

4-in-Wanderlust

Put four designers to work on one boutique hotel and the result is a quirky mix of themes for each floor

tay suan chiang

Boutique hotelier Loh Lik Peng gave Chinatown a hip designer touch when he opened 1929 in 2003 and New Majestic Hotel in 2006.

Now, he is hoping to do the same to Little India, with the opening of his newest hotel, Wanderlust (below), in Dickson Road. There are 29 rooms in the four-storey building, which was previously Hong Wen School and later the Buddhist Welfare Association. But no fewer than four design firms got involved in its design.

Mr Loh, 38, picked DP Architects, Phunk Studio, Asylum and fFurious to each design one storey of the hotel, where every room is different.



He says: "I wanted four designers so we could have a project with more diverse talent. And I chose them on the basis that they were talented designers who were already successful in their respective fields. None of them had done interiors before, so it was interesting to see how they interpreted their work on an interior design project."

On the first floor, design firm Asylum took charge of designing the lobby and the hotel's French restaurant, Cocotte.

To get ideas, its designers Chris Lee and Cara Ang did their research.

The building is believed to be built in the 1920s or 1930s, going by its architectural style. It has European art nouveau-inspired tiles used on a scale that is unique to Singapore, said the Urban Redevelopment Authority, which gave the building conservation status in 1989. This meant that the facade of the building has to be retained, while the interiors may be altered to suit the building's new use.

Mr Loh bought the building in 2008 for a sum he declined to disclose.

In the vicinity of the hotel, there is a mix of hardware stores, provision shops

4TH FLOOR: CREATURE COMFORTS



fFurious' nine loft rooms include the Typewriter room where a giant typewriter doubles as a sofa.

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and coffee shops. Asylum founder Lee says: "We wanted to bring in some of these industrial elements into the hotel design, but not without first adding a twist to them."

A gold-painted metal gate, counters made of raw oxidised steel and neon signs on tinted mirrors are found in the lobby. The colourful packaging provided by nearby shops is transformed into a wallpaper by the hotel entrance.

Lee adds that the most fun bit of the

project was finding lighting and furniture for the first floor.

The pieces include The Ogle pendant lamp from Swedish design group Form Us With Love, recycled stools by Australian designer Trent Jensen and a Frank Gehry two-seater sofa. The vintage barber chairs from Mr Loh's private collection, which are a signature feature in both his Chinatown hotels, are also in Wanderlust. Two of them sit in the lobby.

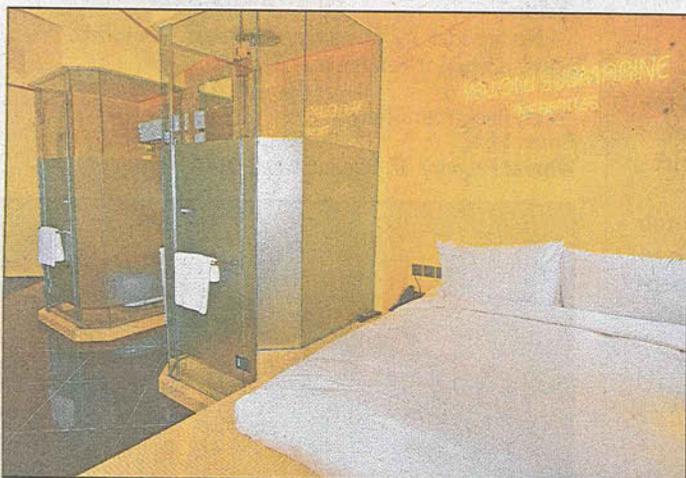
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3RD FLOOR: IS IT JUST BLACK OR WHITE?



DP Architects' rooms were inspired by a blank piece of white paper, origami and pop-up books.

2ND FLOOR: ECCENTRICITY



Phunk Studio's mono-coloured rooms have a neon sign of a corresponding song title, such as Yellow Submarine.

1ST FLOOR: INDUSTRIAL GLAM



Asylum put a fun spin on the industrial element theme with an interesting mix of furniture and textures.

29 different rooms

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On the second storey are 11 rooms designed by Phunk Studio. Each room is mono-coloured – yellow, blue, orange, green or red – and has a neon sign of a corresponding song title, such as Yellow Submarine in the yellow room.

Mr Jackson Tan, co-founder of Phunk Studio, says the firm was inspired by “the colourful stories and characters of the people in the area”.

“As first-time hotel designers, we were mindful of the limited space and its functionality as well as the overall experience of the guest,” says Mr Tan.

Those who find Phunk’s riot of colours a little too much may prefer to stay in one of the nine rooms on the third storey designed by DP Architects. The rooms were inspired by a blank piece of white paper, origami and pop-up books.

While the corridor on this floor is all black, the rooms are mostly white with black accents. Five of the rooms have sharp, undulating ceilings representing paper folds. The remaining four have themes such as pop-out pictures of flowers and furniture.

DP Architects, which is behind public projects such as The Esplanade and the Singapore Flyer, was also in charge of configuring the building’s entire floor space.

Mr Little Ong, creative director of fFurious, designed the hotel’s nine loft rooms on the fourth storey. Creature Comforts is his theme for the rooms, “where friendly creatures welcome guests as they step into the rooms”.

In the Typewriter room, a giant typewriter doubles as a sofa enveloping guests. In the Tree room, a “tree monster” shelters guests with its felt canopy.

The overhaul of the hotel, which opened its doors to guests earlier this week, cost about \$4 million and took about 10 months to complete. Room rates start from \$180 a night.

While the designers had a free rein of what they wanted to do, DP Architect’s Ms Chua Soon Hoon was tasked to coordinate the different ideas.

She says: “We have to help ensure that we can keep to the designers’ intent and yet make their rooms work in real life and also to source for the right materials to achieve the effect and concept of the designers. It is actually harder to execute another’s concept than one’s own.”

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