

YTL *life*

The YTL Luxury Magazine

COLLECTOR'S EDITION

HOTEL MAJESTIC

CREATING HISTORY SINCE 1932

The grande dame reawakens

Colonial Cuisine • The Majestic Spa • Of Gin Pahits & More



Can you recall what you had for tea yesterday?

Maria Menado can still remember her afternoon at The Majestic over 50 years ago.



Maria Menado, Malaya's screen goddess from the 50s, was socialising with the likes of P.Ramlee and Tunku Abdul Rahman at The Majestic. Now that we're about to open our doors once more, we would love to hear your stories too. Please email us at info@majestickl.com

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.
Creating history since 1932.

A YTL CLASSIC HOTEL

5, Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin, 50000 Kuala Lumpur. Tel: (603) 2785 8000



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The YTL Luxury Magazine

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A Note from Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh



Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh
Managing Director,
YTL Corporation

Built in 1932 as one of colonial Malaya's finest hotels, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, regarded, in its heyday, as one of the great hotels in Asia, is now poised to rejoin the ranks of the world's legendary properties, like The Peninsula in Hong Kong, Singapore's Raffles and New York's Waldorf Astoria. It is a great honour to have been entrusted with restoring this grande dame to its former glory and majesty. A national heritage building and an intrinsic part of Malaysia's history, it has been privy to the changing tides of the country; from witnessing its proclamation of Independence to the tremendous growth of the nation. YTL Hotels, with our consistent track record in spearheading vision and creating value, has successfully seen to the painstaking restoration of The Majestic – from the exquisite and original five-story building to a beautiful annexe that complements the property's much-treasured historicity.

Our efforts have earned the new Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur a coveted listing in the Leading Hotels of the World – the only hotel in Kuala Lumpur to bear this badge of honour, an accolade only other landmark hotels like The Ritz in London and, in Paris, Le Bristol possess. The restoration of this colonial icon is in-line with YTL's vision, which has included the transformation of Bintang Walk in Kuala Lumpur and encouraging duty-free shopping in the 1990s, all of which have been the catalyst in the city's transformation. This move, I am happy to report, has recently led to Kuala Lumpur being awarded the world's fourth-best shopping destination by CNN, and the second-best shopping city in Asia-Pacific by the Globe Shopper Index.

It is not often that one has the privilege to be part of a renaissance. From spearheading growth in the city's retail scene to being able to usher in a glorious new era for The Majestic Hotel, I am pleased at YTL's contribution in reaffirming Kuala Lumpur as a truly great city of the world. I look forward to welcoming new generations of guests to what I hope to be the city's finest hotel – a truly luxurious property that combines the best of past and present, in a way that is uniquely YTL. I also wish to thank my Lord Jesus Christ for all His bountiful blessings. Welcome to the new Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

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An artist's impression of the lobby at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, the latest addition to the ranks of the Leading Hotels of the World.

Only The Best

When it comes to luxury experiences, only the highest standards will do at The Leading Hotels of the World. Find out what it is that makes membership so exclusive.

For more than 80 years, The Leading Hotels of the World, Ltd (LHW) has been meticulously curating a list of members that exemplifies the best of luxury hospitality. Today, it represents more than 430 of the finest hotels, resorts and spas in over 80 countries. With its headquarters in New York City, it has a network of 24 offices in key cities around the world.

In 1928, a group of European hoteliers established LHW as a way to connect directly with the travellers and the then-crucial travel agencies in the North American market. There were 38 members in the beginning, mostly in Europe and Egypt, including the renowned Hotel Negresco in Nice and Mena House in Cairo. To become a member, a hotel must adhere to the strictest standards of quality and master the art of extraordinary hospitality, a standard that has continued to the present day. In

1971, as the world opened up and international travel continued to grow in leaps and bounds, the organisation decided to include members from around the world. By the 1980s, its numbers had grown to 235, serviced by offices in Europe, Asia, Australia and the Americas.

High Standards

Potential and existing members are evaluated against the highest benchmarks of the luxury hospitality industry. These standards are also periodically reviewed and revised as the landscape of travel and guest expectations change. Product and service standards are established through Leading Quality Assurance, an organisation that conducts anonymous spot checks for the world's most prestigious hospitality organisations. With a detailed point system, the checks cover all aspects of the guest experience, from reservation to check

in, to the stay and check out. Every area of the hotel comes under scrutiny, from front-of-house to back-of-house and everything in between.

LHW is always thinking ahead, staying one step ahead of customer behaviour and expectations. Recently, it re-evaluated its standards criteria, taking into account the present environment, customers' changing expectations and purchasing patterns of high-end consumers. Behavioural and intuitive interactions also have to be considered, in addition to the physical aspects of the stay.

Ted Teng, president and chief executive officer of LHW, said that this re-evaluation of the organisation's standards criteria will ensure that members continually deliver even more outstanding luxury experiences to their guests. "By enhancing and further defining product standards, and adding staff behavioural factors, we have substantially raised the bar when it comes to demanding and delivering excellence. In order to attain higher scores, hotels definitely have to pay even greater attention to precision, and focus closely on personnel training and empowerment," he said in a press release.

Trent Walsh, managing director of Leading Quality Assurance, says that it has amassed a comprehensive set of global benchmarking data in the industry through evaluating noted luxury brands like Mandarin Oriental, Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton. With this information, along with a revised and more stringent set of inspection standards, LHW offers its members a great and distinct advantage. Membership at the LHW means instant recognition and prestige, as its strict standards allow its members to raise their quality profiles to match the competition.

Every member is periodically inspected to ensure adherence to the said standards. A directory of its member hotels is published every two years. In addition, it also provides marketing and public relations support to its members through exclusive programmes for their guests. LHW doesn't solicit members; rather, hotels wanting to join the ranks of the LHW must apply for admission. To be considered, the hotel must be in the luxury category and meet the highest standards in the areas of accommodations, service, cuisine, employee behaviour and facilities. Only the best is allowed in this inner circle, ensuring exclusivity and quality.

Continuous Innovation

LHW's members are very innovative and forward thinking when it comes to creating a wonderful experience for their guests. Recently, many of its member hotels introduced the VIP Airport Experience for high-flying guests. To combat crowded flights, traffic jams, long lines at airport security and crowded terminals, these luxury hotels have come up with the ultimate VIP assistance.

Tortuga Bay in the Dominican Republic, for example, welcomes its guests right at the airplane, whisking them through immigration

"By enhancing and further defining product standards, and adding staff behavioural factors, we have substantially raised the bar when it comes to demanding and delivering excellence."

and taking them directly to the resort vehicle waiting outside. At Le Royal Monceau – Raffles in Paris, guests are met at the gate and brought to a VIP-only "Express" desk to clear immigration, after which an agent will take care of their luggage before escorting them to the awaiting limousine. Guests of the Taj Mahal in Mumbai have access to a one-point contact at the airport, who will expedite immigration, luggage and hotel transfers, leaving them stress-free.

Other LHW hotels that offer similar experiences are The PuLi Hotel & Spa in Shanghai, Copacabana Palace in Rio, The Saxon Boutique Hotel, Villas & Spa in South Africa, La Mamounia in Marrakech and, most-recently, the newly-opened The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

Award-Winning Effort

In the recently-published 25th Annual *Condé Nast Traveler* Readers Choice Awards, 118 hotels that were selected were LHW hotels. That is the highest among all other luxury brands. A total of 46,476 readers participated in the survey and LHW hotels were rated with scores above 90. This is a true testament to the company's commitment to quality and excellence.

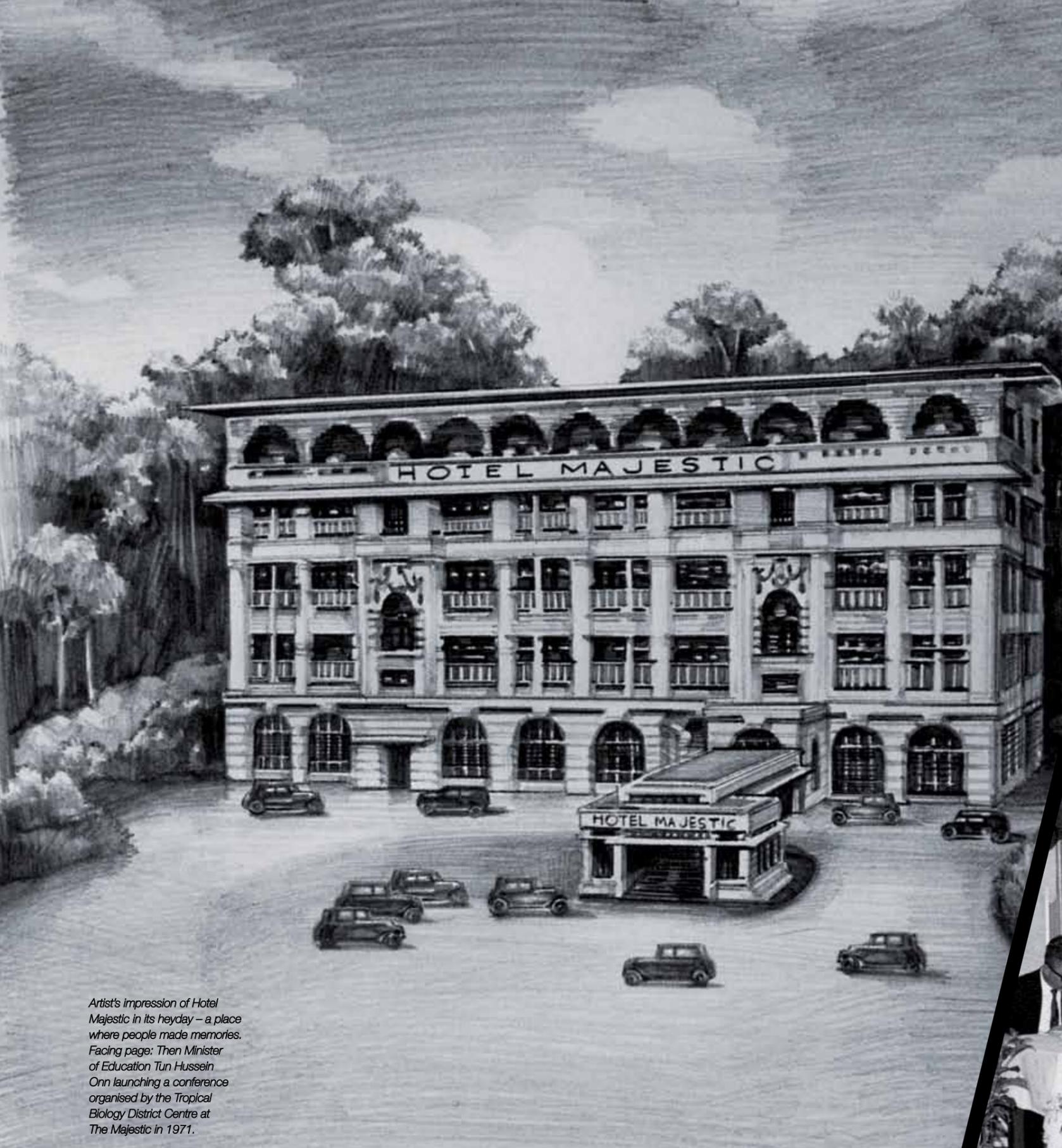
What is it that customers can expect when they walk into a LHW hotel? This set of discerning clientele would be used to the best that life has to offer, therefore nothing less than spectacular will do. This group demands a certain level of quality that they have come to associate with all LHW hotels. They seek authentic and enriching travel experiences and that is what LHW hotels go above and beyond the call of duty to fulfil. ■

For reservations, visit www.LHW.com.

MAJESTIC ACROSS TIME

AS THE MAJESTIC HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR REOPENS, WE LOOK BACK AT ITS COLOURFUL PAST AND THE PROMINENT AND MEMORABLE ROLE IT PLAYED IN OUR CAPITAL'S – AND COUNTRY'S – HISTORY.

Text Priscilla Rajan Illustration Chew Shing Yi



Artist's impression of Hotel Majestic in its heyday – a place where people made memories. Facing page: Then Minister of Education Tun Hussein Onn launching a conference organised by the Tropical Biology District Centre at The Majestic in 1971.



Image from Star Publications (M) Bhd

It was said to be truly majestic; a beacon for travellers, comfort for expatriates and stage to artistes of the global showbiz fraternity. The Hotel Majestic was recognisable, desirable and, more importantly, memorable. First opening its doors on 15 August 1932, the hotel would play a significant role in many events – big and small – in the many months and years to come, before finally closing its doors on 31 December 1983. Its closing was met with great sorrow as many viewed it as an irreplaceable national treasure.

Yet, what was it that made The Majestic just so special? Through the years, what stood out most for the hotel was its pivotal role in the social tapestry that was Kuala Lumpur; it was a place where people made memories. Patrons were said to have called The Majestic “unpretentious”, “best place pre-war” and talk about how, every Wednesday and Saturday, there would be dancing, after which the patrons would adjourn to the Selangor Club to “continue with revelries until the early hours.”

The hotel would have been the first choice for many a traveller entering the capital city. The hotel itself was not huge – it measured 150 feet in length, 70 feet high and was designed by Dutch architect Van Leangeanderg of the firm Messrs Keys & Dowdeswell in a mix of neo-Renaissance and Art Deco, built at a cost of 500,000 Straits dollars. Reviewers called it “the favourite hotel of the discerning

visitor to Kuala Lumpur”, with its gorgeous roof garden where many of the parties took place. The lodgings itself constituted more than 50 rooms with modern sanitation, 18 of which had long baths and boasted hot and cold showers, no doubt a great luxury at the time of its opening.

This first premier-class hotel became an immediate hit with the local nobles and colonial elite of the 1930s as well as the perfect location for important government and state occasions. Guests at the hotel included the Chinese actress Tze Loh Lin, who stayed at the hotel during the release of her movie *Dark Heaven*, Mrs Buxton, the secretary to the High Commissioner Sir Gerald Templer, and theatre buff and author Donald Davies. The Rotary Club had its weekly luncheon meetings there, as did the Kuala Lumpur Musical Society, which invited European artistes to the hotel to perform.

More than just a venue, The Majestic had character, and it attracted a fair menagerie of oddball characters. There was an Irish novelist who locked herself in her room, living only on orange juice until her book was finished – it took her 10 days. Then, there was an elderly man who kept telling the other guests that he was the illegitimate son of Sherlock Holmes, no less. Possibly an early proponent of biodiversity conservation, there was also an Englishman who scurried about surveying the dragonfly population that he claimed was on a decline. He walked around with an ultrasonic recorder hoping to pick up dragonfly activity for his census.

Such characters took nothing away from The Majestic but, instead, made it the beloved of so many. It was said to have a “great sense of comfort” that allowed for relaxing and for giving its guests the



Clockwise from above: The re-opened Hotel Majestic Kuala Lumpur; Hotel Majestic in 1981; Then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak

speaking at a National Union of Journalists Malaya's dinner at The Majestic on 9 October 1965.

breathing space so many of them sought, away from the hustle and bustle of their own lives. It also gave a great deal of attention to the ease of the guest, a characteristic that is now often hard to find as hotels have gone the way of business and not quite that of seamless service.

Among the many traditions linked to the hotel, the unique *rijstaffel* stands out – it means ‘rice table’ and is an extensive Padang meal adapted by the Dutch in West Sumatra. Eaten with rice, side dishes may number 30 to 40, including *sambal*, fish, pickles and nuts. The Sunday *rijstaffel* lunch was typically washed down with homemade shandy in the 1960s, and was much en vogue.

As the city around it continued to grow and expand, other hotels began to crop up in Kuala Lumpur. One was the 40-room Capitol Hotel, which was said to have not impressed the more stylish and urbane segment of KL society. The Europeans, too, were more likely to have remained with The Majestic as it saw to their creature comforts. Into the mid-1950s, the nine-storey Federal Hotel made its appearance, playing a big part in being home for the who’s who that had arrived to see Malaysia claim her independence. Still, The Majestic remained forefront and would continue to do so well into the 1970s.

Although The Majestic was classified under the Antiquities Act 1976, which provides for the preservation of places and

structures of historical and architectural significance, it didn’t stop its closure in 1983. And when the hotel’s last guests checked out that fateful New Year’s Day, the hotel had survived for some 50-odd years and had acquired layers upon layers of history.

Now, nearly 30 years later, a revival is afoot. The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur was recently unveiled in early December 2012 as a YTL Classic Hotel. With the restoration of the five-storey Hotel Majestic, now christened the Majestic Wing, YTL Hotels has given new life to a Malaysian icon. Its rooms have been converted to 48 luxurious suites that radiate the history and stature of the building. As service has always been part of The Majestic, the rooms in the Majestic Wing will be offered full butler service.

YTL Hotels owns and manages hotels of luxury and prestige and, with its collection of award-winning hotels and Spa Villages in South-East Asia, China, Japan, France and the UK, the company was the perfect partner to revive the splendour of old Malaya. It has always strived to embrace and highlight the true culture and character of every site it develops, and the newly-branded The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur



Image from The New Straits Times (Malaysia) Press



Clockwise, from top: University of Malaya Vice-Chancellor Dato’ Sir Alexander Oppenheim proposing a toast to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong at the university’s convocation dinner held at Hotel Majestic in 1963; The new Bar flanked by the Colonial Café; The Colonial Suite in the restored Majestic Wing.



Image from Star Publications (M) Bhd



Image from Star Publications (M) Bhd



“More than just a venue, The Majestic had character, and it attracted a fair menagerie of oddball characters.”

is no different. The architect and builders have kept the external facade as intact as possible, sticking to its original hybrid of neo-classical and Art Deco, where simple lines are married with Roman columns and intricate cornices.

YTL Hotels has further developed the land surrounding the original Hotel Majestic to complement the building and add to its appeal. On the right of the Majestic Wing is the Majestic Spa, offering an array of rejuvenating experiences amidst style and opulence. On the left of the Majestic Wing, by means of a walkway that goes past the orchid conservatory, is the newly-built Tower Wing. Designed by architect Zaidan Tahir, the Tower Wing has taken the prominent elements of the Majestic Wing but included modern touches to make the hotel more attractive and welcoming to the discerning palate of the 21st-century guest. The new wing will house

253 plush guest rooms and suites, and harmonises with the older wing beautifully.

Together, the Majestic Wing and the Tower Wing make The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur a sight to behold and, more importantly, it is set to be the star of the capital once again. With its two full-service restaurants, tea lounge, reading room, drawing room and pool, the latest in gym equipment, the Majestic Spa, meeting rooms and a pillar-less ballroom that can seat up to 1,200 guests, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur will no doubt shine in the months and years to come.

Now, the story of Hotel Majestic has always been that of family. Back in the day, the Lim family originally managed it, although the Lokes, a prominent philanthropic family in British Malaya, owned the building. Interestingly, in those early days, the hotel had a close association with the

Hainanese community in Malaysia, who used to be dressed in starched white cotton suits trimmed with red stripes. Building on its character of serving its guests' every need, it was recorded that the hotel used to hire the wives of hotel staff to babysit expatriate children for RM2 an hour, with the year-end festivities being a peak period for the babysitters.

Another interesting point about the hotel is the term Majestic itself, which seemed rather popular with the older set; quite a number of Majestic Hotels are found worldwide, with all of them spoken of fondly. One such example is the Hotel Majestic in Barcelona, Spain, which is a major historic hotel located not far from Gaudi's La Pedrera. The hotel has been in existence for more than 90 years and was originally named the Majestic Hotel Inglaterra, and had 100 rooms. Then, there's the Hotel Majestic in San Francisco



From far left: Voon Chin Keng wiping down the bar at The Majestic in 1983; A photograph from 1981 showing the gardens near the entrance of The Majestic; Chinese actress Tze Loh Lin at The Majestic; The present-day Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur retains some of the colonial touches of its predecessor, including a doorman dressed in a pith helmet.



Image from Star Publications (M) Bhd



Image from Star Publications (M) Bhd



Image from National Archives



Clockwise, from top left: The empty lounge-cum-restaurant the day after The Majestic closed in 1984; The Drawing Room of the new Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur; Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin with The Majestic in the background in the 1970s; Dato' Sir Onn Ja'afar announcing his resignation from UMNO at the Roof Garden of The Majestic on 25 August 1951.

that was built by the Schmitt Family; it was four-storeys high, had 57 guest rooms, 25 bathtubs, 30 water closets and 29 wash basins! Majestic Hotels can be found in New South Wales, Australia, in Santorini, Greece, and even in Tunis, Tunisia.

Furthermore, Majestic Hotels have appeared in two Agatha Christie novels — in *Peril at End House*, the Imperial is renamed Majestic Hotel, while in *Body in the Library*, the amateur sleuth Miss Marple spends the night at the Majestic Hotel, Danemouth. There seems to be a special connection between guests and their hotels Majestic; with YTL's revitalising of the site, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur that continues to sit lovingly opposite the Moorish-designed Railway Station, will once again join its worldwide namesakes in being first in hearts.

History will always be embedded in this hotel and its significance will not change despite it getting a makeover. During World War II, this grande dame found herself in the midst of much intrigue, with former patrons claiming that Allied forces used to exchange information at the height of the war at the hotel; no doubt their enemies did the same. Political conspiracies were also discussed over tea and scones, as new parties were formed behind closed doors. The idea for UMNO is said to have been conceived at the hotel, and the party later chose to hold a number of its general assemblies there as well. The inaugural meeting of the Independence of Malaya Party, founded by Onn Ja'afar after he left UMNO in 1951, in fact had its first meeting at The Majestic Hotel according to historians.

Memories being what they are, many wanted to preserve their association with the hotel. Many former patrons made it to the auction that was held before the official closing to get themselves a bit of

history, a piece of their memory. Bathtubs with cast iron lion's feet, chandeliers, teak furniture and, in some cases, whole rooms were auctioned off to make way for the building's new incarnation: The National Art Gallery.

Certainly, this was a sad time for many. Some called the auctioning of the furniture and fittings rape, with rubbish strewn under the dome-shaped roof; others still signed petitions to prevent the hotel being turned into an art gallery. Architect Hajeedar Haji Abdul Majid was quoted as having said: "An old man without memories is not an old man, is he? A city like ours needs buildings like the Majestic. They are a measure, a physical form by which we measure time and the progress we have made".

