

Living & Property

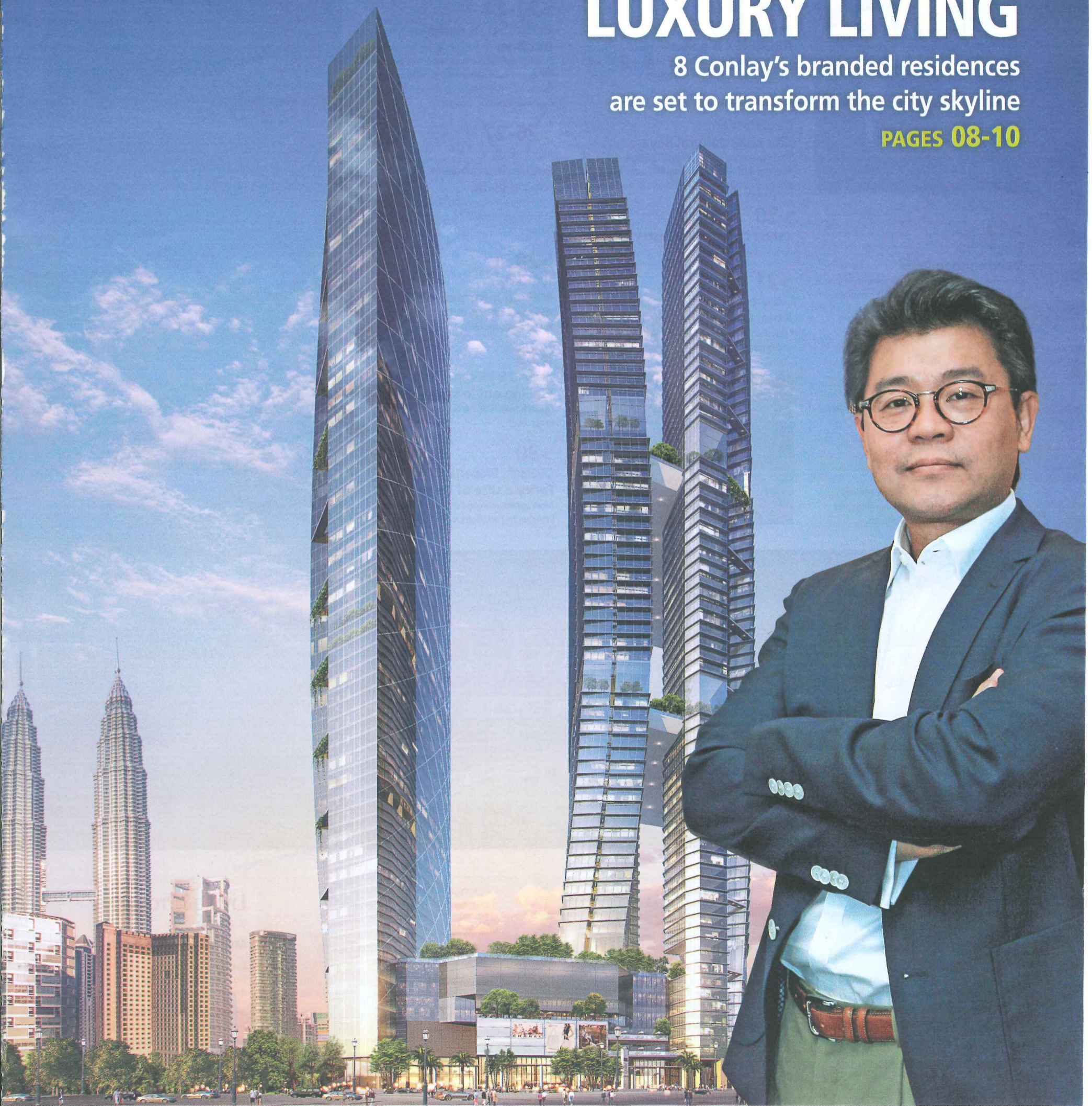
ISSUE 09

Enabling a better life

LANDMARK IN LUXURY LIVING

8 Conlay's branded residences are set to transform the city skyline

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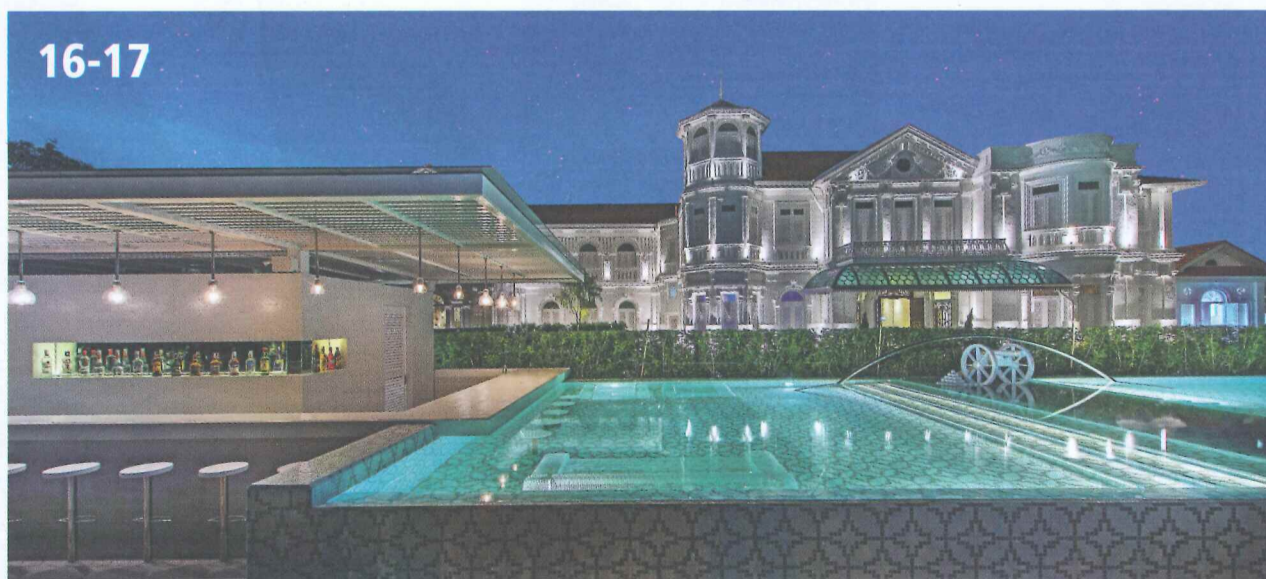
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Icons in our midst

FAR-FLUNG or near, famous landmark buildings remind us of the very nature of their iconic status reflecting not only the era and expressions of the culture of their time, but also the aspirations underlying their very existence.

Take for instance, the One World Trade Centre in New York, ranked fourth place as one of the tallest skyscrapers in the world. Owing its sleek architecture to the creativity of David M Childs of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), the rise of the 104-storey glass tower from a cube base that transforms its shape from the 20th floor into eight isosceles triangles at a site nearby the 9/11 memorial, certainly testifies to the power of architecture to inspire.

Closer to home, blue-chip developer Tropicana Corp Bhd has engaged SOM to dream up its most ambitious development to date alongside VERITAS Architects, the executive architect. Anchored by the W Hotel occupying the lower levels of the tower, The Residences will epitomise the art of living life to the hilt.

The savvy developer will offer a dozen attractions on its 53rd floor — from soaking in a salt pool to being close to nature surrounded by a sky forest — almost like reversing the order of nature, but in an ingeniously possible way.

Imagine, it was only years ago when what is being planned now would have been conceived as something impossible springing from an overly fertile imagination!

