

AN UNBLINKERED VISION

You don't have to attend Yale, Harvard, Oxford or Cambridge to become a successful business leader, although having studied at one of these institutions may help open a few doors. However, in today's dynamic world of commerce and industry, having a good sense of what's naturally right and believing that people will want to have your product is just as helpful. To put the icing on the cake, if you can form a coalition of like-minded souls, then you may be able to breed success.



Mr. Clint Nagata is a Hawaiian-Japanese national and perhaps as a result of this island characteristic he projects the belief that what he does for a living is just what people want to be associated with. Creative Director and Founder of Blink Design Group, one of Asia's rising design firms, Clint specialises in one of the hottest markets in Asia: hospitality. He needs to travel extensively to monitor the number of projects his firm's involved with to ensure that what was dreamed up in swish offices thousands of miles away is actually being translated into reality on the ground.

On a recent stopover in Bangkok, *In Residence* caught up with the much sought-after creative designer to find out how he's managing to drive the company he started five years ago from a regional upstart to a global powerhouse.

"I have never been too bothered about whom we are, but I am more focused on who we can be. I think this attitude reveals itself in our concepts and our designs as they follow this format. We don't want to copy ideas or trends that we're seeing today or even those we've successfully used in previous projects. No, we want to set the trend for tomorrow," says Clint. "We can't go off the art of thinking. It's my personal passion and I enjoy coming up with new ideas in the blink of an eye."

"We have never been told in detail what style to follow or what we must follow; it really comes from our own sense. My personal and natural sense of design is oriented to simplicity and elegance. As I am part Japanese, people generally think that the Japanese way is to create things that are very clean and simple and yet modern and elegant."

Clint's creative journey began in 1993 when he became a shareholder in Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo (WATG), one of the world's leading design and architectural firms. One of his first assignments was the Hawaii Convention Center and later he



assisted in other projects such as Atlantis in the Bahamas, the Venetian in Las Vegas, Abu Dhabi's Emirates Palace, the Four Seasons Wailea and the Hyatt Regency Kauai Resort & Spa.

In 2006, he established Blink Design Group (BLINK) with the vision of becoming a global player in the hospitality design industry. The company offers an integrated, end-to-end range of services and comprehensive solutions to the hospitality industry, including brand identity, master

planning, interior design and architecture.

Blink has designed hotels and resorts, restaurants, clubs, spas and residences for leading global brands. Each project undertaken is viewed as a platform for achieving something extraordinary and this has led to contracts with hotels such as the Conrad, Hilton, Jumeirah, Langham Place, Le Meridien, The Regent, Sheraton, Westin and a number of properties within The Luxury Collection brand.

"It's important to understand the position



of a hospitality project or what we are going to design. Asian should be Asian while the addition of a touch of the Western is always good. As a design firm, we have to keep in mind the taste, personality and character of our end-users and the target customers of a hospitality project. We try to tailor our designs to a specific audience in a particular area and market," says Clint.

"It's tough for me to identify the most challenging projects I've been involved in. I'm proud of every project because they are all so unique as I like to follow my heart and build places that have never been done before. I like to utilise my ideas in design and



knowledge to do different and new projects. You know, it's challenging to get out-of-the-box and do something that's non-traditional and unconventional," he says.

"I joined forces as a shareholder and director at Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo (WATG) in Hawaii. It's quite a big company, so I had a lot of support before I formed my own company. I didn't foresee that we'd grow so fast and have a headcount of more than 40 people. I knew I had to make a decision whether to continue growing and take on more and more projects or downsize and focus on small scale jobs. Then one day Space Matrix gave me a call to discuss the possibility of collaborating.

"It was not until I met Alan Barr, Director of Hospitality at Space Matrix that I knew we had the same synergy. We got off to a great start because we have the same vision and share the same personal background. The acquisition initiative helped us gain more identity and the credibility to support

our customer network. It also gave us the strength of overall operation and management.

"I love Thailand and I also love Thai designers. The acquisition has given us the chance to work in collaboration with other people in more than seven countries. I think it's about building the brand with the staff as they can learn and experience from people with different backgrounds. This collaboration helps diversify ideas with people from different cultures and regions," says the youthful looking designer.

Blink was recently awarded a contract to design two luxury 5-star properties for Starwood Hotels & Resorts' in Saminyak, Bali. The client was searching for exceptional and innovative designs and Blink won the day with its creative designs. The collaboration Space Matrix and Blink design teams will help the new luxury resort achieve an enchanting atmosphere and an inspiring design is guaranteed.

"What I have achieved over the years I have to credit my experience with WATG. This helped me form a network of people and some super connections. Also high on the list of helping me realise my dreams have been my Thai staff. I'd like to give credit to the amazing accomplishments of Blink to all of our Thai staff. This is one of the main reasons why I came to work in Thailand as Thais are much more creative and I really feel relaxed working with them. I always say to my Thai staff that working here is more challenging than working in Hawaii, Hong Kong or Singapore; everything here has to be very *Sabai Sabai*," he says with a smile. 🙏

Key Points:

Artistic skills are just as important as college degrees
Big ideas come from small beginnings
Blending cultural designs can lead to success
Always look outside the norm
Thai designers sharing global designs