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The Pavilions Phuket

The law of design

BY LEONA LIU

Hong Kong-based lawyer-turned hospitality entrepreneur Gordon Oldham's The Pavilions Hotels & Resorts group has built a host of sensational getaways in far-flung locations. He explains why good, sustainable design is crucial to his business

You founded and spearhead the law firm OLN (Oldham, Li & Nie Lawyers); what inspired you to expand from law to hospitality and branded real estate?
Wanderlust, basically. My two core passions have always been travelling and adventure, so the opportunity to create something new and inspiring in places where people love to explore made perfect sense. If you build it, they will come. If you create magic, they will invest and come back.

Why are your hotels called The Pavilions?

The name is inspired by the epic romantic novel *The Far Pavilions* [by MM Kaye], and also represents a place to seek shelter and safety – a place to call home.

What words would you use to describe the brand?

Adventure, romance, art, culture.

What does luxury mean to you? Which property in your portfolio is the most luxurious, in your opinion?

Luxury is not about how much money you spend, it's about the experiences you have. Like beauty, luxury is in the eye of the beholder and all our properties offer a distinct luxury of their own.

What does good hotel design mean to you? How does it contribute to the business?

The best hotels are designed as if every guest was a business partner and an honest critic – but also a valued friend. Finding the right balance of private versus social, convenient versus unique, is not only crucial for attracting guests, it is essential to a hotel's operations. Design plays a central role in all these distinctions and is therefore one of the key pillars of success in the hotel business.



The lavishly decorated Pavilions Lisbon, due to open in 2020



Pavilions Hotels & Resorts founder and CEO Gordon Oldham

What qualities do you look for when appointing architects and interior designers?

I look for experience in conceptualising the type of property I intend to build, and for a deep understanding of the nature and culture of the location where I want to build it. I also like to work with people who are willing to challenge me, but only with ideas and proposals they can justify.

For the newly opened Madrid hotel, how did the collaboration with Studio Marincola Architects come about?

It was really a no-brainer to bring back the team at Studio Marincola, who designed The First Roma, our art-inspired award-winning hotel in Rome. Studio Marincola showed a real commitment to innovation, but also have the utmost respect for the proud and colourful history of the Spanish capital, which is incorporated throughout The Pavilions Madrid. For example, besides featuring artwork from budding Spanish artists, there's also a nod to Madrid on the soft furnishing patterns used in the guest rooms, and even a lobby sofa inspired by the city that's carved into the shape of a bear [a symbol of the capital].

Which property in the portfolio posed the biggest challenges in creating the hotel; and how did you tackle them?

The Pavilions Lisbon – our stunning property that will open in 2020. The hotel incorporates two stand-alone 19th-century listed buildings, so we have to adhere to strict building codes in order to preserve the original architecture. The buildings feature fabulous artworks and mosaics, but it's quite a challenge to create a hotel with operational functionality. The final result will offer guests a beautiful stay in the Portuguese capital and a totally unique experience.

The Pavilions Himalayas resort was noted at Perspective's 40 Under 40 Awards forum in Hong Kong for its sustainability. Is this an important element in your group's philosophy?

Sustainability is fundamental to The Pavilions philosophy. Take the properties' locations for example; all the resorts and residences are either surrounded by stunning natural scenery or magnificent human heritage. In both types of destination, our aim is always to enhance, preserve and respect the location and to support the local environment and culture.

The Pavilions Himalayas, co-founded by my close friend Douglas Maclagan, provides a special example of our commitment to sustainability. The resort is 100 per cent eco-friendly and also a social business designed to show the world that the more you give as a business the more you get back. It achieves sustainable growth, which in turn funds its social activities and makes the destination a better and fairer place for those who wish to work in the fastest-growing global business that exists today – tourism and hospitality.

The Pavilions is tapping into residences again with the Niseko project. Why are so many hotel brands entering the residential market?

In the right location, and at the right time, hotel-branded residences are the ultimate win-win scenario. From a business point of view, they offer an obvious advantage because residential sales help finance a larger project so that developers can build and meet their revenue targets faster. This is crucial in a highly competitive marketplace where maintaining quality and meeting deadlines both have a significant impact on success. From a buyer's point of view, hotel residences offer a rare combination of lifestyle benefits with an appealing opportunity to also enjoy healthy returns on investment or rental income. ■

pavilionshotels.com