As the National Art Gallery, the building that housed the Hotel Majestic would undergo minor interior refurbishment to fit its new role. The gallery was housed there for 14 years, where it held some 60 exhibitions, before the call came for it to move as well. In the end of July 1992, the government began considering a proposal by Syarikat Yeoh Tiong Lay (YTL); in exchange for a new art gallery, the former Majestic Hotel would be handed over to YTL to convert into an exclusive hotel. And, so, this is where a new chapter begins, where new memories will be made. Three decades later, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur has come full circle. ☑

New Start for a National Icon

Architect Zaidan Tahir shares the challenges he faced while refurbishing the iconic Hotel Majestic for its new incarnation as The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

Text Priscilla Rajan

It would have been a daunting task already for any architect asked to refurbish a national icon; to design and build a building to complement it as well, now, that would have been nerve-racking, not to mention stressful. Yet that was exactly what Zaidan Tahir was tasked with by YTL Hotels on the site that formerly housed the Hotel Majestic in Kuala Lumpur.

Reopened in December 2012, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, comprising the Majestic Wing, Tower Wing, Majestic Spa and The Smoke House, aims to bring back the nostalgia of a bygone era where hotels were truly homes away from homes, where service was of utmost quality and loyal guests were a hotel's best advertisement.

More than a decade ago, however, all Zaidan had were 3.2 acres of land, the original Hotel Majestic building that had been left unused for a number of years and a couple of smaller annexe buildings to work with, to create the masterpiece that is set to be a YTL Classic. Interestingly, Zaidan was familiar with the site, having visited it during his college days. "I paid a visit to the building when it housed the National Art Gallery. I enjoyed walking around, appreciating the small details of the building, its style and architecture," says the Texas Tech University graduate.

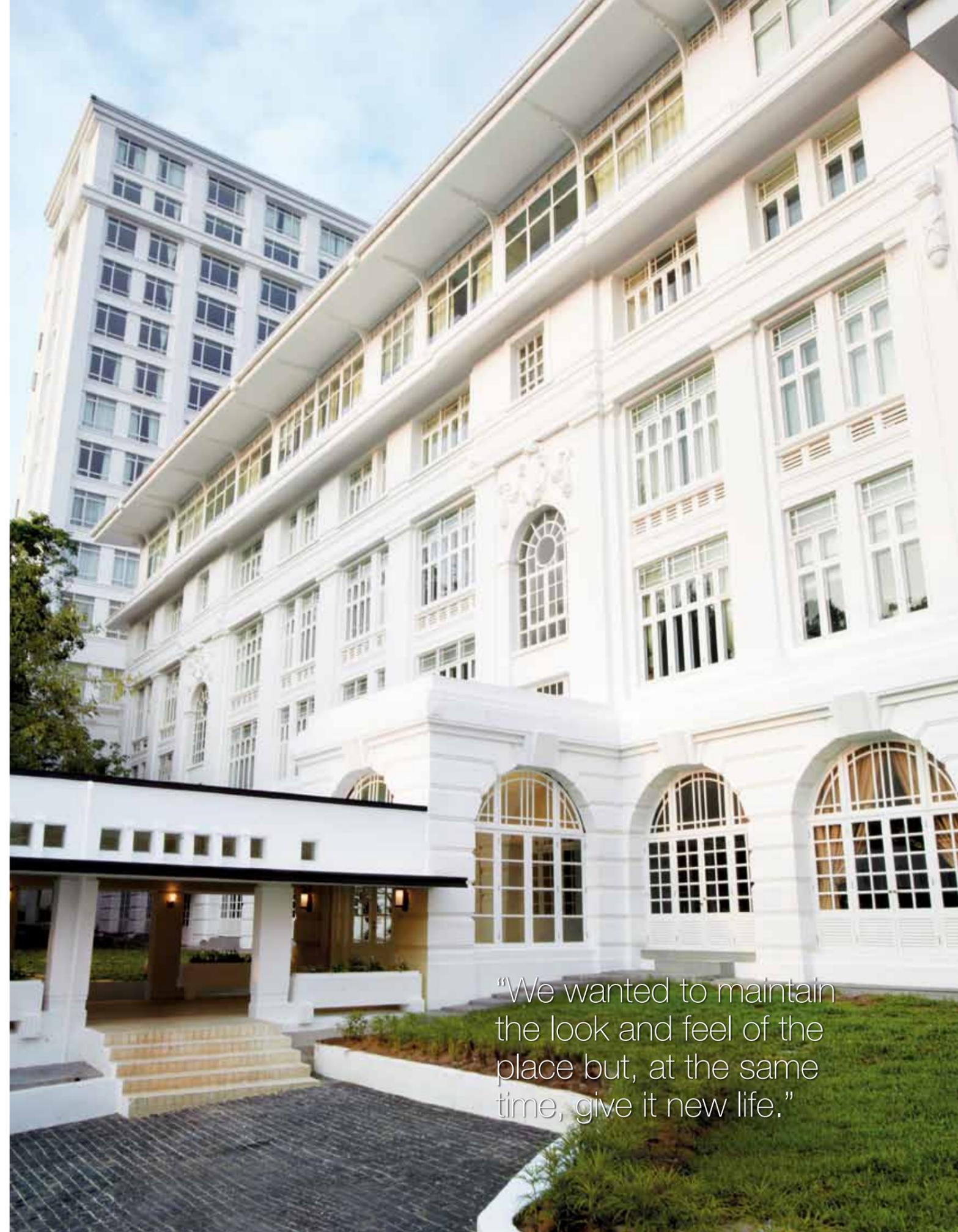
Designed by Dutch architect Van Leangeanderg, the building's high ceilings, neo-classical style with splashes of Art Deco made for a memorable visit, with many of its guests enjoying the hotel's simple sophistication. "I have always had keen interest in historical

buildings with good spatial quality and interesting architectural details, and this hotel was certainly one of them."

The original building that housed the Hotel Majestic was made up of an entrance hall, a lounge and dining hall, cloak rooms, kitchens, a separate grill room and bar, and a management office. The dining hall and lounge had teak floors that made dancing fabulous entertainment and had also facilities for cabaret entertainment. The hotel had a roof garden which was a big hit with guests and where many functions were held. The hotel had a decidedly old world feel, where the style was a mixture of simplicity and function, which was what guests enjoyed the most and what Zaidan, in his refurbishment, hoped to preserve.

What Zaidan and his crew have created in the old building – the Majestic Wing – is truly remarkable. Walk through the doors and one can see what it would have been like in the 1930s: the domed roof, the wooden bar, the light streaming in through the windows and doors... "We wanted to maintain the look and feel of the place but, at the same time, give it new life. For example, we kept the dome roof in the entrance hall but we added gold leaf, which has livened up the room," he says.

Another beautiful sight at the Majestic Wing is the lampshades sitting on side tables across the lobby and light fittings on the walls. Based on articles of the auction that took place when the Hotel Majestic closed in the early 1980s, some of the original light fittings included vintage wrought-iron ceiling lamps that were suspended by pulleys and a counterweight. In the refurbishment, light fixtures were specially designed to recreate a similar aura and transporting guests to a bygone era. This theme runs throughout the Majestic wing and can be found in the guest suites, too. The original

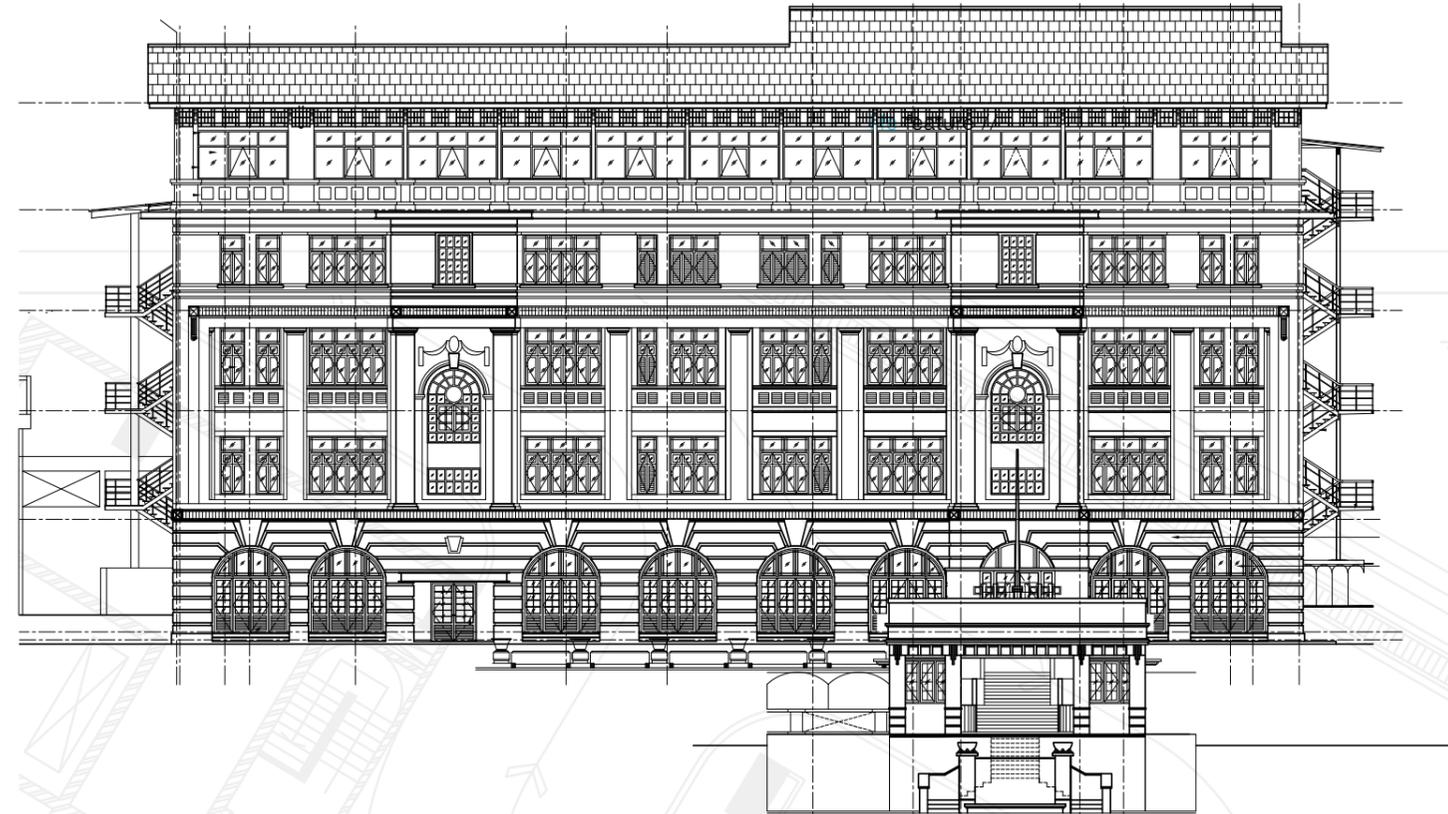


"We wanted to maintain the look and feel of the place but, at the same time, give it new life."

staircase, with its unique albeit old-fashioned design of little squares cut into the solid frame, still leads up to the guest rooms, and while its floorboards have been changed, they maintain the same style idea.

Zaidan is no stranger when it comes to giving old buildings new life. He has been instrumental in working on a number of YTL Hotels projects, one being Cameron Highlands Resort, where he refurbished the former Merlin Hotel and created a two-storey structure that harmonises perfectly with the rugged terrain and greenery of the highlands. He also worked on The Majestic Malacca project that saw it undergo a roughly USD10million renovation. Again, like the Cameron Highlands property, the YTL Hotels element of emphasising the culture and tradition of the property was foremost in the brief.

With these among many other experiences, Zaidan was able to bring out the best of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur site, especially as he was cognisant of the existing architecture of the area and the feel of the surroundings. "There were many challenges in designing the hotel, mainly with regard to the Majestic Wing, which falls under the Antiquities Act 1976. We had to be very sensitive to its original design architecturally and structurally, and could only do minimal changes to the interior space and ensure we maintained the architectural elevation of the original design."



The rooms in the Majestic Wing are stylish and opulent, with adjoining sitting room and bathroom. Furnishings were picked by Zaidan and his team and approved by the hotel owners, which he says helped the whole concept of the hotel merge well: a perfect marriage of architectural and interior design. The bathrooms are lovely spaces, with claw foot bathtubs, handheld deck-mounted classic mixer showers, as well as separate shower areas fitted with delightfully powerful rain showers – perfect examples of old world meeting new amenities, which suits the hotel perfectly. This, the older wing, has 48 suites in the five-storey building and comes with full butler service that guarantees a fantastic guest experience.

Back down the stairs, we find the lounge, reading room and bar, with the Majestic Spa building to the right. There's an infinity pool in the Majestic Spa, which also carries the styling details of the Majestic Wing.

The new addition – the Tower Wing – is on the left of the old building and consists of 253 beautifully-designed rooms, a full-service restaurant, swimming pool, gymnasium, 16 meeting rooms and a pillar-free ballroom that can seat up to 1,200 guests.

"The Art Deco period represents luxury, glamour, exuberance and technological progress, which I found would be the best concept for the interior of this new building, elements of which are found in the old building," says Zaidan. "Therefore, we included elements such as mirrors, polished chrome, stainless steel and dark ebony veneer in the concept for the Tower Wing. In designing the new portion of the hotel, I was very careful to make sure that the building has the same architectural language, rhythm and proportion in respect to the old building, with the neo-classical and Art Deco

architecture, and, at the same time, staying true to the original design of Van Leangeanderg."

The lobby of the Tower Wing also has elements of gold leaf in its ceiling, with a gorgeous chandelier providing dazzling lighting. Similar chandeliers light up the ballroom, creating a magnificent venue for weddings, product launches, conferences and meetings. The newer wing also has function rooms that are serviced by a separate set of lifts, so as not to disrupt the convenience of the hotel's live-in guests. The ground floor houses a interactive dining concept restaurant and wine cellar.

"In my opinion, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur is already an iconic hotel in the city; it is the only hotel in Kuala Lumpur with a strong historical background," says Zaidan, referring to the many major events and functions that have taken place here from the 1930s, through to the independence of Malaya and even the changing landscape of Kuala Lumpur in the 1980s.

"Being the grandest hotel in its day, on par with the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, we feel that we have successfully brought back its old world charm and grandeur; the hotel is certainly back to its glory days. As architects, we always hope that the building will stand the test of time and be appreciated by the public in the future," says Zaidan, looking like a proud father at this beautiful creation. That's surely one test The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur is ready to pass, with flying colours no less. ■



Contango, the Tower Wing's contemporary interactive restaurant.

life feature //

Opening In Style

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur opens in grand style with three consecutive weekends of world-class musical entertainment, featuring the Mills Brothers, Freddy Cole and The Original Rat Pack.

Text Errol de Cruz





Brothers in Harmony

Grammies, gratifying music and so much more from the legendary Mills Brothers.

It's not often my heart skips a beat but the Mills Brothers seem to do that just with their music. To be honest, I didn't realise the band was still around. They'd been playing for a long, long time already when I first heard them back in the 1980s.

The Mills Story

John Jr, Harry, Herbert and Donald Mills began their starry career in 1922, as an American jazz and pop vocal quartet who went on to make more than 2,000 recordings that sold a combined 50 million copies, and garnering at least three dozen gold records. In 1934, the Mills Brothers became the first African-Americans to give a command performance before British royalty. They performed at the Regal Theatre for a special audience that

included Their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary.

While performing in England, John Jr became ill. It took him months to recover from battling pneumonia. Before he completely recovered, the Brothers returned to England, where John Jr once again became sick and died in the beginning of 1936. The remaining brothers considered breaking up, but their mother convinced them that John Jr would want them to continue. They followed her suggestion and their father, John Sr, came on board as the baritone and to play the tuba. At this time, Norman Brown also joined the Mills Brothers as their guitar player.

In 1943, the Mills Brothers were anxious for a hit and recorded *I'll Be Around*. Donald chose *Paper Doll* as the B-side of the record. *I'll Be Around* became a popular hit, until a disc jockey turned the record over. *Paper Doll*, recorded in 15 minutes, sold six million copies and became the group's biggest hit.

Gratifying Music

The Mills Brothers, from Piqua, Ohio, 40km north of Dayton, were inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in 1998. Of the three original Brothers, however, tenor Herbert died on 12 April 1989, baritone Harry on 28 June 1982 and lead tenor Donald on 13 November 1999.

Still, the magic of the Mills Brothers' honey-dripping vocalising continues unabated today under the leadership of John Mills III, who recreates the band's inimitable sounds while vocalising the multitude of hit songs that made the family famous. John started performing with his father, Donald – the last surviving original – in 1982, and now brings to stage the newest generation of the Mills Brothers. This new duo includes and highlights the beautiful voice and compelling stage presence of the talented Elmer Hopper, who spent 21 years with the renowned Platters.

Hopper was 19 in 1974 when he was trained personally by Paul Robi, the baritone of the original Platters. Hopper accompanied Robi on an international tour in what was said to be the best ensemble of The Platters since the group's inception. Hopper and Robi were best of friends for more than 15 years before the latter succumbed to cancer in 1989. Hopper continued touring the world with The Platters until 1999, when he joined John Mills III in the latest incarnation of the Mills Brothers.

On The Road

On tour, Hopper and John have combined their unique talents to present the incomparable music of the Mills Brothers in the original keys and with the original scores, embracing a high level of vocal musicality and integrity that is rare in this day and age. Hopper is a truly gifted singer who says that performing as the Mills Brothers has been extremely gratifying, as there are few endeavours that compare with his prior illustrious musical achievements. Capacity crowds singing along to familiar songs,

rising to their feet cheering through multiple standing ovations... there's nothing like the Mills Brothers when they play.

With their impeccable musicology and the priceless Mills Brothers discography of smash recordings, John and Hopper present a singular recreation of music that has been universally embraced by audiences since 1922, when the original quartet first stepped onto a stage, at the Mays Opera House in Piqua, Ohio, more than two generations ago.

The band's distinctive sound captured the fancy of audiences, earning them a Grammy for Lifetime Achievement in 1998, and that musical mystique still continues today. Classic hits include *Tiger Rag*, *Cab Driver*, *Glow Worm*, *Lazy River*, *Yellow Bird*, *Basin Street Blues*, *Opus One*, *Paper Doll* and many others, a tradition that continued into the 1990s, when John and his father, Donald, released their own recording, *Still... There's You*, a compilation of some of the original group's greatest songs and new material. ■

This page:
The Mills Brothers (from left) Herbert, Donald, Harry, and John Jr appearing in the 1935 musical film 'Broadway Gondolier.'



Facing page:
(from right) Herbert, Harry and Donald Mills with a guitar accompanist. Donald's son, John, is now carrying the torch for the family.

Cole Play

As part of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's star-studded line-up of musical greats for its gala opening, Lionel Frederick Cole oozes the same jazz greatness as his better-known brother, Nat 'King' Cole.

Jazz maestro Freddy Cole will be performing at The Majestic's grand opening. Facing page: Cole's brother, Nat, was another jazz great.

Lionel Frederick Cole doesn't apologise for sounding like his brother, Nat 'King' Cole. There are certain unmistakable similarities. Cole plays the piano and sings, and performs live with guitar and upright bass, just like Nat did; yet, his voice is raspier, smokier, jazzier even. That was obvious when he performed solo at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas in Kuala Lumpur a few years ago, an evening of crooning and ivory tinkling that made you swoon.

This Cole, however, has emerged from the awesome shadow cast by his elder brother. In truth, his phrasing is far closer

to that of Frank Sinatra or Billie Holiday than that of his brother. His timing swings a little more and his vocals are among the most respected in jazz, with more colour than his sibling.

Cole, who began playing piano before he was six, still records and performs live at the ripe age of 81. His album, *Freddy Cole Sings Mr B*, earned him a Grammy nomination last year. Born on 15 October 1931, the youngest of Edward and Paulina Nancy Cole's five children, his three elder brothers, Eddie, Ike and Nat (12 years Freddy's senior) were all musicians.



“He began playing and singing in Chicago clubs as a teenager and went on to become a fantastic recording artiste and performer.”

“Music was all around me,” he said, as his Chicago home received regular celebrity visitors like Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Lionel Hampton. Cole, however, credits Billy Eckstine as a major influence: “He was a fantastic entertainer. I learned so much from just watching and being around him.” It was obviously the psyche of Eckstine's presence that invaded his musical soul.

Like most red, white and blue Americans, Cole wanted to play football but a hand injury put an end to that. Football's loss was music's gain, as he began playing and singing in Chicago clubs as a teenager and

went on to become a fantastic recording artiste and performer.

When he was a teenager, wanting to hit the road at 18, there was a snag: Paulina Nancy insisted otherwise: “Go to college!” Thankfully, it was music college that Mama Cole was referring to and Cole soon found himself getting a proper music foundation at the Roosevelt Institute in Chicago. He moved to New York in 1951, where he studied at the Juilliard School of Music and became greatly influenced by John Lewis, Oscar Peterson and Teddy Wilson. He got a Master's degree at the New England

Conservatory of Music and spent several months on the road as a member of an Earl Bostic band, which at that time included Johnny Coles and Benny Golson.

In New York, this entertainer laid the groundwork for his still-flourishing career, developing a wide repertoire in Manhattan bistros and supplementing his live performances with TV and radio commercial jingle work. An Atlanta resident since 1972, Cole leads a quartet comprising himself, guitarist Randy Napoleon, drummer Curtis Boyd and bassist Elias Bailey that regularly tours the United States, Europe, the Far East and South America.

On the recording front, Cole's first single, *The Joke's on Me*, was released by an obscure Chicago-based label in 1952. He quickly followed with a host of albums for European and British companies in the 1970s, which helped develop a loyal overseas following. “Becoming an international favourite made me widen my scope a little bit,” he said, admitting that he developed a stand-up act to create a better rapport with audiences and learned to sing in other languages. “It made me much more of a performer.”

If you want to keep him on your CD racks, look for *Freddy Cole Sings Mr B*, *The Dreamer in Me*, *Music Maestro Please*, *Because of You*, *This Love of Mine*, *I Want a Smile for Christmas*, *Le Grande Freddy (The Music of Michele Le Grande)*, the Grammy-nominated *Merry Go Round*, *Talk To Me* and, of course, *I'm Not My Brother, I'm Me*. ▀

The Coolest Rats

Old Hollywood grooving returns to Kuala Lumpur for the re-launch of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.



Mark Adams, Stephen Triffitt and George Daniel Long will be recreating the Rat Pack experience that the original members (clockwise, from left: Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, Joey Bishop and Sammy Davis Jr) created in the 1960s.

“They were the coolest cats of their time, ruling the roost and going all out in a lifestyle that could only be called hedonistic.”

