

writer Karen Fong

# ASIA'S top 10 SPA DESIGNERS

From architects to interior designers to spa consultants, it takes more than one person to create an award-winning spa. Design can come in many forms, from the exteriors of a hotel to the creation of nature-inspired interiors, taking into consideration the natural surroundings, the amount of light entering the spa, the comfort levels of the guests. Ultimately, passion for the work and a dedication to the environment has made these designers and architects our top choices for Asia.

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## Bill Bensley, Bensley Design Studios

"Design transcends disciplines. I believe all good design arises out of passion and the ability to draw inspiration from varied and multiple sources – as well as the ability to think laterally." So says Harvard-educated architect and landscape designer, Bill Bensley, whose most recent projects include the Anantara Resort & Spa Koh Samui, the award-winning Coqoon Spa at Indigo Pearl Phuket and the Leela Kempinski Udaipur in India. Known for integrating sophisticated structures with breathtaking natural elements, his work pushes the boundaries of traditional design and regularly favours stone, wood and ceramics. "I love to sculp stone because stone has a quality of permanence," he notes. Based in Bangkok with another studio in Bali, Bill derives a lot of inspiration from his Asian-based surroundings. "The best part about having our studios in Thailand and Bali is that I truly believe these places are home to the most creative and naturally artistic people in the world." As a motto, Bill refers to the Indonesian phrase '*lebih gila, lebih baik*', meaning 'the more odd, the better.' [www.bensley.com](http://www.bensley.com)



## Dan Bube, Design Bube

A dreamer at heart, Dan Bube creates a spa out of a story, basing it on anything that catches his imagination, from the history of the country to the owner's interests. "At the site, we look for significant features to highlight or obstacles to overcome," he explains. Dan believes his work on spas, including the recent Shangri-La Rasa Sentosa Singapore and Shangri-La Rasa Ria in Sabah Malaysia, allows him to interact with people who have a real depth or commitment to a cause such as environmental and cultural protection. Looking to the future, Dan has high hopes for more diversity and growth, citing "family spas" as something he'd like to see more of, as he believes "Kids should be encouraged to lose themselves in play more often and teach their parents to do the same." [www.designbube.com](http://www.designbube.com)

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## Ed Ng, AB Concept

Hong Kong-trained Ed Ng finds inspiration in local history, culture and geography. A fan of luxury spa and wellbeing treatments himself, Ed likes to position himself as the end-user when considering spa design and takes special note and consideration of the control of ambience and emotional quality of a space which must be done with both guests and staff in mind. "Spas are where people will focus on every single detail, both visible and invisible, that's why in some areas where guest will possibly walk barefoot, sub-floor heating is necessary. While the guests are looking to indulge in a relaxing experience, the therapists are working in the real world. For a spa designer, the biggest challenge is to create a space that is both functional and relaxing." [www.abconcept.net](http://www.abconcept.net)

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## Inge Moore, HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates

Principal of interior design, Inge Moore has been responsible for some seriously swanky spas including the ESPA at The Edition Istanbul and the ESPA at the Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong. She finds the chance to create intimate spaces for guests intriguing and believes that in a spa, "the body is more powerful than the mind" she says. For Inge, "the spa is the one place that guests can decompress and figure out elements in their lives they are often too busy to focus on. Therefore the space must not accost people with its complexity; these functions should always be behind the scenes, because the sight of that stray wire or flashing red light can induce feelings of edginess and weariness." Inge finds inspiration in her travels and keeps a box filled with mementos that evoke memories and feelings. "When I want to be inspired, I pull out these trinkets and use them to develop ideas that can translate into design concepts." On the horizon is the Raffles Istanbul Zorlu Centre. [www.hbaonline.com](http://www.hbaonline.com)

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### Jaya Ibrahim, Jaya International

The Indonesian-born son of a diplomat, Jaya Ibrahim initially started his career as a banker, but soon left the finance world to pursue a career in interior design, first in the UK and later back in his native Indonesia, which influences much of his style today. Recent projects have included Amanfayun, Capella Singapore and The Nam Hai in Hoi An Vietnam. In all his projects, Jaya aspires to create a sense of balance and harmony between the elements as well as between the materials chosen. Favouring a contrast of textures (rough/smooth, hot/cold, bright/subdued), Jaya believes materials used in spa design speak for themselves "That's why there's no pressure to impress and no need to think about decoration," he explains. For Jaya, "Asian style is about the materials, how they are combined what it does to the person who sees it, touches it and smells it, and the sensation that one feels being in the middle of it all. Be it peaceful, or exhilarating."

