

## A knack for all things green

If you've seen the plans for 8 Conlay, one of Kuala Lumpur's most talked about developments, you would've seen the talent Harvard-educated designer Pok Kobkongsanti has when it comes to landscapes. Based in Bangkok and having founded T.R.O.P. in 2007, Kobkongsanti has accumulated more than a few achievements under his belt, including the starkly modern Hilton Pattaya, Casa De La Flora as well as the first Southeast Asian to win the prestigious American Society of Landscape Architects ASLA Award.



### Share with us what made you decide on becoming a landscape architect.

Actually, it was pure luck. I'd skipped two years of high school and got accepted as last place into the Landscape Architecture Department, Faculty of Architecture at Chulalongkorn University. And as they say, the rest is history! Other than that, I was a kid who not only had dogs and cats as pets; I raised tonnes of insects in the garden and beetles were my favourite. To a certain extent, I'd also say that nature is in my blood as my parents loved gardens, and that's pretty much where we'd spent most of our time at home.

### What is T.R.O.P. all about?

In order to create landscape architectures, we try our best not to have any particular form in our head prior to the design process in the first place. Instead, we study the contexts, problems and solutions that are before us. Then, we use two of our best tools, terrains and open space, to create an extraordinary experience for our customers. So, that is why I named the practice "terrains + open space", which we nicknamed "T.R.O.P."



"A good landscape is probably related with a sense of place, where the design must 'belong' to the context."

*Pok Kobkongsanti,  
Founder of T.R.O.P.*



### Is there a certain character to all your projects?

It's all about experiences in the outdoors, all of which are created by topographical manipulation of terrains and open space.

### What was the main thing that drew you to work on 8 Conlay?

I'd first met KSK Land and their architect, Ar. Hui Bakar, in an interview in Bangkok as they were searching for a landscape designer for their project. The first reason I was interested in 8 Conlay was because I'd always been keen on Malaysia, and particularly Kuala Lumpur — in my mind, it would have been nice to be given the opportunity to design one of the most iconic projects in the city. Moreover, the moment I'd seen the architecture, I was hooked and determined to design the landscape for them because I knew I could create a one-of-a-kind landscape design for this handsome structure.

### What were the key elements for this property?

Honestly, this project made a huge investment in terms of landscape design. They'd provided a lot of space in order to deliver a good urban lifestyle for their prospective residents, so it meant nothing but the best from us. Known for our tailor-made approach, we made each garden space in 8 Conlay totally unique and different from the another. Other than that, the main inspiration for our design came from Kuala Lumpur city itself — I myself would be amazed by the fact that there is a huge urban centre right in the middle of a lush rainforest. Unbelievable, isn't it?

We started right after the initial concept stage of the architectural design was complete and basically worked closely with the architects right from the very beginning. This was so that the landscape design would tell the same design story as the architecture intended.



**In your opinion, what is a "good landscape"?**  
To me, a good landscape is probably related with a sense of place, where the design must 'belong' to the context.

**What is the most valuable life lesson you've come across during your career as a landscape architect?**

The fact is, you can't do everything. So pick your comfortable spot and give it your best.

**You have quite a few TROPsters; what does it take to be a good leader to the team?**

The TROPsters are more like a family, with me as the big brother. There is no employer-employee relationship and sometimes, I have to act like a sports coach as well. As a team, everyone has his/her own role — myself included — and if one doesn't do his/her best, the whole team can't perform either. At the same time, they know they can lean on me when problems occur, and I know I can rely on them to save my butt when I run into a wall! ☺

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