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Silverfox Studios



SUSAN HENG AND PATRICK WARING, OWNERS

Can Faik talks to Susan Heng and Patrick Waring, joint owners of Silverfox Studios about their full interior design consultancy that encompasses all stages of the process, from conceptualisation to final delivery.

Silverfox Studios specialises in bespoke interiors for urban, resort and boutique hotels, standalone restaurants, and luxury villas. Both Susan and Patrick collaborate with architects, fashion, kitchen and lighting designers, and work directly with artists, art consultants and accessory houses. The studio believe that design should never be forced. It should be allowed to follow its own path, to change within the processes of creation.

Tell me about your role at Silverfox Studios?

Susan & myself are joint owners/partners and are both Lead Designers, directing the studio and our talented teams within all departments, in addition Susan leans towards contracts & finance, while I more towards job development and marketing.

What five words would you use to describe Silverfox Studios?

Driven, Courageous, confident, inventive, collaborative.

How long have you been involved with hotel design?

Silverfox is now 11 years old, while we have both specialised in Hotel and F&B design for 25 years and 20 years respectively.

Have you noticed any particular trends in hotel design?

The luxury sector has started to take on board a more innovative approach to F&B design and service. Many brands are moving towards a new, more expressive use of space such as the fusing

or separation of service points and outlets. There is now a greater emphasis on revenue from all areas of the property. This challenge requires an inventive planning philosophy requiring greater creativity, leading to greater operational flexibility.

How would you describe your style?

Our style or our approach can be described in terms of, entertainment, interaction, innovation and theatre. Brand "Silverfox" merges multiple disciplines within each project and creates memorable experiences.

How did Silverfox Studios become to be a specialist in a F&B Design?

We research the subject matter and visit hundreds of restaurants in order to understand why they work, why they are busy. We are fascinated with everything F&B and we continue to make a concerted effort to keep learning. We know how kitchens and associated equipment work, how the chef works and the dimensions needed for his/her kitchen planning and operation and how the chef will interface with the guest. We know how to control budgets because we have a full understanding of the disciplines associated to kitchen design, lighting, audio, visual, graphics, tabletops and uniforms. We provide these services. To become a specialist it helps to have a passion for everything that surrounds that discipline, therefore to become specialist in F&B for Hospitality the scope areas are enormous. We understand Hotel design and Hotel F&B design, it is our backbone. >





Where do you get your inspiration for new F&B design?

There are various sources for the development of a concept strategy, however it is best to understand the market and what position the outlet should take in terms of access, demographic, market studies and demand analysis. We look at the spend versus return ratios associated to menus and the price per plate. This assessment will direct the focus of the operator and owner on the level of complexity they are willing to invest in. We suggest concept strategies in line with the brand and the research statements. These strategies include reference information to the research and how to create a market separation. Further to concept creation we also advise on a Market Strategy, or how to take the restaurant to market.

How important are public spaces in hotels?

Public spaces define the brand. Therefore they are vitally important. However it is interesting to see that Hotel public spaces are now becoming F&B spaces. All areas of the property should be revenue generating, from the hotel entrance and Lobby to break out / pre functions with open kitchens and social space to patios and libraries. All areas should have an anchor, a defining F&B component. This allows flexibility and enables operations to pressure the Hotel to make all public area revenue generating. We design Full Scope Hotel projects, in fact that is our core business, however that side of Silverfox has become more niche and now much more connected to the fact that the Hotel offer revolves around F&B.

With so many hospitality designers in the industry, how does Silverfox Studios stand out from the rest?

We are gaining in experience according to the practices of industry leaders, the key individuals, and therefore the decision makers. Often these people

come from a catering background or are well known personalities / celebrity Chef's / Actors. These are the people who are pioneers of the next generation of Hotels and F&B operations and are the innovators who are willing to take on board design ideas that enhance their vision and who are continually challenging conventional thinking. This work is extraordinary, and maintains a contagious intensity and energy within our studio. We bring this mind set to the industry.

What is the biggest thing the company has learnt over its years in the industry?