Not to be outdone is KSK Land Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of the KSK Group Bhd headed by Joanne Kua which is putting in place its well conceptualised plans for its maiden branded residences in 8 Conlay. Kua relates that skeptics have said that what they are trying to achieve is an impossible dream. Not to be deterred, the team finally found like-minded brand partners who share their dreams and vision.

Backed by an A-list line up of talents with Hud Bakar, director of RSP Architects conceptualising the architecture of 8 Conlay, poised to be among the world's tallest swirling residential towers once completed, things are starting to take shape. Pok Kobkongsanti of TROP (Terrains + Open Spaces) was also in town to share his landscape design concept of an undulating jogging track on the adjoining 44th level of 8 Conlay that pays tribute to our mountainous rainforests.

Branded and iconic residences aside, this issue also pays tribute to the movers and shakers of the industry who are at the top of their respective game.

This includes Singaporean Syddal Wee, who grew the stature of Space Furniture into a household name in the Lion City and has now moved over to Macsk. Its Singapore showroom was set up in a record six months — much to the amazement of the Italian principals. So impressed are they that they are using the Macsk Singapore showroom as the benchmark standard for Asia.

Singaporean Colin Seah of Ministry of Design has also refurbished Penang's old mansions into stunning modern day hotels. We also pay tribute to prolific architect Hijjas Kasturi's illustrious career through the years.

What fascinating examples of the power of passion at work. To paraphrase Khalil Gibran: "If you love what you do, you never have to work a day in your life" rings true for them whose creative passion for achieving the impossible make them icons in their own right.

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A-list architect of our time

Ar. Hud Bakar's midas touch is poised to transform the projects he designs into stunning landmarks, with his latest architectural concept for the swirling towers of 8 Conlay set to be among the world's tallest

| Text by YVONNE YOONG | yvonneyoong@hckmedia.com

There seems to be a law of natural attraction that gravitates Hud Bakar, director of RSP Architects, towards designing prestigious developments spanning the globe.

After all, he has the enviable claim to have conceptualised the spectacular architecture of award-winning buildings and accolades of which other firms can only dream of. All these creations and more precede the achievements of this prolific architect who is an alumni of the University of Berkeley, California in the US.

Leaving an impressive trail of landmark buildings comes naturally to RSP Architects which has won more than 200 awards in over 30 categories for work that has been described as cutting-edge. Many indeed are the elegant creations now enshrined in an ever-growing list of accomplishments.

"For me, the 'given' elements in architecture are its practicality and design fit for its purpose. It must be appropriate to its *genius loci* where it is situated. The real challenge is to design a building that has a soul and moves people. By doing so, certain perpetual economic and social values are attached to the building forever. It becomes a monument of time," he shares.

Armed with over 25 years of experience in designing small and large scale projects, the architect who advocates the concept of "liveable architecture" is famed for his contemporary and clean-lined design creations.

Completed RSP Architects' projects include the understated architectural elegance of the five-star Hilton and Le Meridien Hotel Kuala Lumpur (completed in Dec 2003) and The Interlace in Singapore (Sept 2013) with the dramatic stacking of 31 blocks retaining a sense of privacy via eight interconnected courtyards with easy way-finding via barrier-free access.

In striking contrast to the corporate skyscrapers of the Gurgaon business district, the luxury business hotel known as Oberoi Hotel in India showcases the ingenuity of incorporating the glowing "jewel box" architecture strategically positioned above a pristine water feature promoting a green oasis framed by tropical gardens.

RSP Architects' brand of distinctive architecture has taken high-end living another notch higher as exemplified in the luxe finishes of the St. Regis Hotel & Residences in Singapore (Sept 2008). Also making a statement in the Lion City is the amorphous cladding and organic design of the ION Orchard & The Orchard Residences (Oct 2010) birthed out of recreating the original orchards to reflect the growth cycle from seed to tree. The development has now become the "centre of gravity" on Singapore's famous shopping belt.