They were the coolest cats of their time, ruling the roost and going all out in a lifestyle that could only be called hedonistic. Carousing was the word and they – the bad boys of Hollywood, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr, Dean Martin, Joey Bishop and Peter Lawford, better known as the Rat Pack – got away with it. They ruled Las Vegas and Hollywood in the 1960s. Of the five, however, the ones who cashed in on the concept of the Rat Pack were Martin, Sinatra and Davis, simply because they were the talented ones, singing and standing up for everything funny.

They appeared together in films, including 1960s *Ocean's 11*, and on stage, selling out all their concerts and packing Las Vegas with fans who wanted to be a part of the Rat Pack experience. While the original members have all died – Lawford in 1984, Davis in 1990, Martin in 1995,

Sinatra in 1998 and Bishop in 2007 – the Rat Pack experience lives on, thanks to Stephen Triffitt, George Daniel Long and Mark Adams, who have spent more than 10 years faithfully recreating that era as The Original Rat Pack.

The trio have performed all over the world and The Original Rat Pack are some of the world's finest interpreters of Frank Sinatra (Triffitt), Dean Martin (Adams) and Sammy Davis Jr (Long). Hear the artists sing classics songs such as: *Fly Me To The Moon, You Make Me Feel So Young, My Kind of Town, My Way, New York New York, The Lady is a Tramp, That's Amore, Volare, Sway, Ain't That a Kick in the Head, King of the Road, Everybody Loves Somebody, That Old Black Magic, Mr Bojangles, Too Close for Comfort, Once in a Lifetime, Come Back To Me, What Kind of Fool and Me and My Shadow.* ■



Living Up to the Legacy

Family ties and a hereditary gift for making beautiful music keep the Solianos at their top spot as Malaysia's most musical family.

Text Errol de Cruz Photography Marcus Wong Art Direction Sheila Cheah Assistant Yvonne Low

“The Solianos are the only family in Malaysian show business who can claim a heritage of jazz that dates back into the nation's history.”

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur will resound with some truly musical magic when it reopens in grand style in December 2012, what with the slew of talent from Malaysia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The thing all the acts have in common is that they all boast hereditary music genius, namely the Mills Brothers, Freddy Cole (brother of renowned Nat), the Rat Pack and Malaysia's very own the Solianos, whose father, Alfonso, incidentally, once performed at the same venue with Freddy Cole.

There is a joke that says if you don't want to become a millionaire, all you need to do is become a jazz musician. It's probably what used to happen in the early 1900s, what with so many talented jazz and blues musicians succumbing to occupational hazards like sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Today, however, jazz musicians have come a long way and some have even made a big name for themselves. Jazz itself has come a long way, finding its way into pop, rock and ethnic fusion, and it is not surprising to find pop artistes who have matured, so to speak, turning back to their roots and hitting jazz joints with sets that include songs by Porter, Sinatra, Streisand, Charles, Ellington, Cole, Fitzgerald, Simone and Jobim.

The Solianos are the only family in Malaysian show business who can claim a heritage of jazz that dates back into the nation's history, thanks to Alfonso and Tony Soliano, who were living legends in their time. The family legacy has its roots in the British occupation, when Rufino Soliano and Dominado Tirona arrived from the Philippines to play in the Constabulary Band in Malaya.

Alfonso and his nephew Tony came later: Alfonso was the serious one, leading and writing for the orchestras of the time



Previous page, from left: Rizal, Don Alfonso, Isabella and Conrado Soliano.

This page, far left: Valentino Soliano making music.

Below: The late Alfonso Soliano performing with Valentino Soliano and a singer at the Chao Phraya Hotel, Bangkok, in the 1960s.

and founding the Radio Malaya Orchestra which evolved into Orkes RTM. His nephew Tony, on the other extreme, was the live wire, life of the party, leading local musicians in one jazz ensemble or another in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Bangkok, playing alongside other gifted performers like Ahmad Wan Yet, Zain Azman, Julie Sudiro, P Ramlee and Saloma.

Alfonso and Tony died, months apart, in 1990, and it has been their children and families who have kept things together, with the former's son-in-law, saxophonist extraordinaire Salvador Guerso, taking the lead. Today's Solianos remember the heydays. "If you went to any of our homes after dad passed away, there'd be a portrait of him above the piano and, as we practised, we'd get his echo: 'No bluffing, ah'," says Valentino.

This generation's Solianos performed all over the country for more than 15 years, before individual talent and creativity nudged them into forming their own groups. And, instead of



Below: Vocalist Irene Soliano.
Right: The late Alfonso Soliano leading the Orkes Radio Malaya in a 1961 concert in Dewan Tuanku Abdul Rahman on Jalan Ampang in Kuala Lumpur.



“I believe my father brilliantly orchestrated the move to make all his children musicians even before we were born. The vision that he foresaw in his children became a reality and the Soliano family band was formed.”

- Isabella Soliano

just one family ensemble plying the trade, there were at one time, at least six outfits flying the Soliano flag from Bangkok and Langkawi to Singapore, and with many venues in between as they were always welcomed for one-nighters or weekend gigs.

The entire family would get together at Christmas and often take over Langkawi for two whole weeks during that festive season. And when they did get together, it was the late Salvador who would lead them. Familiarly known as Ado, he was the elder that the Solianos looked up to and, like Alfonso in his time, Ado wrote and arranged for the RTM Orchestra and also played as often as he could with any of the Soliano outfits.

“Times have changed,” Ado’s daughter, the pianist Rachel, says. “I used to follow him; now I have his music to inspire me.” It’s a tough job leading the entire clan when they get together, but Ado wore the mantle well and his hope that he would, one day, be instrumental in making some Soliano dreams come true did materialise when the family band released *Pusaka*, an album of Alfonso’s tunes, while Alfonso’s son Conrado, along with his son, Wynton, and nephew Jared Cheow, launched Soliano Sound Solutions, a music and studio and school, in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur.

Pusaka: Remembering Alfonso Soliano covers such classics as *Getaran Jiwa*, *Tudung Periuk*, *Widuri*, *Gadis Idamanku* and *Tanah Pusaka*, all given new vibrant arrangements by Ado, who passed away early this year, and the tearjerker *Aimata Berderai*. The music studio and school has also been a long time in the making. It offers recording services, album and voice-over production, fully-equipped rehearsal and recording studios, composition arrangement services, music classes, artiste and band management, supply of musicians, instruments and sound systems, concert consultation and management.

“These are our dreams,” Ado had said before he passed away early this year. “I know we can do it if we put our heads and talent together.” Considering the reputation the Soliano clan has earned over half a century and more, the realisation of such dreams would only be fitting. Rizal puts it right: “Dad didn’t leave us any wealth because making music was more important than making money; but he did leave us with a big name and it’s up to us to do something with it.”

The Solianos – Isabella (piano), Irene (vocals), Valentino (bass), Conrado (drums and trumpet), Rizal (drums) and Don Alfonso (bass) – will rotate as a quartet for evening performances at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur nightly. Tristano (piano) will also be making regular appearances.

Unsung Hero

The affable and hugely-talented Ooi Eow Jin will be tinkling the ivories at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur as resident pianist.

Text Errol de Cruz Photography Marcus Wong

You might not realise it, but there's a living legend playing the piano at the newly-reopened The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur. Now into his seventh decade, Ooi Eow Jin has had a long list of credits as the creative force behind some of Malaysia's most popular songs of the last 40 years.

The unassuming Ooi, for example, was the composer/arranger for the late Sudirman's first hit, *Terriring Doa*, in 1975 as well as 1979's *Gerimis Di Lautan* and *Seniman Tua*. He also wrote the music for Yassin Salleh's 1981 blockbuster, *Dia Ibuku*, which produced the hit theme song by M Nasir and Yunizar Hussein. In 1975, Ooi was behind Salamiah Hassan's tearjerker, *Masa Berlalu*, and Dahlan Zainuddin's *Lagu Untuk Mu*, for whom he also wrote *Mungkin Esok* and *Dalam Diri* in 1982.

Ooi's talents were not just recognised on these shores – he composed *Dengan Senyumku Rasiahkan Hati* for Filipino singer Flora Santos in 1982 and Gigi Villa's *Hilangmu Tiada Ganti* in 1983. Other singers that Ooi wrote for included Zulkifli Ahmad, Derwina, Rafeah Buang, Yunizar Hussein, Rahimah Rahim, Frances Yip, Jennifer Yen, the Alleycats, Salimah Mahmud, Mirza Eleno D'Souza and Eddynoor Ali – a roll call of some of South-East Asia's finest voices of the 1970s and 80s.

You'd be hard-pressed, though, to find any kind of tribute to Ooi's contribution to Malaysian music. At best, there is a home-made compilation that he titles *19 Of My Best Compositions (1975-1983)*, which he occasionally duplicates for friends and fans.



Musical marvel: sprightly septuagenarian Ooi Eow Jin.



“Ooi's talents were not just recognised on these shores – he composed *Dengan Senyumku Rasiahkan Hati* for Filipino singer Flora Santos in 1982.”

Born in Penang, Ooi studied and taught English there until 1963, when the late, great Filipino pianist and composer, Alfonso Soliano, invited him to play in the RTM Orchestra that he founded and helmed. “Under the guidance of Alfonso, I slowly began helping with music arrangements and my most treasured time was when we toured 21 army bases and forward areas in Sabah and Sarawak in 1965 with veteran stars like P Ramlee, Saloma, Kamariah Noor, SM Salim and violinist Hamzah Dolmat for three weeks,” Ooi recalls of the time at the RTM Orchestra, with which he performed from 1963 to 1967 and again from 1970 to 1984. “It was an honour performing alongside them; they were the cream of the crop then.”

That, however, was only the start of a career that would be a good half century in the making, during which he composed the scores for three full-length movies – *Dia Ibuku* (1980), *Ali Setan II* (1986) and *Hati Bukan Kristal* (1989). Singer and composer M Nasir, who sang the title track from *Dia Ibuku*, also has the talented musician to thank because it was Ooi who co-produced his first recording for Polygram Singapore in 1979.

Ooi went on to play in Japan, Korea, Dubai, the Netherlands, Kuwait, Australia and Taiwan, and made personal performances for a host of dignitaries from around the world when he was resident performer at several elite nightspots, including *Suasa on the Sixth* at The Regent Hotel Kuala Lumpur and *Carcosa Seri Negara*, the former official residence of the British High Commissioners in Malaya-turned-luxury boutique hotel. He also led the RTM Combo that accompanied all the contestants in the national talent competition, *Bakat TV*, until 1984 and, when you note the array of genres that the performers sang in, you can well imagine what a complete artiste Ooi is.

It's a life he has enjoyed to the fullest and, asked how he feels at not having been recognised with a national award for his services to country, Ooi says: “It would have been nice but when you're doing what you love most, you don't really think about such things.” And it is this love that will continue to shine when this consummate performer takes on his new role as the resident pianist of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur. ■



Mr & Mrs E.H Wong on the famous steps leading up to the Hotel Majestic. The grand facade of the hotel back in the old days.



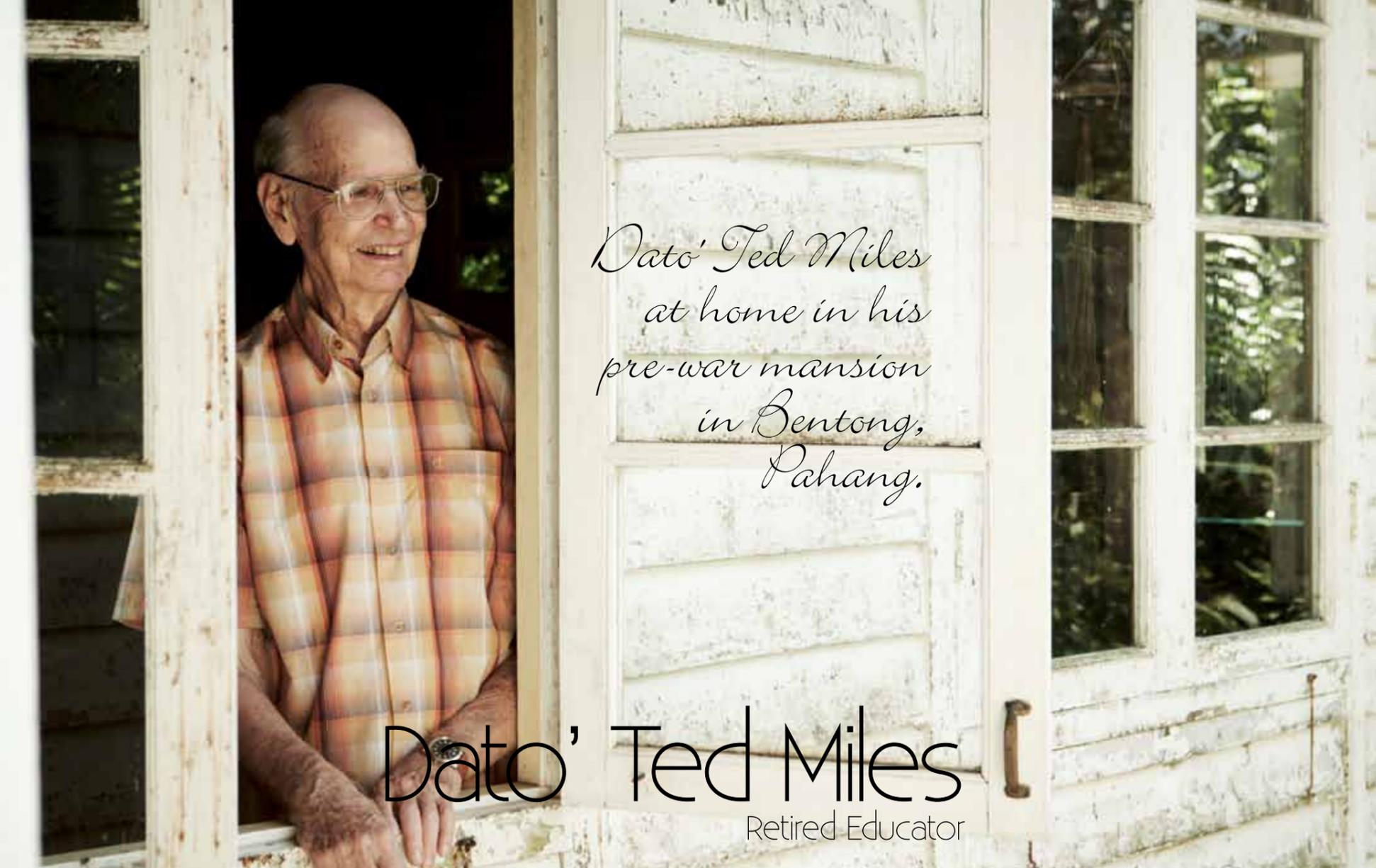
A family shot during the wedding reception of Mr and Mrs Lim Heng Suan held at the rooftop of the hotel.



MY MAJESTIC MOMENT

FOR MANY YEARS, HOTEL MAJESTIC OFFERED UNPARALLELED SERVICE TO ITS GUESTS. EVERYONE TOOK BACK A WARM MEMORY AS A KEEPSAKE. TODAY, AS THE HOTEL REOPENS AS THE MAJESTIC HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR, *YTL LIFE* UNCOVERS THE STORIES THAT ONCE MADE IT THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

Text Shanti Ganesan & Diana Khoo



*Dato' Ted Miles
at home in his
pre-war mansion
in Bentong,
Pahang.*

Dato' Ted Miles

Retired Educator

A familiar name among Malaysians and a household figure in the town of Bentong, Pahang, the American-born Dato' Ted Miles is as Malaysian as they come. Living alone in a pre-war mansion that he bought in 1964, the house is now a haven for him and his gaggle of pets ever since he retired in 1997. Bordering a patch of jungle, it is here that Dato' Ted writes (he is the author of several books on his life and times in Malaysia as well as compilations of his popular column in *The New Straits Times*) and reminisces. Having lived in the country since 1961 and accepting citizenship, the slightly-frail but still sprightly octogenarian is a living annals of Malaysian history. He has been privileged to have been present at some of the country's iconic moments, including attending the

ceremony of the proclamation of independence at Stadium Merdeka on 31 August, 1957, occupying Seat 389, to be precise. Dato' Ted also remembers enjoying the refinement of the Hotel Majestic, as it was then known, on several occasions. "People remember the Majestic, you know," he says in his soft voice. "But The Majestic holds special significance for me as it was the first place in which I saw television for the first time ever. I still remember the year. It was 1964 and there was a black and white television set in the hotel's dining room and it was only switched on between 6pm and 11pm. There was also one channel only, which showed the news. I remember it being about the Vietnam War and seeing President Lyndon Johnson's face for the first time."

One of the country's most well-known educators, Dato' Ted had arrived in Malaysia at the age of 24 and began his career by, first, teaching at a Methodist English school, before setting up Bentong's first boarding school. "I just continued staying on after that," he says. For many Malaysians, Dato' Ted is best remembered as the principal of the famous Taylor's College – a position he held from the 1970s all the way up to 1997. Among Dato' Ted's students were a royal prince and it was the Sultan of Pahang himself who conferred the honorary title of 'Dato' to the by-now thoroughly Malaysian Ted Miles.



*Letter written from the
Hotel Majestic.*

Dato' Ted also remembers checking in for an entire week at the landmark hotel. "It was during the school holidays – I was a teacher then – and I wanted someplace where I could get away from it all." Recalling his stay, Dato' Ted notes that "the dining area was the main hive of activity" and that "the tablecloths were always crisp and white, and a small bouquet of flowers, usually, Vanda orchids, would be placed perfectly in the middle of each table." Although over 80 years

waiter being a thin, stern-looking Chinese man who was always dressed in black."

Design-wise, he also remembers the hotel's elevator then, which had "a very noisy old gate" and the ensuite bathrooms in the hotel rooms, which always had a bathtub and a wooden latticed platform upon which one stood for their toilette, so that their feet could stay dry. "It was a very lovely place to stay and I remember the days being a pleasurable routine of having tea and cake at around 4.30pm,

"I still remember the year. It was 1964 and there was a black and white television set in the hotel's dining room and it was only switched on between 6pm and 11pm."

of age, Dato' Ted's memory is excellent, sharing little details and recollections: dinners at The Majestic were always formal affairs, beginning with soup, fish, the main course and dessert, before ending with cheese and coffee. "It was formal but a regular type of meal," explains Dato' Ted. "You also weren't required to dress up for dinner, unless there were a lot of expatriates, particularly the British, who were always quite formally-attired. But I do remember the head

before sitting down to dinner at 8pm. And, in those days, the menus at the restaurant were prepared and typed out daily for each single table. Can you imagine?" says Dato' Ted. "There was also a café called The Oasis then, along Batu Road. I remember going there sometimes to have a hamburger. It helps that I kept a very detailed diary from those days. But it's lovely YTL is reopening The Majestic. I have many fond memories of it." And it seems, so will a whole new generation and beyond.

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr M Mahadevan

Former Chief Psychiatrist to the Government and Founder
of the Malaysian Psychiatric Association



Telling stories of The Majestic brings back good memories for Tan Sri Mahadevan.

“It was a classy place and people who dined, partied or stayed at the hotel expected the best and the Majestic waiters provided that kind of service.”

“The Hotel Majestic was upmarket and exclusive,” Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr M. Mahadevan, the former Chief Psychiatrist to the Government, recalls. “My friends and I used to have dinner there and I loved the steak. We'd always get dressed up after our polo game and head to Hotel Majestic for food at the restaurant and then drinks at the bar.” The once-avid polo player remembers how he and his friends would put on their bowties and their best attire, knowing it was the norm to be stylish and well-groomed when patronising the hotel in the evenings.

“During lunch time, it was more of a working crowd and it was always busy. They were mostly expatriates having their lunch there and tea too,” he says. He also remembers, as most do about Hotel Majestic, the excellent waiters. “It was a classy place and people who dined, partied or stayed at the hotel expected the best and the waiters provided that kind of service. It was, however, another reason some locals felt it was only a place for the expatriate community.” According to Tan Sri Mahadevan, some locals had a complex where Hotel Majestic was concerned. “But to me, it was simply majestic and most of the upper echelon felt right at home there. They felt they belonged.”



Foster travels the world in search of interesting experiences.

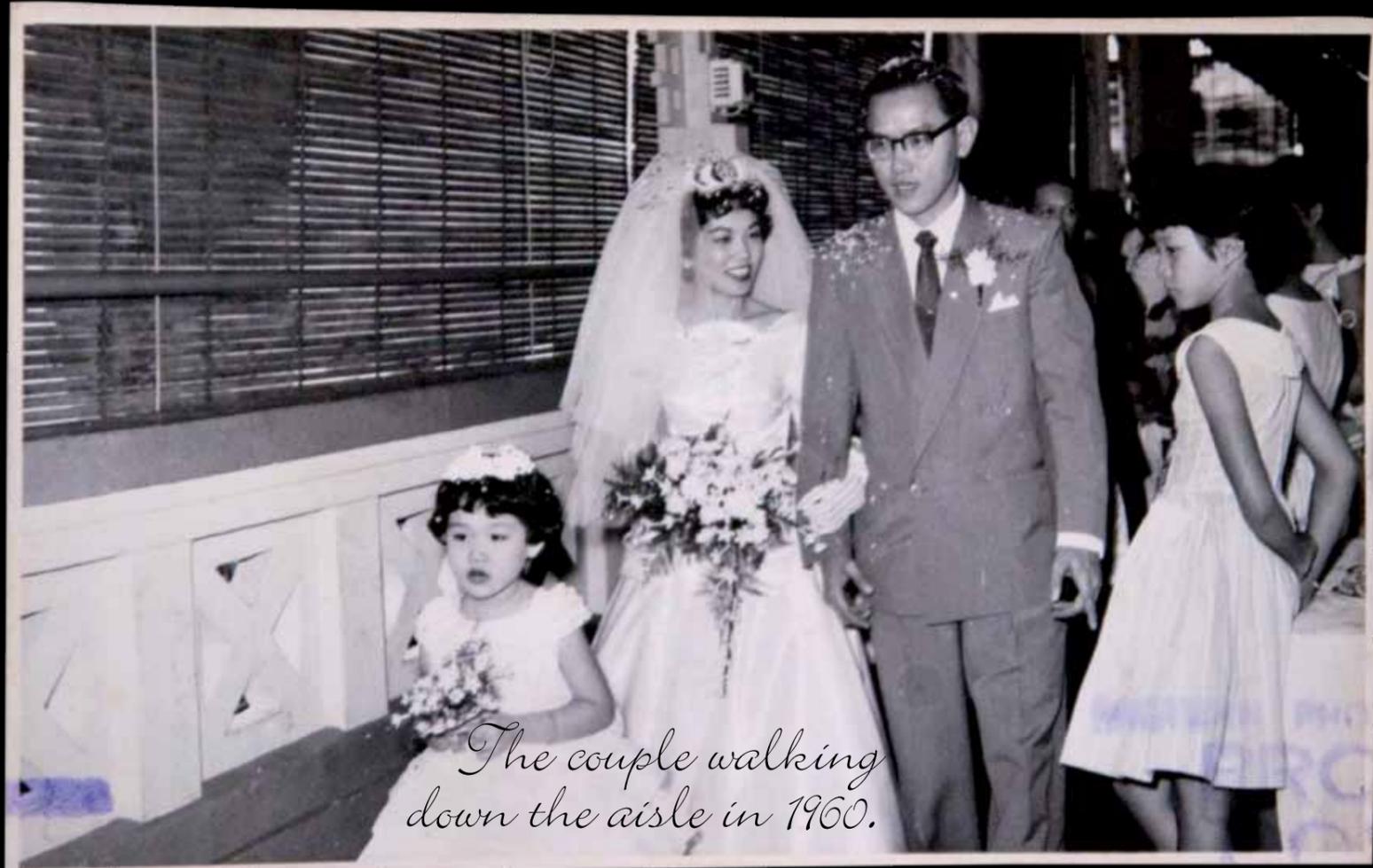
Alan Foster

Author

Alan Foster and his wife arrived in Kuala Lumpur from Bangkok as part of their extended honeymoon in July 1975. Not having made any advance hotel reservations, the couple asked around and were pointed to the Hotel Majestic. Checking in, they admired the beautiful gardens and the calm, peaceful grounds. “Our room, at the very back of the hotel, was spacious, with a large bathroom and long bathtub. The rear window opened directly onto untouched rainforest. Being something of a nature lover, I opened the window the first day we arrived so that, as I soaked in the bath, I could hear the sounds of the rainforest,” Foster remembers. “The sound I heard soon after I climbed into the tub was, however, not of monkeys or other forest creatures but my wife JoAnn screaming at the top of her lungs,” Foster scrambled out of the bath and rushed into the main room, where she sat, terrified, on the bed. “She stammered: ‘Don't you hear it?’ I listened but didn't hear anything. Her eyes were as big as one of the coffee cups in the hotel restaurant as she told me: ‘There's a bug in here as big as a 747!’ There was, indeed, a bug present, zooming around the room, one of Malaysia's beautiful beetles, though somewhat smaller than a jumbo jet. I shooed it out and my wife immediately had me close the window. So much for the sounds of the rainforest,” he laughs.

