

Living & Property

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Enabling a better life



THE KEMPINSKI CONNECTION

The luxury brand is set to make its debut at 8 Conlay as it undertakes the management of its hotel component

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SPECIAL FEATURE: Building with a difference

BRDB Developments Sdn Bhd's focus extends beyond its buildings to create thriving communities PAGES 12-13



The grand entrance of Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin in Germany with its famous red carpet walkway that has greeted many celebrities, dignitaries and even royalty

Fit for royalty and the KL market

Kempinski fulfils the final lavish component of 8 Conlay's luxurious branded residences' offerings, with its unparalleled hotel management services set to create a new benchmark in living standards in Kuala Lumpur

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Long associated with a legacy of European excellence, Kempinski is a name synonymous with luxury and impeccable service. The 118-year-old brand with 78 hotels in 33 countries, including Berlin, Istanbul, Bangkok and more, continues to be the hotel of choice among the world's social elite.

Counted among its long-time clientele is KSK Group Bhd executive chairman Tan Sri Kua Sian Kooi, whose family has stayed at several Kempinski hotels around the world and is accustomed to its rich European heritage with personalised service and hospitality.

Having experienced the service by Kempinski that is rated among Europe's best, it was only natural that it was seen as the ideal brand partner for the hotel management services of KSK's 8 Conlay integrated development in Kuala Lumpur.

The venture is the group's maiden foray into property de-

velopment from its mainstay insurance business, previously known as Kurnia Asia Bhd. The group's insurance business is still ongoing in Indonesia and Thailand operating through PT. KSK Insurance Indonesia and KSK Insurance (Thailand) Public Co. Ltd.

"Tan Sri had wanted to venture into property development for a long time but back then, we were concentrating on the insurance business. Incidentally, any business we undertake is for the long term and so, it was something we thought through in terms of the direction we wanted to pursue," shares Joanne Kua, group CEO and executive director of KSK Group.

"Therefore, we have chosen to seal our partnership with the world's oldest inn-keeper to up the ante of Malaysia's service and hospitality landscape by bringing a timeless level of five-star luxury here," she affirms.

At a private media session held at Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin in Germany recently, she reiterated how hon-

oured KSK was to be partnering one of Europe's leading hotel brands.

Kempinski, after all, is known to be especially selective when it comes to choosing its partners with its DNA firmly entrenched in the highest level of exclusivity, individuality and management. And, as Joanne rightly points out, Kempinski hotels are renowned the world over for their distinct surroundings, architecture, facilities, history and fine locations.

"They are also viewed as iconic places that people want to be associated with, which is precisely what 8 Conlay strives to stand for," Joanne observes in reference to the group's ambitious mixed-use development, which she envisions will introduce a new benchmark in living standards in KL. The development will include branded residences, retail components as well as hotel and service suites that are expected to be fully operational by 2020.

Boosting values worldwide

Joanne notes that even as Kempinski aims to be a leader in all the markets it ventures into, its presence has in turn boosted the investment values of the exclusive brand's various partners around the world.

"Kempinski has a brand personality that is a key strength for us. We want to achieve this (level of branding) with 8 Conlay, which is a unique development. People who live in branded residences are discerning buyers. They have high standards and a good eye for everything. In every city, there is the need for branded residences. There is a high level of expectation from people when it comes to branded residences — especially from a design and service perspective — so you have to think about everything for them. And herein starts our journey with Kempinski."

Like-minded brand partnership

Joanne was speaking alongside Alejandro Bernabe, CEO of Kempinski, to a few select media who accompanied the developer to experience Hotel Adlon where the rich legacy of the Kempinski hotel first started in the German heartland. It was obvious that both parties share common values and points of interest resulting in a holistic partnership.

"It's a long-term vision that we feel very comfortable with. We are also extremely excited about the brand partners. When we go to a meeting in KL, regardless of who we

are dealing with, there's a vibrant and positive energy. That's what will make this project successful," Bernabé says with a sense of hearty optimism.

"I think if you listen to Joanne, it is very clear why we are excited to partner KSK for 8 Conlay. I don't think you can find a better partner than the whole family — not only with Joanne, but the entire group," he adds.