RSP Architects' multi-disciplinary professional practice has grown in stature to encompass over 1,000 staff members with offices spanning Malaysia, Singapore, Dubai, India, Vietnam, Ghana, China, London, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

Besides meeting the tall order of designing prestigious developments world-



PHOTOS BY DD HOE

Hud's artistic sketches for the swirling towers of 8 Conlay marrying two connected platforms on levels 26 and 44. (Top right) The architect with his masterpiece creation



wide, the firm's footprint in Malaysia is concentrated in Kuala Lumpur (where he is based), Penang and Johor.

Putting KL on the world map

Bearing further testimony to his creative talent, is the iconic 118-storey Warisan Merdeka tower scheduled to be completed by 2020. His firm is the executive architect of the tower that will occupy the historical site of Dataran Merdeka, an enduring symbol of national pride.

"The world of architecture is ever changing. While height does not necessarily mean being the best in architecture, at 118 storeys, Warisan Merdeka will definitely re-establish Malaysia on the world map of super high-rises which are getting higher and higher. The country's architecture is an important yardstick as it is a symbol of the nation's progress," he analyses.

"Mature architecture" he says, is definitely one of the measures of a developed nation as apart from creating value, good design reflects the people's thoughts and aspirations. In that respect, architecture plays an important role in charting the country's progress and status.

"Our government has promised to take steadfast action in getting us to become a developed nation by 2020. Accordingly, it is important for our architecture to follow suit and even lead the nation towards this grand plan. We have passed the 'quantity' era to move to the 'quality' era. Apart from first-class maintenance, we need 'mature' designs in our buildings. 8 Conlay is designed to fit in and lead this order," he says.

Hud is the architect for 8 Conlay, KSK Land Sdn Bhd's maiden property undertaking. KSK Land is a subsidiary of KSK Group Bhd (formerly known as Kurnia Asia Bhd).

"Establishing a new benchmark for branded residential development, 8 Conlay will definitely add to KL's already interesting skyline. 8 Conlay's swirling shape will be an exciting piece of architecture. Its unique form, which is the first-of-its kind here, will be a new landmark in residential buildings that is world-class in design. The soaring twisted towers exceeding a dizzying 60 storeys will be one of the tallest twisted towers in the world. The unique forms and the technological advancements to construct such a building will definitely lend a role in showcasing Malaysia's capabilities in achieving developed nation status."

Poised to tower over the heart of KL at about 285 metres (935 ft), Hud says that 8 Conlay's height exceeds the curvy configuration of the residential condominiums of Absolute Tower in Ontario, Canada, also known as The Marilyn Monroe Towers; Sweden's Turning Torso and the Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower in Shinjuku, Japan.

"In Dubai, the Infinity Tower makes a striking statement at around 307 metres (1,007 ft), probably one of the tallest. These are some of the world's tallest spiral residences," he says.

Likening 8 Conlay's parallel in KL to creating a buzz like that of the Walkie Talkie and Cheesegrater landmark developments gracing the new areas in London, he believes that it will be the talk of the town once completed, being also situated nearby the Petronas Twin Towers, a symbol of the nation's success.

"In terms of height, the Twin Towers definitely makes its mark, but at 61, 57 and 68 storeys, 8 Conlay is not just about height. Its unique building form is a fresh change in symbolising status and success not only against other buildings around KLCC, but also for discerning buyers fortunate enough to afford a piece of this jewel," he observes.

8 Conlay's Tower A and Tower B have interconnecting platforms on levels 44 and 26 while the standalone Tower C will house the Kempinski Hotel and hotel suites.

The lifestyle retail quarters on the elevated nine-storey retail podium serves to complement the overall architecture with the rooftop garden situated above the retail podium roof area cascading downwards on both sides.

Your Place, Your Story

Joanne Kua, managing director of KSK Land who is also group managing director of KSK Group says 8 Conlay is designed to be a new benchmark in high-end retail, hotel and branded residential development. Working alongside to realise the dream is an A-list team of international talents who will complement the architecture conceptualised by Hud.