[www.jayainternational.com](http://www.jayainternational.com)



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### Alan A. Barr, BLINK

Having recently moved from New York to Singapore, Alan A. Barr is dedicated to creating timeless proprietary products that allow guests to connect with the experience. Already responsible for some of Asia's finest including the recently opened Jumeirah Dhevanafushi in the Maldives and the upcoming The Regent Phuket, Alan believes that Asian style and properties are largely defined by a sense of place. "Our designs holistically embrace each location, parcel of land, vernacular, culture, etc., to create a product that belongs. For our company, Asia style is about belonging." Alan cites "revolution, not evolution" as his company's signature style, ensuring each project is dynamically different from the next. For Alan, excitement builds with every project. "As the creators of intellectual property for our clients we crave the next design that has never been produced yet."

[www.blinkdg.com](http://www.blinkdg.com)



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### Richard Hassell, WOHA

One of the two founding directors of this Singapore-based firm, Richard and Wong Mun Summ were responsible for the awe-inspiring Alila Villas Uluwatu in 2009. Committed to creating environments that match the natural landscape as much as possible, Richard says, "The spa is one of the few times a guest truly comes alive to

their surroundings and the architectural experience. People move more slowly in a spa and have more time to experience everything." WOHA's design aesthetic is heavily focused on creating a sincere response to the terrain, using local materials where possible and avoiding trying to be too "fashionable". With a strong focus on permanence and authenticity, WOHA has infused a great deal of time into their projects, which have included the InterContinental Sanya Resort and upcoming Alila Villas Bintan.

[www.woha.net](http://www.woha.net)



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### Lim Hong Lian, LTW Designworks

Singaporean Lim Hong Lian studied in London where he worked in the design industry for hospitality before returning to Asia in 1979. Since then, he has worked on luxury properties around Asia, including the Mandarin Orientals in Tokyo, Hong Kong and Sanya as well as the InterContinental Puxi Shanghai. 'H.L.' as he is known, takes inspiration from basic factors such as location, culture and historical elements of a place and believes Asian design is distinctly divided into Oriental design (with Chinese, Japanese and Korean influence) and a tropical ethnic aesthetic. Looking to the future, he sees a change coming in traditional spa design. "From my experience, I see developers being less ostentatious, than say a decade ago, where one thought classic European style as luxurious and grand. With more and more people travelling overseas and having first-hand experiences, Asians are becoming more self-confident. Developers are being more discerning." His favourite part of a project? "Testing out the spa once the project is completed!"

[www.ltwdesignworks.com](http://www.ltwdesignworks.com)



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### Chakkraphon Manipanti, P49 Deesign

A specialist in hotels, resorts and spas, Chakkraphon Manipanti and his firm P49 Deesign have built some of Asia's most iconic spas including the Ayana Resort and Spa in Bali, Kaya Kalp – The Royal Spa at ITC Mughal in Agra India and the Anantara Spa in the Kempinski Hotel at Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi. With each project, Chakkraphon takes into consideration spa operator, destination, location, locality, local resources and materials, and of course budget before beginning. His goal he says, is "to study and create each characteristic to convey an unexpected spa journey to the guest." Having worked on spa projects across the world including in Switzerland, India, Bali and China, Chakkraphon has designed spas ranging from the flamboyant to the earthy. "Every project has its own unique characteristics and I adapt my design concepts to match each spa."

[www.p49deesign.com](http://www.p49deesign.com)



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### Carol Chng Hsi Yee, eco.id Architects and Design Consultancy

Singapore-born and raised, Carol Chng is responsible for spa design at eco.id whose projects have included W Resort and Spa and Kandooma Resort, both in the Maldives. She cites the former as being one of her most memorable projects, for which she created a story and experience to match the spa treatments. "Each project the company has worked on is different and unique," she notes, eschewing a signature style. "We see ourselves as custom tailors who create the perfect suit for each client," she explains. She lists stone and timber works best in spas due to their ability to evoke softer sensations and warmth but most important, "location is key." In the future, Carol sees spa design becoming a more competitive industry, very much as a result of the population becoming more well-travelled, and looking for more experiences to unwind or heal instead of just focusing on luxury. "The challenge in this instance would be to constantly create new experiences that reflect that change."

[www.ecoid.com](http://www.ecoid.com)