The following morning proved just as interesting for Foster's wife. “She woke me up and said: ‘Do you hear that?’ Again I listened, but this time I immediately recognised the sound. “That's the *muezzin* in the nearby mosque calling the faithful to prayer,” I explained. I could feel her staring at me in the darkness: “At four o'clock in the morning?” I shrugged and turned over to go back to sleep. “First call,” I told her.”

The couple ended up having a wonderful time in the Hotel Majestic and another clear memory this writer of novel versions of many films, including such well-known productions as *Star Wars*, the first three *Alien* films, *Alien Nation*, *The Chronicles of Riddick*, *Star Trek*, *Terminator: Salvation*, and both *Transformers* films, has is of the headwaiter at the hotel. “He was the most dignified gentleman I had ever met. I'm sure he's long since passed on by now, but I used him as the model for an industrialist in my novel *Cachalot*. As a writer, I'm always making use of people I meet and places I visit in my writings,” he says.



The couple walking down the aisle in 1960.

Mr & Mrs EH Wong

Retired Businessman & Former Secondary School Teacher

For EH Wong and his wife, stepping into the Hotel Majestic was a dream come true. The couple, who has now been married for more than five decades, celebrated their wedding in the rooftop garden with a high-tea reception in 1960. "I always passed by the hotel back then and wondered what it would be like to walk in. I always thought the steps leading up the hotel looked impressive. When I was getting married,

I thought it was the only place in Kuala Lumpur that was grand enough for our wedding," says Mrs Wong.



Mr & Mrs EH Wong tell us their story at their home in Ipoh where they live today.

Mr Wong, on the other hand, had always looked out for the celebrations that took place in the hotel when he was in his teens. He was born and raised in Scott Road in Brickfields and, from his home, he could see Hotel Majestic. "Every Christmas and New Year, there would be celebrations on the rooftop of the hotel. The English officials would go dancing there and there would be loud music from the band. I would always imagine what it would be like to be part of that celebration," he says.

When the day came to plan their wedding, it was inevitable that Hotel Majestic would be the venue of choice. They recall the area being big, long and grand, while the waiters who served their guests were experienced Hainanese waiters. "They were professional, kind and treated us well," remembers Mrs Wong. "I think if I had to describe the hotel in just a few words it would be: 'splendid, grand and majestic'. Having my wedding at The Hotel Majestic definitely fulfilled my dream," Mr Wong says.

"When I was getting married, I thought the Hotel Majestic was the only place in Kuala Lumpur that was grand enough for our wedding."



Guests enjoying a high-tea reception at the rooftop.

McNicoll still remembers her meals as a 5-year-old at the Majestic.



Ingeborg McNicoll

Senior Partner at Environmental Resource Management Malaysia

It's strange what we remember as children and in Ingeborg McNicoll's case, she has warm memories of having scrambled eggs and chilli sauce at Hotel Majestic when she was just five years old. "I was born in Batu Gajah, Perak. My father came to Malaya as a rubber planter after World War II. Every three years, my father would get leave and we would all fly back to the UK for a holiday. Kuala Lumpur was the central point for us before a really long, 24-hour trip to or from the UK, and we would stay in the Hotel Majestic before or after the flight."

Ingeborg remembers Hotel Majestic for many things: how close it was to the train station and being in her father's station wagon driving the high little path up to the entrance of the building. "Inside, the hotel had lovely wooden floors, dark doors and big beds. We had adjoining rooms. That's what I remember," she says. "All places in Malaysia had special food that we liked and I always remember getting scrambled eggs and chilli sauce at 3am because we'd be jetlagged and needed something to eat." She also remembers little things like how she always drank soya bean milk from a glass bottle with a straw in it and how the building was white, matching the railway station across the road.

Ingeborg said that the service in those days was unbelievable. There weren't that many expatriates living in Malaya then and she and her two siblings – all blondes – were quite the hit. "You can imagine the kind of attention we got from the staff. People just loved looking after us. My parents, of course, enjoyed that very much because they could rest," she smiles. The hotel's surrounding, she recalls, was always lush, "the colonial type of lush, with lots of trees, and there were a lot of *cicak* (geckos) too. It was a little haven to come back to after the miserable journey and weather in the UK."

With her wonderful experiences at the Hotel Majestic behind her, Ingeborg has always kept an eye on it since she returned to Malaysia in 2007. "I just find it fascinating that it is being revived. I think it's a very graceful building. It has that balance in geometry and style. It is very stylish and now a whole new generation is going to enjoy it."

Wairah Marzuki

Former Director General, National Art Gallery



Former Director General of the National Art Gallery, Wairah Marzuki not only experienced Hotel Majestic in its heyday, but also spent time working in the building when it was the National Art Gallery from 1984 to 1998. "It was a great move for us as it was a bigger space; there were more rooms for our exhibitions and education programmes," she recalls. "When it was a hotel, it was where many 'big' guests stayed. The restaurant, I believe, was what attracted many people to the hotel. I remember the western set lunch menu was RM6, which came with soup, bread and chicken chop. That was very popular."

The National Art Gallery after it took over the Hotel Majestic building in 1984.



The service at the restaurant was another memorable thing. "The waiters were experienced and sophisticated and were in colonial-inspired uniforms. The tables were covered in heavily-starched linen and I used to have Bombe Alaska and coffee in a tiny cup for dessert," she remembers.

Hotel Majestic was Wairah's favourite meeting place, as it was for many of her friends. She also recounts many VIPs staying in the hotel during the Merdeka celebrations in 1957. According

to her, it was *the* place to stay not only because of its central location but because of its classy feel and attention to detail, including the room keys, which were old-fashioned and had the room number etched on the zinc plate that hung on the chain from it. "The hotel's name says it all, really. It was a great landmark for Kuala Lumpur. It was fantastic and created enjoyment... it was the greatest joy to have the hotel then and I believe the Hotel Majestic will live on."

"The tables were covered in heavily-starched linen and I used to have Bombe Alaska and coffee in a tiny cup for dessert."



Lim Heng Suan

Former bookkeeper at the Hotel Majestic

It was the Lim family that ran the Hotel Majestic from the moment it was launched right up till it closed. For Lim Heng Suan, whose father Lim Thye Hee was the Managing Director of the hotel from 1932, The Majestic will always be an indelible part of him. "There's no other word that describes the hotel better than 'grand'," Lim says. "It was the biggest hotel and most of the guests had certain standards we had to adhere to. Most of the people who came to our hotel were regulars and they were mostly top government servants."

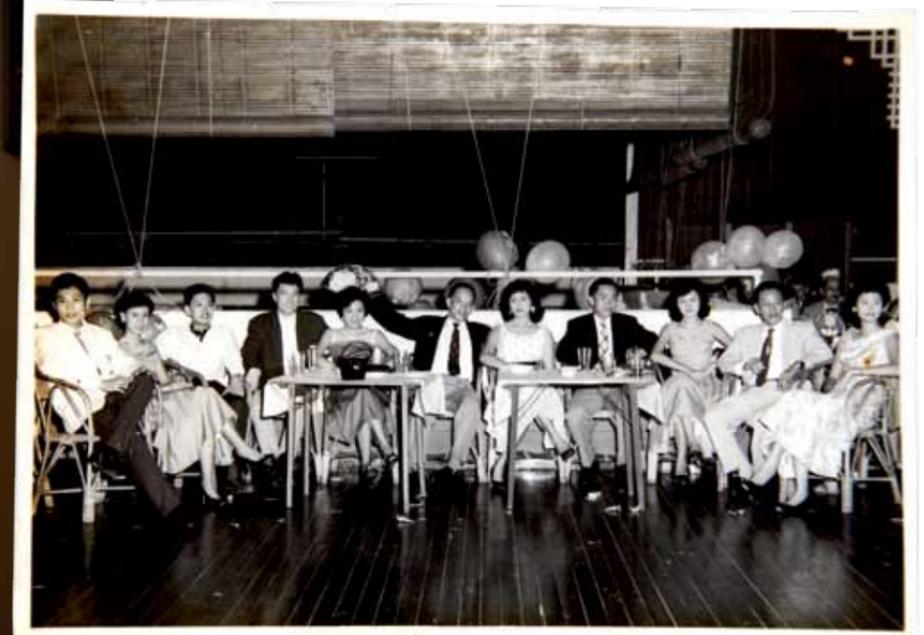
It was the food, he said, that kept bringing people back. The breakfast was famous and only cost

RM2.75 for orange/tomato juice, fried ham, half boiled eggs, bacon/sausages, omelette and toast. The home-made coffee was also a hit. "Lunch was RM3.75 and there was an option of fish, chicken or lamb chops and minute steaks, which was the favourite, and came with green peas, French fries, tomatoes, carrots and broccoli."

Having lived in the hotel for many years, Lim clearly recalls what the hotel and its surroundings looked like, even today, at the age of 81. "The first thing you pass is the reception area and it was always kept tidy. The surroundings were complemented by lush green plants – roses and palm trees, which

were all well-trimmed," he says. "After you walk past the reception, you come to the restaurant and bar on your left and a lift right in front of you. That lift was self-operated, while the lift on the other end of the hall was manned and only went up to the rooftop garden."

The rooftop garden was a popular venue for many occasions. "It was mostly used for tea parties and wedding ceremonies. Guests would have to fork out RM2.75 per head for a tea party with cake, curry puffs, sandwiches, ice cream and such," he recalls. "There were also a lot of government department meetings during the British time there.



But what was quite exciting for me were the New Year parties and Victoria Institute Old Boys Association gatherings on the rooftop."

For Lim, living in a hotel can be very interesting because of the different kinds of people who check in. "There was a funny character, actor Donald Davies who stayed at our hotel on a monthly basis. He walked around with a lion's tail," he remembers. "There was once when we set off a big packet of fire crackers just before dinner at the car park outside our hotel. It upset Davis, who gave my father a telling-off. I was furious and I hung a cracker on a fruit tree right outside his room window, attached a mosquito coil to it and lit it. Needless to say, the cracker gave him a fright in the middle of the night," he smiles.

"Unfortunately, my father got the brunt of it the next morning when Davies screamed at him. Confused, my father asked me what had happened and, after I confessed, he scolded me and told me to never ever annoy a customer again, no matter the situation. He was right as that was our policy: the customer is always right. And we kept to that policy until the time we closed down the hotel."

Lim and his friends during a gathering at the Hotel Majestic rooftop.

Datin Paduka Sister Enda Ryan FMM & Sister Letitsia Yang FMM

Nuns, Assunta Convent

"It was so long ago... but I still remember this classy hotel," says Sister Letitsia from Assunta Convent about Hotel Majestic in the 1960s. The nun, who hails from Sichuan, China, was thrilled to talk about her experience of the hotel when she discovered it was going to be restored and relaunched as The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

"It was the wedding of a teacher who came from a well-to-do family. I initially didn't want to go because I felt it was like a queen's palace and I would not fit in," she laughs. "It was a huge building (for that time) and I thought to myself that anyone who could afford to stay here was great. The reception area was simple; I remember orchids there and I felt it was all very classy. Everything was done in an orderly manner and people were well-behaved."

Sister Letitsia attended a high-tea reception, which was very popular back then, in the rooftop

garden. She still recalls the serene atmosphere and romance that filled the air. "I liked the quiet and peaceful feeling of the hotel. Guests had to concentrate on the couple and pray for them," she says. "I remember the bride walking down a long aisle. The venue wasn't very big but I think it was long. It looked like a concert hall and the floor was maroon," she recalls. "I think people will be very pleased that the hotel is going to be revived. So many sweet memories have been made there."

Irish-born Sister Enda's account of the hotel, although brief, is a little unique: she was at the hotel building for a prayer meeting before it became the National Art Gallery. "It was an unusual experience, in a sense. There were mixed feelings as I walked up the steps to the hotel. I was invited to join a charismatic prayer group and I usually prefer a quiet prayer. But I joined in to appreciate it. It was certainly a spiritual experience of a different kind," she says.

"I liked the quiet and serene feeling of the hotel. Guests had to concentrate on the couple and pray for them."



The nuns pose in the beautiful chapel at their convent.

Dato' Maria Menado

Former actress and model



The ever-graceful ex-actress and once hailed as the most beautiful woman in Malaya, Dato' Maria Menado has only fond memories of Hotel Majestic. In its heyday, the hotel hosted many dignitaries as well as celebrities, and Dato' Maria was one of those who had a real taste of the hotel. The Sulawesi-born talent went to Singapore in 1950 for a fashion show, where she was spotted and signed up as an actress by Cathay Cinema Production. This launched her career that would, literally, take her places, including to the Hotel Majestic for a film festival in 1959. "It was like a fairytale. I had never stayed in a hotel like the

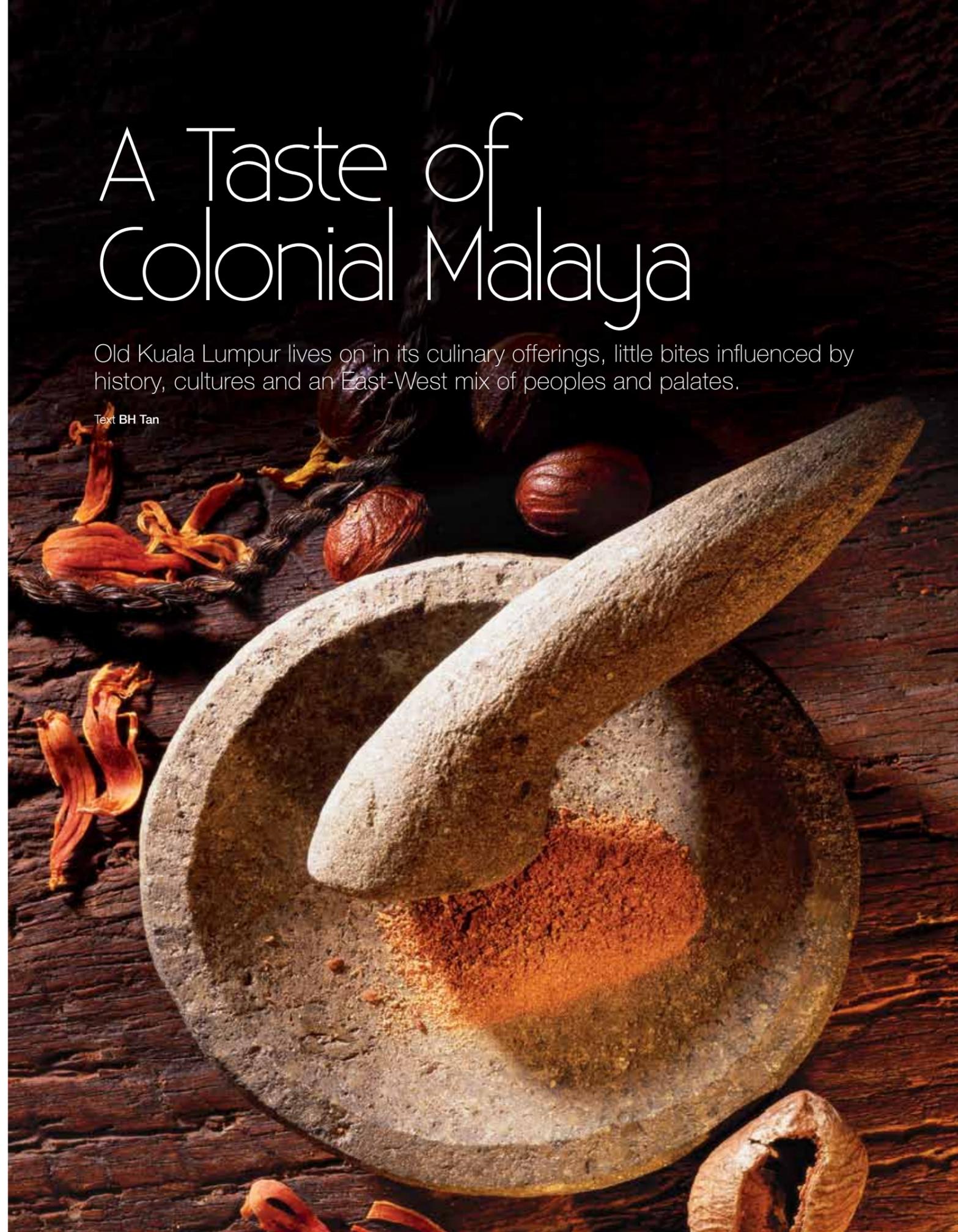
Majestic. It was, indeed, a majestic hotel and there was nothing else like it," she remembers. "We had a big room and a long bath but there was no time to get into it. We were too busy as there were so many things going on; besides, we were too excited as we were surrounded by so many stars and friends... we even had tea with the Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman during that trip," Dato' Maria reminisces.

She also remembers how the hotel was always cool inside and of having breakfast in the restaurant every morning. What lingers in her mind, though, was wearing a *batik wiron kebaya* and walking up the famous Hotel Majestic steps leading into the hotel with much difficulty. "The *kebaya* was so tight that I had to walk up sideways," she laughs. ▀

A Taste of Colonial Malaya

Old Kuala Lumpur lives on in its culinary offerings, little bites influenced by history, cultures and an East-West mix of peoples and palates.

Text BH Tan





Few countries can boast of a richer tapestry of foreign influences woven into the very fabric of its cuisine than Malaysia. Chinese and Indian migrants brought recipes from their motherlands, while visitors and traders from the Middle East, Indonesia, Japan and beyond all added to the growing repertoire of culinary delights. When the Dutch, Portuguese and British claimed parts of the country as colonies, they left lasting influences on the local cuisine while appropriating what they liked to add to their own. This has resulted in a cuisine that is neither European nor Asian, but a unique *mélange* called colonial cuisine.

The Portuguese

Although they were the first to arrive, it was the Portuguese rather than the Dutch who left a stronger cultural and culinary legacy, which has endured to the present day. Their descendants, especially those who intermarried with locals, had adapted original recipes to reflect their assimilation into the local culture. They were mainly seafarers and fishermen, so seafood features largely in their daily meals, while meat is considered festive fare.

Fisherman's stew, *gerago pikkadel* (krill fritters), *cari papair cung siput chupaku* (sea snail and papaya soup) and *pesce kertouk* (fish parcels) are some of the daily fare, accompanied by *sambal*

Top left: The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's adaption of an old classic, the Swiss roll. Top right: Oldie but goodie, the chicken chop.





The British were also partial to tiffins, a practice they also borrowed from India, where workers brought along their lunch in multi-tiered carriers called 'dabba'. This led to the Sunday curry tiffin lunch, a leisurely meal eaten outdoors after the family came home from church. As rice was the main source of carbohydrates in Asia, the British added it to their meals and even created desserts with it, such as rice pudding. The popular *kedgeree*, said to have originated from the Indian dish *khichri* (a dish of rice with spices and pulses), was adapted for British tastes with the addition of eggs and smoked fish. Roti John, thick slices of bread spread with minced meat that are dipped in egg and fried, was so called as, in those days, all British men were invariably referred to as John. The Peranakans, or Straits Chinese, created their own version of Roti John, called Roti Babi – instead of beef, they used minced pork and added their preferred herbs and spices.

A need for comfort food or, perhaps, nostalgia also meant that the British held on firmly to the Sunday roast tradition, where they served roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, Beef Wellington or saddles of mutton with roast potato on the side, all washed down with glasses of sherry. They also insisted on afternoon tea with cakes and scones with strawberry jam, followed by "stengahs" (whisky and soda on ice) in the early evening before dinner.

English afternoon tea at around 4pm became a daily ritual and soon was associated with genteel society. Who else could afford the luxury of spending an hour or two in the middle of the day to indulge in cups of golden tea sweetened with honey or sugar, while nibbling on cakes, tarts and dainty sandwiches filled with sardine, cucumber, watercress and even *sambal*? The English afternoon tea ritual today is still considered an indulgence and is usually served in multi-tiered fine bone china plates filled with

belacan and steamed rice. For Sunday luncheon, families would gather after church service for a meal of rice, curry, *semur* (ox tongue and beef stew), *feng* (minced pork and innards curry, eaten with crusty bread) and the fiery *debel* (devil) curry.