The Kempinski and KSK connection

"As Joanne mentioned, Hotel Adlon is the birthplace of Kempinski in Germany in terms of hotels. However, in terms of family origins, we come from Prussia, which is now Poland, but at that time was a part of Germany," relates Bernabé.

"Adlon is a family name. The family started out 150 to 160 years ago by growing vineyards. And then, they moved into the retailing of food and beverage products and thereafter, into restaurants. In 1897, they started the hotel and since then, the company has evolved tremendously and is now privately owned."

Bernabé shares that the historical learnings and legacies that brought Kempinski to where it is today are significant.

"Why is this important? To a certain extent — we now have control over our future, meaning there is no pressure from anybody to grow extensively. We want to grow, but we want to do so with quality, which means that we are extremely selective about the type of property and with whom we engage. When I refer to the type of property, I don't only mean the building and interior design, etc. For us, when we talk about quality, it is very important to consider who we do business with, and what the vision and reasons are."

Although Kempinski's legacy and reputation of European distinction stretches far and wide, it remains deeply rooted in time-honoured traditions and grounded values — and is, interestingly, family-based. Incidentally, KSK is also a family-owned entity that fully understands the importance of a sterling reputation and providing unparalleled service.

"We are not a huge company, but we have a vision for the future, same as KSK. We made a very clear decision, making the process for both parties to come together very quick — in three months. We were fortunate that KSK also agreed to proceed with Kempinski and since then, I can only say that everything has only got better as KSK has a very exciting new approach to the project. They question everything as they want to find a better way of doing things and not just replicate what is being done in other places. They want to infuse new ideas and are always thinking about how to bring that exclusive experience to the person who is going to live at 8 Conlay," Bernabé reflects.

Desiring to be the best

While the desire to be different and to take the development to the next level — not just replicating what is happening in KL or within the region — marks the group's uncompromising commitment to quality, Joanne shares that besides the element of luxury, sustainable growth is key.

"If there is one added parallel, then it is the desire to provide really good customer service. We come from an industry where reputation is extremely important to us. As the owner of the hotel, we have to keep our promises to the



Alejandro Bernabé, CEO of Kempinski



Joanne Kua, group CEO and executive director of KSK Group

"One can negotiate whatever contract but it is that finding of each other and fulfilling the contract, bringing it to reality and thinking of how to get there in terms of building the business with your brand partners that is at the crux of it all."

— Joanne Kua

buyers in terms of providing excellent hospitality services. And, for us as a property developer, we have to think of the branded lifestyle experience from the customers' perspective," she reiterates.

Bernabé says KSK's grounded approach makes it an ideal partner in keeping with Kempinski's values.

"If Joanne says they want the best designer, they will look for the right designer. They want to grow, but they want to do so selectively while ensuring sustainable growth of the project. And, for this, they have to be selective."

"The process is lengthy because the brand partnership is like a marriage as people don't get married for just one day but, hopefully, for a long time. So, we need to make sure KSK is happy, we are happy, and putting together this place will make those who live there happy," he adds.

Joanne agrees, sharing that although the decision to have Kempinski as its brand partner was swift, the process of working out the ensuing contract proved quite lengthy.

"But, I'm confident to say that the process did not take us as long as we expected because if you look back, we formed KSK Land just two years ago. Besides, one can negotiate whatever contract but it is that finding of each other and fulfilling the contract, bringing it to reality and thinking of

how to get there in terms of building the business with your brand partners that is at the crux of it all," she says.

Bernabé confirms that the right working chemistry was crucial to Kempinski as well.

"KL is extremely important and is part of the axis we are looking for. It's an incredible city. I love the fact that it is a vibrant city that is still very green and local — where much of it is rich in culture. Everything is looking very good whereby the economy was doing very well then, and like everybody else, will turn the corner and do better."

"We were interested in KL but we were not interested just for the sake of being in KL. So, if we had not found the right partner with the same vision, then we just wouldn't have undertaken the project. I met Joanne and the whole team as well as the architect. We listened to them as to what they wanted to do, their vision and how they wanted to develop 8 Conlay," he elaborates.

