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there
yet?
the travel issue

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a sphere of wonder

ELEGANCE MEETS IMAGINATION AT THE NEWLY-OPENED KLAPSONS THE BOUTIQUE HOTEL.

TEXT BY ROSSARA JAMIL

IMAGE COURTESY OF KLAPSONS THE BOUTIQUE HOTEL

Venture past the immense glass frontage of Klapsons The Boutique Hotel and you would most likely be intrigued by the myriad of forms and colours within. And should you step into the lobby, the sheer volume of the space entralls, which is further intensified as you look up. Overhead on the ceiling, organic forms in white intersperse with soft yet dramatic lighting that glows and changes as minutes go by.

Chances are, like several boutique hotels that have opened in recent years in Singapore, Klapsons The Boutique Hotel would not go unnoticed. Here in our bustling city, elegance is de rigueur in large mainstream hotels. Yet, a sense of the hotel's personality is often lost on its guests, making boutique hotels a source of fascination and a welcome development in the hospitality scene.

Unlike many boutique hotels here in shophouse spaces on the fringe of the city, Klapsons The Boutique Hotel is part of an office tower. Without a doubt,

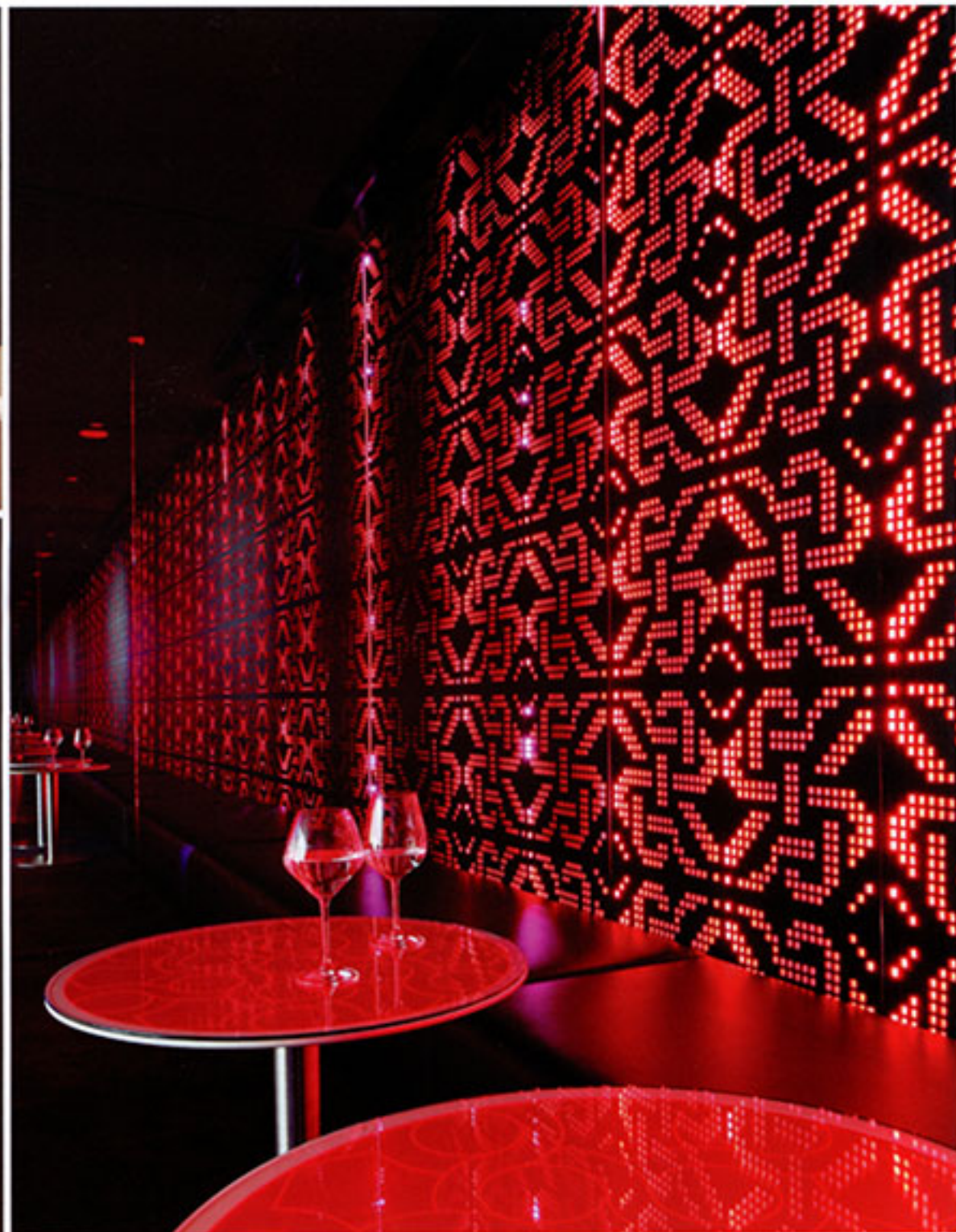
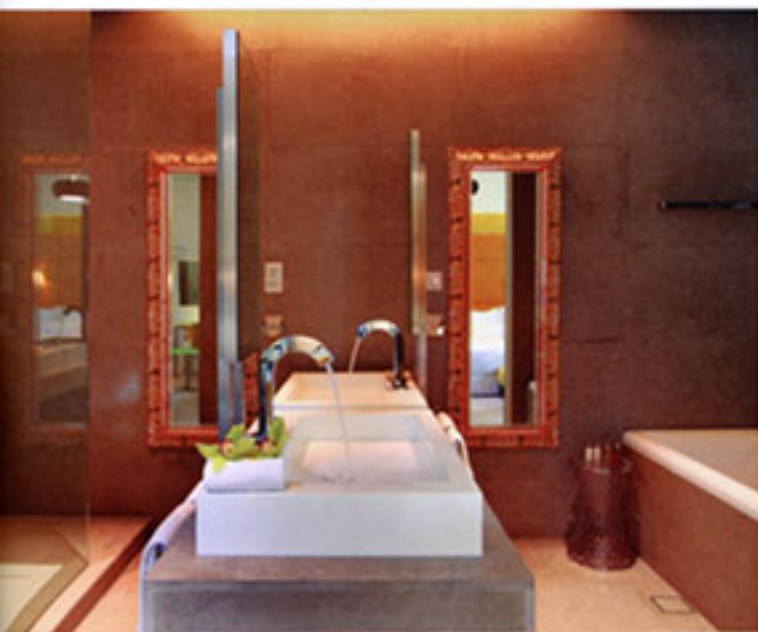
its location in the heart of the central business district is a boon to business travellers whose dealings are held in the area.

