

# a jewel at the bay

BY LUO JING MEI | PHOTOS BY THIO LAY HOON



In 1930s Singapore, Clifford Pier was a gesture of welcome for immigrants seeking a better life in a foreign land, an exciting bustle of activity with a sense of sojourn and destination. Fast forward to today, the resurrected Pier is still a gateway, albeit of a different sort with the opening of the much anticipated boutique luxury hotel, The Fullerton Bay Hotel. We go on a journey to see how this jewel opens up to reveal surprising depth and personality, making this hotel more than just another glass box.



**The Fullerton Bay Hotel. Design: DP Architects Pte Ltd, LCL Architects and AFSO Designs.**

**F**rom the sea front, the modern, the boxy glazed façade of the hotel is lost in the forest of towering skyscrapers. The only clue to the building from the main road is its name standing against the ubiquitous concrete art deco arches atop the old Clifford Pier entrance façade.

Even getting into the hotel proper requires some assistance. In the lobby area of the old Clifford Pier, you are greeted by hotel staff who politely instructs you to turn left to proceed to the reception. Staring straight on and above you at the ribbed concrete arches of the Pier, you realize, disappointingly at first, that the hotel experience does not encompass the rest of the original Clifford Pier.

As you turn and begin your journey through the promenade to the main lobby, you begin to take in the crafted experiences the three different design firms who collaborated on the hotel have attempted to create, engaging the spaces with the water and the heritage of the site through differentiated symbolic and sensorial references.

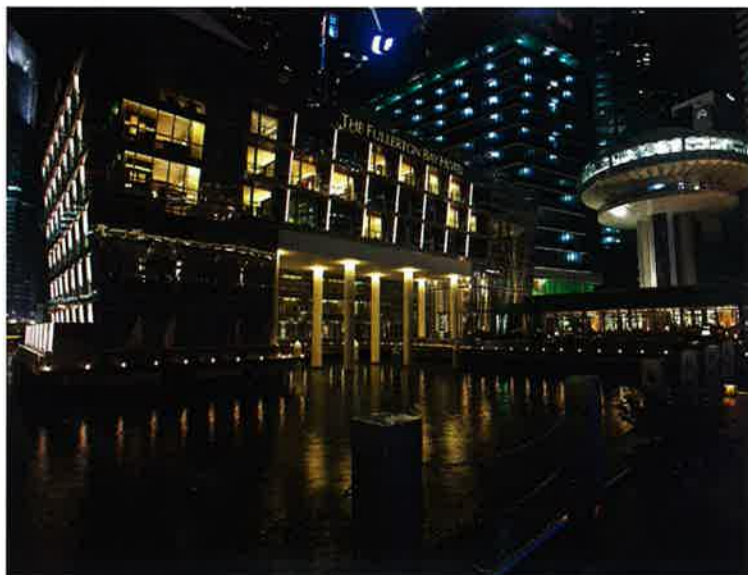
DP Architects Pte Ltd, responsible for the hotel's architecture, explained that it was a challenge that there was no proper entry into the hotel except via Clifford Pier. Undefeated, they embraced this as a guiding factor for the design where 'the journey slowly transits to a modern architecture (and) each of the spaces within the hotel is designed to capitalize on the glorious views present on site.'

These views include Clifford Pier and the Customs Harbour Branch Building, reflected onto the glass elevation through the inclination of three sides of the façade that also alludes to a ship's hull resting on the waters, a more intimate feel at the base of the hotel where guests spill out onto the decks for outdoor dining.

Articulated as a jewel floating on the water, the hotel contains secrets that can only be experienced from the interior. The architects brought the sea in through a carving-in of the box on one side, creating an inner atrium where the posh set can moor their boats and check-in in style at the main lobby on the first floor. Here, in the day, the reflected waters casts a dazzling moving display of speckled light into the space whilst at night, the glow of lights through the glass box creates lanterns in the water.