There has been no looking back since then and for now, both parties are planning the back-of-house details.

"Obviously, we have to think about the design and development plans now as the back-of-house is the heart of the hotel," quips Joanne.

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The interior of the two-Michelin-starred Sea Blue fine-dining restaurant at Hotel Adlon complements the creatively presented Pan-Asian cuisine.

Designing the 8 Conlay dream

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This is important, as Bernabé shares from experience, that "whatever is at the back-of-house will eventually emerge in the front-of-house".

A calculated leap of faith

Although new to the competitive world of property development, Joanne is certainly no stranger to challenges, having fashioned her career with the risk appetite required of the insurance industry, which at the same time, requires the trust of agents and insurers alike to succeed.

"We come from a risk background so number crunching is our strength. We don't leave any stones unturned. We put all the risk on the table and calculate them as we go along," she affirms of the standard operating procedures of the insurance business, which has become second nature to her.

On the flip side, there is a softer yet profound aspect to the business that revolves around relationships with people.

"Our DNA is insurance. So what that means is building relationships with our customers, understanding what they need and want, plus getting that interaction going with them as well as with our business partners. That is the start of how we always think about our other businesses, including property. To me, the biggest strength that we have is the people we collaborate with," she maintains.

Ultimately, at day's end, Joanne acknowledges that with 8 Conlay, it is all about selling a branded luxury lifestyle.

"That's the way we angle the business and how we look at it from the customer's perspective. If we had just wanted to sell a shell and core, then it would probably have been a 'close eyes, buy land and just build' situation. But, that's not the direction we want to pursue. The strength we have and our DNA is in insurance. And, in selling a piece of paper, it's really about trust. That is how we view our other businesses."

Operating from this premise, she affirms that KSK's biggest strength lies in it always considering what its customers really want in the branded residences.

"It is this thought process that we deal with every step of the way — even in our collaborations with our brand partners. And, if you ask me how we managed to get Kempinski to be a brand partner, it's really a similar process that grows from the same DNA. For me, that is unique," she comments.

"This is our DNA because everything we do is for the long term. Tan Sri built his insurance business from scratch and could not have done this without our agents. The agents



TOP: Impeccable service from the heart is the hallmark of Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin in Germany.

RIGHT: It's a feast for all your senses at the Lovers Adlon fine dining restaurant overlooking an enviable view of the historic Brandenburg Gate.

form partnerships built over time, and that's really the kind of relationships we want to build even in the property space. These are the fundamentals of the really long-term core business that we take on and why we wanted to do property."

Joanne is also the managing director of KSK Land Sdn Bhd, having assumed the mandate to spearhead the group's property subsidiary in August 2013. Her responsibilities include overseeing various aspects of the group's corporate strategy besides her active involvement in its operations.

"I've been with the group for five years, and it has been a steep learning curve. As much as we started the project and have put the team together for 8 Conlay, we also built a company from scratch. At KSK Land, we're still a learn team. It's like forming a start-up. We are learning from each other and about each other as individuals — so that's the strength of

the brand partnerships. It's also about nurturing the right talent and sharing the same vision while pushing boundaries.

"The minute we have people joining us, we ask them if they believe in what KSK is trying to achieve in the future. The people we hire today have at least an average 15 years' experience, having worked for top-tier developers.

"I always ask them if they believe in what we are trying to do. If not, this is not the place for them. But if it is, then we always try to push the boundary a bit more. We take baby steps and give ourselves little high-fives, having formed the team that we have."

For now, the KL market waits with bated breath for Kempinski to make its mark at the branded residences named YOOB serviced by Kempinski as well as at the Kempinski hotel and its serviced suites. ■

Your Place, Your Story — Perfect for purveyors of perfection

Purveyors of luxury have a new playground to look forward to with the introduction of 8 Conlay's branded residential, retail and hotel components.

Comprising branded residences named YOOB serviced by Kempinski, the 62-storey Tower A and 57-storey Tower B will have interconnecting platforms on levels 26 and 44. There will be another standalone 68-storey tower comprising the five-star Kempinski hotel, complemented by a four-storey retail podium at the bottom level also known as the lifestyle retail quarter.

