

A SCULPTURE IN THE SKY



Hud and Kua with a diorama of 8 Conlay. The curved towers look like they lean towards each other, evoking a sense of stability and strength.

Abstracts of the Chinese character of its address and the yin and yang symbol give 8 Conlay its unique shape — making it a piece of art, says architect Hud Bakar

People who hesitate to acquire property in condominiums say it is like buying a space in the sky. What if that unit is part of an impressive sculpture and you get to own a piece of art?

"It's like art: To some people, a painting is just pastel or oil on canvas. But to the privileged few, owning it gives you an inner satisfaction that words cannot describe," says Hud Bakar of RSP Architects Kuala Lumpur. The same sense of realisation applies to 8 Conlay, adds the man behind its design: "There is a lot of meaning to the architecture. And that eventually becomes clear when one dwells on it."

As with all good art, creativity sets the foundation for this maiden project of developer KSK Land situated at Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.

"The property's address is 8 — a good number especially to the Chinese because it has the meaning of wealth. We felt that would be a good start for our design inspiration," Hud explains.

The Chinese character of the figure eight inspired the curved profile of two residential blocks of the integrated development in KL's Golden Triangle. "It's an abstract," the architect says. The twisted vertical form of that numeral is then intertwined with the horizontal plan

to create yet another abstract symbol — yin and yang — which denotes balance.

Visually, the curves of 8 Conlay make its towers look like they lean towards each other, evoking a sense of stability and strength. The yin and yang connotation, which resonates with the various cultures in the country, adds another layer of meaning to the building.

"We need balance in everything we do: If you want to see black, there must be white. There is day and night, work and play, that kind of thing. A lot of thought has been given to the concept behind 8 Conlay. So when you buy a unit, you are also buying [into] the philosophy behind the architecture, not just a space in the sky."

The two branded residential towers of 8 Conlay, called YOOS, will be serviced by Kempinski. They will sit atop a four-storey lifestyle retail podium alongside a third tower — the first five-star Kempinski Hotel in Malaysia when it opens in 2021.

Working on these different but integrated components is complex and requires concerted and detailed planning because they need different drop-off points, and separate parking entrances and exits for privacy, security and view. That in itself makes the project more challenging for Hud's team, which was responsible for the architectural

concept and drawing up the floor plan from the start.

But with more than 25 years of experience under his hat, Hud welcomes challenges and tackles them head-on.

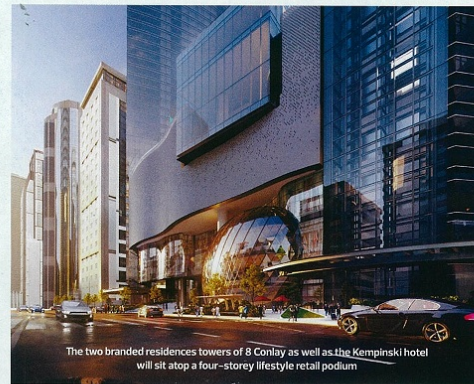
"To me, as an architect, challenge is what pushes the boundary. I like buildings that, other than meeting the practical purposes, challenge our mind. Every time I get an opportunity to create such a building, it definitely stretches our creativity and thinking."

One needs a unique mind to create a unique building, Hud believes. But working with a client that is open-minded and receptive to unusual ideas makes the work more interesting, especially when the project is more complex than a typical condo block, he says. "And once you have a curved building, to actually construct it is even more challenging. You need to have vast experience and certain tools to handle such a building."

An architect works closely with engineers and contractors to turn his ideas into reality and there must be an understanding between them, Hud adds. The engineer has to figure out how to construct what he envisions for the building and the contractor needs to have the skills and technology to build it. On a wider scale, the shell and core of his design has a bearing on the work of other consultants in the project, such as the



Artist's impression of 8 Conlay, seen against the city skyline



The two branded residences towers of 8 Conlay as well as the Kempinski hotel will sit atop a four-storey lifestyle retail podium

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landscape and lighting consultant and interior designer.

The interiors of Tower A and Tower B of 8 Conlay's branded residences are designed by Hong Kong-based Steve Leung and British celebrity designer Kelly Hoppen, respectively. They comprise 564 and 498 serviced units priced, respectively, at RM3,260 and RM3,350 per sq ft. Bangkok-based Pok Kobkongsanti of TROP Studio is in charge of the landscape design.

For Hud, many elements have to connect to frame a solid structure and give it balance. "Every project must be practical first — you build for a specific purpose. Then you add the concept and the soul. A lot of projects just stop at being practical. There's nothing wrong with that. But when you push the boundary, what lies beyond is the architecture — in our case it's the art part that gives it the yin and yang and meaning. We started from scratch by looking at the very site of 8 Conlay, in the heart of the city, to determine our thinking and approach."

Location is key in every prime property, the first thing an architect looks at because "you have to be mindful of what's there, such as the view and the buildings around you, to dwell and be in harmony with your neighbours," Hud explains. "You have to live with your neighbours because they were there first. So when we come in, we have to respect our 'elders', so to speak. But at the same time we have our own character."

The project site is special because it looks to the Petronas Twin Towers and can be seen from there. "As it sits among many different condos in the area, we wanted to be unique, otherwise we would just be joining the bandwagon. That's why we pushed ourselves to come out with the twisted design — a poetic structure with a soul."

Beyond locality, at the macro level, are heritage and pride. "What [we do] here will stand for a long long time. As a Malaysian architect using Malaysian elements to build a structure on Malaysian soil, it is important to have the right ingredients because we are sculpting an architecture heritage for our country."

The challenge to be unique was reinforced by the vision KSK Land, owned by investment holdings company KSK Group Bhd, has for its first project: bespoke property that prioritises design, craftsmanship and lifestyle, a building that is to become another KL landmark.

KSK Group CEO and KSK Land managing director Joanne Kua elaborates: "Do you want to sell an apartment as a commodity, a space in the sky? [If so] the property is just four walls. Or, do you want to push the boundary and sell a story so that when people walk in, they find a space that has a soul that emotes for them. People want to belong to stories, to communities. Architecture is synonymous with a building. It stands [the test] of time and becomes part of history and there is a story to it."

"People who understand branded residences are global in outlook and well-travelled and they understand it has the component of luxury hospitality. They want to have that same experience of what they feel in their home. They also appreciate what design can bring in terms of value. It's not what you say but what stands behind [the building]. At 8 Conlay, we not only have the architecture but also the interior design and the landscape. The concept ties all these components together."

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Hud hopes that people looking even from the outside will appreciate the whole building because it offers something more. Or, to have them walk in and say, "Ah, there is something here."

It does not matter if they do not know what it is, he says. "It's like looking at a painting that attracts you. You don't know what it means sometimes, but it affects you. That little touch will lead to more things to discover."

"For me, apart from the story, 8 Conlay is also a piece of art. Why do you buy a painting and put it on the wall? You do that because your inner feeling speaks, it represents the finer things in life." With this project, he reiterates, "the architecture is a living sculpture and you are owning a piece of it. And just like an art piece, the longer you keep it, the more valuable it becomes".

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