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Gut-Feel Architecture

LAYERING A CORE DERIVED FROM INSTINCT WITH COLLECTIVE MEMORIES, SHARED HISTORIES, COMMON CULTURE AND EVEN COMMON SENSE INFORMS BLINK DESIGN GROUP'S CREATIVE PROCESS

It all begins with a distinct concept, an overall prevailing idea," Christopher Chua, Associate Director – Architecture at Blink Design Group sums up the practice's design genesis. "The first impression is the right one," he continues, alluding to Malcolm Gladwell's thesis that is also Blink's adopted mantra. The thesis is worked out in Gladwell's book *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*. "All experiences in our lives merge to give us a 30-second predetermination on an outcome. Site visits, weather analysis, context and culture all contribute to give this idea more depth."

For Chris, designing a hotel or a resort, for instance, boils down to creating two important things – fantasy and functionality. "My personal approach always has been, first, to understand what the resort guests want in their fantasy and, second, ensure that the design concept works within the

hotel operators' expectations."

Chris believes that Blink's approach to design is distinct from other firms in that the practice does not have an 'architectural signature brand', but rather a 'design mantra signature brand' that is apparent in their portfolio. "We might use louvers, wavy lines, random patterns or green walls, but it's always clearly a Blink project because the design is specific to each and every individual project we do. There are no copies and there's no re-using the same method or design language."

Through the years, Chris explains by way of an example, the House of Dior or Chanel have changed creative directors who in turn presented different and distinct collection. "Yet there is an ever-present, distinct point of view that is based on the House's history and tradition. Our goal is the same: to ensure that the first direction is the one that is followed

through – and the rest of the design process adds layers to it. We collect all the ideas from everyone in the studio from diverse, new ideas to relevant personal memories and go from there."

At residential cum commercial project Clearwater Residences/Work @Clearwater in Damansara Heights, an affluent suburb of Kuala Lumpur, Chris spearheaded the construction of a new building next to an existing office to form a total lifestyle project. "I started to develop the project with initial ideas from Sim Boon Yang of Eco.id, turning them into 3D renderings and then I leapt into the rest of the design from there. Obviously, there were the usual problems of drawings, coordination, etc., but I learned so much from that project that I cherished until after I left Eco.id."

He is equally proud of the Hilton Goa project for the preparatory research that went into it which in turn resulted in the Goan village concept that they






adapted. “The bases of the main structures were inspired by the Portuguese colonial era and Goa’s beautiful laterite stone forts. We used fort-like walls and laterite widely at the base of the main guest room structures. The building also features elegant columns with stone bases and a lot of architraves, mouldings and scallops.” The outcome is not a colonial replica but something very contemporary and relevant, and solidly rooted in Goan culture and traditions. “Once again, it is all about context and a superseding design concept.”

Singaporean architecture is now very strong, says Chris. “Modern developments come up frequently; we see it in multitudes of new condominiums, each trying to distinguish itself from the next. In all truthfulness, however, they look the same. I’m afraid we’re slipping into a stream of homogenous banality.”

Modern buildings are rising in the rest of the region, Chris observes, but they contribute to the

retention of the architectural landscape. “Let’s pick Bangkok as an example: Look at Thong Lor – the old buildings that are being re-built around the area are respectful of what have existed before. Even with time’s passing, the neighbourhood retains its personality; it still looks like Thong Lor.

“We still have pockets of this in Singapore, from my neighbourhood of Geylang to Balestier, but day by day nearby buildings go down and new flashy condominiums come up with new building language. I’m afraid this will eliminate all context in the foreseeable future.”

Christopher’s family moved houses frequently when he was growing up, but each time he would fight the alienation and try establish a semblance of permanence and stability. “To keep myself feeling ‘at home’, I would decorate my room exactly the way it had been before – the way I worked, the way I placed my ambient lights.”  by Marc Almagro, Photos courtesy of Blink Design Group

A row of screened cabanas heightens the enjoyment of water features at Jumeira



Massive structures leavened with ample openings and broad courtyard define the Conrad Sanya



Small pockets of comfort are created in the ample courtyard where guests can enjoy al fresco treats



The use of screens creates drama and practical spatial treatments in the Regent Bali



The Hilton Goa (*right and below*) is created to evoke a Goan village whose character is expressed in fort-like structures constructed in laterite stones

