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The Kempinski experience

Europe's oldest luxury hotel group, Kempinski Hotels, will be managing KSK Group's 8 Conlay integrated development in Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle. The RM4.5 billion project is the first for KSK's property arm, KSK Land, and Kempinski's maiden venture in Malaysia. The partnership promises to take the hospitality sector to the next level. **Rosalynn Poh** has the story on Page 4.

KSK Land managing director Joanne Kua and Kempinski Hotels CEO Alejandro Bernabé

Taking luxury living to the next level

BY ROSALYNN POH

In case you are wondering what is that special something that Kempinski Hotels proudly stands for, it is — as CEO Alejandro Bernabé puts it — service. The brand is well known among discerning travellers looking for not only luxurious accommodation but also impeccable service.

Kempinski Hotels, established in 1897, is Europe's oldest luxury hotel group and has a portfolio of 75 five-star hotels in 31 countries, with more in the pipeline in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In November 2014, the group signed a management agreement with Malaysian developer KSK Group Bhd, via KSK Land Sdn Bhd, for 8 Conlay, a large-scale luxury development in the heart of Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle.

KSK Group has since been busy showcasing its partners — Kempinski Hotels, RSP Architects (Hud Bakar), interior designers Steve Leung and YOO for Tower A and B, as well as landscape designer Kob-kongsanti of Trop.

Kempinski Hotels started its first venture in Berlin, Germany. So, what better way to get the Kempinski experience first-hand than a trip to the iconic Hotel Adlon Kempinski? The hotel may not be the first managed by Kempinski but it has been described as a national treasure and a landmark in Berlin.

The drive from Tegel Airport took about 30 minutes. At the hotel, no one can miss one of the city's most important monuments just a few metres away — Brandenburg Gate. According to the official city portal, Brandenburg Gate was erected between 1788 and 1791, and became a symbol of a divided city. Visitors used to climb an observation platform to catch a glimpse of the world behind the Iron Curtain, which separated East from West Berlin both geographically and politically. Following the reunification of Germany in November 1989, Brandenburg Gate was then reinvented to become New Berlin's symbol of unity (see story next page).

The plaza right in front of it is packed with visitors throughout the day and surrounded by several embassies and an art college, and of course, Hotel Adlon Kempinski. The Reichstag building, the seat of the German parliament — another historic landmark — is visible from the hotel. In fact, most of the city's landmarks are within walking distance, as we discovered during a four-hour walking tour.

When we arrived at the hotel, and took the few steps from the car onto the red carpet to the revolving door, it felt like we were being transported into one of those romantic old Hollywood movies.

The lobby, which oozes old world charm and luxury, was bustling with customers. One can only imagine how it was back in the day.

We were warmly welcomed by managing director Emile Bootsma and the staff, as well as some Ladies in Red — another proud creation of Kempinski (see story on Page 12). Ladies in Red can be described as brand ambassadors or guest relation representatives, whose aim is to give personalised services. Dressed in (as you may have guessed) red from head to toe, they were hard to miss. It all began at Hotel Adlon Kempinski, where there are currently five of them, with every Kempinski Hotel having at least one.

Their touches were evident throughout our stay — from the welcome cards and chocolates placed on the table to greet us almost every evening to occasional little notes from them.

The food — from the delicious breakfast spread to



PICTURES BY KSK LAND

For us in KSK Land, we wanted a partner who truly understood it is all about the service. — Kua



the fare served at Sra Bua by Tim Raue and the two Michelin-starred Lorenz Adlon Esszimmer — was unforgettable. Delicious cuisine and impeccable service ensure that the restaurants are packed with patrons, even on weekdays.

Kempinski in Malaysia

Kempinski Hotels has been present in Asia for a long time now, says CEO Bernabé. The hotelier currently manages 76 hotels worldwide, including in Indonesia and Thailand. Upcoming hotels to be managed by Kempinski include those in Malaysia and the Caribbean.

Its first venture in Malaysia will be managing the much-anticipated 8 Conlay.

8 Conlay, which sits on almost 4 acres and has a gross development value (GDV) of RM4.5 billion, is the first project for KSK Group Bhd's property arm KSK Land. Cash-rich KSK Group, which aims to be a diversified conglomerate, was formerly known as Kurnia Asia Bhd and is involved in the general insurance business, with a presence in Indonesia and Thailand.