Opened in June this year, the hotel is designed by Sawaya & Moroni, the renowned international firm of architects and designers. The project is helmed by none other than William Sawaya, the artistic director and principal designer of the firm.

Klapsons appears to be doing what mainstream hotels that set out to woo business travellers find it hard to do – that is, to peel away its serious approach, hinting that life is really about having a little fun.

One of the things the firm did, explained Sawaya, was to place much focus on lighting to create different moods throughout the day. "Since Singapore is a warm and humid country, you'd want a cool feeling. So, when you're inside, it's like you're in an oasis, in a paradise, not just because of the air-conditioning but also the surrounding. The white organic shapes give you the feeling of being in an igloo," he adds.

Within this welcoming space sits a glorious steel sphere, propped up at a height above everything else. Symbolic for the world and what it has to offer, the irregular surface of the sphere reflects the rest of the space. It is here that guests would find themselves taking the few steps up towards the reception



counter, enveloped in the cocoon-like atmosphere after zipping through the streets from the airport.

Sawaya sums it up, "The steel sphere represents the world you enter when you step into the hotel. It's about a new experience. You enter it like a dream and then it's up to you to decide your own journey in the hotel." As you set foot into the neutral-coloured interior of the sphere, Sawaya explained, it is your personality that interprets the experience in the hotel.

It is the steel sphere, together with the fluid forms of the furniture within the lobby, that gives the space a whimsical and somewhat surreal feel. Pieces designed by Sawaya himself, such as the sculptural Maxima chairs, furnish the space. As one walks towards the lift lobby or restaurant for a bite, the sensuous form of a lounge chair with a distinct Zaha Hadid touch catches the eye. Sure enough, the piece is designed by the architect herself, an early piece that was the result of a collaboration with Sawaya & Moroni.