Christmas, or Natal, is the time to show off recipes that have been handed down for generations, with *galinhia* (chicken pie), *mohlyu* (seafood in spicy coconut gravy), pork *vindaloo* (an import from Portuguese-ruled Goa in India), *teem* (soup), beer-boiled ham, pickles and salad, as well as savouries and sweets like pineapple tarts, *bolu cocu* (coconut cake baked in a brass mould), *pang susie* (savoury meat buns) and, of course, *sugee cake*.

The Dutch

The Dutch, on the other hand, were more interested in the economy rather than assimilating with the locals. So, despite occupying Malacca for over 180 years, the Dutch left a relatively small impact on local culture, customs and cuisine. In any case, since the Portuguese were already firmly rooted and could cater

to Western palates, the Dutch were more than happy with the existing fare. They did leave behind a few delicacies, though, including *bergedel*, the minced beef-filled potato patty, which the Dutch, in turn, picked up from their time in Indonesia.

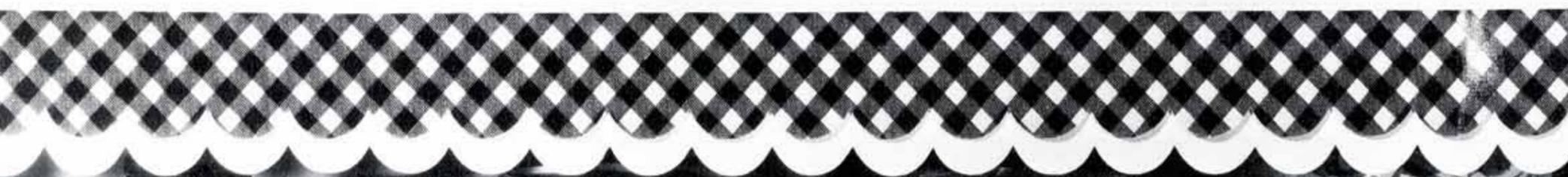
The British

The British first arrived in Malaya in the late 18th century, when the East India Company set up a trading post in Penang. Gradually, the company and, subsequently, the British government expanded their presence and, as their area of influence expanded, more British families settled in Malaya, bringing with them their own culture and cuisine. It was not always easy to get ingredients from home, however, so the British had to find other sources of food. Also, because of climatic differences, some British dishes proved disastrously heavy when combined with our hot, equatorial humidity. In any case, the British adapted quickly and were soon relishing local cuisine, and were more than happy to allow their *amahs* (servants) free rein in the kitchen or employed

Hainanese cooks (usually men) whose wives took care of other domestic chores.

Many of the British in Malaya at the time came from India as employees of the East India Company, where they had acquired a taste for spices and curry. Curry Kapitan, for instance, was a mild curry adapted to suit British palates. It is said that the name came about because, when the servants announced the dinner menu, they would say, "Curry, Captain".

“The Hainanese nevertheless played a huge role in developing colonial cuisine as they were the preferred choice of cooks.”



“The British adapted quickly and were soon relishing local cuisine, and were more than happy to allow their *amahs* free rein in the kitchen”

beautifully-arranged scones, cakes, pastries, tarts and curry puffs and served with pots of Darjeeling or Earl Grey, as found in high-end hotels like the newly-opened Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's Tea Lounge.

The Hainanese

While they were not colonialists, the Hainanese nevertheless played a huge role in developing colonial cuisine as they were the preferred choice of cooks and houseboys. The “mems” eagerly handed over kitchens to them with instructions so broad that it was nothing short of amazing that these cooks managed to create dishes that met the approval of their bosses. They learned to keep an eye on the clock to turn out perfectly-roasted meats, made fluffy omelettes and cream soups, as well as kneaded flour for pastries and mixed batter for cakes, cookies and puddings. They also had flashes of ingenuity, creating, for instance, Swiss rolls filled with local *kaya* instead of fruity jams. They also made their own versions of steak and kidney pie, chicken chop and pork chop, which developed into a cuisine of its own – Hainanese western food.

Hainanese chicken or pork chop comprises thick slices of meat pounded tender before being dipped in a batter and deep-fried. These are almost always “drowned” in a brown gravy of cloudy origins and served with green peas and fries. Occasionally, there’s also a side dish of vegetables (usually potato or broccoli). Macaroni pie was another pride of Hainanese cooks but this was peculiar to Penang only. Unlike the original Scottish invention of plain cheese and macaroni, the colonial version is far more interesting, probably because Hainanese cooks thought they’d perk up the dish by adding ingredients such

Some British larders in colonial Malaya were considered incomplete without essentials like Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce.



as chicken, mushroom, leek, carrot, onion to the pre-cooked macaroni, cooking them slowly in a rich, creamy cheese sauce. Then everything was put in a deep dish and topped with an egg-white meringue before being baked to a golden brown. The last time I ate an authentic macaroni pie was two decades ago, in a restaurant named Hollywood in Tanjung Bungah, Penang.

One thing that these Hainanese cooks learned from the 'mems' – and later helped to popularise – was Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce. No other brand would do and this tangy sauce, known to the Chinese as *ang-moh tau eu*, or English soya sauce, soon grew to be an indispensable item in both the kitchen and on the dining tables as a marinade and dipping sauce.

When the sun set on the British empire and the colonists went home, the Hainanese were re-employed in rich households, especially the Peranakans, while the more enterprising set up restaurants to offer these westernised dishes to the public. Some of these restaurants are still open for business, with the culinary legacy being passed on from father to son and grandson, including Yut Kee and Sin Seng Nam in Kuala Lumpur, and Hollywood, Loke Thye Kee and Sin Kheng Aun in Penang. ■

Hainanese chicken rice (top) from the Colonial Café at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.



life cuisine //



The Right Recipe

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur takes guests on a culinary adventure, giving them the opportunity to experience the old and the new all under one roof, thanks to its Executive Chef Mohammad Ali Kunhi.

Text **Shanti Ganesan** Photography **Danny Lee, Law Soo Phye & Yong Keen Keong**

“At the café, the menu has been designed to offer only classic colonial dishes, including chicken chop, seafood platter, prawn cocktail and weekend roasts.”

Mohammad Ali Kunhi, Executive Chef of the recently launched The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, can certainly take the heat, so he's definitely not getting out of the kitchen. In fact, today, he's on a quest to entice guests to head to the hotel for its culinary delights. After all, you could say the gastronomic experience here is nothing short of an extravaganza and Chef Mohammad has made sure of this.

The young and dynamic Singaporean-born chef, who decided at the age of 13 that he was going to create culinary masterpieces, has experience in five-star properties in Asia, Europe and the Middle East under his belt. Having had the opportunity to head the F&B outlets during the opening of new hotels like The Ritz-Carlton, Doha and The Four Seasons in Dubai Festival City, Chef Mohammad was more than thrilled to hear he was going to have a hand in the reopening of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

“The hotel is divided into two sections; the old building, which we're calling the Majestic Wing, is where we decided to keep a sense of colonialism, even in terms of food,” says the 35-year-old chef. “We have the Colonial Café, which seats 120, and the Tea Lounge, which seats 40, here. At the café, the menu has been designed to offer only classic colonial dishes, including chicken chop, seafood platter, prawn cocktail and weekend roasts.”

In keeping with the colonial touch, even the chefs are Hainanese, a throwback to the kitchen traditions of the time. As for the Tea Lounge, expect afternoon tea, scones and finger sandwiches with influences of Malaysia. “We thought we'd give



Facing page: Prawn cocktail and escargot with garlic toasties are among the offerings at the Colonial Café.

This page: Contango, located in the hotel's Tower Wing, offers a wide variety of international cuisine.



Clockwise, from left: The pizza oven at Contango; The Colonial Café is where the menu reflects The Majestic's glorious past; Afternoon tea at the Tea Lounge with sandwiches and scones; Trifle from the Colonial Café.



our sandwiches a real Malaysian twist, like with our *serunding* (meat floss) sandwiches, but we'll also have classics like the chicken pie as well," says Chef Mohammad.

Food apart, the interiors of both the Colonial Café and the Tea Lounge exude a sense of the old in a refurbished setting, with classic furniture which gives the café a certain warmth and cosiness. "The Majestic experience is about going back to a certain era. We have definitely recreated that with our Colonial Café. It's a historical place, somewhere you need to visit," he says.

Complementing the Majestic Wing is the entirely new, 15-storey Tower Wing, where Contango, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's contemporary interactive restaurant, is located. Chef Mohammad says: "Contango seats 250 and is an interactive dining experience. This is what I am really excited about: a restaurant where diners get to see their food being prepared there and then, and talk to the chefs about it." The restaurant has a juice bar, patisserie and *gelato* counters, and a Western section with a pizza oven and *churrasco* grill. "There is also an Asian zone, where you have the Chinese wok, the sushi bar, as well as *robatayaki*, Malay and Thai sections."

"It's an international dining experience and the chefs are going to be the ones selling their dishes. They will explain the concept of their dishes, the ingredients and even why it is so special," Chef Mohammad explains. "We are also particular when it comes to the quality and freshness of the ingredients. We buy most of our ingredients locally, except for our steaks."

Apart from the food, the atmosphere in Contango also plays a big part in creating the experience for diners. It has a simple, modern setting, and guests can choose either the dining area or the booths and the vast area is suitable for interactive dining. As for presentation, Chef Mohammad is keeping that under wraps for now. "We are thinking of presenting the food in a special way, especially in the Colonial Café," he says. "You will just have to come and experience it for yourself to find out." ❖

OPENING HOURS
Colonial Café: 11am to 10.30pm
Tea Lounge: 3pm-6pm
Contango: 6.30am to 10.30am; 11.30am to 2.30pm;
6.30pm to 10.30pm

Magnum Opus

For connoisseurs, oenophiles and lovers of all things fine, one of the highlights of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur has to be its unrivalled Opus One collection, a magnificent vertical flight of wines that span from 1980 to 2008.

Text **Diana Khoo**



One of the great wines of the world, it is no secret that Opus One is the result of a brainwave collaboration between the great European winemaking family, the Rothschilds, and the pioneering American winemaker and Napa Valley legend, Robert Mondavi. Having entered into the partnership in 1979, Opus One was jointly created by Chateau Mouton Rothschild's winemaker Lucien Sionneau and Mondavi's chip-off-the-old-block winemaking son, Timothy. The 1979 and 1980 vintages were simultaneously unveiled in 1984 as Opus One's first release and it didn't take long for the wine to assume cult-like status, with oenophiles waxing lyrical about it and proclaiming it to be the United States' first ultra-premium wine, which was, in fact, spot on – a unique and delicious blend of iconic Bordelaise varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and even, depending on the vintage, Malbec and Petit Verdot. However, it is almost always a Cabernet Sauvignon-driven wine and, as can be seen in two vintages, can comprise of up to 97 per cent of that wonderfully flavoursome grape.

From then on, Opus One began, slowly but surely, bridging the image gap between Old and New World wines, with quality and prices that often matched or exceeded some of the august European houses as well. By the 1990s, Opus One was more than well established as one of the premier labels to savour, and cases upon cases soon began finding their way into the wine lists and cellars of the world's best hotels, restaurants and collectors.

"Opus One, as you are also aware, is a musical expression that means 'the first masterwork of a composer'," shares Johann Ong, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's Executive Assistant Manager of Food & Beverage and the custodian of its 6,000-bottle strong cellar. "I'd read that, initially, the plan was to name the

wine just 'Opus' but Sionneau and Tim Mondavi decided to add 'One' to the name a few days later." Dato' Mark Yeoh, the Executive Director of YTL Hotels and a connoisseur of fine wines himself, adds: "One of the things we researched on for The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur was also the music of that period. As a child, one of my favourite sources of entertainment was RTM radio's English channel, the Blue Network, and one of the tunes I loved most was the Mills Brothers' *Opus One*. Tommy Dorsey made the instrumental version a big hit and, later on, the Mills Brothers put lyrics to it. Also, the Mills Brothers will be the opening act for Contango, the hotel's contemporary interactive restaurant, starring John Mills and Elmer Hopper, former lead singer of The Platters, and backed up by the Mills Brothers All-Star Big Band jazz ensemble. I thought it'd be the perfect coming-together of a multitude of details; from the song *Opus One*, the wine itself, the various facets of the restaurant and the idea of all these elements coming together in one venue. A perfect composition!"

On how the hotel managed to amass such a coveted collection of wines, Dato' Mark just grins and says: "We have our ways." Here, it must be noted that YTL Hotels has been collecting fine wines *en primeur* for the past two decades and its canny may be reflected in the stunning, beautifully put-together wine lists of its award-winning Shook! restaurants in Kuala Lumpur and Shanghai, which boasts amazing collections of Chateaux Mouton-Rothschild, Yquem and Cheval Blanc.

"I'd first encountered Opus One in an Italian restaurant in London," Dato' Mark volunteers. "I'd been frequenting this restaurant called Montpeliano, along Montpelier Street, in Knightsbridge since young and the maitre d' had become a good friend of mine. He'd



usually recommend an Italian wine as I am particularly partial to Italian reds like Omellaia and those by Gaja, but, one day, he brought out a bottle of Opus One. The vintage escapes me but I remember liking it immediately! As I began working with YTL Hotels, I made a conscious decision on the hotels' part, especially for our city hotels, to have a special offering for our guests and I am pleased to say that the Opus One collection at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur will be a signature and premium offering for us and one that will go a long way in enhancing the overall experience for our guests."

For connoisseurs and those who appreciate life's finer things, it certainly looks set to be a hit. After all, as the Mills Brothers once sang: *There's never a doubt, you'll knock yourself out, whenever you get near Opus One*. Music to our ears, indeed. Oh, and our palate as well. ■



Opposite page: Opus One has entrenched itself in the world's best wine lists.

This page, top: Johann Ong, Executive Assistant Manager – Food & Beverage of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur; A precious case of Opus One.

A Series of Stengahs

And the rain my drink? Not quite. Olde Malaya wasn't without its fair share of thirst-quenching, slightly-fortified refreshers. John Yap, the dapper Bogart-esque barman of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, shares a few of his favourite colonial cocktails and the stories behind them.

Text **Diana Khoo** Photography **Yong Keen Keong**

If you lived in colonial Malaya, circa the 1940s or 1950s, you'd have discovered it to be a jolly place. Where gents of all shapes and sizes would, once the day has cooled down a little, converge around the nearest bar for a little imbibing – tropical-style, of course. It can, of course, be tawdry, rowdy and not without its fair share of hardship. In those days, inconveniences could range from something as minor as a prickly heat rash to running for cover from an ambush by communist insurgents. If you've ever read John Dodd's hilarious and blush-inducing memoir, *A Company of Planters: Confessions of a Colonial Rubber Planter in 1950s Malaya*, you'd be well-familiar by now with the languid, sometimes roué-like lifestyle of expatriates in colonial Malaya. More often than not, it involved a series of drinks that has, by now, firmly entrenched itself into the history and culture of the country.

"Those looking for a taste of old Kuala Lumpur would do well to look for me at the bar," grins John Yap, the barman and go-to



Below: John Yap is the new custodian of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's history-soaked bar.



person for some of the most delicious cocktails in town. A veteran of the F&B industry, Yap, 47, has chalked up over 14 years of experience and is immersing himself into his new role as custodian of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's Bar – a reworking of the hotel's original watering-hole but with an elegant, slightly-modern look and feel. The long bar itself is crafted out of fine *nyatoh* and spans 22 feet in length, while Yap holds court in style from behind the counter, working in an environment crafted out of panels, mirrors, brass fittings and a marvellous gold-leafed dome ceiling; the décor a respectful nod to when The Majestic was in its heyday. It was said that author Graham Greene used to pop by for a cuppa, while actor David Niven preferred to take his drinks on the rooftop bar. "It's a classic bar in every sense," notes Yap. "We wanted to capture the history and spirit of the old Majestic and, in those days, the bar was the focal point of the hotel. We've modernised it, of course, but its classic soul still remains. You can see it even in the menu, which is focused on all the classic cocktails of yesteryear.

Forget about all the modern, newfangled molecular cocktails. What we serve here is designed to be simple, fresh, delicious and unfussy."

Certainly, the menu is a tempting read; particularly if you've spent the day trawling Kuala Lumpur's exciting streets, the nearby Chinatown with its colourful temples, street food stalls and flower markets or trekked about the expansively-verdant Lake Gardens. If you're in luck, Yap and his team will have something cold and refreshing waiting for you. It could be a *stengah*, half-measures of whisky and soda served over ice (the name itself derives from the local Malay word for 'half') and quite possibly the most popular drink among the British in the early 20th century, or perhaps a gin *pahit* – another contender for the title of most popular colonial cocktail and is itself a lovely blend of gin and bitters (*pahit* being Malay for 'bitter'). The celebrated writer W Somerset Maugham was particularly fond of it, mentioning it in several of his books,

"Those looking for a taste of old Kuala Lumpur would do well to look for the dashing tuxedo-ed attendants at the bar."

Clockwise, from left: Tanqueray Blue, Gin Pahit, Malayan Colada and Jungle Bird.

including *Footprints in the Jungle* and *The Letter*, both of which were set in Malaya.

To the nostalgic soul, the mere mention of these names evokes images of coconut trees, local attendants in crisp white uniforms, *cheong sam*-ed lovelies and black and white-tiled floors. Should you wish to, however, get acquainted with these colonial quenchers in the comfort of your own home, once you've checked out of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, here are four recipes from Yap's own notebook for your mixing pleasure.

Tanqueray Blue

Created by the barman, this exotic cocktail is based on an infusion of blue ginger, native to Malaysia. Reflecting the delicate flavour of this wild rhizome, this drink is tempered with sugar syrup, cranberry juice and a generous squeeze of lemon.

- 45ml Tanqueray 10
- 30ml blue ginger syrup
- 20ml cranberry juice
- 20ml freshly-squeezed lemon juice
- 20ml Gomme syrup
- 20ml Blue Curacao

1. Shake and strain into glass filled with one large and crushed ice.
2. Garnish with ice cup filled with diced mango and lime zest.

Gin Pahit

The *de rigueur* drink of the colonial days, its name is in fact a direct translation of the Malay word for 'bitter'. It features in several of W Somerset Maugham's stories and offers a perfect taste of old Malaya.

- 45ml Hendrick's gin
- Dash of Angostura Bitters

1. Mix in glass and serve immediately.

Jungle Bird

This *tiki* drink, a term often used to describe exotic cocktails, was said to have been created in 1970s Malaysia. A potent but



tasty blend of rum, lime, sugar, pineapple juice and Campari, this obscure Malaysian cocktail looks set to be a popular new classic.

- 45ml Gold rum
- 20ml Campari
- 10ml lime juice
- 10ml sugar syrup
- 45ml pineapple juice

1. Shake and strain into ice-filled glass. Serve immediately.

Malayan Colada

A local twist on the classic Piña Colada, this is the barman's interpretation of the popular cocktail and is enriched with coconut cream, golden rum and sweet chunks of pineapple.

- 40ml Gold Rum
- 15ml coconut cream
- 5ml double cream
- 90ml honey pineapple juice
- Dash of Angostura Bitters
- Pinch of Salt

1. Shake all the ingredients together and strain into crushed ice-filled glass. Serve immediately. ▣



Clockwise, from above: Art Deco nuances give the Colonial Suite a vintage charm; The Colonial Suite features a separate sitting room; The Majestic Wing is a full-butler service hotel.



A PERFECT HIDEOUT

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur lives up to its name and reputation as the premier hotel in the city, with atmospheric, luxurious suites designed to indulge in.

Text **Tan Hui Ling** Photography **Yong Keen Keong**



for two people plus bags. Showing me straight to my room, where the check-in process is done quickly and expertly, and within the comfort of my suite, I take a moment to soak up the pleasure of such discreet and attentive service.

Reviving the past

When Mohammed leaves, I cannot help but channel my intrepid traveller alter-ego circa 1930s again – it is impossible not to be caught up by the ambience of this place. I wonder which illustrious guest had stayed in this same room before me? Did the founding fathers of Malaysia contemplate the future of the nation while they sipped coffee and looked out at the gorgeous Moorish-inspired train station? Did one of the sultans rest here after a long journey from his home state to meet with other rulers?

Guests like Mrs Buxton, secretary to Sir Gerald Templer, the British High

Commissioner; Donald Davies, well-known writer and theatre buff; Mrs Dorothy Nixon of the Selangor Book Club; and Tze Loh Lin, the famous Chinese actress in town for the release of her 1950s film, *Dark Heaven*, are just some of the people linked to this hotel.

I cast an appreciative eye over the suite, decorated in a soothing, mostly beige and brown, palette. Art Deco nuances give the place soul and a certain vintage charm but it is also tastefully modern. A vintage writing desk, a period TV cabinet, the vintage framed full-length mirror, Art Deco carpets and marble-

“Art Deco nuances give the place soul and a certain vintage charm but it is also tastefully modern.”

Exuding old world elegance, the newly-restored Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur sits atop a little hillock in the heart of city. Built in the neo-classical style, the original structure of the hotel is modest by today's standards. The atmosphere, however, is incomparable. Walk up a gentle slope surrounded by rain trees to arrive at the porte-corchere or arrive in grander style by walking up its famous staircase. I am overwhelmed. It feels like I have stepped through a time window and are now in 1930s Kuala Lumpur, perhaps a newly-arrived globetrotter, just off a ocean liner after months of seafaring.

waiting patiently with my bags. I want to call him Niles (inspired by *The Nanny*) or Jeeves (are not all butlers named that?) but his name tag says 'Mohammed'. He leads me up the stairs, through the hall and into the hotel, and I am once again floored by this place's sense of history. Images of moments past dance before my eyes: a gentleman is smoking a pipe while reading the newspaper; ladies are sipping tea and nibbling on scones; hearty laughs punctuate the air as businessmen wheel and deal over a tippie.

No time for fanciful ruminations though; my personal butler, a service afforded to all guests of the hotel's Majestic Wing, is

Snapping out of my reverie, I smile apologetically at the patient Mohammed and dutifully follow him into the quaint elevator that has just enough space



This page: A four-poster takes centre stage of the Junior Suite in the Tower Wing. Facing page: Dual vanities flank the standalone bath tub in the Junior Suite bathroom. Plush carpeting and tasteful furnishing give the Junior Suite a premium feel

“The pièce de résistance, though, is the luxury that is the suite’s bathroom. Is there anything more indulgent than a claw-foot bath tub?”

top coffee table blend seamlessly and tastefully with more modern furnishings and timber flooring. For a 20th-century girl like me, this is just the perfect mix of past and present. Heritage hotels that insist on strictly reviving the past give me the creeps, to be honest.

