



Staying fit

Seven top executives and heads of property development companies reveal how they keep themselves in shape while sharing their views on the growth prospects for the Malaysian property market in 2013

A state of fitness

There is a growing trend towards a healthier lifestyle among Malaysians. This can be seen in the expansion of fitness and wellness centres, demand for organic food and health supplements, and the amount of fitness equipment and products that have flooded the market.

In the property sector, developers too are finding that it pays to offer a healthy lifestyle concept to buyers and residents.

Many builders, especially the younger generation, are aware of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and follow their own fitness regimes.

City & Country recently invited several top property executives to tell us how they keep themselves and their companies in top form (page 6-12). They share the belief that keeping fit physically translates into better work performance.

On what they foresee for the local property market, they were generally optimistic and expect a more active market after the 13th general election, which must be held before April next year.

Magna Prima Bhd CEO Datuk Rahadian Mahmud Mohammad Khalil, who hits the gym often and is into Muay Thai, believes the Malaysian property market will continue to remain healthy. He sees strong demand for properties that will be coming up in some of the growth

areas where infrastructure projects are being implemented.

Holding a similar view is Wing Tai Malaysia Bhd's Lim Hooi Yen, head of marketing and sales, property division. Lim, who attends regular Pilates classes, says, "Our property industry in general will still be very steady and resilient next year and the years to come, but no doubt some sectors and locations may fare much better than the rest."

The implementation of major infrastructure initiatives like the mass rapid transit (MRT) project has drawn interest to areas once off the radar of property investors, a development that Chan Chee Kian of Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd is looking forward to. "We are excited about the prospect of the MRT coming into service in the Klang Valley, which we believe — together with other projects like the River of Life — is going to bring life and growth to areas which were under-served in the past," says chief investment officer Chan, who is an avid runner.

PPC Glomac Sdn Bhd project director Choong Wei Min, concurs. "The outlook for 2013 is still selectively optimistic where certain areas will experience rapid growth and demand," he says. Mega projects in the Greater KL area, such as Menara Warisan, the MRT lines and Tun Razak Exchange, will attract investors and boost the

property market, says Choong, a sports enthusiast who visits the gym regularly.

Meanwhile, Mah Sing Group Bhd's Jane Leong says developers will need to hone in on buyers' needs and wants and provide products that suit their lifestyle and aspirations. Malaysians still believe that property makes good investment sense, hence demand for property will remain strong, she says. Leong, who is deputy general manager of business development and investment, enjoys group classes like body combat.

As for Colin Tan of Hatten Group Sdn Bhd, he says the market may slow down in the first quarter but will pick up after that. Tan, who is managing director of the Melaka-based developer, visits the gym and runs to stay in shape.

Datuk Lai Yeng Fock, who heads several special purpose vehicles, including YNL Properties Sdn Bhd, sees the market as being in a state of consolidation and adjustment. "The financial institutions and the government have imposed several steps to curb speculation and I think that is healthy for the market," says Lai, a former national cager in the 1980s, who takes brisk walks daily to keep fit.

The Malaysian property market looks to be in a healthy state, and it looks like some in the industry are ensuring that they keep in peak condition and are ready to face any challenges the new year may bring. — *By Wong King Wai*



From left: Lim, Leong, Lai, Chan, Tan, Rahadian and Choong strike a fitness pose for the photoshoot at CHI Fitness in Damansara Perdana

Chan Chee Kian

Chief investment officer, Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd

Ireka Corp Bhd has completed more than RM4 billion worth of projects since early 2000, including those with its associate company Aseana Properties Ltd. About RM2.34 billion worth of projects are in Vietnam. Among the developments undertaken by Ireka are I-ZEN@Villa Aseana, I-ZEN@Kiara II, Sandakan Harbour Square, SENI Mont'Kiara and Tiffani by I-ZEN. The London-listed Aseana Properties was initiated by Ireka in 2007 for development activities in Malaysia and Vietnam. Ireka's subsidiary, Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd, is the exclusive development manager.

What type of exercise do you engage in regularly?

I have been an avid runner for the past 1½ years. I have run two marathons and will be taking part in my third in a few weeks. Running is probably the easiest and simplest form of exercise. All you need is a pair of running shoes and the proper attire. I like it for its simplicity and convenience in getting a good workout.