Further drawing on the sense of history is celebrated designer, Andre Fu of AFSO Designs, who designed the first-storey common areas and all three F&B facilities.

Right from the drop-off lobby, Andre Fu has articulated, with impeccable detail, a flavour of old-world glamour that harkens back to the Colonial days – from the tall frosted, tinted glass screens etched with diamond-shaped renderings behind plush cream bespoke daybeds right down to the olive Oriental boxes accessorizing the lacquered coffee tables. Turning right you enter into the glittering marble mosaic promenade lined with artfully arranged lilies and hydrangeas atop chest of drawers on one side and the tiered bar, The Landing Point, on the other with its colonnade of glass lanterns. Views through the glass skin to the waters expand the narrow bar visually.





Entrance and main lobby

PHOTOS BY MARK WEBBER COURTESY THE FULLERTON BAY HOTEL



Landing Point

Likewise, the 10-metre high ceiling and narrow space of The Clifford brasserie, serving modern cuisine and boasting a library of 800 wine bottles, is never claustrophobic. This is in part due to the glass skin on an entire wall surface and also attributed to sensitive touches by Andre Fu, including intricate French panelling against mirrors, dark wooden floors, and lush patterned curtains.

The feeling is opulent, the texture luxurious, but the mood intimate, which is appropriate as Andre explains,

that 'the hotel is designed to entice the feeling of a highly individualized stately residence... it's also the fact that each part offers a sense of destination... a holistic journey that is interlinked.'

The sense of journey is apparent when you enter the rooftop restaurant, Lantern. We have left the past and arrived at Singapore Future. Inspired by the red lanterns that used to hang from the pier to guide seafarers, Lantern, peppered with glass lanterns and a playful mixture of wicker, timber,

beaten metal furniture, is surprisingly differentiated from the lower spaces with a more metropolitan styling where uninhibited guests, Moet in hand, stroll around the deck to take in the breathtaking views.

LCL Architects, who designed the function rooms, 100 guest rooms and their linked common spaces, also drew on nautical imagery, as explained by Christina Chew, Director at LCL Architects. 'The Fullerton Bay Hotel is on the Water, thus the main focus was the water and how best to maximize bay views and "draw" the water in. With this in mind, reflective and polished surfaces were used and there is transparency within the rooms, ie, bathrooms are separated from the bedroom with clear glass...'

Some rooms designed with a more Asian palette used rosewood, light marbles and silver and steel accents whilst others, generating a more Colonial feel, were rendered in Burlwood, dark marbles and gold accents. Five major suites named after ex-governors were also specially designed with varied Singapore cultures in mind such as Indian, Chinese, Peranakan, Malay and Colonial. Much thought had been given to the weaving of the materials into the hi-tech functionality of the rooms, containing maritime imagery, for the savvy and sophisticated traveller. For example, bedside tables recalling the form of suitcases with leather handles have panels that hide the light switches.

Luxury is represented by more than just the bespoke Molten Brown toiletries and a television at the bath. The Fullerton Bay Hotel has expressed luxury with expansive views, a surprising sense of space and history, richly textured through the sophisticated interior finesse right down to the smallest of objects.



Clifford



Premier, themed and deluxe rooms



**LUO JING MEI speaks with ANDRE FU of AFSO Designs for further insight into the design of the Fullerton Bay Hotel interiors.**



**LJM: I know you designed the F&B and first storey common areas. How about the common areas upstairs?**

**AF:** Actually the entire ground floor is done by us. We did the lift and the entire sky roof. So just imagine if you're an outside guest and you're not staying at the hotel, then everything that you see is done by us. It's only if you're staying in the room that you see the interiors by the other design team. So we pretty much masterminded the entire public experience.

**What was the brief given to you for the hotel?**

The brief was to create a new classic. That's pretty much the idea. It's to create something that would bring the Fullerton Heritage to a new level of sophistication and style. Of course, everybody knows The Fullerton Hotel and that's a hotel pretty much catered for business travellers. But this one, because of the waterfront position, the idea is to create something a bit more personalised, because there are only a hundred rooms. We've got a lot of really unique spaces that are, in my opinion, destinations in their own right. So it's to take advantage of our unique location and create something very, very special.