The suite is designed with a separate living room, a design feature I have always loved in a hotel room. Had I been staying longer, here with family or on a business trip, the rooms would have been put to full and good use. But, even alone, I still like that home-away-from-home feeling that the distinct spaces offer. The pièce de résistance, though, is the luxury that is the suite’s bathroom. Is there anything more indulgent than a claw-foot bath tub? Perhaps it is the exclusivity of it that makes me swoon at the sight of one and gush over it like a school girl in the throes of a crush. With the black-and-white chequered tiles, it is absolutely nostalgic to the hilt.

Bath drawn, and bubbly and book in hand, I settle down for a long-awaited soak. Motherhood has trained me to make do with five-minute showers, so this is downright decadent. I wish I had asked Mohammed to send up a box of chocolates too... When the risk of a pneumonia-induced death seems a real possibility, I reluctantly emerge from my watery cocoon. Snuggling into a plush

bathrobe and smelling like a bouquet of lavender, I ring for room service. It would have been nice to join the crowd at the Colonial Café or The Bar, but getting dressed up would simply take too much effort tonight.

Contemporary luxury

Refreshed by a wonderful, peaceful night of slumber, I bid a sad farewell to my lovely suite. I had booked only for a night because I thought it would be a good idea to also check out the Tower Wing’s rooms, but now I am not so sure. Mohammed comes to my room after he has checked me out and walks me over to the other side.

The difference is subtle yet distinct. It instantly feels like the 20th century. The Tower Wing is as contemporary as the Majestic Wing is nostalgic, although it is not without its own appeal. Designed to complement the original building’s Art Deco style, it exudes a retro vibe with large doses of glamour, thanks to the dark marble, polished chrome and jewel veneers.

My Junior Suite follows the posh and luxurious décor of the lobby. Plush carpeting and tastefully-appointed furnishing keeps pace with the wing’s sophisticated and deluxe ambience. The blend of neutral tones and darker hues gives the room an even more premium



Chequered tiles and the claw-foot bath tub give a nostalgic feel to the bathroom of the Colonial Suite.



Curl up with a book and some coffee for a little quiet time in your suite.

feel. In the middle of the suite sits a four-poster bed, its large frame towering over to create a throne-like feature. I am won over! I want to wake up every day in a bed like this for the rest of my life. By the window is a sofa-cum-lounger, a nice touch I fully appreciate. Don’t you just hate stiff, uncomfortable hotel room chairs that do not serve any purpose except to take up space? This, on the other hand, is perfect for curling up with a book, for breakfast or afternoon tea, or couch surfing in the lap of luxury.

Then, of course, there is the bathroom. YTL Hotels seem to have a knack for designing the most incredible bathrooms. In place of the claw-footed bathtub from the Majestic Wing is a free-standing one that is every bit just as indulgent. And even a wall-mounted television faces the tub. How am I ever going to go back to normal life after this weekend?

There is also a separate rain shower for those poor souls in a hurry, but I cannot imagine picking a shower over a

bubble bath soak. The dual vanities get my vote too. Every woman dreams of this; imagine no more shaving foam and aftershave jostling for precious space with serums, moisturisers and eye gels. All this comes enclosed within a modern glass sanctuary that is incredibly sexy and too sophisticated for words... although it does make room sharing a tad awkward, I would think. But, since I am all alone, this calls for yet another bubble bath while catching up on the latest episodes of *CSI* and *Criminal Minds*.

It was with a heavy heart that I bade The Majestic farewell. And with so many different room categories, from the colonial-inspired suites of the Majestic Wing to the slightly more contemporary (yet no less luxurious) rooms over at the Tower Wing, I take a moment to muse on the name ‘Majestic’. Billed as the ultimate in luxurious indulgence and quite possibly the best way to live it up colonial-style, I couldn’t help but think no name would’ve proven more apt for this property. ■



Serving it in Style

Once the place where the elite and privileged partied, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur is poised to become the foremost events venue in the city again.

Text **Tan Hui Ling** Photography **Law Soo Phye**

The slumbering doyenne that is The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur is stirring, and set to dazzle and surprise in many ways. Chief on that list is reclaiming its previous position as the most coveted and prestigious venue for hosting functions and events. In its prime, The Majestic was where the ruling elite and royalty met for state meetings and occasions, while the city's who's who hosted high society weddings and attended New Year's revelries.

It also witnessed several pivotal turning points in Malaysia's history. Malay rulers and leaders of the newly-formed United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) met to plot and strategise the country's independence from the British. The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) traces its roots to meetings held here. And, in August 1951, UMNO marked a red-letter General Meeting during which party founder Dato' On Jaafar resigned

from the President's post and was succeeded by Tunku Abdul Rahman, who later became the country's first Prime Minister.

The Grand Tour

Now, the hotel stands on the cusp of a new era, with the staging scene set at the Tower Wing, which houses the ballroom and 16 meeting rooms.

Proving that size does indeed matter for a historic and illustrious hotel bearing the name Majestic, the ballroom is a massive, cavernous space measuring over 1,700 sq m. Gargantuan, grandiose, epic... these words come to mind at first sight. With nary a pillar in sight and a banquet seating capacity of up to 1,250 guests, this is by far one of the city's largest ballrooms.

It certainly is its grandest and is designed to inspire awe and invoke jaw-dropping reactions. Like some of the most

*Entertaining with elegance
is a hallmark of The Majestic
Hotel Kuala Lumpur.*



The extensive reception area outside the ballroom is the perfect place for pre-function cocktails.

renowned Art Deco ballrooms, it has a deluxe earthy décor theme that combines elegance, luxury and opulence. Extensive use of wood panelling and neutral walls are matched with plush carpeting in bold Art Deco prints. A towering ceiling creates the illusion of doubling the size of the already expansive room, as grand chandeliers from the same style movement glitter above, lighting the room like a million rays of sunshine.

A colossal stage takes up nearly half of one side, its epic proportions making it an attention-grabbing feature. On the wall is an LED screen that stretches just as wide, a first-of-its-kind in a five-star hotel. Supported by state-of-the-art lighting, high fidelity sound system and audio-visual technology, this game-changer is part of The Majestic's bold vision to create a new standard for indoor events.

Possibly for the first time, concerts can be held in style at an indoor venue. Sure, one might still prefer to rock to Adam Lambert in a sweltering stadium but, certainly, when Josh Groban holds his first concert in Kuala Lumpur, it would have to be at The Majestic. Or imagine Celine Dion bringing the house down or being serenaded by Andrea Bocelli!

The avant-garde, high-tech feature also adds a new dimension for other functions, from private parties to meetings, conventions and exhibitions. With the audio-visual systems of most hotels being of passable quality at best, there is also a giant screen which rewrites the rules. Luxury and atmospheric has crossed path with sophisticated technology; the possibilities are thrilling. Even if it was without the fancy offerings, The Majestic's resplendent ballroom will

send thrills down the spines of event planners and party hosts looking for ways to up the ante. The scale, richness of materials and sumptuous finishing of the ballroom are spectacular, and they certainly raise the bar.

Spanning outwards from the ballroom entrance is an extensive reception area to support pre-function cocktails. The entire second floor of the Tower Wing is dedicated to the ballroom and reception area, hence the generous amount of space. Floor-to-ceiling glass windows overlook the picturesque 1930s Sulaiman Building across the road, and the tree-lined Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin. By day, natural light streams in invitingly, bringing a touch of the outside in. By night, the twinkling street and city lights provide a serene backdrop. The spirit of lush opulence pervades with the same Art Deco-inspired chandeliers

and carpeting, and extensive use of wood and rich, warm hues. A balcony overlooking the main lobby below dominates the main area before the space breaks off into little nooks and corners that invite clever ideas for use that can turn ordinary into astounding.

On the fourth level and located next to the swimming pool, which overlooks the minarets of the old train station, is the contemporary roof garden. Expansive and punctuated by reflective pools and a spacious gazebo, it is an ideal space for intimate soirees, al fresco parties or even a sunset wedding.

Sixteen smaller meeting rooms, the largest of which can accommodate up to 100 people seated in theatre-style, offer more variety in the nature and extent of events the hotel can host. Large-scale functions can be followed by quieter

private sessions in these rooms. Guests attending brainstorming sessions, powwows, meetings and smaller functions can still enjoy the best of The Majestic's grandeur and service.

Wine and Dine

Of course, incredible venues are just one part of the banquet equation; food makes up the other. The banquet menu does not disappoint on this count. The extensiveness of the menu is simply mind-boggling, with a great choice of international, Malay, Chinese, Indian and cocktail menus, each with an incredible range of choices.

There are over 50 choices of canapés on the cocktail menu, for example, and more than 150 items in total, from which one would have to pick just 25! Expect to be faced with no less than a dozen options in each of the 11 categories

in the Malay menu selection: How does one decide between Soto Ayam Temasik, Soto Tulang Rawan, Soto Makanan Laut Assam Pedas and Sop Kambing Mamak?

If this is simply too dizzying, The Majestic's chefs are more than happy to propose sample menus. A typical banquet buffet menu, for example, would include something like five 'shoots, sprouts and greens'; two soups with bread rolls, four live action stalls serving *satay*, pasta, *dim sum* and roast beef; 10 mains dishes with vegetarian choices; seven desserts; and coffee, tea, cordial and juices.

Customised menus in consultation with the chef for special events are possible too, ensuring that, no matter the kind of event you desire, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur will make it a memorable one in every way. ■



No Ordinary Club

The Smoke House at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur is not just the place for a post-prandial cigar. It's also a place to socialise, have your suit fitted or even ensure you look your best for dinner with a loved one.

Text Priscilla Rajan

In always putting the comfort and needs of its guests at the top of the priority list, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur ensures that there are ample facilities and services available for all who come to spend some time there. The hotel is working hard to ensure that their stay at The Majestic is always top notch, memorable and comfortable.

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur is a smoke-free hotel but, in consideration of its smoking guests, YTL Hotels created The Smoke House in one of the smaller buildings on site, which features a dedicated cigar room. The Smoke House at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur was created based on the style of gentlemen's clubs of the 18th-century London's West End, which were used for entertainment by the aristocrats. These clubs were typically

characterised by member interests — whether it be politics, literature, art, travel or even sport.

These clubs were second homes where men relaxed, mixed with their peers, ate and even spent the night. Expatriates visiting London would use clubs such as the East India Club or the Oriental Club as a base. Women also started their own clubs at the end of the 19th century — including Ladies Institute and Ladies Athenaeum — which proved to be rather popular.

In London and other parts of Britain, there is now a continuation between the original gentlemen's clubs and more modern but private clubs, such as the Groucho Club, Soho House and Home House, offering facilities that include food and drink, and

comfortable surroundings. The focus of The Smoke House at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur will be to give guests an informal and inviting place to socialise and interact.

The Smoke House will be open to all hotel guests. There are areas where one can read and relax as well as a screening lounge. However, The Smoke House is more than just a venue to light up a cigar or catch up on reading; here, too, are a series of professional services designed for the comfort and convenience of all hotel guests, including a chef who will be available on call when guests choose to dine or be entertained in the private area.

Bespoke tailoring services will also be available upon request. Measurements and fittings will be made at The Smoke

House to ensure the experience is seamless.

The Smoke House also offers a grooming room, operated by London-based Truefitt & Hill, where guests can receive professional hair services to ensure they look their best before events, weddings or business meetings. Established in 1805, the brand maintains the world's oldest barbershop and offers a range of products that are the results of its 200 years of research and intimate customer relationships.

More services are being planned for The Smoke House, all to ensure that guests at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur are given the best care possible to make their stay even more comfortable and memorable. ■

Personalised Luxury Service

With the re-opening of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, guests can once again experience the glory and luxury of its services, in particular the unique Butler Service in its Majestic Wing suites.

Text Chua Siew Ching Photography Yong Keen Keong



Imagine having a romantic poolside dinner set exactly how you want it. Or a relaxing bath, complete with candles and rose petals at the end of every day. How about your suit, professionally pressed and neatly arranged with a matching tie on your bed, before that all-important business meeting? With The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's impressive butler service available in its Majestic Wing suites, all this and more is possible, giving you a unique experience of what luxury and grand comfort is all about.

In the 1930s, The Majestic was the place for those in high society. It was, of course, not uncommon then for the wealthy to stay in this iconic hotel, bringing with them their trusted valet. With this in mind, as one of the main highlights for the re-opening of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur in December 2012, a butler service has been set up to bring back this tradition of gracious service that harks back to the days where having a personal butler was not only a symbol of social status but also the most valuable of accessories for the well-heeled and well-travelled.

Karen Tan, the Majestic Wing Manager, who oversees all the butlers in the hotel, says: "The butler service in The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur is in place to ensure a world-class level of personalised service and to provide each guest with an assistant to guide them as they craft their own unique experience at the hotel."

To set The Majestic butlers apart, no detail has been spared to invoke that traditional service style that was indicative of the golden era of the hotel. "From their graciousness to their uniform, all interactions with the butler team at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur will invoke memories of days past, where the art of hospitality was truly about courtesy, grace, elegance and individualised attention," says Tan.

"A great butler can only be, surely, one who can point to his years of service and say that he has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman and, through the latter, serving humanity."

– Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*

So what can one expect with The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's butler service? Think round-the-clock personalised attention and on-hand assistance for whatever you have in mind. "The butlers at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur are designed to handle even the smallest detail for their guests, to allow the guest to make the most of his or her time with us," explains Tan.

To ensure this, each butler undergoes specific training in nearly every department, as it is essential that they are knowledgeable in all areas of hotel operations. The training is all-encompassing, Tan says: "Our butlers are trained in food and beverage, for example, to be able to recommend a wine pairing for a meal and also to elegantly present and serve wine. In addition, our butlers are able to make dining reservations, and even trained to set a romantic table for two. They are trained as bellman and in housekeeping, to perfect skills such as shoe shining and pressing. They are also on hand to assist in ensuring that each guest room is made up to perfection."

The butler service goes beyond just regular housekeeping necessities. They are knowledgeable about local sights and attractions and even tech experts, ready to troubleshoot any connectivity challenges that international guests may face. As Tan puts it, the butlers at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur are truly Jacks (or, in this case, Jeeves) of all trades, magicians who are always there when you need them but vanish when you don't.

Which goes without saying that, to be a butler in The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, is to be highly-trained, knowledgeable and engaging. "Our butlers are one of the most respected teams in the hotel as they interact with nearly every other department every day as well as ensuring the pinnacle in guest satisfaction," says Tan. "Through their diverse relationships and depth of knowledge, the butlers here are truly an elite team and integral to the delivery of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur experience. They are the best of the best!" ■



Continental breakfast anytime you want it – just ask your butler at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

Uniforms for the bellboys (left) and waitresses at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur – white and with mandarin collars – hark back to its predecessor's, while also incorporating modern touches like logos on the buttons.



Service with Style

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur has taken the term 'conservation' to a whole new level as it preserves the authenticity of the hotel during its heyday... including its fashion sense. Celebrated Malaysian designer Edmund Ser helps realise the dream.

Text Shanti Ganesan

You can count on being transported to another era when you step into the newly-revived Hotel Majestic – now renamed The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur. The experience of the hotel's colonial influence begins from the moment you see the hotel staff, dressed in uniforms that resemble that of the hotel's previous incarnation as Hotel Majestic, waiting to greet you when you arrive. And taking on the challenge of designing these uniforms that will help bring back what was once the hotel to be reckoned with is celebrated Malaysian designer, Edmund Ser.

Any Malaysian, especially those who began their careers as young executives in the early 1980s, would most likely be familiar with the brand Edmundser. A specialist in suits, it was during that time that Ser took the career apparel fashion scene

by storm. Today, the direction of the company has taken a sharp turn. A large portion of the business now only focuses on offering its skills of fashioning sleek suits to corporate bodies. Needless to say, this bold leap has given the brand a great opportunity to work with corporate giants, such as YTL Hotels, in its quest to infuse new life to the once-vibrant hotel.

"At Edmundser, we make a strong statement that we specialise in corporate wear. We digest the philosophy of the company, learn the rules and restrictions, and package it so it speaks their corporate lingo," says Edmund Ser, the designer behind the eponymous Kuala-Lumpur brand. "It all boils down to developing clothing that communicates the company's philosophy. It can be really challenging but, at the same time

“Ser used touches of the 1930s and added modern accents. He took the technical side of the old uniforms and incorporated it into his design.”



The doorman will wear pants that end just below the knee as well as a pith helmet to reflect the hotel's colonial past.

exciting, such as projects like YTL Hotel's relaunch of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.”

Ser was inspired to take on the job when he discovered it would mean having a hand in bringing the iconic hotel back to its glory days. “Dato’ Mark Yeoh, Executive Director of YTL Hotels, who has taken a very personal interest in reviving this hotel has a very clear vision of what he wants. So, it was easy to work with this client and also interesting to conceptualise a design for them,” Ser says. The designer had to take a quantum leap into the past, to the 1930s to be exact, to truly understand the theme of the hotel during that time and re-create apparel that also suits this era.

“I did all the research I could do on the Internet and went to the National Archives to find pictures of the old hotel. Then, I went to the hotel to soak up the style, the colour schemes and the interior themes before I even began to think about the designs,” says the designer. Translating the client's idea into design was a tall order but Ser was up for the challenge. He discovered that the uniforms at the hotel back then were mostly white, had mandarin collars and the jackets were longer. “There weren't any references to women's uniforms though. I believe that, back then, women didn't work in the front of the house in the hotel, so they didn't need uniforms,” he says.

Ultimately, Ser used touches of the 1930s and added modern accents. He took the technical side of the old uniforms and incorporated it into his design. “We did a close button form for all uniforms. The doorman's uniform is a little more unique. He will be in short pants (just below the knee), pith helmet and long socks,” he says. It was essential that colonial influences be added to the design of the uniforms, so that The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur can emphasise the distinctive feature it proudly holds on to. The detailing of the uniforms is also meticulous and well thought out, while the buttons of each uniform have logos on them for that touch of class.

In a nutshell, Ser keeps this corporate line sleek, simple and stylish. Playing only with white and black, the designer envisioned a look that would impress and stand by the mantra ‘less is more.’ “I believe the uniforms will give guests that nostalgic feel. A lot of thought has been given to the hotel in terms of incorporating the essence of the 30s into the theme and general outlook of the hotel,” Ser says. “It's mainly thinking about all the elements of the previous hotel and bringing it to life again in every way and form.” Clearly, the uniforms play a big role in making sure the guests of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur experience what they could have decades ago but in an enhanced and slightly modified setting. “I'm just glad to have been a part of it,” he concludes. ■



SER'S STORY

Edmund Ser's interest in design sparked when a top Malaysian designer had a fashion show in 1968 to mark the silver jubilee of the Methodist Boys' School Kuala Lumpur, where he was studying. “I was 16 then and never thought about the glamour of it all. I was taken up by the idea of what I can create and it was a fairly simple business model to set up,” he says. “I must say, though, that it was the models who walked down the aisle that truly caught my eye and attention.”

It was, perhaps, the powerful strut on the runway that stirred him towards wanting to dress strong characters, something he is doing today. Ser began his journey as an apprentice at a local men's tailor from 1973 to 1975. He then went to England in 1975 and came home in 1980 with a Diploma in Arts from Canterbury College of Art in Kent City, a Craft Certificate in men's tailoring and a City and Guilds of London Institute Advanced Craft Certificate in men's retail bespoke tailoring.

With a RM5,000 loan from his parents, Ser began his dream of setting up his own fashion line. A decade on, he was labelled the ‘jacket man’ and soon opened his first boutique in Concorde Hotel Kuala Lumpur, where he specialised in made-to-measure women's formal wear. Having made his mark in Malaysia, Ser's business has undergone an evolution. He is now the corporate wear designer to more than 50 clients, including in the banking, hotel, airline, jewellery, travel, beauty, corporate, insurance, entertainment, healthcare, shopping mall and telecommunication sectors.

A Majestic Haven

Marrying colonial charm with Art Nouveau chic and channelling the golden spirit of British Malaya, The Majestic Spa is a distinctive experience and a grand indulgence.

Text **Tan Hui Ling** Photography **Yong Keen Keong & Law Soo Phye**

Nestled between the newly-restored The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur and the grand Mughal-inspired railway administration building, the unassuming double-storey annexe housing The Majestic Spa is easily overlooked. Guests arriving at the main entrance of this revived grande dame are more likely to be swept up by the nostalgic charm and impressive restoration of this once iconic landmark.

Perhaps it is apt, though, that this haven in the city should be so discreet – all the better to pamper and indulge weary souls and tired bodies seeking respite in privacy. The humdrum of the city softens to a barely discernible whisper at the sight of the azure pool up front and lush landscaping surrounding it. Inside the spa, time slows to a leisurely pace and one is transported back to the height of colonial elegance and the heydays of pre-war British Malaya.

New Art Meets Tradition

Influenced by the distinctive style of renowned Scottish architect, designer

and artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh as well as the hotel's heritage, The Majestic Spa is a marriage of classic colonialism and the contemporary Art Nouveau approach used by the Scotsman in designing the famous, early 20th-century Willow Tearooms in Scotland. The two-storey-high upper gallery overlooking the receiving parlour and timber panelling recall the traditions of colonial interiors, but mirrored and leaded glass panels, as well as the celebrated Mackintosh Rose motif – all features of the tearooms – are clear tributes to the designer.

High-backed chairs that seem to have been borrowed from the Mad Hatter's tea party in *Alice in Wonderland* are, in fact, a nod to Mackintosh's trademark furniture design. They first made their debut in the Room de Luxe and still form an essential part of the tearooms today. Mimicking the decorator's use of light hues in feminine themed spaces and dark ones for the masculine, the stark white walls are tempered by warm earthen brown and set against glossy tiled floors. The result?



A soothing sanctuary amidst the hubbub of modern-day Kuala Lumpur.

“Each of these are woven around a charming tale about Old Britain or British Malaya, and designed to reveal the essence of the story line.”

A space that manages to be at once welcoming and whimsical yet chic.

A Golden Era

Conceptually, The Majestic Spa takes its story line from the transitional times of turn-of-century Britain and 1930s British Malaya, as reflected by the Willow Tearooms and The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, respectively. The tearooms were the epitome of social grace and tradition, as well as the early 1900s spirit of progress and change. Founded by Catherine Cranston, they were conceived in response to the growing popularity of temperance, of which Miss Cranston was a strong supporter. Her four art tearooms venues quickly became iconic gathering places for businessmen to talk shop and discuss politics, and ladies to relax and socialise.