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Iconic landscape designer



An artist's impression showcasing part of the undulating landscape design features that will grace level 44

BANGKOK-based design director Pok Kobkongsanti of TROP (Terrains + Open Space), the renowned landscape design firm from Thailand was included in the initial stages of the planning details for 8 Conlay.

"Pok has worked with Bill Bensley (a top landscape designer) and he has come out on his own and made a name for himself in Bangkok," Kua enthuses adding that Pok was brought in to continue the story of the architecture to the landscape.

Pok, who is known for his cleverly executed landscape design feats, attributes his design philosophy to the famous proponent of martial arts, the late Bruce Lee.

"Bruce Lee taught everyone to be like water. He said that if you put water into a cup, it becomes a cup. If you put water in a vase, it becomes a vase and if you put water into a teapot, it becomes a teapot. To me, it's the same concept. To become like water, the landscape has to be thought of as an open space. I therefore scout the landscape first to create the open space so that eventually, the landscape becomes the teapot and the open space becomes the water.

"What we try to create is the experience of how we are going to use that space that is invisible. I adopt the 'Be (like) water' philosophy because every time we undertake a project, it's in a totally different context and world. One has to adapt, be flexible and open to get all the inspiration for a particular project before deciding on the strategy. Even if I were to do another project in KL, it would be a totally different concept."

Wanting to create something "very modern, tropical and yet sustainable" — and not an environment that you notice at first but get tired of seeing eventually, he chose to do a landscape design which would grow on the residents, so to speak.

Using the concept of the mountainous areas of Malaysia's tropical rainforests, he designed an undulating jogging track with multiple platforms for different pathways and routes on level 44 that encircle the triple volume space.

In creating the concept of the hanging gardens on level 26, he borrowed inspiration from the idea of dewdrops forming droplets that grow bigger and bigger until they finally drop down to form a pathway that becomes a sheet of water in the infinity pool, complemented by two reflective side pools as well as a heater pool and spa pool overlooking the Twin Towers.

"We want level 26 to have the best pools in KL, and probably in Asia. We played around with the key word 'reflections' and will be incorporating a reflective ceiling besides a special space deck with spa seats, Jacuzzis and a children's pool," he reflects.

Even the rooftops of both towers A and B would have their respective sky or roof gardens.

Pok will also be working on the 9th floor separating the hotel and retail components. A series of landscape designs combine with the water features to emulate the concept of a waterfall using trees that are local, practical and easy-to-maintain to promote sustainability.



TROP design director Pok was inspired by the mountainous tropical rainforest and incorporated this concept in his landscape design for 8 Conlay

PHOTO BY SHARIL AMIN ABDUL RAHIM

Cover Story

Building the 8 Conlay dream

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"I think what is most important is that everyone shares the same vision with the architect and the conceptual idea of the architectural design for 8 Conlay, which is actually bringing the *yin* and *yang* factors together," says Kua.

Hud's design for 8 Conlay in which two concave and convex shapes embrace one another in an abstract form and the curvy, spiral-driven landmark architecture named after the auspicious golden address of the site, received rave reviews from the other international brand partners.

"8 Conlay's curvy spiral represents harmony in duality. There's male and female, black and white... There's always harmony in things. Therefore, we wanted to create the harmony in living between man and the built environment," says Hud.

"At the end, the 'bold stroke' comes from the site address itself – No. 8. The building's form is inspired by the articulation of this auspicious Chinese character. The form is then twisted to soar 68 storeys high to capitalise on the magnificent views. Along with the rooftop sky gardens and two mid-level sky gardens, the green recreational areas are quadrupled from its original ground cover footprint."

Together with a five-star hotel and a retail boutique, 8 Conlay's branded residences cater for the finer things in life. It is designed with a private drop-off, layered security and multiple landscaped levels promising breathtaking views all around.

