

## ARCHITECTURE

# Space Matrix heeds call for innovation

KANANA KATHARANGSIPORN

The Singapore-based design firm Space Matrix aims to offer integrated, one-stop design service throughout Asia, helped by the acquisition of the hospitality architecture firm Blink Design Group.

Alan Barr, director of hospitality at Space Matrix, said having Blink as a subsidiary would help increase the company's business growth and expand to a broader scope of design.

"With Blink, we will become one of a handful hospitality design firms in the world that focus on design for the hospitality business from zero or pre-design advisory service," he said.

Sometimes, he said, hotel investors just have a piece of land but no idea what the hotel will look like, what star rating it should have, what brand it should choose, how many rooms and common area space it should have, and how much the room rates should be.

This is where pre-design advisory service comes in.

Mr Barr said Asia and especially China were emerging as a growth market for the hospitality design industry. This year international brands including Hilton and Starwood have undertaken huge expansion in China with a total of 400 hotels in the country.

"We will expand with an office in Shanghai next week because of huge opportunities there," he said.

Indonesia is another rising star. There are a lot of hotel investments, not from overseas investors but Indonesians, mainly in Jakarta and Bali.

In Jakarta, it is designing a lifestyle hotel and a business hotel while working on four resorts in Bali.

"The key element for hospitality design is how to attract hotel guests to stay and spend the whole period within the hotel," said Mr Barr, who is also



The QBE @ Gole Market in New Delhi, a "townhouse in the sky", is an example of how hospitality design is being applied to residential properties.

the creative director of Blink.

Established in 2001, Space Matrix has 11 offices in four countries including Singapore where it is headquartered. Thailand, Australia and India, an emerging market where it has offices in eight cities.

Apart from India, Indonesia and China, Macau is another destination with heavy influence on the hospitality design industry. Currently, the company is designing for the renovation of

The Venetian in Macau.

Founded five years ago by the Hawaii-based Japanese designer Clint Nagata, Blink focuses on hospitality services from pre-design, master planning, architecture and interior design to furniture and branding.

Mr Barr said hospitality design these days was increasingly entering the consumer sphere as well. There is a new trend of blending hospitality design into residential projects, an example

being the high-rise QBE @ Gole Market in New Delhi.

The "townhouse in the sky" development is designed into five cubes, each of which will have five floors with sales priced around US\$25 million per floor. The first floor of each cube will feature a pool.

"The project's developer wanted to do something different from the market by developing hotel-like concept into residential project," said Mr Barr.