**In terms of the unique location, do you mean Clifford Pier's history?**

Well, there's also no where in the world would you have a hotel that's built on concrete stilts and also have an entrance that's literally the landing point of Singapore back in the 1920s. So it's got very interesting historical content and context to it.

**At the hotel, I noticed that the drop-off area doesn't lead directly into the hotel. It actually leads into the restaurant, One on the Bund, and you have to turn right into the hotel. Do you think that was a constraint?**

Not so much, because the area you first walk into is also designed by us. It's just that the back half is for the tenant, One on the Bund. But as you first go in, the lights, the carpets, the whole mood is designed by me.

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**The Lantern rooftop bar and restaurant, 'at the pinnacle of the hotel, offers a new perspective of Singapore and it's also the high point of the Fullerton experience. It's like a floating oasis. It's very sensuous, historical, but boutique and bespoke.'** (Andre Fu, AFSO Designs)

**Maybe you can talk a little bit about each of the spaces that you designed, beginning from the lobby. What were your design inspirations and the materiality?**

Sure. As I was saying, the whole Fullerton Bay Hotel for me is conceived to tailor a new heritage, because as people come to the hotel, you're in Singapore present when you're outside. Then when you first walk into Clifford Pier, you're kind of walking into Singapore's past. Once you enter into our hotel, via the Pier, it's Singapore future. So we've got that in mind. It's to honour Singapore's heritage and history but with a vision for the future. So with Clifford Pier's unique backdrop and frontage to Singapore's thriving Boat Quay area, the hotel is designed to entice the feeling of a highly individualised stately residence. It's somewhat a modern colonial hotel that pays tribute to the bygone area. For that I have purposefully traced a journey within the public spaces. Hopefully it's visually enticing and there is a degree of colonial heritage that is being provoked – something that's deeply rooted, and yet distinctly sensual and lush.

Now, if we start with Clifford Pier, obviously it's here where customers will come in and it's here that spans 17 metres wide. The entire Pier is painted in egg-white, off-white and ivory colours. The first thing that will draw the eye is the cylindrical chandelier made in the Czech Republic. It's 10 metres high with a span of 5 metres diameter. So it's very, very powerful. Clifford Pier itself has a lot of interesting historical references. Equally interesting is, on the two sides behind the sofa seating, are very beautiful pieces of art work by an artist called Shin Yong Pak, the one with a lot of photographic prints. It's actually called Fullerton Remix and it's a juxtaposition of past and present Singapore.

And as you turn right, you see an eye-catching, diamond-shaped like feature wall by us. That marks the beginning of the journey as you walk into the new hotel. The Landing Point, again, is a long and 6 metres wide internal promenade paved in specially designed commissioned marble mosaic by Caesar, an Italian brand. The whole idea is to look to the Colonial era of Singapore, so the feeling is very residential that implied an old British concession.

**I get that feel actually. In the Clifford restaurant, I saw that you put your wine bottles in a darkwood cabinet, which looked like it could be at somebody's home.**

Yes that's right. So there's Landing Point where the bar is. The whole lounge is designed in three tiers – the upper tier which has the marble mosaic promenade, and then there's the second deck with the 13 metre long bar, and there is the outdoor terrace that overlooks the waterfront. Above the bar is a stunning 7 metre wide multifaceted pendant that

we created. Again it's taken on that idea of a multifaceted, multi-angular framework to echo the shimmering effect of the water, and also the concept that the hotel is the jewel of the bay. But one word I want to emphasise is the sense of residential feeling in the whole project. It's because we want something that is highly individualised – something that captivates the spirit of a stately home, but a modern interpretation of it.