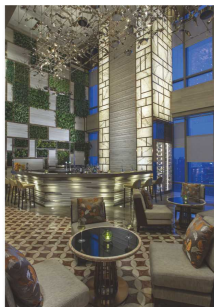
Trust our vision.

What has been your favourite project to date?

The projects that have a collective cohesive professional team and have great contractors and suppliers / manufacturers create the best results, and are the most rewarding. The Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Dubai, Jumeirah beach is one such project. We are responsible for five very challenging and fascinating F&B areas as well as their large Spa complex. This project opens in the spring of this year.

Where do you see hotel design in the future?

We see more niche market segments emerging. Further to the sway of cookie cut "Lifestyle" brands that flooded the market over the past decade there has been a refinement associated to location and demographic. In other words Hotels have become more targeted towards the guest profile associated to the location or city. This impact has affected the luxury end of



the market because of a new demand for luxury-lifestyle, this is creating an interesting deviance away from traditional.

What would you say are the best places you've ever stayed?

Patrick : Places to relax and have adventure. Allia Jabal Akhdar in Muscat is sensational, also Izingwe Lodge Welgevonden South Africa is one such place. This is Trisha Wilsons Private game reserve getaway. As you can imagine it is incredible, from the accommodation to the views and safari expeditions.

Susan : Honke Bankyu Ryokan and Onsen Japan. A hidden gem, a place to get lost and self indulge. My favourite hotel is the Park Hyatt Shanghai.

How and why did you get into the interior design industry?

Susan : Believe it or not it was a choice between either banking or the arts, fine art was an option but I chose design after a short spell at a large corporate office in the financial district and opted for more freedom of expression. I worked at an influential Architectural firm for several years before switching solely to Hospitality interior design.

Patrick : I know I would have enjoyed working in a number of different areas of the design world, I liked the idea of film, photography, theatre and then I fixed my mind on Interiors as there was an opportunity open to me at the time. I was fortunate to have worked for large international hospitality companies and loved it.

What do you love about being a designer? Where do you draw your inspiration from?

This is a full time hobby, which is also a job. We embrace that and enjoy weaving every aspect of life and design together enjoyably. Having your own company enables that enjoyment. Our studio has an overflowing library of books, reference material and magazines. The subject matter varies from Japanese street punk to Alexander McQueen to industrial shipyards, theatre, film, actors and contemporary design icons such as Sou Fujimoto. We attend lectures with artists and architects, attend trade shows and meet old friends. Almost all of our work is outside Singapore so the vast array of visual stimulation we gather every time we travel is enormous.

Is there anything exciting that you are working on at the moment that you can tell us about?

Two interesting projects to look out for. Our latest large F&B project on the roof-top levels of the St Regis Amman Jordan is very interesting, our collaboration with the team pushed the boundaries for this brand, and the results so far are very special. There are challenges over there to get the quality of work and delivery that this level of brand requires, however we and the owner have been through the learning curve on this as we are about to open the W Hotel Amman. The finishing touches are being installed now.

What would be your dream hotel project?

We would love to design a hotel, inside and out in collaboration with our favourite engineering partners. We would include the landscape, lighting and all aesthetics. The location would dictate the design scope and rational but preferably in the central districts of a European capital city.

What markets are you working in and which ones would you like to be working in?

Our home bases are Singapore as well as London UK. Therefore the middle-east, is easily accessible. We are busy in the UAE and surrounding countries. We are busy in China as it has re-emerged after a slowdown, especially in the luxury sector and we also have a healthy spread of work around the Asia Pacific region. Our target markets for further expansion are Europe especially the UK, where we have had interest, as well as North America.

What is your favourite project that you created, and why?

We are on site now with a project that is a stand alone, double storey restaurant on structural stilts 100 metres from the beach, in the sea. It has been designed as a floating village with different pavilions connected by bridges. Our scope includes conceptual and schematic architecture, Full Interiors and site supervision. This one is special because it shall be our first completed fully designed building..... inside and out.

> www.silverfoxstudios.com.sg