"Our debut project is a fully integrated development.

8 Conlay has three components — branded residences, retail and 5-star hotel and hotel residences. It sits on a 9-storey podium. The tallest tower is 68 storeys and we will have a rooftop bar with an unobstructed 360 degree view," says Joanne Kua, managing director of KSK Land.

The branded residences — called YOO8 serviced by Kempinski — will have two towers. Tower A, to be launched this Wednesday (Nov 18) will offer 564 units while Tower B will have 498 units. The built-ups range from 700 to 1,308 sq ft, with an indicative average price of RM2,700 psf.

Says Kua, "We're here to take luxury apartments and luxury living to the next level — and that is how the branded residences came about. There are three main components to them. One is architecture — and what it means for us is liveable and sustainable architecture. We have one of the top architects in Malaysia, Hud Bakar. Second, good design. We are working with YOO and Steve Leung in collaboration with John Hitchcox and Philippe Starck. Impeccable service is the last piece, and this is where Kempinski comes in."

An artist's impression of
8 Conlay in Kuala Lumpur

Brandenburg Gate and Hotel Adlon Kempinski

PICTURES BY KEMPINSKI

Brandenburg Gate (picture) is both a landmark and symbol of Berlin with over 200 years of history, according to the official Berlin city portal. A symbol of a formerly divided city, it drew visitors who used to climb an observation platform to get a glimpse of the world behind the Iron Curtain on the other side of the barren "death-strip" that separated East Berlin from West Berlin, geographically and politically.

When Germany was reunified following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Brandenburg Gate was reinvented as the New Berlin's symbol of unity. It was officially opened to traffic on Dec 22, 1989, and 100,000 people came to celebrate the occasion. Unfortunately, this resulted in severe damage to the monument, which needed to be restored. It was officially reopened on Oct 3, 2002.

Hotel Adlon Kempinski (then Hotel Adlon) was the first hotel with running tap water, an elevator and warm water in Berlin and was sought-after by travellers, including diplomats. During World War II, most of Berlin was destroyed but Hotel Adlon survived. Unfortunately, four days after the war ended,



it burnt down with little of it left standing.

Hotel Adlon Kempinski was rebuilt and opened soon after the reunification of Germany and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. The luxury hotel has welcomed many famous personalities, including Queen

Elizabeth II and Charlie Chaplin.

Anyone remember the time when the late king of pop Michael Jackson dangled his then nine-month-old baby from a hotel balcony back in 2002 and the tabloids had a field day with it? It was at the Hotel Adlon Kempinski. ■



Hotel Adlon Kempinski is just a few metres away from the iconic Brandenburg Gate

angles and puts the pieces together. 8 Conlay gets the snowballing effect and it gets better and better each time," says Kua, who is also CEO and executive director of KSK Group.

"For example, we announced Kobkongsanti of Trop as our landscape designer a few months ago. People thought landscape would come at a later stage but for us, it should be right from the beginning," she says. "He plays a major part of the development as customer experience should be right from the start and it has to be seamless. It should start right from the time you walk into the development, as you step right through your door ... what you experience ... and you can only do that if collaboration starts from an early stage.

"We wanted to share it with you and that's why we brought you here to Berlin," Kua tells a group of visiting journalists from Malaysia. "This is where Kempinski started. For us in KSK Land, we wanted a partner who truly understood that it is all about the service. From our own personal experience, Kempinski popped into our minds. We travel a lot and they have so many hotels. There is the same high level of service no matter which hotel you go to," Kua says.

At the same time, each hotel is different — depending on the local culture, taking into consideration the owner's personalities, together with Kempinski's per-

sonality. "We wanted 8 Conlay to create something unique and be put on the global map. People who buy and live in branded residences are very discerning buyers. They have a good eye for everything and have high standards. Every city that they go to, they expect the same service. There is a level of expectation for everything from design to service."

How did it all come about?

Bernabé says, "We are so excited to be in partnership with KSK and I do not think we can find a better partner. We're a privately owned company. Why is this important? It is because we, to a certain extent, are in control of our future. We do not have any pressure to grow the company tremendously. We want to grow but we want to grow with quality. We are extremely selective with the type of property or whom we engage with. It is not just the building or interior design of a building but who we do business with and what is the reason."

