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BLINK design moves into China.

Tuesday, 4th December 2012

Source : BLINK

BLINK Design Group's journey into mainland China has got off to a flying start, as Asia's 'hospitality aficionado' wins three key design projects in Beijing, Benxi and Hefei, secures an important award and opens a new office in Shanghai.

BLINK Design Group has recently won the Benxi project design - twin resorts located on the verge of Benxi's famous hot springs.



In less than a month, BLINK has embarked upon the interior design of the new Sheraton Resort Beijing, added a contemporary twist to ancient Chinese bathing rituals in the creation of two new resorts at Benxi's famous hot springs in Liaoning Province, and begun design of a new spa-lifestyle clubhouse in Hefei.

BLINK also picked up the Silver Award in Hotel Space for Jumeirah Dhevanafushi, a stunning resort in the Maldives, at the Asia Pacific Interior Design Awards 2012 announced last week in Hong Kong. This follows the Bangkok-based firm collecting one of the world's most prestigious global design awards, the Hospitality Design (HD) Magazine Award for World's Best Luxury Hotel for the Conrad Sanya, in May, 2012.

BLINK, which also has offices in Singapore and India and a stellar list of clients around Asia and beyond, has now also added a Shanghai office to offer a higher level of service to its growing portfolio of China clients.

"I'm delighted that we have won these three exciting and challenging projects in such quick succession," said BLINK Founder and Creative Director Clint Nagata. "China is the world's fastest growing, most dynamic and potentially most lucrative market for design, especially in hospitality, with so many new and refurbished hotels and resorts either coming on stream or in the pipeline.

"BLINK has now served notice that we plan to be a serious player in China and that we are here to stay," Mr Nagata said. "The Shanghai office opens this month and that will be critical in taking our recent successes in picking up work through the design process and to its conclusion.

"There's no substitute for people on the ground and on site, and this gives us the cost-effective capability to be able to offer just that. We're finding very much that in China, the client wants to be guided through the process. They relate to the design, but frown on cliches. You need a strong presence on the ground to keep things balanced and on track."

Mr Nagata said he was thrilled to win the Benxi project design, twin resorts located by Benxi's famous hot springs. "Our role here is as design architects, which means we are the main force driving the design direction and leading the client in trying to create a new hot spring resort typology for them.

"Blink's approach is providing a multitude of strong directions for the project. All of which push the limits architecturally and spatially," Mr Nagata said.

Christopher Chua, BLINK's Associate Director - Architecture and lead architect on the Benxi project, said: "These two resorts sit in a beautiful mountain-river spot. However, the hotels are surrounded by proposed residential and commercial buildings. The challenge is to provide the client with a design that is both urban, yet resort-like. Also to teach and guide the client in what it takes to develop a hospitality resort while trying to break in new ideas to take their existing hot spring ideals to another level."

Hot spring culture was 'such a grounded ritual' in China, Mr Chua said, so imbuing the familiar with new dimensions would be key. Both resorts married Chinese and European elements, merging operationally efficient hot spring operations with new spatial intent.

Clint Nagata (right), Creative Director, BLINK Design Group - 'delighted' to add projects in Beijing, Benxi and Hefei to the company's already extensive portfolio.

"Breaking down the entire built-up massing and spaces within to ensure that views, intimacy, privacy, grandeur, luxury are created throughout both resorts is our main goal," he said. Design began in April 2012, with construction set to complete in two years.

Sheraton Resort Beijing, on the other hand, sees BLINK being called upon to create an escape from the urban chaos of city life. "This is a real challenge, as we must create a genuine oasis in the big city, but one where guests can also seamlessly do business if they so desire," Mr Nagata said.

Yoo Eng Chia, BLINK Associate Director - Interiors and lead on the Sheraton project said the location was very scenic, but also quite barren at certain times of year. "So we had to make the interiors stand out, rather than rely on breathtaking views. It's cold, it's a difficult landscape, so we have adopted a design that uses screens, natural lighting, natural stone, wood and a feeling of warmth."

BLINK had also lent special focus to creating a gallery feel with detailed artworks that would make guests pause as they made their way along the resort's long corridors.

"For the all day dining restaurant, the concept is a trip down memory lane using streetscapes - bringing street themes into all day dining," said Ms Yoo, whose last completed project was the recently opened Four Seasons Hotel Guangzhou. "It is not a typical 5-star restaurant but a little bit edgier.

"For example we sourced old railway station clocks which are strategically placed in the restaurant - bringing the old stuff sometimes ignored or overlooked." This stunning new chapter in the Sheraton legend in China is expected to be completed in Q1, 2014.

Mr Nagata said he was also excited by the Hefei project, but could not disclose full details yet. "I can say it is a big one, with the scope covering master planning, architecture, landscape design, interior design and product branding of a themed hotel and a spa clubhouse and villa development."

BLINK is expanding quickly beyond China as well, and is delighted to be the design agency behind the new Regent Phuket and Regent Bali, and plans to be instrumental in the rebirth of a classic Asian hotel brand with Regent properties in Taipei, Indonesia and China to bear BLINK's hallmark of instinctive design backed by painstaking research, local knowledge and experience.

"These are interesting and challenging times for BLINK and I'm proud of the team for making such great strides and in picking up these prestigious projects in Asia's key gateway cities and resort islands," Mr Nagata said.

Mr Nagata added: "These are all projects we have picked up due to BLINK's unique approach that blends bespoke quality with intuitive expertise and inspiration drawn from the being open to going with our instincts. That's the BLINK difference."

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