"For us, the definition of branded residences is a triangle with three components — liveable architecture conceptualised by Ar. Had Bakar of RSP Architects; bespoke interior design by Steve Leung & YOO for Tower A units with Kelly Hoppers for YOO designing the Tower B units; and finally, impeccable hotel services provided by Kempinski.

"We have our vision for 8 Conlay which is not just about selling an apartment or lifestyle — but promoting luxury lifestyle at its finest," says Joanne, managing director of KSK Land Sdn Bhd, adding that the landscape features will be designed by Pok Kobkongwatt of TROP from Thailand.

She believes that establishing the culture is equally important, just as building the relationship with the group's business partners is, to ensure it will be a "sustainable business that lasts".

And with that, she is confident that the rest will follow. "I personally fell in love with 8 Conlay because the location is great, being in the city's business district but still far from it. Being secluded, there's privacy with the advantage of being located nearby the best shopping centres," shares Bernabé.

Joanne agrees. "What can sustain you in a good or bad market is location because you can't take that away. If you

are in the KLCC market, it's only about supply or demand.

"And herein is the opportunity with our four-acre land, which is the last freehold site. In building a brand, it is not whether you develop a big or small project, but whether you do the project well and with quality. It is about our reputation. We want to develop something of quality that is fresh and new. At 8 Conlay, we are giving you a lifestyle that you desire. This is the story that we want to create," she says.

Already KSK's innovative and ambitious approach in assembling an illustrious A-list of talents is turning out handsomely. More than just a case of beginner's luck, the newest branded residences on the block has, to its credit, enlisted Kempinski — Europe's oldest and best luxury hotelier — to provide its world-class hotel management services for 8 Conlay.

Indeed, the time is ripe for European luxury to arrive on KLS shores.



A bird's eye view of the iconic Quadriga with a chariot drawn by four horses perched atop the Brandenburg Gate overlooking Hotel Adlon.

Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin — Germany's priceless crown jewel

History repeats itself, and in countless different ways when one considers the enduring legacy of the legendary Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin in Germany whose timeless appeal continues to attract the *crème de la crème* of society.

It was devastated in the aftermath of World War II but rising from the ashes of the past, its popularity has not waned one cubic inch. Born out of the original designs of the former Hotel Adlon to reclaim its stake in history, the fascinating threads of the past that the hotel shares with the city of Berlin is astounding.

Today, the classic building reflects the grandeur of the Unter den Linden boulevard where it stands — located just a stone's throw away from the Brandenburg Gate — perhaps the most historic landmark in Germany, and one that bore witness to Napoleon Bonaparte's celebration of his defeat of the Prussians.

Indeed, the past allure of this part of the metropolis perfectly matches the equally fascinating history of Hotel Adlon. Today, the gate remains the starting and finishing point of most of the city's major events.

Starlets and celebrities, royalty and high society alike have always warmed up to Hotel Adlon. It has the distinction of being a pioneer hotel to have hot and cold running water back then — rendering it a personal favourite of Kaiser Wilhelm II for himself and state guests.

Sadly, the World War II years brought about a period of hardship to the hotel. However, after several decades, the new Hotel Adlon reclaimed its reputation as Berlin's most illustrious hotel when it later reopened in 1997.

Today, Hotel Adlon epitomises the peak of luxury standards, transporting one into a world of glamour and grandeur. In June, the hotel welcomed Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Philip who stayed in what has since been renamed as the Royal Presidential Suite. It is said to be the very same presidential suite that the late King

of Pop stayed at when he was in Berlin to perform over a decade ago, where he famously (or infamously) dangled his son out of the window for his fans to catch a glimpse.

In keeping up with the 21st century, a spa and wellness component is counted among its modern-day additions. In all, there are five fine dining restaurants at Hotel Adlon, of which two are two-Michelin-starred restaurants.

"Hotel Adlon is not only a Kempinski hotel, but a hotel that belongs to the city. For me, the beauty is to embrace

the history of this building and to make sure we continue with this tradition of what Germany is. It is a beautiful building with fantastic landscape in the heart of the city. For the people of Germany, the hotel is part of the city and its history, which to me is part of the Hotel Adlon heritage," Bernabé enthuses.