What benefits have you received from your exercise regime personally and professionally?

Personally, it has helped me stay in tip-top condition fitness wise. Beyond that, running has taken me to places I probably wouldn't have ventured to otherwise. When I travel, I make it a point to have a run in the city or locale that I'm visiting. That has opened my eyes to the lives of the people there. The most memorable were from peering into the gritty living conditions of camps or tents of construction workers in Gurgaon, New Delhi, witnessing the Vietnamese perform their morning line-dancing routine in parks, and watching surfer dudes and dudettes off the coast of Waikiki.

Running has allowed me to experience the urban landscape of a city from a human scale. For example, in Singapore recently, I had the pleasure of running through the newly completed Gardens by the Bay and across the Marina Barrage. Seeing how Singapore has transformed Marina Bay and the surrounding areas over the years was an interesting insight to me as a developer.

Running has also made me look forward to the annual *The Edge-Bursa Malaysia Rat Race*. Sport, I believe, transcends generation, class and personalities.

How do you achieve work-life balance?

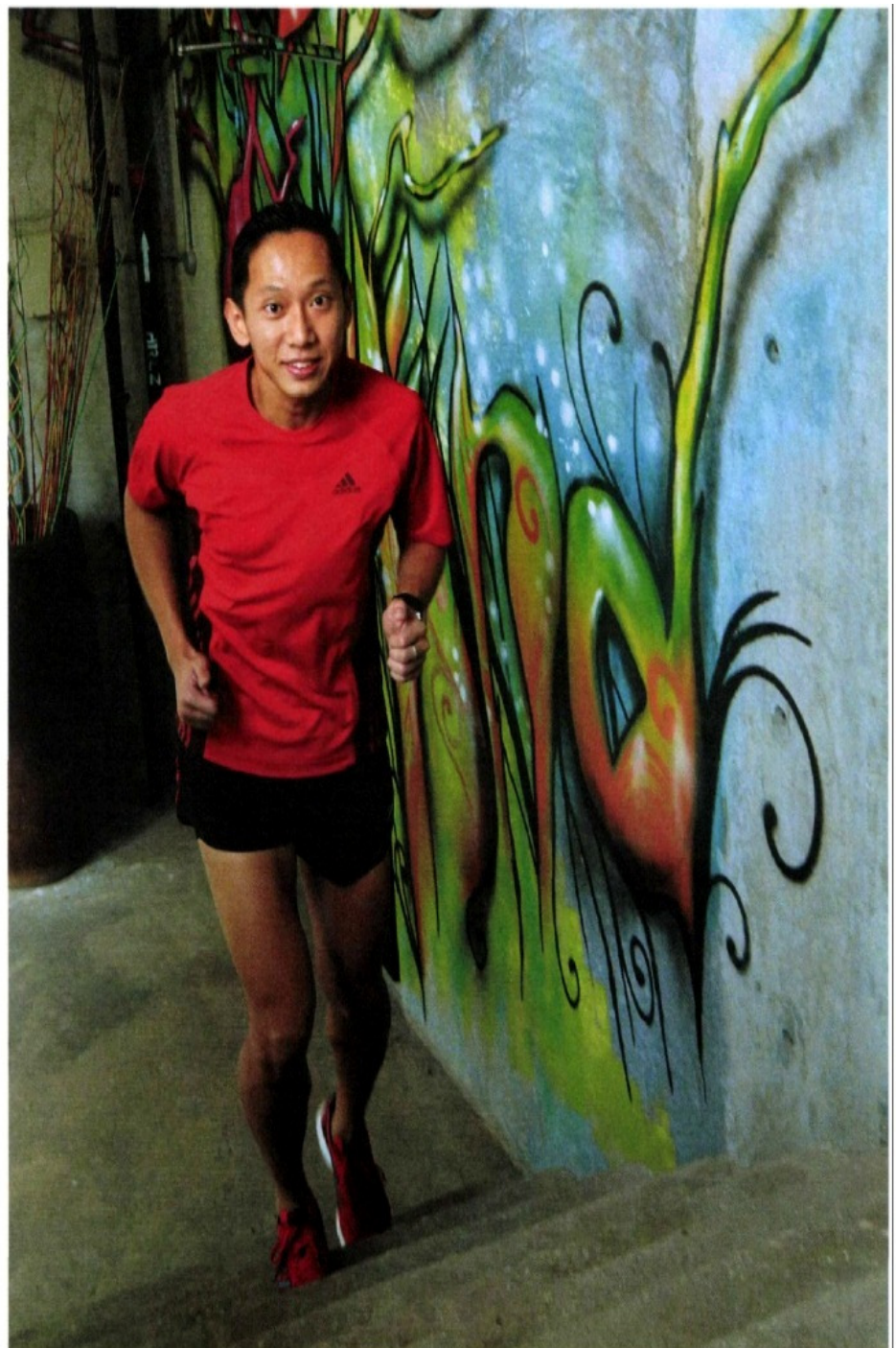
I'm blessed in that I live really close to where I work so that saves me at least 30 to 45 minutes a day in commuting time. Running doesn't take up much time. I run early in the morning, about 6.30am or so, so that it doesn't interfere with my work and family life during the day.