Bernabé, who was appointed CEO in 2014, is currently based in Bangkok, and was previously vice-president, Southeast Asia. He says he was then looking after the development of the business in the region. "Kuala Lumpur or Malaysia is extremely important. We had properties in Bangkok, Jakarta and soon,

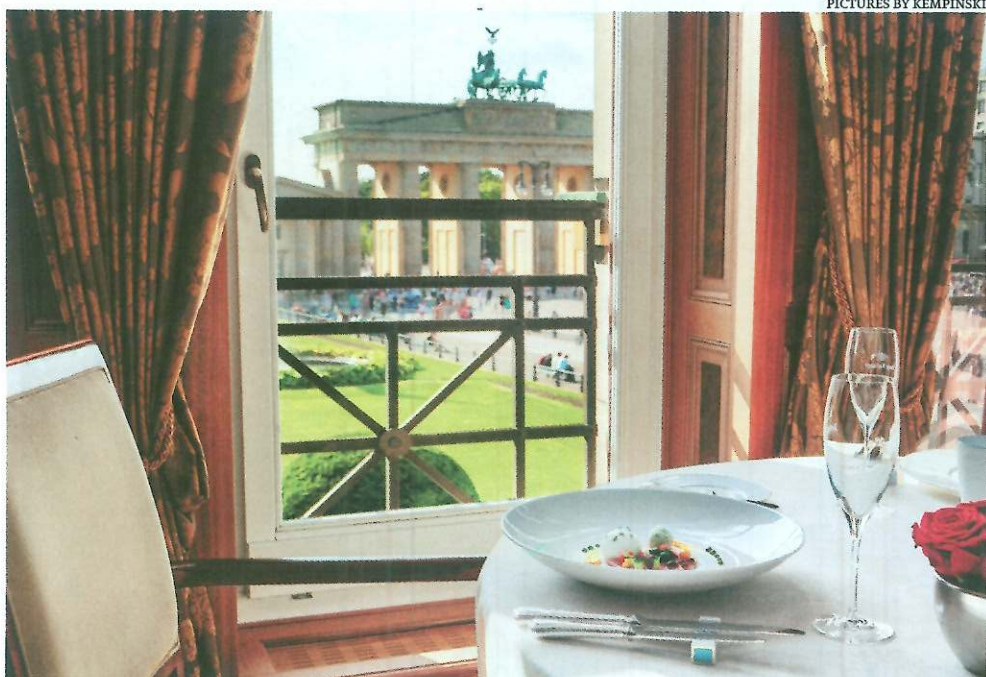
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8 Conlay facts

- Location — Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur
- Land size — 3.95 acres
- GDV — RM4.5 billion
- Development comprises — 2 branded residences towers (YOO8 serviced by Kempinski), 1 hotel suites strata (Kempinski), a 9-storey podium (4-storey retail space, 5-level basement car park, 5-storey car park and 1 banquet hall)
- Price — RM2,700 psf (average)

The company does not just want to sell an apartment, but a lifestyle and luxury living at its finest, she adds. "What does that mean for people? We had to go out and find partners who would really share this vision from the start. Why do we say they are our partners and why do we say we collaborate? It means finding partners and everyone comes from different

PICTURES BY KEMPINSKI



Brandenburg Gate is a city landmark that lies just outside the hotel

New approach to everything is very exciting, says Bernabé

FROM PAGE 5

in Bali, as well as many properties in China. Kuala Lumpur is part of this axis and what we were looking for. It's an incredible city. I love the fact that it is a very vibrant city but at the same time, very green. It is still very cultured and local," says Bernabé.

"We were interested in Kuala Lumpur but not just for the sake of being in Kuala Lumpur. I met Joanne and the whole team and we listened to them — what were their plans and what they wanted for the project. I personally fell in love because the location is great. You're in the business district but still surrounded by greenery. Very close to the best shopping centre — not really next to it but close so it's still private. The development with the three towers gives us an opportunity to attract different people and provide different types of services and experiences for different components.

"We were very fortunate that KSK decided to proceed with Kempinski. It is a long-term vision that we feel very comfortable with. Since then, I can only say that it has only got better, just as Joanne said. Because it is very exciting — the new approach to everything. They question everything. They want to find better ways to do something instead of replicating it but always keeping in mind who is going to live there and experience it. We are extremely excited about the other partners Joanne has mentioned. The whole team is fun to work with. When we go for



KSK LAND

Bernabé: It is a long-term vision that we feel very comfortable with

meetings in Kuala Lumpur, there is a vibrant and positive energy and that is what will make this project successful," Bernabé says.