Then as guests come in, they will see the hotel main lobby, again a very intriguing 18 metre high atrium void. The main backdrop is inlaid with patterns of Indo Wenge veneer and a lot of bespoke diamond-shaped wall scones. So it's highly captivating. During the day the entire lobby is bathed with natural daylight, whilst at night, obviously the chandelier will pretty much take centre-stage. The refinement and the level of detailing – the mist greens, the pale greys, the chocolate bronze that pretty much marks that point of that particular layer and the entire arrival experience.

The Clifford, our signature restaurant, is a tribute to the social salons of the bygone era. We have a 10 metre high ceiling, and a very deep space, which is challenging to design. What we have done is we have created a number of salons within the space, so each will feel a bit more intimate. In terms of feeling, we go back to the Landing Point. The Landing Point is very much about soft, elegant, very feminine. Clifford, however, is about the buzz, about the energy.

**More masculine?**

More masculine. It's a modern interpretation of a French Brasserie. There's a huge range of vintage inspired furniture, in warm greys, burnt orange, dark aubergine and without saying, the full-height ivory French panels and herringbone oak floor that envelopes the space. Also we have two semi-private rooms at the front and the back. And as you take the lift up, in the lift we have a fan-shaped feature wall done in Crema Mafil marble – again that whole Asian Oriental reference – a mixture of what's Oriental, what's French, what's Islamic – all of these, for me, is my interpretation of Singapore today.

Lantern, obviously being the pinnacle of the hotel, offers a new perspective of Singapore and it's also the high point of the Fullerton experience. It's like a floating oasis. It's very sensuous, historical, but boutique and bespoke. The key words here are my interpretation of a tropical Mediterranean lifestyle. Obviously there's the wonderful pool. There's our really stunning 6 metre diameter glowing bar, that's done entirely in bronze with swirling fins. There are over 30 pieces of chocolate bronze fins that surrounds the bar counter.

At night as you can see, with all the lighting effects, it pretty much glows like a contemporary lantern. During the day obviously, you see all the furniture that's done in deep reds, olive greens, icy blue – it's very much about the good life and we have spent a lot of time selecting and designing all the outdoor furniture. It's much more personalised and there's a high degree personality.

**The Lantern seems more modern than the spaces on the first storey.**

Yes, because it's really, for me, a reference to the past, and a feel towards the future. The sky roof is very much about that new perspective of Singapore. But for me it's more that degree of indulgence and also the fact that each part offers a different sense of destination. It's important for customers to feel that it's conceived as a holistic journey, which is in a way orchestrated with high points, with moments of interest, with special features to entice the eyes.

**What is your favourite feature about this hotel?**

I guess it's that sense of journey because in a lot of hotels, public areas are designed as totally disjointed features, whereas in my view point, it's more conceived as a holistic journey that is interlinked. Especially at the ground floor – it's a very, very unique proposition because very rarely would you have a hotel that's built on waters and the whole environment is laid in parallel with the waters. So that in itself is really interesting.

**I heard that you actually designed everything, right down to the flower arrangements.**

Yep.

**Would there have been anything you would have done differently about this project?**

Actually no. I'm quite happy with the way it has turned out. It's a very, very challenging project given its location and the fact that me being someone who's not from Singapore, it's pretty much my take on what I perceive is suited for today's Singapore. And I'd also like to mention that I've seen a lot of recent hotel projects in Singapore which are quite disappointing because a lot of them lack the soul in the property. That's very much something I'm very keen to establish with this particular project – something that has a very truthful relationship with the city.

**At the hotel – with reference to your mention of historical references, I see a lot of patterns, and like you mentioned, diamond shapes. Were there any art deco inspirations?**

There are indeed a lot of geometrical patterns. It all started off with that concept of multi-faceted elements, which is something we want to bring into the project. That lingered on and became the pattern in various variations but they can be interpreted in many different ways. Some see them as Islamic patterns, which again echo Singapore's multi-cultural aspect. Some see them as pure geometrical diamonds. You can also see them as something art deco. It's highly open. I've heard a lot (of interpretations) actually. *(laughs)*+

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