The hotel comes with 24 rooms and 8 suites, all of which are luxurious, stylish and furnished with pieces by Sawaya & Moroni as well as designer brands such as Kartell. Sleek forms combine with a cool mix of colours and textures that breathes freshness into each space. At the end of the day, when neckties are loosened or power heels kicked off, and it is time to head to the showers, the experience at Klapsons is unique to its own. Here, you enter a glass-

covered shower pod that stands right within the bedroom itself.

Even with its design-centric approach, it is clear that the hotel does not lose touch with the primarily business crowd it seeks. It offers a space that is modern, warm and elegant. At the same time, it is a veritable playground for those with a keen eye for design, its dream-like and illusory architecture and interior design without a doubt representative of our time. And for the jaded business traveller, it might just bring back the joy of business travel for what it is, an opportunity to wake up in a new or different place and remember where one is despite the blur of airports, airplanes, unfamiliar streets and business meetings. ■

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www.klapsons.com

WHY ARE THEY SIGNIFICANT TO YOU?

WS: When the *Diva* came out in 1987, the professionals were amazed by how it was done. Everyone was coming to touch it, to turn it upside down. It looked like a plastic mould but it was actually done in wood. It had a shape that could not be done with wood at that time. But I had the opportunity to know about a machine that recently came about. Everyone had access to it, but no one thought to apply it that way. The *Maxima* had a fold that was done without breaking. Plastic is a very malleable material but I also played on the thickness, it's 2.5cm thick but at the edges it looks like a paper fold. It was a visual trick and a calculation of the resistance.

YOUR FIRM HAS COLLABORATED WITH BIG NAMES IN DESIGN SUCH AS ZAHA HADID AND JEAN NOUVEL. HOW DO YOU CHOOSE WHO TO WORK WITH? WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR?

WS: We look to complete our collection, our idea and concept. Paolo and myself are passionate about modernity, architecture and contemporary [design]. Every three or four years, we fall in love with someone's brains and mind. We started with Michael Graves and Charles Jenks during the post-modernist period. Then, it was Kazuo Shinohara, the Japanese architect who was the first minimalist. Everyone gets his ideas but nobody mentions him.

After that it was Jean Nouvel, Zaha [Hadid] and Dominique Perrault. This year, we worked with [Daniel] Libeskind. Everybody represents his own time, his own philosophy and concept of architecture. That's what we would like to represent in our collection. Like playing music on one chord, we find that limiting. We always prefer to be very open-minded. We don't just limit our collections to one line. We challenge the world, we are not afraid of new experiences and new adventures. What we like is what we are and that's what you see.

COULD YOU NAME ONE YOUNG AND UPCOMING DESIGNER THAT HAS CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION?

WS: Konstantin Grcic, if you would call him a young designer. He's almost forty, but he's from the new generation. He's very good, I like what he does. The Bouroullecs are more boring. I mean, I call them constipated-minded because they want to be minimalist at any price. For them, sometimes they might question why an object should exist, that we live very well without it, so why not take off? But if you take it off, take off even the object itself, I don't need it. Grcic is different. He is not at all minimalist but he's conceptual. I like concept in a product, not just the outward allure.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE DIRECTION OF DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS?

WS: I cannot predict. I'm nobody to say what's coming. But, I think, especially with the recession, this period of crazy architecture of "the more you bend it, the more you are known" will stop very soon. We'll go back to rational thinking, with a basic and more human approach. Something that reflects more of the human needs but not the ego of the architect. I wish and I hope that soon it will all come back to its origins, using all the technology and advanced concepts but putting it in a more rational way. That doesn't mean it's retrograde, where you go back in time. To think basic and rational, why should I bend the building if there is no reason? I'd understand if you have to do something for more square metres. But if it's just for aesthetics, it's just cheap glamour and attention seeking.



beyond trends

Interview by Rossara Jamil Images courtesy of Sawaya & Moroni (unless otherwise stated)

William Sawaya and his business partner Paolo Moroni founded Sawaya & Moroni in 1984 driven by a desire to produce contemporary design. Through the years, the company has been known for products that are poetic in form and, at the same time, display a sensibility that does not bow to trends. As the artistic director and principal designer of Sawaya & Moroni, Sawaya's works encompass architecture, interior as well as product design that spans from furniture to glass and metalwork. We caught up with Sawaya while he was in town to oversee the opening of his latest project Klapsons The Boutique Hotel in Singapore, which is also his first work in Asia. The firm has worked with acclaimed designers such as Zaha Hadid and Kazuo Shinohara whose pieces, along with Sawaya's, are to be found in Klapsons.

