

# A Tactile Touch

Award-winning designer **Kelly Hoppen** brings her iconic East-meets-West design philosophy to Malaysia for the first time through KSK Land's 8 Conlay project, writes **Lily Ong**

“OUR PERSONALITIES couldn't be more different than each other, but when it comes to our philosophy on interior design, we share the same values,” says property entrepreneur John Hitchcox about his long-time friend Kelly Hoppen. It is because of these common

## Tell us about yourself, Kelly.

As a child, I was fortunate that my parents would take me to their friends' homes for social visits. I would meet with people like artists, poets and chefs. The way they used their homes as a means to communicate their passions struck a chord with me and sparked my curiosity. I started developing an interest in visiting apartment showrooms, imagining and dreaming of how people lived their lives behind four walls and a door.

Plus, I was dyslexic as a child and hated school. So, I started my interior design business in my teens. Today, four decades after I began my business, I still bounce out of bed every day wanting to design.

## What drew you to design for Yoo and work with John Hitchcox?

Kelly Hoppen Interiors rarely does collaborations but we did for YOO because of the similar values we share. John and I have known each other a long time. He's the business mind of YOO, while his co-founder Philippe (Starck) drives the creative side of things.

On a personal note, I like working with John because he is incredibly selfless. He understands how we work as creatives and gives us room to create. There's an established trust between us. Plus, he is passionate about the concept of building 'vertical villages' through projects like 8 Conlay—and it is something I feel connected to as well.

## Let's talk about your upcoming interior project in KL. What attracted you to

ideals that Kelly—who has styled the homes of Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow and the Beckhams—makes time to commit to John's UK-based bespoke property company, YOO. In an interview with *Malaysia Tatler* at YOO's office in London, Kelly gives us an insight on how she styles a space—using her first design stint in Kuala Lumpur, for KSK Land's YOO8 Residence Tower B, as a reference point.

## work on designing the second tower for YOO8 by 8 Conlay?

Today, I am blessed to be in a position where I can choose the projects that I want to be involved in. I have not worked in KL before, so I jumped at the chance to do so. Plus, I liked the idea of 8 Conlay. When I met KSK Land's managing director Joanne Kua and her team, I got a sense that this partnership could work well together. When we all sat around the table to talk, I knew we were on the same wavelength. Therefore I signed up.

## What's the dynamics like between you and Steve Leung—who designed Tower A of YOO8?

Steve is a great friend and we've worked on many projects together in the past. He came onboard the 8 Conlay YOO8 project first, and designed two concepts for the first block, Tower A, called 'Wood' and 'Water'. Kelly Hoppen Interiors only came onboard after Tower B was conceptualised, and produced two concepts too: 'Urban' and 'Spring'.

## Could you tell us more on how you came up with the idea behind 'Urban' and 'Spring' for 8 Conlay?

[laughs] You come up with names for things because it feels right at the moment. That's all.

## Can you share how do you conceptualise a space then?

When I design a space, I take time to visualise the lifestyle around it: sleeping, waking up, watching television, seeing the marble of the

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**HOPPING AT A CHANCE IN KL**  
Kelly posing with Joanne Kua of KSK Land and John Hitchcox of YOO

wall, feeling the details on the floor and so on.

What I do after this lifestyle mapping is try to add more details to what I visualise. After 41 years, I have been successful because I know all these little elements will make people go, "Wow!"

It's a tactile thing, you know. For example, I don't just imagine a wooden floor—I'll also think about how it feels when I touch it. The texture and sensorial details add up. For a home buyer who has never experienced these before, all of these things are big moments.

## Your book on an East-meets-West design philosophy was a big hit over 20 years ago. Have your thoughts on this evolved throughout the years?

When I first came up with East Meets West, for me, it was all about bringing the east to the west. For example, I took a picture of a paddy field for the book and was inspired by the hats the farmers were wearing. So I make the shapes of the hats into a design or brought a weave of their paddy basket into a bathroom design.

It was recently that I had an 'aha!' moment. While I was at Singapore's Changi airport after a work trip, two women approached me and asked for my autograph. They talked excitedly about

how I brought 'West-meets-East' to them and that was when the light bulb turned on for me, about what my philosophy means on a broader scale.

You see, I never thought of it like that. It can work both ways, east can meet west and vice versa! It was incredibly rude of me to think that this style of design was a one-way street.

## What is your favourite part of a home?

I love the bathroom because it is a space in the house that is truly private. You can go in there, lock the door, have a bath and relax away from prying eyes. I love bathing rituals and I am inspired by them. The idea of luxury living is to have a beautiful bathroom in your home—one that is regal and completely yours.

## What are your hopes for your maiden foray into KL with these two designs for Tower B at Yoo8, 8 Conlay?

Here's the thing, every project that I do, I commit to it because I am positive it will succeed. If you truly believe from day one that you will succeed, your outcome will be a success. It's the law of attraction. So I am positive 8 Conlay is going to sell out—no question about it! 🙌

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A peek inside Kelly's Urban concept design, a manifestation of the iconic designer's meticulous arrangement of details, materials and textures

