

MONOCLE

A BRIEFING ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS, BUSINESS, CULTURE & DESIGN

OUR NEW
HOSPITALITY AND
TRAVEL SPECIAL

The art of hospitality: reap what you sew (and bake, make and brew)

The basics of being a good host: start in the home or a well-equipped Finnish classroom. Monocle gets a few lessons from battle-hardened GMs and some charming ambassadors. A new **MONOCLE SPECIAL**

Learning needs to be hands-on and heads-down

I'm part of a new generation that can actually...

The Hospitality Rule Book

1 Focus on the details 2 Lead from the front 3 Be authentic 4 Hire staff based on potential, not credentials 5 Speak with a consistent tone of voice 6 Turn the lights down 7 Figure out your signature soundtrack 8 Avoid fads and trends 9 Keep your plates and bowls round 10 Old school is more welcoming than new school

...run a household, lend a bar and mend uniforms

issue 80, volume 08
FEBRUARY 2015

- A AFFAIRS** Hostile hostels: check in at the world's most dangerous hotels
- B BUSINESS** Take a bow: how to be funky and gracious in a single move on the shop floor
- C CULTURE** Southern scene: the art world's other Louisiana
- D DESIGN** Panasonic makes a move into town-planning
- E EDITS** Nice meat in Lisbon, edgy living in Melbourne and perfectly printed invites

AT YOUR SERVICE

1 THE FINEST EMBASSY



Putting on a corking event for esteemed guests requires exemplary decision-making

2 THE SMARTEST AIRLINE



The well-designed airport lounge that makes you pray for a long delay

3 THE TASTIEST CHEF



Ruth Rogers of the River Café describes the menu for her perfect 'last meal'

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Better buildings

New beginnings *Pocket Projects' CV*

- 2010** Karen Tan returns to Singapore from London and founds Pocket Projects
- 2012** Blaise Trigg-Smith relocates to Southeast Asia and joins as co-founder. Lorong 24a Shophouse Series opens
- 2013** Lorong 24a project wins its second URA Architectural Heritage award and is nominated for the President's Design award
- 2014** Sharon Tan joins the team. The Projector launches during the Singapore International Film Festival
- 2015** The Row phase one is due to open in Kuala Lumpur

01

03 Pocket Projects, Singapore Small-scale regeneration

A mention of the Singaporean property market might bring to mind slick office towers, aspirationally named condominiums and glittering leisure complexes. Yet Pocket Projects, a young all-female creative-development consultancy that specialises in adaptive reuse – the repurposing of old sites or buildings – is hoping to change that. “Where others see problems and rubbish, we see potential,” says company founder Karen Tan.

In a country that has modernised at breakneck pace, Pocket Projects' creative yet economical approach to reinventing heritage architecture is a refreshing contribution to the property mix. “Conservation in Singapore is not always about freezing a building in its past,” says Teh Lai Yip, senior director of conservation at Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). Rather, Teh says, the city-state's stock of close to 7,200 conserved buildings “must continue to be useful and relevant for today's needs”.

“We love old spaces because they have their own story to tell,” says Karen, contrasting her company's development approach with the trend of aspiring toward the “new and shiny” especially prevalent in Southeast Asia.

Native Singaporean Karen and her US business partner Blaise Trigg-Smith met a decade ago in London. Last year they lured Karen's sister Sharon away from a job in urban planning to bring her expertise and zeal to the company.



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Notably for the industry that it operates in, Pocket Projects is relatively youthful: Karen is 34, Trigg-Smith is 33. “We are a start-up so we don't have significant assets to use on land acquisitions,” says Trigg-Smith. “But we cover our costs, we have some investments that we hope to see a return on and we are growing in terms of our staff, our finances and our track record.”

The firm first earned acclaim at the start of the decade with their Lorong 24a Shophouse Series. For this project it commissioned eight local architects to reinterpret the interiors of a row of 1920s houses in Geylang.

United behind a tastefully restored façade, each architecture firm took a different approach to their respective interior. Many original elements were kept, including window panels, brickwork and beams but freshened up with lap pools, spiral staircases and laser-cut screens. The URA awarded the project two Architectural Heritage Awards and Teh praises the shophouses' “creative approaches on modest budgets” and the cultural



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activities they host between leases to strengthen the area's community spirit.

The idea of cultivating community is echoed in Pocket Projects' most recent development. The Projector is its reinvention of a rundown cinema as a multi-use space that launched as an official venue of the Singapore International Film Festival in December.

The Projector is on the fifth floor of 1970s landmark the Golden Mile Tower, situated between the Kampong Glam enclave and the Kallang River Basin. The rest of the tower is filled with a jumble of businesses including budget travel agents, Thai snack bars and computer shops. These odd neighbours, combined with Singaporeans' enthusiasm for multiplexes showing bland international blockbusters, serve to make The Projector a less-than-obvious endeavour. Yet Pocket Projects relished the opportunity to fill what Sharon calls a "gaping hole in Singapore's cultural ecosystem". The light-touch renovation retains many charming elements from the cinema's original incarnation, including the floor lettering, seats and signage. Money for a portion of the refurbishment was sourced via crowdfunding and local design studio Farm also pitched in as a co-investor.

The firm's next project aims to rejuvenate a tired collection of 1940s shophouses in Kuala Lumpur. The Row will provide residential, retail, small offices, F&B and cultural spaces and is pitched as an antidote to KL's ubiquitous malls and towers. The first phase of the project, encompassing a co-working space and several independent food-and-drink operators, is due to open next month with the developers courting handpicked local retailers for tenancies in the second phase. With Pocket Projects' young team, "their energy and belief in their strategy for the project won us over", says Chan Chia Lin, a key investor in The Row.

Pocket Projects demonstrates what can be achieved when passion, creativity and a sensitive approach to place serve to subsidise modest budgets. It will be fascinating to see what they do next, particularly if they are able to defy Singapore's currently soft property market to attract larger investors to future projects. — SMI



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- 01 No 11 at the Lorong 24a Shophouse Series
- 02 Spiral staircase at No 19
- 03 Sharon and Karen Tan
- 04 New development plans
- 05 Karen and Sharon Tan (front from left) with the Pocket Projects team
- 06 Pool at No 19
- 07 Striking staircase in The Projector's lobby
- 08 The Projector entrance
- 09 Shophouse façades
- 10 Larger screening room at The Projector