Similarly, The Majestic Hotel embodied the glory days of British Malaya in the 1930s. The premier first-class hotel in the country was the centre of social life and activity in old Kuala Lumpur. British expatriates, colonial elite, local nobles and European travellers spent much of their time here dining, dancing and hobnobbing. It was a time of refinement and genteel class. It

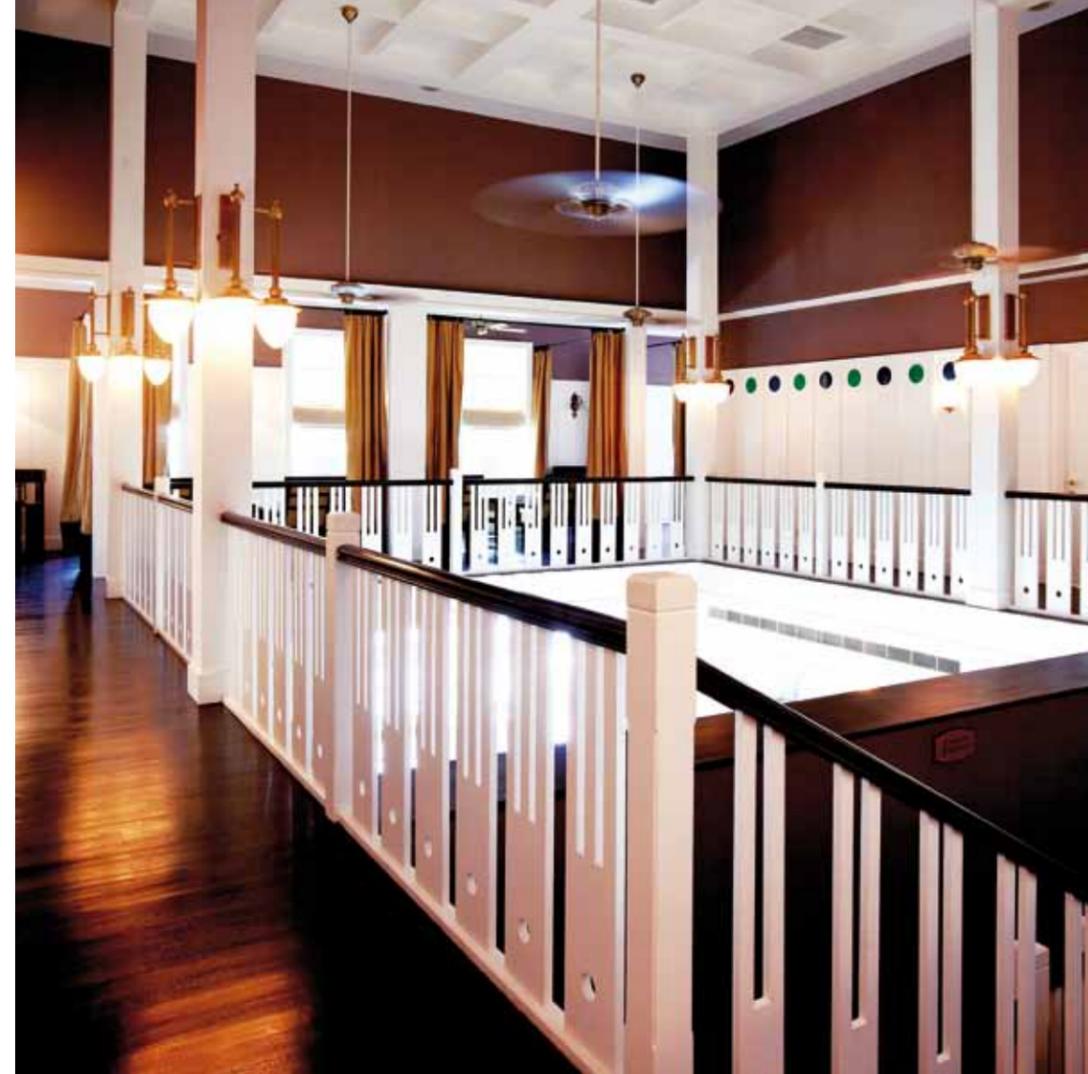
is this golden era in the hotel's annals and Malaysian history that The Majestic Spa reflects on.

Blissful Rituals

Each of YTL Hotels' spas has unique and quaint welcome traditions in line with the property's theme. Here at The Majestic Spa, the rites take on a British flavour, with guests beginning their journey to bliss at the receiving parlour with a welcome tippie of Pimm's or, for the teetotaler, a mocktail.

Then, it is on to the pre-treatment ritual, another signature touch of the YTL Hotels' spas and prelude to the greater pleasures that are to come. In keeping with the British theme, The Majestic Spa's ritual is named 'A gift from the garden', and guests are pampered with two classics from the English garden: lavender and rosemary. A soothing lavender foot soak, to relieve exhaustion, pains and fatigue, is followed by a stimulating and revitalising rosemary scalp massage before guests are whisked away to treatment rooms.

There is also the steam room, a cavern-like space separated into hot and cold rooms. With its glistening mosaic tiles in



The Majestic Spa's design and wellness rituals all hark back to the golden era of the 1930s, of British Malaya and old Kuala Lumpur.

shades of brown and mood lighting, it is a space designed not just for sweating it out but to do so in impressive style. Spa guests are also guaranteed to be won over by the unique cooling bench. Kept chilled by a concealed machine beneath, it is a delightfully icy cool way to refresh post-perspiration.

Majestic Experiences

The Majestic Spa has just seven rooms – of which three are couple suites, while one is disable-friendly – making it a boutique retreat. The menu is modest but focused on selected à la carte services and four experience packages. Each of these are woven around a charming tale about Old Britain or British Malaya, and designed to reveal the essence of the story line.

The Malay Golden Chersonese is a two-and-a-half-hour couples' treatment celebrating the epic world-wide travels of explorer and writer Isabella Lucy Bird. The intrepid and unconventional Englishwoman circumvented the globe three times in her lifetime and chronicled her time in British Malaya in *The Golden Chersonese*. Drawing inspiration from Miss Bird's evocative account of exotic





“The Majestic Spa also offers à la carte massages comprising a choice of Swedish, aromatherapy, traditional Malay and herbal sports bodywork.”

and exquisite Malaya, the treatment makes use of the abundance of the land. For her, it begins with a banana-and-honey hair masque, followed by a papaya coconut scrub, lime blossom bath and, finally, the Bunga Rampai massage using frangipani and *pandan* (screw pine) essential oils. For him, the same hair masque is followed by a Malayan herbal scrub using local herbs, a herbal steam and the East Indian Spice massage with essential oils of ginger, patchouli and ylang ylang.

From the jungles of Malaya, be transported to the English herbal garden and the delights of a particular royal favourite: lavender. Queen Victoria was said to have an enthusiastic passion for this versatile herb, and her royal blessing raised it to great heights of popularity. Her Majesty demanded it in her perfumes, on her mattresses and pillows, and strewn on floors, while English ladies placed small sachets between their bosoms to attract suitors. In modern times, lavender is used to calm the nervous system, regulate sleep and reduce stress. Put aside worries, exhaustion and fatigue, and surrender to the relaxing three-hour Queen Victoria's Lavender experience. The Tranquillity Breathing Ritual lulls guests

into deep rest before the treatment starts with the Harmonising Exfoliation, then the Curative Lavender and Aloe Gel mask, and culminating in the Drift Away Lavender Massage using essential oils of lavender, clary sage and mandarin.

The quintessential tradition of afternoon tea is honoured in the English Afternoon Tea experience. The Majestic Spa cleverly turns the mid-afternoon tea menu into a sumptuous two-hour long pampering session that fully exploits the potent antioxidant power of berries that, literally, sounds good enough to eat! A blackberries and cream scrub delivers a burst of moisture and antioxidants to the skin. The delectable Garden Berries Massage is then brilliantly finished with a fragrant English rose natural facial to soothe and regenerate skin cells.

Finally, North Coast Seaweed Sculpt, the last of the experience packages, employs the world's finest seaweed harvested from the coasts of Ireland and northern Britain. Rich in essential minerals and nourishing polysaccharides, it is highly effective in slimming treatments because of its firming and lifting properties, and ability to reduce cellulite and aid in water retention. The treatment starts with a

gentle dry brushing to stimulate lymphatic and blood circulation, which helps break down fat deposits. A mineral rich seaweed wrap nourishes tissues while reducing the appearance of cellulite. This is complemented by Lymphatic Drainage Massage to eliminate newly-released cellular toxins.

Post-treatment, guests are gently ushered back to reality with a cup of soothing camomile tea and a thoughtful memento of their time spent at The Majestic Spa, a bookmark bearing a quintessential Mackintosh design. The Majestic Spa also offers à la carte massages comprising a choice of Swedish, aromatherapy, traditional Malay and herbal sports bodywork. For facials, the spa proudly features the Swedish luxury skincare collection of Kerstin Florian, which is used in its Cellular Firming, Deep Cleansing Pure, and Classic European facial treatments.

A New Icon

The reopening of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur returns to the city one of its once-lost icons and also gifts its denizens a new landmark in The Majestic Spa. Together with the hotel, it looks poised to write a new chapter in Kuala Lumpur's story. ■

Clockwise, from top: Scented candles set the mood; a lavender foot soak is the prelude to a spa experience to remember; soaking it up Victorian-style.



Let a Thousand Orchids Bloom

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's dedicated orchid conservatory is a celebration of a stunning local variety, the Phalaenopsis.

Text **Diana Khoo** Photography **Jacob Termansen & Yong Keen Keong**



Chairman Mao may have uttered the phrase 'Let a thousand flowers blossom', but it appears a specific form of floral revolution is taking place at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, featuring, exclusively, orchids. The first and only hotel in Malaysia to boast a dedicated orchid conservatory, stepping into this haven dedicated solely to the beauty of moth orchids, also known as Phalaenopsis, is certain to bring out the green thumb in everyone. A special space measuring 28ft by 50ft has been built in between the hotel's two wings and, upon entering, it is very likely the first word uttered would be 'wow'. Specially-constructed shelves and planter boxes line the walls and the room, at any one time, holds nothing less than a thousand orchid plants in glorious full bloom.

"It's truly a world of Phalaenopsis," says Steven Cheong, a renowned orchid cultivator and enthusiast. "There are many species of orchids in the world but Phalaenopsis, in particular, has proven the most popular, overtaking roses to become the number one cultivated bloom in the world." Phalaenopsis as a species is also relatively easy to grow and care for, thriving especially in controlled climate environments, similar to what The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur has achieved with its conservatory. "The ideal temperature ranges from 22 to 24°C and it's also great that the hotel has chosen to showcase and celebrate this particular orchid, which is native to Malaysia as well as a few other countries in the region."

Certainly, the orchid conservatory looks set to be one of the hotel's star attractions, a stunning platform to showcase the beauty of tropical flowers or, as Dato' Mark Yeoh, Executive Director of YTL Hotels, likes to put it, "a thousand perpetual blossoms". "It's a very clever way of juxtaposing something that is classically beautiful yet endemically relevant," adds Cheong. "What The Majestic Hotel has achieved here is what I'd term 'the ultimate Phalaenopsis alliance'."

Left: The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's stunning orchid conservatory. Top right: Milk cow orchids.



The Phalaenopsis orchid is the hotel's signature flower.



“There are many species of orchids in the world but Phalaenopsis, in particular, has proven the most popular, overtaking roses to become the number one cultivated bloom in the world.”

FLOWER FACTS

The Phalaenopsis is one of the most popular species in the orchid trade, due to relative ease in its cultivation.

Its name is said to derive from the word Phalaena, which is an archaic term used to describe a large group of moths. Its petals are also said to resemble a large moth, hence the name.

There are no less than 60 species of the Phalaenopsis genus. Phalaenopsis may be found growing wild in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and as far north as Taiwan.

There are no less than 60 species of the Phalaenopsis genus and the conservatory is a rainbow collection of some of its most beautiful varieties. Ranging from small to large, the blossoms come in a variety of hues, from soft buttery yellow to ivory white as well as bright fuchsia. There are also unusual examples, including a dotted one nicknamed 'dalmatian' or 'milk cow' by Cheong as well as a speckled variety. Adding a verdant touch are also pots upon pots of local ferns and pitcher plants, which, according to Chinese belief, are a symbol of good luck, but only if the pitchers are constantly filled with liquid.

With the Phalaenopsis firmly in place as the signature flower of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, plans are also underway to enhance the orchid experience further for horticulturally-inclined guests with organised tours to local orchid farms, complete with generously-filled picnic baskets and return transfers. ❖

Explore The World of YTL Hotels...



THE MAJESTIC HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Sometimes the resurrection of a hotel can herald a second Renaissance for an entire city district, explaining why in Kuala Lumpur all eyes are on The Majestic Kuala Lumpur.

Located on a wide boulevard once known as Victory Avenue, the property was built in the 1930s and, during its hey-day, ranked as one of South-East Asia's grandest hotels. Re-opening in December 2012, The Majestic Hotel is poised to reclaim this former glory; its pièce de résistance will be The Majestic Wing, whose neo-classical details have been meticulously restored. An annexe, housing the majority of the plush rooms, was designed to complement the historic building. A spa has been designed in Art Deco fashion.

Beautifully balancing old and new, The Majestic Hotel is Kuala Lumpur's most exciting hotel debut.



+60 3 2785 8000
www.majestick.com



GAYA ISLAND RESORT
MALAYSIA

Set within the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park, off the coast of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Borneo's latest luxury retreat sits gracefully on Gaya Island, the largest of the five islands in the marine park. Golden beaches and lush tropical rainforest beckon sun-worshippers and those wishing to commune with nature, while the island's waters teem with marine life, including bamboo sharks and enormous barrel sponges. Reconnect to a PURE world, the resort's activities programme that vivifies the senses.

One hundred and twenty luxurious hill villas and one two-bedroom suite invite you to embrace island living, while the resort's two distinctive restaurants, Feast Village and Fisherman's Cove, as well as a Spa Village allow for stylish indulging.

+60 3 2783 1000
www.ytlhotels.com

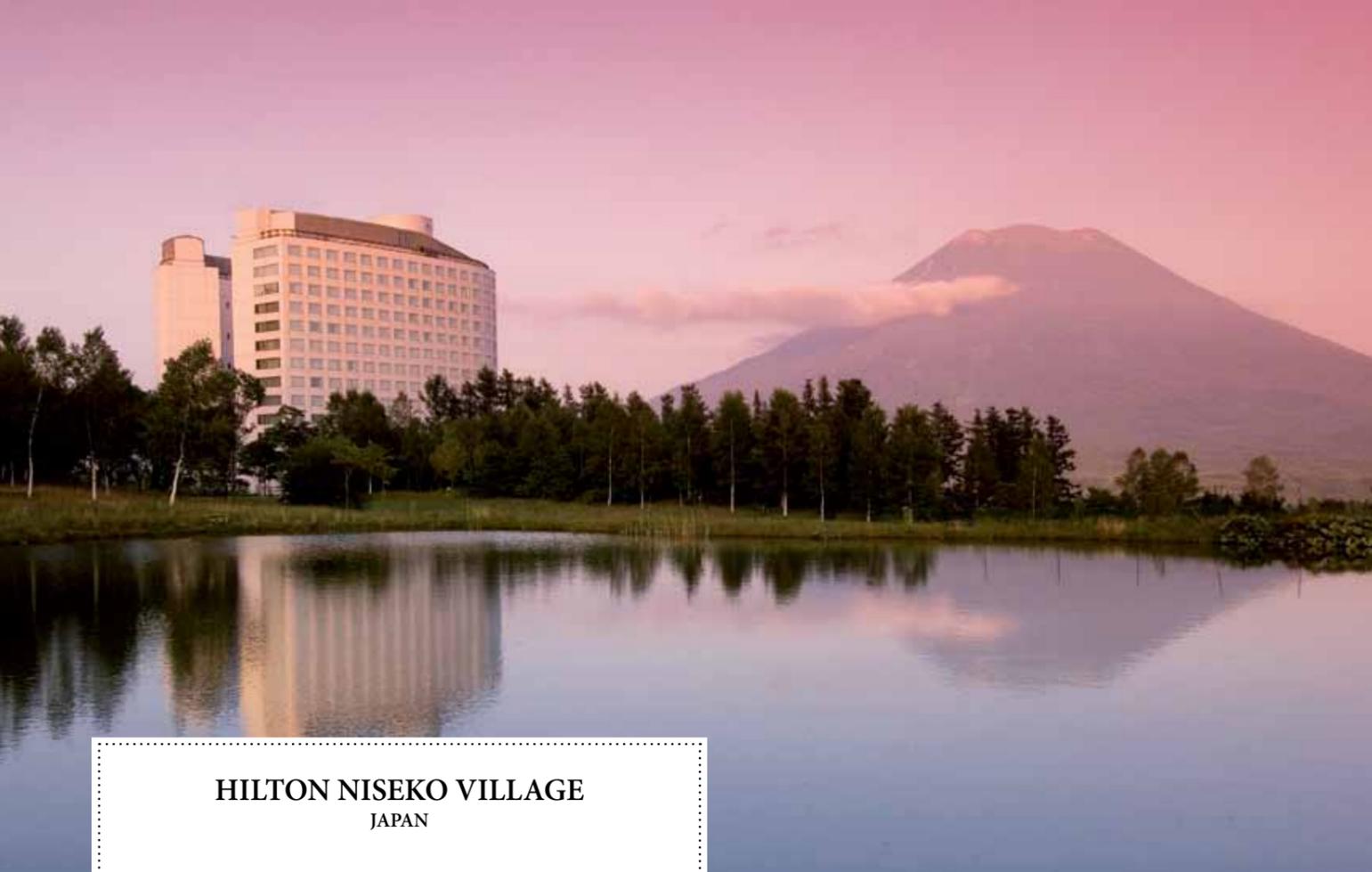


THE GREEN LEAF NISEKO VILLAGE
HOKKAIDO, JAPAN

Located in the heart of Niseko Village in Hokkaido, the newly unveiled The Green Leaf Niseko Village is the premium contemporary resort in Niseko, appealing to guests who want to enjoy a seamless experience of stay, snow and ski. The 200-room, ski-in, ski-out resort is perfectly-placed for all activities and offers a variety of dining options, including the Lookout Café and the hotel's rooftop bar, Altitude. Alternatively, relax in the forested *onsen*, a therapeutic natural volcanic hot spring guaranteed to soak away tension and time.



+86 (21) 6321 0021
www.thegreenleafhotel.com



HILTON NISEKO VILLAGE
JAPAN

Set at the foot of the Niseko Annupuri Mountain, the Hilton Niseko Village is the perfect base from which to enjoy a huge variety of outdoor activities throughout the year. Ski on powdery slopes during the winter season and enjoy family-friendly facilities such as the Niseko Ski Village ski school, Niseko Kids ski programme, a luxurious spa, and five restaurants.

There are also two 18-hole championship golf courses nearby (one designed by Arnold Palmer), a tennis complex, an equestrian centre and a unique nature-based activity area called 'PURE', complete with tree-trekking and beginners golf.

+86 (21) 6321 0021
www.hiltonniseko.com



CAMERON HIGHLANDS RESORT
MALAYSIA

Set amidst tea plantations and rolling hills, this tranquil hideaway promises visitors all the splendour, romance and nostalgia of Cameron Highlands' grand colonial heritage.

Cameron Highlands is Malaysia's largest hill resort and is largely unchanged since its colonial heyday, this 'little corner of England in Asia' is still dotted with Tudor-style cottages, a place where scones and afternoon tea will not seem out of place.

The resort, with its tall French doors, timber-beamed ceilings, plantation shutters and a fireplace, add old-world charm to the surroundings. It also houses a Spa Village as well as an 18-hole golf course and 56 luxuriously-appointed rooms and suites, which weave in wondrous colours and textures of Jim Thompson's famous silks.



Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.cameronhighlandsresort.com



PANGKOR LAUT RESORT MALAYSIA

Pangkor Laut is a privately-owned island located three miles off the west coast of Malaysia along the Straits of Malacca. This piece of paradise has been two million years in the making, and it is here you'll find one of the world's premier award-winning resorts nestling in the shade of forest giants as old as the land.

There are no other resorts – just secluded bays curled around pristine beaches, evening skies woven with colour and a deep sense of serenity reserved exclusively for guests. A combination of luxury, natural beauty and age-old wilderness woven together to produce an environment where peace and magically-memorable moments are the currency.

Of the island's 300 acres, only a fraction has been developed to house the resort and its eight estates. Wooden buildings blend seamlessly with the forest, as if nature had been the architect dictating how walls curve around foliage, and roofs open up to allow trees to continue on their journey to the sky.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.pangkorlautresort.com



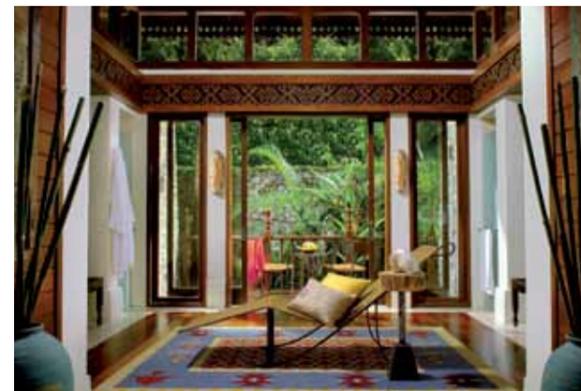
THE ESTATES AT PANGKOR LAUT RESORT MALAYSIA

In a small, secluded cove near Pangkor Laut Resort rests the eight wonders that comprise The Estates. Each of these individually-crafted enclaves is reminiscent of the traditional South-East Asian way of living of days gone by, when an 'estate' was made up of a number of special purpose buildings placed amidst gardens of astounding beauty.

Comprising two, three or four bedrooms, each Estate offers a private infinity-edge pool, as well as pavilions in various adaptations of Malay architectural traditions.

There is also a private vehicle and driver assigned to each Estate should guests decide to leave the seclusion of their villa to dine at one of the resort's restaurants or to go for a treatment at the Spa Village.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.pangkorlautesates.com





THE MAJESTIC MALACCA MALAYSIA

The historic city of Malacca is steeped in a rich tapestry of multicultural influences reflected in its heritage architecture, diverse lifestyles and eclectic cuisine.

Located on the banks of the river which, in yesteryear, teemed with Chinese junks and spice-laden vessels from all over the world, The Majestic Malacca provides a glimpse into the splendid saga of an extraordinary empire.

The Majestic Malacca is an integral part of Malacca's colourful history. The original serene mansion, dating back to the 1920s, remains at the heart of the hotel, whilst a new building has been created, mirroring the original architecture, to house 54 spacious rooms and suites.

