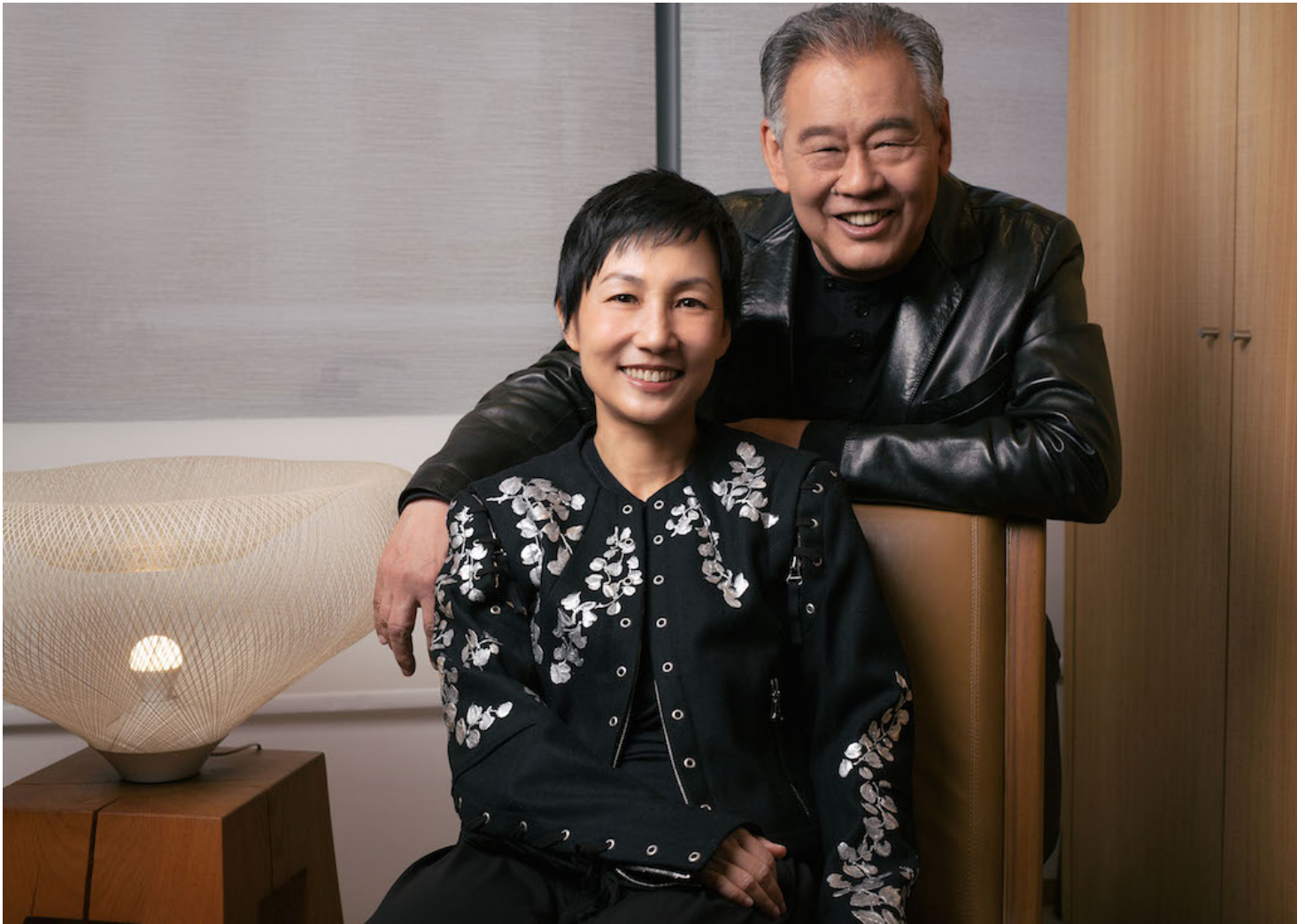


## In Conversation with LTW Designworks

We speak to the partners at the Pan-Asian design studio about storytelling, hotel design trends and why meaningful design matters.



*Su (left) and HL (right)*

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BY TAMSIN BRADSHAW

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The creations of LTW Designworks (<http://ltwdesignworks.com/home>) are on display everywhere from the Maldives to Lhasa, and in hotels by Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and The Lost Stone right through to global 'lifestyle hubs' for Kohler. The Singapore-headquartered design firm has made its mark all over the Asia-Pacific, and particularly in luxury hospitality. Here, we speak to the studio's partners, Lim Hong Lian (HL) and Teo Su Seam (Su), about original, authentic design.

### How do you keep your designs unique and different each time?

Su: By creating a sense of place, and giving each project a storyline. And by trying to stay true to transporting that concept into something tangible you can see.

HL: When we start work on a project, we carefully consider four issues. The first of course is the location of the project. A design should be culturally and geographically sensitive.

We also look very carefully at the architectural design of the hotel we're working on. The building form and function have to go hand in hand.

Then there's the end user – in this instance, we consider the hotel operator to be the end user. We need to design to suit each individual brand. Look at Marriott these days, for example; they have over 30 brands. Each of their brands has different values and specialties.

Then there's the investor's viewpoint. I think we need to listen to their perspective, but I would expect that they would want to listen to us to some extent too. After all, they engage the project consultant to get the project built on time and on budget.

### LTW was responsible for creating 321 guestrooms and suites, the spa and the public areas at the new Four Seasons Hotel Seoul (<http://www.fourseasons.com/seoul/>). How did you find working on this project?

Su: Four Seasons were very supportive of our design, because they realise they can no longer associate themselves with a specific look. They know they need to move forward with the times, giving each property a sense of place.

During the excavation of the site, they discovered this geographically and historically significant site; it's actually a Joseon-period path that leads to the palace. That was the starting point for the design concept.

HL: Sometimes when you want to design a hotel with a strong sense of place, the easy way out is to take something of that period or that culture, and cookie-cut, or reproduce exactly that pattern from that era and call it a day. But with this project, we extracted certain elements from the past and reapplied them in a contemporary way, and I think this was very successful.

### You work in hospitality design so often: what changes are you seeing across the industry?

Su: Many hotels are realising that they're starting to look alike. Their competition is now also with the likes of Airbnb. So they're starting to think about what they can do to revamp themselves. Moving forward, I think it will be about designing hotels that are not like hotels. Spaces will be a bit more relaxed, which is what I think the new generation of Millennials are looking forward to: new explorations, new experiences. The way we lay out has to loosen up and be a lot more flexible. You don't want to use a lobby lounge as just a lobby lounge anymore. Instead, you integrate other components into this space to make it more interesting.

HL: But if everyone goes the same way, you'll end up with the same problem.

Su: That's why the story is so important.

HL: You have to consider the brand's soul. I recently created two hotel brands for Artyzen Hospitality Group. One is to do with Chinese art, and the other is about conservation of craft. They're culturally sensitive. Hotels in general should go in that direction – they should convey something meaningful.

### What are you working on right now?

Su: Apart from hotels, we're helping Kohler create what they call the Kohler Experience Centre. In strategic locations around the world, they are setting up lifestyle spaces that designers can have meetings in; they can entertain in these spaces. And this way, Kohler won't be displaying its products in a boring, showroom format.

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