"Kempinski is a European brand. We want to incorporate the European flair although Kempinski has the

philosophy of looking at every project individually — at what type of clientele, guest and city we are in.

"We provide great service and to me, that is Hotel Adlon. It's very difficult to replicate. We use the tag line, 'We will never be bigger than the age of Kempinski', but what is really behind this saying is the idea that we don't really want to grow in numbers — but we want to grow in quality, with better owners and projects," he elaborates in detail.

In a similar vein, Bernabé shares that Kempinski is a unique European luxury brand with its own merits.

"You cannot replicate Hotel Adlon and bring it to KL. The idea was to replicate this level of service and bring it to KL, with KL having its own identity. Kempinski has to integrate itself with the city where it is.

"We want to create restaurants and outlets that are inclusive for the people who live in the city and for those who visit KL and stay at Kempinski. Those who live in the residences also want to feel that they are a part of the city," he shares. ■



The historic Brandenburg Gate

Analysing the trends

The recently released Knight Frank Global Cities: The 2016 Report names Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Nairobi and Moscow as five cities investors should watch out for based on the independent global property consultancy's findings and analysis.

In presenting the market performance of 20 global cities around the world, of which 10 are in Asia-Pacific, the new "Watch List" section was introduced, which highlights cities with the potential to become a global city in the future.

Coincidentally, these are the cities where Kempinski has its presence, as reflected in its namesake luxury hotels offering impeccable hospitality.

These include the Kempinski Hotel Mad of the Emirates, Dubai located in proximity to downtown Dubai and the luxurious Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok marrying the philosophy of European flair with local traditions situated near Siam Paragon, Bangkok's premier shopping centre.

In addition to these Kempinski hotels are Villa Rose Kempinski Nairobi in the Kenyan city's commercial centre and the recently renovated hotel Baltichug Kempinski Moscow that offers spectacular views of the Kremlin and St Basil's Cathedral.

And, with Kempinski making up the hotel component for B Conlay, KL also joins in this winning circle.

"There will be renewed interest in the city — to live and work, as well as for entertainment and tourism. The impending entry of upscale hotel brands such as Four Seasons, Fairmont, Kempinski and Jumeirah in the city will further catapult Malaysia into the global tourism market," says Sarounan Subramaniam, managing director of Knight Frank Malaysia.

Knight Frank Asia Pacific head of research Nicholas Holt concurs, adding that the Asia-Pacific region will see "relatively strong economic growth over the coming years", rendering the next three years "a growth story for Asian global cities".

The findings indicate that foreign buyers from Japan, Singapore, the Middle East, Indonesia and China are eyeing the KL market with interest.

"These investors are attracted by the relative ease of transacting in Malaysia, the favourable foreign ownership rules relative to other Southeast Asian markets, and the weakness of the Malaysian ringgit which has fallen 29% against the USD during the last 12 months," says Knight Frank Malaysia (capital markets) executive director James Buckley.

The findings seem to augur well for B Conlay's well-timed foray into the branded residences segment targeting the upper crust of the property market with a 50% foreign buyer profile, with Kempinski enlisted to provide its unique expertise in the area of hotel service management.

Tower A, with its 564 units, that is set to be launched in November, will command a starting price from RM2,700 per sq ft. The size of the branded residences will range between 700 sq ft and 1,308 sq ft.

"We are targeting foreigners and locals. At a time like this, we are selling to a segment of people who are affected but yet not really affected, and they have to make their money work. If you buy an apartment like YDGB serviced by Kempinski, it's for investment so you're buying for the long term. For foreigners, it's competitively priced — even for branded residences in the region considering it is located near KLCC," reasons Joanne Kua, managing director of KSK Land Sdn Bhd.

"In general, whether you are local or a foreigner, you are looking at the long term. There will be fluctuations in the market but the property will hold its ground," she opines, adding that it is not so much the currency risk but the fluctuating risk that is of concern.

However, she believes the problem will be worked out eventually in favour of B Conlay with its gross development value of approximately RM4 bil being realised in time to capitalise on a stronger market rebound.