Kua says the decision to go with Kempinski took about three months. The contractual part, getting into the important details, as one would expect, was lengthy.

"It is like a marriage — we don't want to get into it for one day. We want it to last for a long time. But the decision to go ahead with the partnership was quite fast," Bernabé says.

"KSK Land was established just two years ago. The entire project has a GDV of RM4.5 billion. The day we bought the piece of land was the day we actually started KSK Land. We announced the partnership with Kempinski last

Ladies in Red

It all started back in 2009 when Kempinski conducted extensive interviews with hotel owners and guests and found that what was needed was a high level of personal service. The first Lady in Red started at Hotel Adlon Kempinski and today, there are five of them there. Every Kempinski hotel has at least one. They are described as Kempinski brand ambassadors, with the red standing for European luxury.

All guests are welcomed by a Lady in Red, who will be their first contact with the hotel. If they have any questions or wishes, she will make it happen.

Planning to propose in front of Brandenburg Gate, or want a cake for a special anniversary or birthday celebration? The Ladies in Red will make the necessary arrangements, and work closely with the concierge team. They will make courtesy calls to the guests to make sure they are fine, and know everything about the hotel including internal procedures.

Why red? First, it is a very eye-catching colour and a Lady in Red should always be visible to guests. The designs they wear may vary depending on the culture of the country they are in, but will always be Valentino red. And everything they have is red — from their folders and business cards to nail polish and lipstick.

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Every Kempinski hotel worldwide has at least one Lady in Red

November. It usually takes longer to get these contracts. You can negotiate whatever contracts you want but I think it is that marriage, that chemistry you find with each other and that understanding that you want to create that vision together, wanting to bring it to reality, putting our heads together and throwing ideas around ... I think that is the crux of it," she says.

Standard and à la carte services expected

to be provided by Kempinski Hotels for the branded residences include concierge, butler and maid services, 24-hour room service and a private chef, housekeeping and laundry. There will also be limousine service, arrival preparation service, and residence unit maintenance packages so that residents can enjoy services similar to that received by the hotel guests.

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Learning from its first development

FROM PAGE 10

Star City is the second mixed-use development of Leadmont Group — its first was Centrestage in Section 13, Petaling Jaya.

Established in 2000, the developer started with pocket residential developments in the Klang Valley. These include Amansiara in Selayang, Leadmont Hill in Cheras and Avenue D'Vogue in Section 13, Petaling Jaya.

Ng says the company learnt a lot from developing centreSTAGE, especially the tenant mix and putting a hospitality element into a project.

centreSTAGE comprises 352 serviced suites, 789 designer suites housed in two blocks of 11 and 14 storeys respectively and five levels of retail lots.

"The mixed-use development was launched in 2011. The company sold off all the retail units. The management later realised that they had problems drawing the crowds because of the tenant mix," Ng explains.

Thus, Leadmont Group has no say in the tenant mix and the planning of retail events — the owners find their own tenants and they do not attach great importance to bringing in more variety to the mall, he says.

However, things improved when the group brought in Best Western hotel — it helped attract people to Centrestage, bringing customers to the retail component.

"The retail business there has improved; we

can see new tenants coming in. It's growing at a slow but steady pace," says Ng.

Holiday Villa in Star City

After the lesson learnt from Centrestage, the developer decided to add a hospitality element to the Star City development.

"We were looking for a well-known local brand and Holiday Villa fits our requirement. It is also interested to expand its presence in the area as there are not many choices of hotels here," says Ng.

Upon its completion in 2017, the four-star Holiday Villa will have 306 serviced suites as well as meeting rooms and a banquet hall.

Ng says the company is also urging Majlis Perbandaran Selayang to promote Selayang as a tourist destination — it has natural recreational areas such as Batu Caves and hot springs.

Although Selayang has been left out of the public rail transport mega projects, Ng says Star City will still benefit from the spillover effect from the neighbouring areas, such as Kepong, Sungai Buloh and Jinjang, which have mass rapid transit (MRT) and light rail transit developments.

"We plan to provide shuttle bus services, fetching people from the nearest MRT stations to our shopping mall. With the shuttle bus service and good traffic connection to the mall, we believe Star City will attract people to shop, play and eventually live and work here," he says.

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