



## Urban Outfitter

Hotelier extraordinaire Markus Engel explains what separates The RuMa Hotel and Residences from the rest of Kuala Lumpur's luxury hotels, why he feels so at home in Malaysia and his fondness for travelling with shoe trees.

**Y**ou'll know you're staying in one of Markus Engel's hotels by its sense of generosity, intuitive service and trademark guest experience philosophy of 'hostmanship'. With a 25-year career in luxury hospitality up his well-tailored sleeve, the co-founder and CEO of Urban Resort Concepts (URC) is perhaps best known for creating The PuLi Hotel and Spa in Shanghai, which was launched in 2009. He has since expanded URC's collection of luxury urban resorts to include The PuShang Hotel and Spa in Xiamen, The PuXuan Hotel and Spa in Beijing, and - most excitingly - The RuMa Hotel and Residences in Kuala Lumpur.

Interview by **RENYILIM**



**We're confident that our product will have a disruptive quality to it** – in a very positive sense, of course. It's always astounded me that Kuala Lumpur, which is such a mature environment with sophisticated consumers and seasoned travellers, has no hotel that embraces the zeitgeist of a society that's among the leaders of lifestyle consciousness in the region.

**There's nobody as generous, inclusive and intuitive as URC.** People are tired of hotel brands making promises they don't deliver on or becoming more petty and bureaucratic by effectively treating guests as a room number. That's something we're reversing entirely.

**The challenges that many hoteliers impose upon themselves** are not necessarily the ones we look towards. The hospitality industry is very fast-paced and there's a lot of discussion about where its future lies, but we've

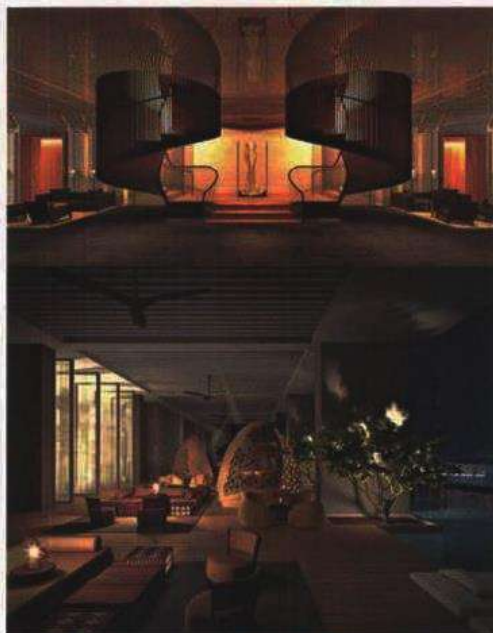


removed ourselves from that by going analogue. After all, which is nicer: a flashing light on your TV with a message or someone delivering a beautiful handwritten note in an envelope with a tactile, personal quality?

**It's been an extremely productive relationship collaborating with Datuk Lai Voon Hon** of Ireka Corporation on The RuMa. He's helped us enormously along the way by opening many doors for us to express some of our creative ideas and notions – the quirkiness and whimsical references that we wanted to make.

**My first foray into hospitality was as a bartender at the age of 17,** without any knowledge of how to even mix a gin and tonic. I was left to run the bar by myself, and the end result was that it started to do extremely well! I was promoted to bar manager and was offered an internship to study hotel management.

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As the CEO of Urban Resort Concepts, Markus Engel is responsible for strategic development and expansion of the company, determining the hotel's positioning, design and programme, as well as consulting with owners on the sales and marketing of each hotel.

**This is very much a homecoming for me,** as I was part of the original opening team at The Datai in Langkawi, and Malaysia has stayed very close to my heart. In fact, the idea of creating URC was born in Malaysia, so by rights, this was the perfect scenario for us to come back.

**It's immensely satisfying being able to create a product that people embrace and totally enjoy experiencing.** At The PuLi, we have such an interesting environment because you can have Giorgio Armani sitting at the back of our lobby, Jonathan Ivy at the bar and a Korean rock star checking in at reception – all simultaneously, without clashing.

**I'm currently re-reading *Crowds and Power* by Elias Canetti.** It's a pretty weird and abstract book, but quite fitting for the time in an ever-increasingly democratised world.

**I always need to bring enough shoes with me when I'm travelling,** even if that necessitates carrying a second suitcase. Oh, and shoe trees – especially if my shoes are by Berluti or Tom Ford. ■