

CEO INTERVIEW: YOTEL'S HUBERT VIRIOT SHARES HIS MARKETING SECRETS

MIDDLE EAST

# Hotelier

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL HOTEL MANAGEMENT

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## A BUMPY RIDE

The *Hotelier Middle East Salary Survey 2015* results are in.

With economic and political instability impacting performance and pay packets, hoteliers are bracing themselves for the year ahead

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## Designing for the seasons

Clint Nagata of Singapore-based design firm Blink Design Group talks to *Hotelier* about his interior design for the new Alila Salalah, and being inspired by the Omani Khareef

By Sarah Williams

**T**he region's next Alila Hotels & Resorts property, to be based in Oman, is scheduled to open in the second half of 2017 in Mirbat east of Salalah, a coastal town in the Dhofar governorate in the southwest. The Mirbat property is home to a surprising microclimate in the Arabian Peninsula, an area most famed for its heat. From July to September, it experiences a wet season, called the Khareef, when the desert is drenched in torrential rain, transforming it into lush greenery.

Clint Nagata, founder and senior creative director at Blink says the Khareef phenomenon will be referenced throughout the interior design of Alila Salalah, with a monumental structural feel, exaggerated scales, and a strong dialogue between the interiors and the landscape architecture.

"Salalah is one of a few places in the region that has such a climatic condition. Our interiors are subtly inspired by the colours and patterns of the tropical plants," he explains.

The group's first property in the region was Alila Jabal Akhdar, which opened last year in the Al Hajar mountain range of Oman and incorporates the surroundings into its design — down to minute details such as the mountain rocks being part of the structure and décor. Alila Hotels & Resorts

focuses on each location's specific features and tries to incorporate that into the design.

It also has an eco-friendly, sustainable ethos, purchasing local produce and participating in the Earthcheck operating standards programme.

"Most people believe that sustainability pertains only to architecture," says Nagata.

"However, a hotel's sustainability also relates to the interior design. For this project, as we do for all of our projects, we chose to source locally.

"This reduces our carbon footprint while also helping to create a design that fits into its context. Also, since Salalah is in a sub-tropical environment, we have designed the buildings to encourage natural ventilation."

Nagata brings an impressive résumé and array of experience to the project, having worked on properties for major brands such as Six Senses, Jumeirah Group, Mandarin Oriental, Rosewood and Hilton's Conrad, in locations as varied as the Maldives, Thailand and Indonesia.

Educated at the University of Hawaii, Nagata is influenced by Sri Lankan designer Geoffrey Bawa, and has won numerous awards for his design, including making the *Condé Nast Traveller* Hotlist and winning the Hospitality Design Award. However, while Nagata and Alila are both com-







### IN THE FRAME

1 Clint Nagata, founder and senior creative director at Blink Design Group.

2 Fairmont Sanur Beach Bali, a project designed by Nagata.

3 The bathroom of Regent Cape Panwa Resort, designed by Nagata.

4 Regent Phuket Cape Panwa Resort, another of Nagata's previous projects.

5 Alila Jabal Akhdar, Oman — with design by WS Atkins and P49Deesign.

mitted to incorporating the locality into their design, Nagata is careful to avoid this being merely a curio cabinet for the surroundings.

"There's a fine line between being a museum and being a hotel. In hotels it's important to have art and artefacts incorporated, but they should be carefully chosen and located.

"I think that as an interior designer, it's most important for me to create the right experience, which may very well mean that both art and artefacts become secondary," Nagata asserts.

Alila means 'surprise' in Sanskrit, and the idea of surprising and delighting guests forms part of the brand's guest experience goals. The resort will house 100 suites, 25 villas, fine dining restaurants, and a spa and Alila wellness centre, and will "bring forth a community of discerning travellers", who appreciate the green environment and a retreat which complements the area, according to Alila CEO Frederic Simon.

Nagata echoes Simon's sentiments, saying that his interior design will blend with the resort's architecture, which will in turn fit in with the surroundings. He explains

how the overall vision for the resort is to be in harmony with the environment in which it exists: "We have chosen materials and natural, subdued colour tones that are locally inspired to instil a sense of the region."

The development is the second, but possibly not the last Middle East resort in the group's pipeline. Julian Ayers, regional VP of Alila Hotels & Resorts says the company would love to have a resort in Mussandam, and Oman is a location that continues to pique its interest.

"We're thinking of doing a chain of [resorts] about three or four hours apart so you could drive through the desert and stop off at each one," he told Hotelier last month.

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Clint Nagata

And Alila's sustainable ethos is also evidenced in many of its operations, including achieving the government's 80% Omanisation target.

Furthermore, Alila Jabal Akhdar recently became the first resort to join in with Omran's Farming for Hospitality initiative.

The programme first gives traditional Omani farmers the training they need to farm with more modern methods, and then it provides greenhouses so that they can grow varied produce throughout the year. Finally, it connects the farmers with hotels, which buy their produce.

"We recently experienced our first yield of vegetables, a portion of which was sold to Alila Jabal Akhdar Resort. Since my first sale the resort has been in continual communication with me to enquire about future harvests and sales. This has given me great confidence as I know there is a constant market for my fresh produce," says local farmer Ahmed AlShariqi.

And with Blink and Nagata firmly on board with the sustainable ethos, Alila Salalah looks set to be the next big green thing in the desert. ■