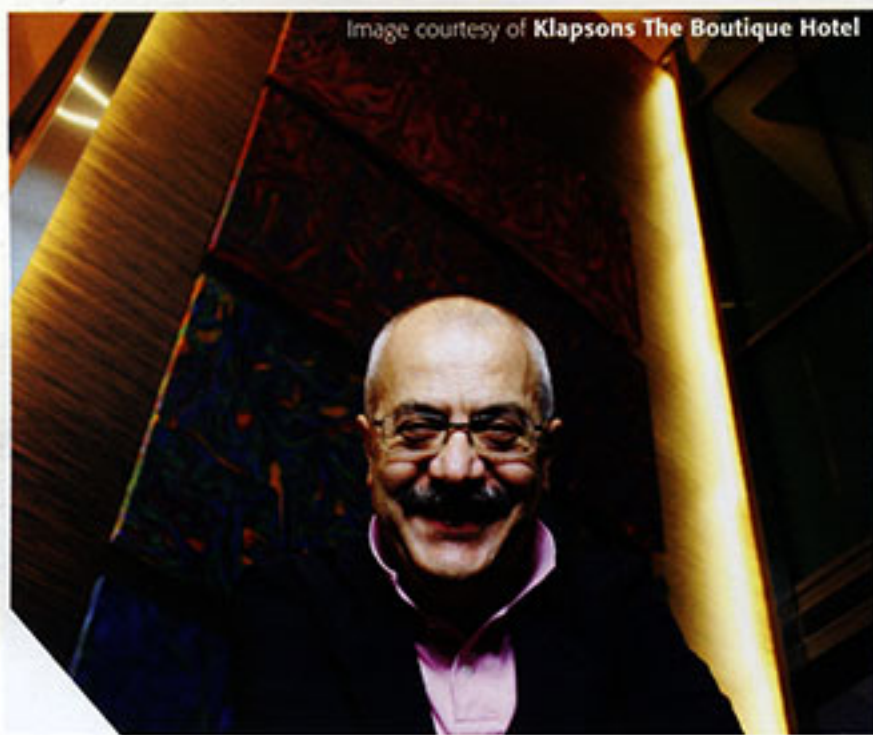


Image courtesy of Klapsons The Boutique Hotel

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FIRST UP, WHAT MAKES AN EXCELLENT HOTEL?

William Sawaya (WS): Very simple. I live more than half of my life in hotels. Within the first two seconds when I open my eyes, if I can recognise which country I am in and which hotel it is, it means it's a good hotel. If the smell of the linen, or the crisp of the linen, can remind me of the place, then, yes, it is. Apart from all the connotations, whether this or that is different, it's the way of leaving the hotel. Either it gives you a good impression so you'll come back, or never again.

IN THIS AGE WHERE DESIGN APPEARS TO BE ABOUT BEING TRENDY, WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE KEY FACTORS THAT MAKE DESIGN TIMELESS?

WS: Not only in design but in any creative activity, it should be simple, rational and logical. If you can work with these three key factors, you can succeed in creating ageless and timeless products and architecture. It should also reflect the time you're living in, the culture and concept. But all of that should be woven in such a way that the intention is there, but not in a "look at me, look how good I am" way. It should be very low profile, but whenever you dig into the details, you'll see that it has been properly done. If it reflects all the needs you want out of this project, but with a low profile, it has a shot at living for a long time.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR DESIGN AESTHETICS.