From the original porcelain flooring, teakwood fittings, intricate artwork and antiques, to the finely crafted Nyonya cuisine, every aspect echoes the history of the region, and offers a beguiling journey through this enchanting heritage.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.majesticmalacca.com



TANJONG JARA RESORT MALAYSIA

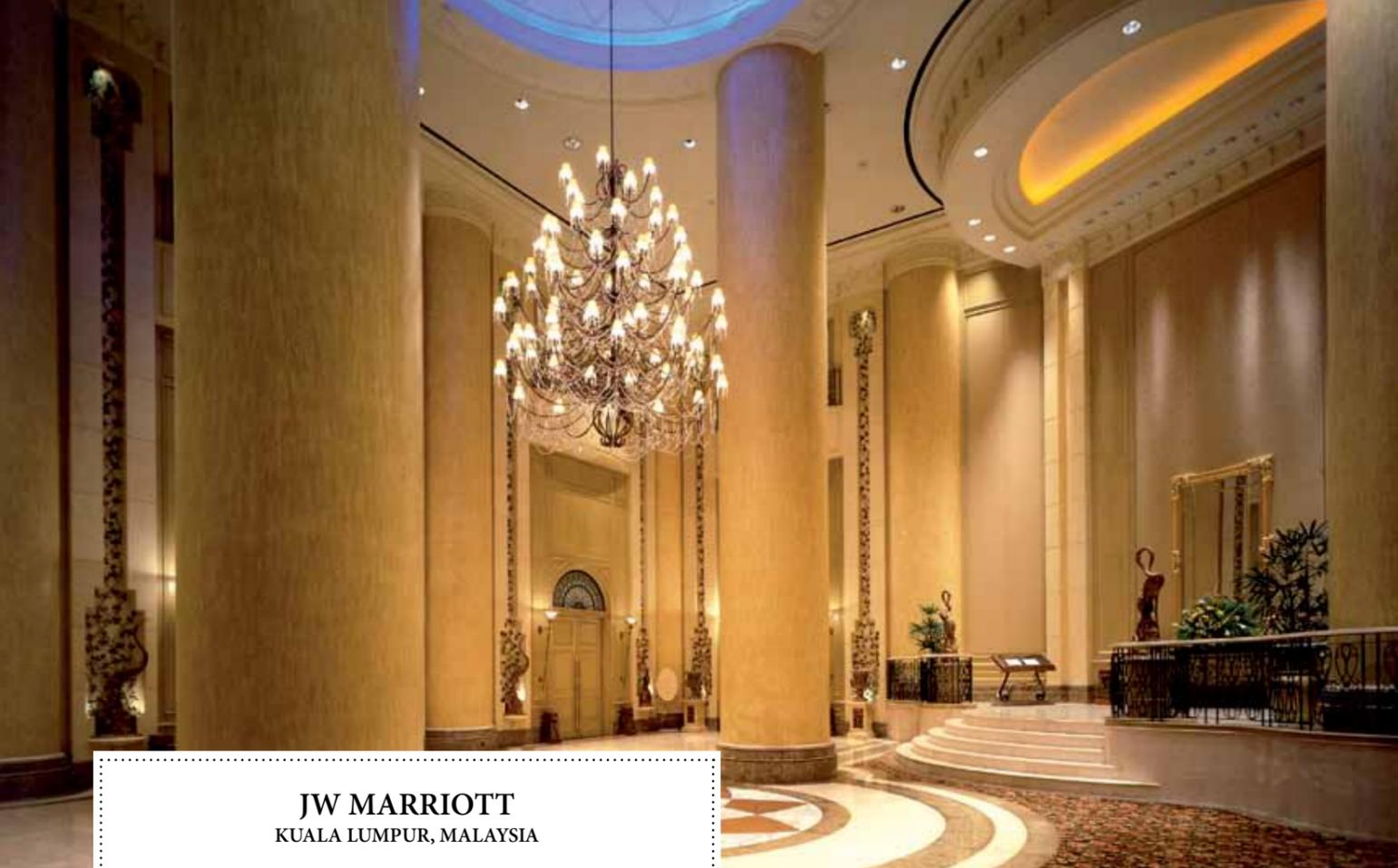
Located on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, Tanjong Jara Resort is a sanctuary of luxury and well-being steeped in age-old Malay traditions. Designed to reflect the elegance and grandeur of 17th century Malay palaces, Tanjong Jara is a 99-room resort embodiment of the gentle Malay art of service and hospitality.

The philosophy of the Resort is as unique as the Resort itself. Based on the Malay concept of *Sucimurni*, which emphasises purity of spirit, health and well-being, Tanjong Jara encourages true rejuvenation of both body and spirit.

Tanjong Jara is an opportunity to withdraw from the pressures of this ever-changing world by offering a chance to immerse oneself in a sanctuary of serenity and beauty.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.tanjongjararesort.com





JW MARRIOTT
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Guest rooms at JW Marriott Kuala Lumpur offer the ultimate in comfort and convenience, designed with the discerning business traveller in mind. An ample work area, with adjustable desk lighting and ergonomic chair, provides a comfortable environment for executives. Desk-mounted electrical outlets, two-line speaker telephones with call-waiting facility, fax modem and voice mail make for easy communication around the world.

Accommodation comprises 561 guest rooms with 294 Deluxe Kings, 172 Deluxe Twins, 25 Executive Deluxe Rooms, 19 Studio Suites, 32 Junior Suites, 2 Executive Studio Suites, 2 Executive Junior Suites, 8 one-bedroom Suites, 3 two-bedroom Suites, 2 VIP Suites, a Chairman's Suite and a luxurious Presidential Suite.

Marriott Marquis Platinum and Gold card members and guests occupying suites enjoy access to the JW Lounge, with its complimentary breakfast, light refreshments and evening cocktails.

Tel: +60 3 2715 9000
www.ytlhotels.com



THE RITZ-CARLTON
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Discover the exclusive Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur and experience a place where ancient rivers converge and a modern city beckons guests to explore the sights, sounds and flavours of Malaysia. Located downtown in the Golden Triangle business district, this distinctive five-star luxury hotel in Kuala Lumpur is conveniently accessible to upscale shopping, dining and entertainment. At The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, guests can indulge in soothing spa treatments, delectable cuisine or simply relax in the exceptional comfort of their rooms and take in the best the city has to offer.

The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur is the city's first award-winning full-butler hotel, featuring 365 guest rooms and suites. The fresh style of The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur is influenced by a variety of themes reflecting Malaysia's diverse artistry of ethnic cultures. The dark-toned woods with angular designs reflect masculinity, while details like brass inlays add a touch of elegance. Rich earthy tones in the carpet and wall coverings are used to create a cosy, warm home-away-from-home ambience, while hidden modern technologies add a modern yet subtle flair.

Tel: +60 3 2142 8000
www.ytlhotels.com





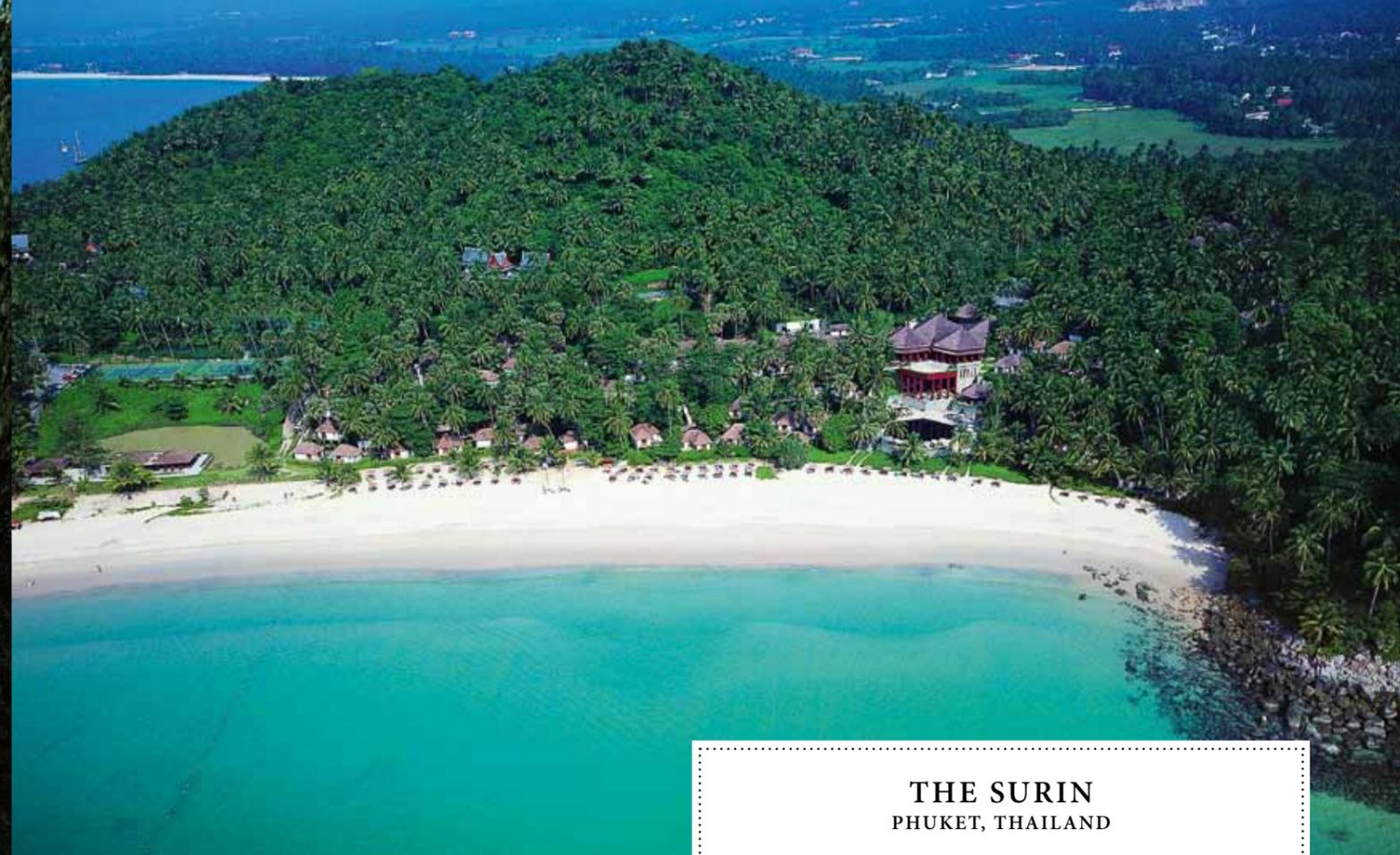
VILLA TASSANA
PHUKET, THAILAND

Set amidst a tropical forest on a craggy cliff overlooking the beautiful emerald green of the Andaman Sea is a gem in the YTL Hotels' portfolio of luxury holiday destinations. Located just 15 minutes away from Phuket International Airport on the island's quiet, undeveloped north-western coastline, Villa Tassana offers guests a vacation of modern sophistication married with Thai hospitality.

Spread over a generous 2,800 sq m, the villa features three large bedrooms with ensuite bath and dressing areas, a 15m swimming pool, separate living and dining pavilions, a kitchen and a maid's room. For those looking to get away from it all, Villa Tassana is staffed by one dedicated attendant and a chef specialising in delicious home-style Thai dishes.

Guests can also enjoy the first-class spa and sports facilities located at the nearby Trisara Hotel. There are three excellent golf courses nearby, including the exclusive Blue Canyon course, and a range of luxury motor yachts you can use to explore Phuket's many bays, islands and dive locations.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.ytlhotels.com



THE SURIN
PHUKET, THAILAND

The Surin Phuket is an exclusive beach retreat for discerning travellers, families and couples seeking relaxation and indulgence in a serene beachfront setting. The Surin Phuket is located on the tranquil Pansea Beach on the west coast of Phuket Island, Thailand and a member of Design Hotels.

Offering a total of 103 hillside and beachfront cottages and suites all discreetly built into a carefully conserved landscape, amidst coconut trees and gently sloping down to meet a small coral reef. The Surin, Phuket offers a contemporary Thai experience in timeless simplicity and modern sophistication.



Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.ytlhotels.com



SPA VILLAGE RESORT
TEMBOK, BALI, INDONESIA

Dawn rises and an indigo curtain of stars is drawn back from the sky, exposing a dramatic landscape of soaring peaks that sweep down across grassy lowlands to the black volcanic sand that kisses the blue of the Bali sea. You are in Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali and the day has just begun.

Inspired by the award-winning Spa Village Pangkor Laut, Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali embraces the same healing ethos of celebrating local culture, honouring the ancient remedies of the region and infusing each visit with the essence of the surrounding scenery.

Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali is a place of peacefulness and calm, combining the therapeutic value of its beautiful location with an ancient and rich cultural heritage. Reflecting the spirituality of ages, the environment here is soft and serene; its people go about their days in a caring manner that brings calm to the harried and peace to the stressed; here, at Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali, it is possible to recapture one's sense of self.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.spavillage.com



EASTERN & ORIENTAL EXPRESS

The Eastern & Oriental Express is more than a train service: the quarter-of-a-mile in length train is a haven of comfort, style and luxury, and the perfect vantage point from which to tour the region. The Restaurant Cars, Saloon Car and Bar Car are located at the centre of the train, while the Observation Car, with its open deck area, is located at the rear.

The interior walls of the compartments are panelled with cherry wood and elm burr, and decorative marquetry friezes and intricate design inlays. The delicate embroidery work was done in Malaysia, and the bespoke carpets hand-tufted in Thailand.

Chefs onboard the E&O Express are internationally-renowned for their tantalising variety of Eastern and European dishes, using the finest seasonal ingredients. While guests dine at night, the steward transforms the compartment from a living room to a luxurious bedroom.

www.easternandorientalexpress.com





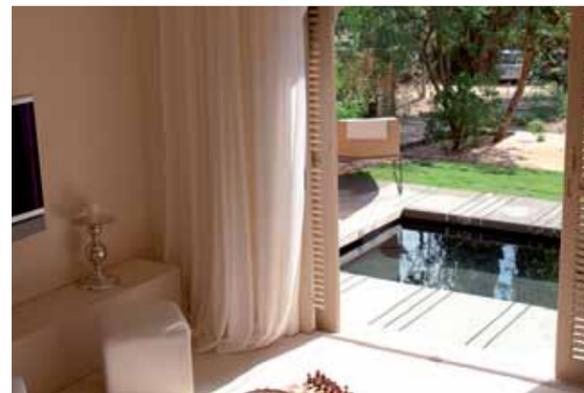
MUSE HÔTEL DE LUXE
FRANCE

Bardot would no doubt approve of Saint-Tropez newcomer, Muse Hôtel De Luxe, just minutes from the Place de Lices by car, situated on the stunning Ramatuelle *route de plages* and set amongst an ecological landscape of terraced gardens.

Fifteen ultra chic suites (10 featuring private plunge pools) are dedicated to famous muses such as 'Edith', after Edith Piaf, 'Catherine', after Catherine Deneuve, and 'Lauren', after Lauren Bacall. Each suite sports a unique interior but all blend seamlessly with cool stone floors and marmorino wall finishes. Thoughtful touches include a 42" Loewe plasma screen with over 100 channels, a PlayStation, iPad and iPhone.

Designed with pure lines, a cool elegant reception area and outdoor water cascades, the hotel is a reflection of architectural simplicity, immediately stamping its original and stylish signature on the Saint-Tropezienne landscape.

Tel: +334 94 430 440
www.muse-hotels.com



BRAY HOUSE
ENGLAND

An elegant private home dating back to the late 17th century, Bray House has been restored and transformed into an elegant, high design boutique home stay. Featuring an eclectic mix of interiors spanning the Art Deco period of the early 1900s, Bray House is a unique experience of the gentrified English lifestyle, complete with bespoke service and intimate atmosphere.

Designer furniture, vintage accessories and vivid splashes of colour create an atmosphere that marries the modern and the classic. Each of the bedrooms has its own theme: a lullaby of white in one, and a symphony of Tuscany red in another. Bray House also features a private courtyard and a natural spring found in the garden.

The idyllic village of Bray, near Windsor, is quintessentially English, with its period houses, traditional pubs with beamed ceilings and fireplaces, and a beautifully-restored church dating back to 1293.

Tel: +60 3 2715 9000
www.ytlhotels.com



1. Spa Village Kuala Lumpur Malaysia

This unique retreat offers the world's most sophisticated therapies integrated with traditional healing practices of the region. Paying tribute to Malaysia's fascinating cultural diversity and rich healing heritage, this most stylish of spas seamlessly blends ancient and modern practices, using natural local ingredients to deliver blissful relaxation and rejuvenation.

2. Spa Village Pangkor Laut Malaysia

The Spa Village at Pangkor Laut Resort is a unique, ultra-exclusive retreat that extols the healing tradition of Malaysia's diverse history of people and cultures and wealth abundance of exotic natural resources. The abundance of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Thai practices make this the ideal tranquil setting for complete rejuvenation of body and soul.

3. Spa Village Malacca Malaysia

The Spa Village Malacca is the world's only spa to base its therapies on the healing heritage of the Baba-Nyonya or Peranakan culture – a unique combination of Chinese and Malay influences. The spa is spread across the first two floors of the new wing and provides a serene environment in which one can rest, recuperate and rejuvenate in the care of some of the world's best therapists.

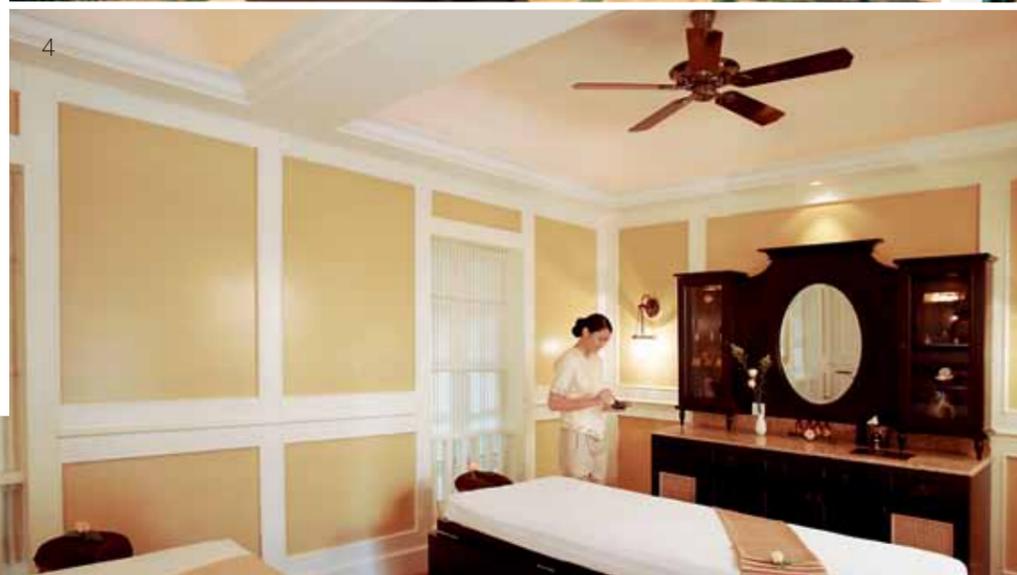
4. Spa Village Cameron Highlands Malaysia

Cameron Highlands Resort features the third wellness centre of the award-winning Spa Village brand with a wide range of sophisticated treatments and healing therapies inspired by the restorative properties of tea. Each guest luxuriates in a signature tea bath before every treatment. Cameron Highlands Spa Village offers tranquil indoor and outdoor treatment rooms, tea bath rooms and a fully-equipped gymnasium.

5. Spa Village Tanjong Jara Malaysia

At Spa Village Tanjong Jara, time-tested health and beauty traditions are revived in the most comforting surrounds. Guests can benefit from a comprehensive programme of therapies, created using unique ingredients from indigenous herbs and plants, along with the skills of resident Malay healers.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.spavillage.com





FEAST VILLAGE
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Feast to your heart's content in our Feast Village, a dramatic and stylish dining haven with a village charm. Here, you will find 11 uniquely-designed restaurants serving a mix of world-class cuisine and providing a display of culinary skill embodied in a chic and contemporary atmosphere.

Restaurants and bars at Feast Village include Fisherman's Cove, Luk Yu Tea House, Pak Loh Chiu Chow, Tarbush, Spice of India, Starhill Tea Salon, Shook!, Jake's Charbroil Steak, KoRyo Won, Enak, and Village Bar.

The design of Feast Village is inspired by nature. Walls are asymmetrical and serve not to separate, but rather to provide peaceful enclaves where people may relax.

Rice paper from Japan combines with slate and *ikat* from Indonesia, granite from China, silk from Thailand and timber from Myanmar to create the essence of Asia from a design perspective, making Feast Village truly one-of-a-kind.

Tel: +60 3 2782 3855
www.starhillgallery.com



SHOOK! SHANGHAI AT THE SWATCH ART PEACE HOTEL
CHINA

Perched on a space of symmetry and proportion, Shook! Shanghai features the skills of four epicurean chefs with four distinct cuisines. A show kitchen – dubbed the 'Ferrari' of kitchens – is where its signature dishes are created around the senses. The menu flirts with seasonal trends with whispers of Chinese, Japanese, South-East Asian and modern Western cuisines, yet flexible enough to transport you anywhere your heart and palate desire. Another highlight at Shook! Shanghai is the showcase of the world's finest wines and champagnes, including rare vintages from 1945 through to 2000. Shook! Shanghai also houses The Time Bar and The Swatch Art Peace Hotel Terrace on the roof top, overlooking a stunning backdrop of the Pudong skyline.



+86 (21) 6321 0021
www.shookrestaurantshanghai.com



The Twain Shall Meet

Two men, two very different lives. One lived it short but brilliantly; the other, considerably longer but no less brilliant, and still continuing to shine brightly as one of the country's foremost musical talents. The man on the left is none other than the late great P Ramlee – Malaysia's most celebrated icon of film and music. A renowned singer, composer and actor, he managed to act and direct 66 films as well as have over 360 songs to his credit at the time of his passing, at the young age of 44. The man on the right is your guess. A renowned music-maker, he has spent much of his career shining light onto the careers of others while remaining in the wings himself. With the reopening of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, however, this looks set to change. Who is he? Turn to page 36 to find out. ❏



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We've been told our service is good;
in fact it's literarily inspiring.
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In July 1975, Alan Dean Foster, author of "Star Trek" had his honeymoon at The Majestic. Foster was so impressed by our headwaiter (pictured above) that he not only kept his photograph over these many decades, but even based a character on him in his novel "Cachalot".

Now that we're about to open our doors once more, we would love to hear your stories too. Please email us at info@majestickl.com

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur
Creating history since 1932
Add your own chapter from December 1st, 2012

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