

FEATURE

Live, love, loft!

Aloft Kuala Lumpur Sentral may be a new kid on the block in the local hotel scene but it comes backed by Starwood Group's vision of the W Hotel. Ireka's president and CEO tells DIAN PASQUINAL KAUR about the trendy hotel that aims to be the city's modern, fresh and fun destination.



LAI VOON HON, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF IREKA DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

THE ribbon to Aloft Kuala Lumpur Sentral was cut on March 22 to unveil a hotel that is unlike any other in the city. The 482-room hotel radiates with a rather unconventional panache, reinforced with raw, rough and an unfinished ambience.

The modern minimalist ground floor lobby area is peppered with distinctive features such as the chrome-plated Caisson columns with LED light strips, exposed pipeworks lining the ceiling, the undulating wall at the escalator area, shiny pure white floor and walls of the Re:fuel kiosk constructed in Profilit channel glass. Ingeniously designed by renowned architect Edward David Poole, who also designed the hotel's all-day dining outlet, the lobby alone is worth writing home about.

Developed by Aseana Properties Limited and project managed by Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd – companies with good and enviable records of taking property appreciation to another level – the hotel aims to draw both leisure and business travellers looking for an A+ experience.

“Every little detail of Aloft KL Sentral was infused with the DNA of Starwood Group’s much acclaimed W Hotels, a modern and refreshing concept with loft-inspired design and free-flowing energy. It’s spacious and cosy at the same time. I believe Malaysians are ready for this whole new travel experience,” says Lai Voon Hon, president and CEO of Ireka Development Management when met just a few weeks after the busy opening week.

Aloft Hotels, conceived by Starwood in 2005 and dubbed the “vision of W Hotels”, is most notable for its modern design and atmosphere that encourages socialisation. It has cleverly renamed its facilities with quirky names. The pool is referred to as “splash”, reception area as “Aloha desk” and meeting rooms, “tactic”. Dressed casually in white tee and jeans, staff – hired through a walk-in audition *a la* talent show – greet guests with a cheerful “Aloha!”

Malaysia’s first Aloft hotel is constructed to be forward-looking without any historical



YUSOF GAJAH'S FAMOUS ELEPHANTS ARE APLENTY ALONG THE ROOM CORRIDORS



SPACIOUS, 11-FOOT-HIGH CEILINGS AND MODERN FURNISHINGS ARE A COMMON FEATURE



NOOK, AN ALL-DAY DINING OUTLET THAT IMBUES MODERNITY

architecture with works of Australian artist Tony Twigg's 165 carved timber sticks series entitled *Five Sticks in Any Order*.

Initially, Lai was worried that the bold and overtly hip ideas may be too much for the Malaysian appetite but at Ireka, pushing boundaries into new territories and challenging design norms is often done with aplomb. Ireka previously developed, owned and managed The Westin Kuala Lumpur, a five-star award-winning hotel. It was opened in 2003 and went on to receive numerous hospitality awards. The 443-roomed hotel was later sold in early 2007 for a record price of about RM1 million per room.

With such a proven track record, we can only expect the best. Lai says his team has tried their best to incorporate music, technology and design into the hotel and present a never-before-seen product to the market. "Ireka believes in setting benchmarks. It's been a pleasure putting forward this product, which is the largest Aloft Hotel in the world to date."

Aloft KL Sentral definitely has all the elements to launch itself as the place to be for savvy and sassy travellers. It ticks most of the boxes in terms of feasibility and has

definitely set the bar high for modern, trendsetting and edgy hotels in this country.

reference, aptly labelled by Lai as industrial hip. "We've taken some inspiration from sci-fi movies, believe it or not! But mostly we've incorporated new designs that we think will work. Industrial-led designs are getting particularly trendy in modern cities like London, Paris and New York and this trend is also evident in their public buildings."

Lai says each time he walks through the hotel, he feels like it's a stage play that changes every day. "The guests and staff are the actors, who play very important roles," he stresses before adding that the hotel space is the perfect background. "It all translated very well and I believe the end product met our objective. The design team did an exceptional job."

When asked about the features of the hotel that are particularly meaningful to him, Lai acknowledges there are too many but he is particularly captivated by the Proflit glass feature, especially when the backlights come on at night and make the glasses glow. "I love the harmonious colour-play, it doesn't clash and is very trendy. I also like the different pods at Nook. The capsule seating with lime green hair-on-hide, quartz table tops and curved glass that surrounds the area gives it a feel of travelling first class on international airlines," he says.

Each Aloft Hotel adheres to a set template but is

localised according to the venue they are in. "We came to a decision that the best way to exude the local identity is by employing artworks that depict the Malaysian lifestyle. We wanted famous cartoonists to tell a story in each of the rooms and we found Antares, formerly known as Kit Lee, to have a very interesting way of portraying Malaysians." Eighteen of his works can be found in the different rooms.

Along the room corridors, naïve artist Yusof Gajah's colourful elephant paintings add pops of colour to the hallway. It's impossible not to take a moment to soak in his quirky works. At Nook dining area, two large oil paintings of the Rafflesia flower by Lam Lee Siang calls for appreciation. The Mai Bar, located at the roof level overlooking an infinity pool, boasts a Polynesian tiki-bar

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THE W XYZ BAR AT THE GROUND FLOOR IS A GREAT PLACE TO MEET