Hud speculates that upon its completion, 8 Conlay will represent the first twisted residential towers in the country and one of the tallest in the world. As such, it is poised to attract international buyers anticipated to make up 50% of the total purchasers. The 3.952-acre development with a GDV (gross development value) of RM4 bil will also be unsurpassed in terms of quality finishes.

"Foreign buyers will ask which brands are behind 8 Conlay. They will sleep easy knowing that the architecture is by a firm with international presence while the interiors is by YOO with retail input from Benoy and services by Kempinski. This will be the quality given at every single angle," says Kua.

Tower A's fully furnished branded residences are now open for registration at approximately RM2,700 per sq ft, with the more exclusive units selling for about RM3,000 per sq ft. Unit sizes range between 682 sq ft and 1,982 sq ft.

"We hire the best of the best because personally, we like people who can really think out of the box. It's really about pushing that boundary," she says adding that all the brand partners were brought in at the beginning so that they could work to complement one another.

The interiors of 8 Conlay's Tower A will be designed by prolific Hong Kong creative director Steve Leung & YOO (pronounced "You").



ABOVE: The well-designed interiors of the YOO Hong Kong Residences.



LEFT: The interiors for 8 Conlay's Tower A units will be designed by Hong Kong based Leung (left), seen posing here with YOO co-founder Hitchcox who is a well-known property entrepreneur

"We have also got Kelly Hoppen on board. You can find her books everywhere. She designs for David Beckham and the royal family in the UK and will be designing the show unit for Tower B," Kua discloses.

This collaboration makes perfect sense as far as Kua is concerned as YOO, founded by property entrepreneur John Hitchcox and world-renowned designer Philippe Starck in 1999, is not only internationally known for its designs, but is also a pioneer in the branded residences category. To date, it has undertaken over 76 design projects in 53 cities spanning 33 countries.

The illustrious list of designers under YOO reads like a who's who in the design world. They include Marcel Wanders, Hoppen and Rolling Stone singer Mick Jagger's daughter Jade

Jagger who loves to mix her bohemian lifestyle and taste into the design projects she undertakes for YOO's celebrity clients.

Then, there is also the commercial aspect of its retail component being handled by international firm Benoy.

"Benoy will be our retail partner undertaking the design of the retail space. It is a big name in the architecture world known for really thinking out-of-the-box. The entire podium is nine floors but the first four floors are dedicated to the retail component. We will be 'giving back' the nine floors to retail as we wanted to create something different and add some character into the development.

"We will be managing the retail lifestyle component by ourselves. It's a work-in-progress as retail is the heart of the development. What we don't want to do is to compete with Pavilion and Harrods. It's like a retail puzzle at the moment but what we actually want to do is to create a 50% F&B component with the other 50% emulating a retail lifestyle concept. We are trying to push the boundaries to bring in more interesting brands from overseas," says Kua.

Another important aspect is the hotel component that is expected to rival that of the luxury market in terms of international benchmark standards.

"We've chosen Kempinski to complement 8 Conlay. This longstanding European brand is well-known in the international market for its immaculate service and style. In Europe, the Kempinski properties are really nice and in Bangkok and Jakarta, they do very well. This will be the first Kempinski hotel here in KL."

And last, but certainly not least, is the landscape design that will elevate the art of luxe living to an artform and which Kua believes will exude a calming effect in the urban area.

"One of the luxury aspects of this development is its landscape. When you buy into 8 Conlay, you are not just purchasing your own space in the sky — you're also buying these communal spaces that are filled with landscaping at the four upper levels which will house the wet, dry or green areas that are all over the building," says Kua. □

Kua of KSK Group (front left) officiating the partnership with Mike Haemmerli, senior vice-president of development, Kempinski Hotels. (Back row L-R) Vincent Tan, executive director of KSK Land; Tan Sri Kua, executive chairman of KSK Group; Kempinski's Maria Kuhn, vice-president of public relations and Florian Linder, director of development (South-East Asia)



PHOTO BY DD HOE