WS: It's a very big question that could not be said in one word. Everybody receives aesthetics in different ways. I guess every designer dreams of one single product that could survive him and remain as a classic. The concept of aesthetics depends but there are some basic things that everybody agrees on. It should be elegant, attractive and timeless. But I can't decide on that, it's the years that do that. My philosophy and my company's philosophy is to be simple but not banal, to be elegant but not exaggerated. We are always on the cutting edge, although there is always the risk that it might fall into kitsch or vulgarity. The good part is that everyone at Sawaya & Moroni, my partner [Paolo Moroni] and I for example, plays the devil's advocate vis-à-vis one another. His task is to criticise me from morning to evening and vice versa so we don't sleep on our old glories. We are always awake, every day is a new day and every work is a new work as we start from zero.

OF ALL YOUR WORKS, WHICH ONES ARE MOST SIGNIFICANT TO YOU?

WS: The first is called *Diva*, which still sells since the first day it came out. It's very modern and classical at the same time. And then there's the *Maxima* chair. It was prized many times for its technology and new concept, and is still very elegant after six years. The *Bella Rifatta*, the first recycled plastic chair, is another one.



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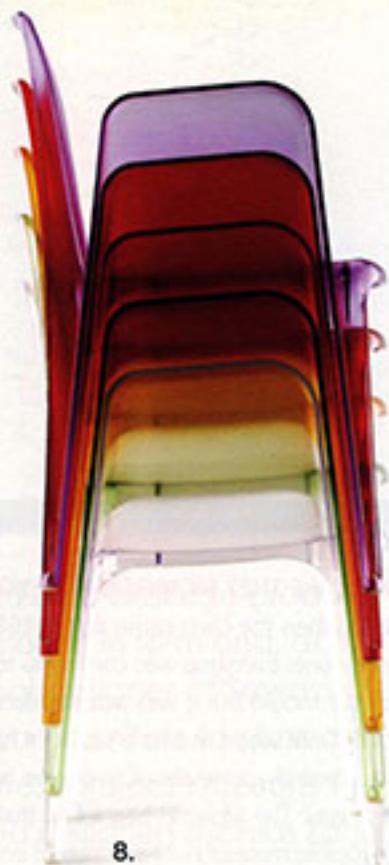
1. Sawaya & Moroni showroom
2. Punto, Linea and Doppia Linea tables in the showroom of Sawaya & Moroni
3. Amy chairs
4. Sawaya & Moroni showroom
5. Trafalgar square
6. Maxima chair
7. Diva chairs
8. Bella Rifatta chairs



6.



7.



8.

WHICH CITIES FASCINATE YOU THE MOST?

WS: Every city fascinates me for its unique facet. But the city I love most personally as a born Lebanese is Paris. All Lebanese love Paris because we were colonised by France. Paris for us is a second home. I feel more at home in Paris. It's really glamorous, every corner is different and it has many centres. Somehow, it's like Singapore. It doesn't have one downtown but several downtowns. Every district has its own attractions, museums and galleries, whatsoever.

WHEN IT COMES TO TRAVEL, WHETHER BY AIR, SEA OR LAND, IS THERE SOMETHING THAT YOU WANT TO SEE CHANGE IN?

WS: Yes. For an old person like me, you have to be really comfortable. When you're on a 12-hour flight, you have to be comfortable. I would do a better seat that becomes a real bed, not a bed that cuts you here or there just to give you an impression that you are horizontal but something where you can really take a rest in. Airlines have the possibility of space, and they are dedicating a lot of space to business and first class. But few airlines get real luxury. It should be better done.

WHAT PLANS DO YOU HAVE FOR THE COMPANY?

WS: A lot of expansion. (Laughs) I mean, what we would like is to keep having the energy and goodwill to go on with what we are doing. It's our life and our passion. We consider ourselves very, very lucky persons because our work is our passion. We are paid to do it.

SO, HOW DO YOU KEEP THINGS FRESH?

WS: By convincing myself that I'm still young and I have to work. And, to restart always from the beginning. We don't take ourselves seriously. I mean, we just feel like beginners. This is true. I'm not saying just to look nice to you. Everyday is the first day for us. We work with the same enthusiasm, curiosity and love of things. I guess that's our secret. We always deal with young people. In my design office, the oldest is 30 years and the others are 25 or 20. To feel like them, to deal with them, you have to convert your mind to be on the same level. So you think young, you act young and what you come up with could be fresher than if you are just on your own. ■

Klaptops The Boutique Hotel is featured in this issue of Cubes on page 112.