

# Loh Lik Peng

The award-winning hotelier on his fantasy staff, his bed and finding odd locations.

**You started with Hotel 1929, then logically followed with New Majestic Hotel: Both are different but stylishly designed. Now you have three new hotel projects in three countries, are they all vastly different?**

They are very different buildings and in very different locations. Town Hall is in the heart of the East End of London and Waterhouse is in the old industrial docklands of Shanghai. Town Hall hotel is actually an old town hall and it's a beautiful listed building, just chock full of original and very grand features, both inside and out. It's almost embarrassingly beautiful and very easy to imagine as a fantastic hotel. Really it's just a case of not doing too much to ruin it.

Waterhouse is an entirely different thing. It was an old industrial building and was used as a dockside office and warehouse. It was never built to be conventionally beautiful and has a hard utilitarian character. It has its own Brutalist type of beauty and has a unique 1920s Art Deco style about it. We have reinforced this character and tried to make sure the hotel itself reflected its hard history. I think it's a fascinating project but very different from Town Hall.

**You're known for your offbeat locations, why the fascination?**

I think all my hotels are in very interesting and offbeat locations but they really work and make a statement in the neighborhoods that they're in. These are the areas of Singapore that hold the most interest to the genuine traveller, the adventurer. Where else do you find the authentic Singapore, the old Singapore? Everywhere else is a very recent manufacture and it's something you can find anywhere else in the world. Frankly what is so unique about Orchard Road?

**Location is often muttered like a mantra, is location everything?**

Location is something, but I'm a firm proponent of opportunity and creating something unique. It's almost useful to have a good location but it's better to be ahead of the curve and make a not-so-good location work for you by seizing opportunities and creating something unique: 1929 was a pioneer in Keong Saik road and The Wanderlust Hotel in Little India area.

**When you're checking out other hotels, what is the first thing you look for?**

The first thing I look for is the exit... In case it's a really crap hotel! Only joking. I think...

things. I think if the work is original, good things will fall in place.

**Do you have a favourite furniture?**

My favourite piece of furniture is my bed. I think that might be my favourite thing of all time. I certainly try to spend as much time on it as possible.

**You're hard to impress. When was the last time your jaw dropped?**

The last time my jaw dropped was when I saw the Bethnal Green Town Hall for the very first time. Crazy as it sounds, from that moment on I just knew I had to take it on. When I see design that excites me. I try desperately to buy it if I can!

**In your fantasy hotel, which famous person would hold the position of front desk receptionist?**

Nicole Kidman, she is hot!

**Concierge?** Brad Pitt, he has great abs.

**Butler?** George Clooney, very charming.

**Bar manager?** Tom Cruise, *Cocktail* the movie.

**Bar back?** Mini me, imagine, he needs a lift to get the glasses up.

**Chef?** Nigella Lawson, cleavage!

**Housekeeper?** Catherine McCormack, courtesan.

**What's the best part about being a hotelier?**

It has to be watching the front desk in operation when I'm sitting in the lobby, vegging out. I still totally get a kick out of knowing that I'm a part of making all that happen. I get crazy excited when a new hotel is about to open and the contractors are going through the last few bits and pieces of the renovation. The sense of anticipation is so great I can barely stand it. It's like the culmination of so much work and so many hours and you just never know how people will react when it's finally unveiled.

**What's the worst?**

Knowing that you've got something horribly wrong in the design or that somehow you've forgotten something important! I have nightmares about all the things I think I've forgotten about or miscalculated! Hopefully it remains just that... a nightmare.

**Singapore, Shanghai, London, where next?**

I wish to own a hotel in every major city! That way I can travel all over the world and I always have a place to stay! Actually to be honest, staying at one of your own hotels is usually a pain. It's like sleeping in the office. You never really get any rest. **FHM**

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**Your most recent stamp on Singapore – The Wanderlust Hotel – is much anticipated.**

Wanderlust will be the first cool hotel in Little India. Located on Dickson Road, off Little India, Wanderlust Hotel is a four-storey boutique hotel with 29 rooms, featuring the works of local design agencies Asylum, Phunk Studio and fFurious.

**What was the design brief to the designers from Asylum, Phunk Studio and fFurious?**

It was a very slim design brief, they were told to have lots of fun.

front desk, just to see what the staff is like and if they are friendly. I also ask to look at a room, if there are any available.

**What are the three essentials a modern traveller needs in a hotel room?**

Seriously... good coffee, good mattress and good companion to curl up next to.

**You're all about design. What advice do you have for budding local designers?**

Singapore can make its mark on the global design map if she loosens up and not worry too much about the commercial side of