Describe the health of your company?

It has been a challenging year for us in terms of business conditions. The property market has been soft for a good part of the year as we see a mismatch between actual demand and the credit tightening on the high-end property sector. The construction sector was slow in translating to actual contracts on the ground in the early part of the year. However, we are now pleased to be involved in the construction of a high-end serviced residence in Iskandar Malaysia and with the mass rapid transit (MRT) works in Kajang.

Having said that, 2012 has been a milestone year as we have completed several of our key developments such as the Seni Mont'Kiara luxury residences, Harbour Mall Sandakan and Four Points by Sheraton Sandakan Hotel. This momentum will continue into early next year when we complete the Nu Sentral Office Towers and open the Aloft Kuala Lumpur Sentral Hotel, as well as the City International Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

We have launched the Kasia Greens super-link houses in Nilai and the first release has achieved sales of 71%. That will lead on nicely to future releases in Kasia Greens as well as a new development adjacent to it in 2013. We have also recently unveiled The RuMa Hotel & Residences project at Jalan Kia Peng, KLCC. We have created a unique product that we think



will capitalise fully on its prominent location.

With these projects, and others in the pipeline, we look forward to improved times in 2013. Ireka is, and will always be, in the construction and property business for the long run. To run a good long race like a marathon, one needs to have endurance, resilience and adaptability. These traits are the hallmarks of Ireka's track record. We'll continue to put one foot forward at a time and pursue sustainable growth no matter how tough the conditions are.

Describe the health of the Malaysian property market. What is your outlook for 2013?

There has been much talk about the market being frothy with prices having risen significantly in certain sectors and a seemingly abundant supply in the high-end segment. Sure, there are certain segments of the market where supply has exceeded demand, and vice versa, but if you take this over the context of a slower global economy and real increases in costs of property development [land prices, construction costs and compliance costs], these temporary dislocations in market forces are bound to happen. We believe these will be ironed out over time.

Properties in Malaysia, in general, have never disappointed buyers as a wealth creator over the long term ... the keyword here being 'long term'. As such, we applaud the government's

initiative in addressing the issues of affordability, directly by setting up PRIMA and indirectly by addressing the nation's 'middle-income trap'. This ensures sustainable growth of the property sector and country over the long term. However, we hope that the government will not, in the short term, 'punish' sensible investment decisions by tightening the credit market further or ratcheting up the RPGT or stamp duties. Short-term vibrancy in the market is needed to attract investments, particularly from abroad.

We are also excited with the prospect of the MRT service in Klang Valley, which we believe is going to bring growth to parts of the city that have been underserved in the past. There is already talk of MRT 2 and 3 and this will bring areas like Mont Kiara and Bangsar to a whole new level.

In the coming years, we think there will be room for well-crafted, high-end hospitality and residential development in Kuala Lumpur. Leading this trend was the opening of The Grand Hyatt recently with others like Banyan Tree, St Regis Hotel & Residences and W Hotel & Residences in the pipeline. Ireka's The RuMa Hotel & Residences is also pegged at this level. We believe these new developments are set to push the property and hospitality sectors to a whole new level. Success will depend on Malaysia attracting investment and tourist dollars over the coming decade.