overused term," says Lee, who graduated in 2005 from RMIT University in Melbourne, where she majored in Professional Communication and Marketing. "I'm a spa freak, so I wanted to bring this aspect to my home, instead of having to drive to a spa at the end of a long working day."

Clearwater is the first property development for both Sim, the architect for the project, and Lee, who "stumbled upon" a joint-venture opportunity for the 0.5-hectare site, which today features a stunning 4,600sqft, double-storey showflat.

"After Boon flew up to KL and came up with the concept, we then went to look for investors," Lee said. "The first six months were stressful, finding backers, especially as we were doing something 'outside the box'. Since then, it has gone very well and people like the fact it's unusual."

Clearwater is certainly distinctive in each of its 'live, work and play' components. The play aspect is embodied by the Clearwater Wellness Club, which will include a detox centre, gym, yoga studio and spa.

"All of our partners have this healthy lifestyle," Lee says. "Many condos have a gym but they're usually for residents only. We'll have professional, full-time staff, as ours will be a membership-based club, which will benefit from the fact it's located on top of an office building."

The 'work' aspect is provided by the accompanying offices, set to be extensively upgraded to match the high-end appearance of the new residence. As well as three levels of parking for the residence, with two spaces per unit, there will be three levels of parking for office tenants, which at night can become available for guests.

The 'live' aspect, the residence itself, features an interesting array of layouts within its 18 storeys, including studios, 'Superpads' with outdoor jacuzzis, double-storey 'Lofts', and penthouses with a plunge pool on the balcony. "The designs are truly innovative, and the Superpad design is unique because of outdoor jacuzzi," Lee says. Furthermore, every shower can become a steam room, also reputedly a first in Malaysia.

Floors five to nine feature the 25 one-bedroom units and 20 one-bedroom 'Superpads', ranging from 826-1,316sqft, as well as the 10 two-bedroom units (1,703-1,728sqft), which include a study and maid/utility room.

The 42 Lofts (1,459-2,489sqft), each with two-three bedrooms and a maid's room, are located on levels 10-13a, while the 11 penthouses (1,784-4,735sqft) occupy the top three storeys.

Prices for the units range from RM648,000 to RM5.5 million, with prices per square foot ranging from RM762-957psf for the one and two-bedroom units, to RM823-1,023psf for the Lofts and RM1,078-1,144psf for the penthouses.

Lee believes the relatively high prices for a condo not located in the KLCC area is due not only to the project's quality and facilities but also its location in the exclusive Damansara Heights area, where Clearwater is the first condo of its kind in an area made up of high-end bungalows and landed properties. The area will also house the King's new palace, which has a reputed construction cost of RM500 million.

"Damansara Heights is like the Beverly Hills of KL. It's an exclusive neighbourhood, with many government officials living in the area, and prices are going up," Lee says. "There are popular areas nearby, like Mont' Kiara and Bangsar, but Damansara is the most high end, the equivalent of Bukit Timah in Singapore."

Clearwater is a major venture for Sim but more so for the young Lee, who has taken a major step up the business ladder from interning for her father's company during semester breaks. And she's not done yet. "We're now looking at other places to develop, including the Klang Valley, south Malaysia and beach destinations in Thailand."

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Sim Boon Yang
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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.