

# sleeper

HOTEL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & ARCHITECTURE

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**HOTEL VERTA**  
VON ESSEN HOTELS LAND  
AT LONDON HELIPORT

**THIERRY DESPONT**  
THE FRENCH MAESTRO ON  
THE CHATWAL NEW YORK

**VIDAGO PALACE**  
GRACE LHO REINVENTS A  
PORTUGUESE LANDMARK

SAFFIRE - TASMANIA • BARNESLEY HOUSE • VERDURA - SICILY • THE CORNWALL • COSTA NAVARINO

# Siam Kempinski Bangkok

Words: Shiraz Kavirat • Photography: Courtesy of Siam Kempinski

Kempinski's latest property, an urban resort, opens in the Thai capital and reveals its royal connections.



## HOTEL REVIEW

A n eight-year project for architects Brennan Burt Gorman and interior designers, Hirsch Bodner Associates (HBA), this newbuild hotel opens after six particularly aggressive months of political instability in Thailand, during which occupancy rates plummeted and major hotels temporarily closed – and even with the relaxation of the state of emergency and curfew, they are still feeling the consequences.

But confidence is returning and the long-term outlook is positive with many properties due to open in the Thai capital in the next 24 months including Edition Bangkok (2012), Novotel Pointe (November 2011) and Starwood's Four Points (November 2011), Aloft (April 2011), St Regis (January 2012) and W Bangkok (May 2012).

With the Kempinski group now partly owned by the Thai Royal family, it's no surprise that this property, Bangkok's newest luxury hotel, has been afforded a unique location on prime real estate – being built on the site of the previous InterContinental hotel and also a former royal lion garden.

Billed as an urban resort, the property lies directly behind Bangkok's premier shopping mall, Siam Paragon, on the city's main Sukhumvit arterial road and adjacent to the palace of Crown Princess Maha Chulabhorn, who officially opened the hotel in September.

Despite its central location, the hotel has created its own oasis by virtue of a courtyard garden. Indeed all 313 guestrooms and suites face this modern courtyard providing green views and making the city outside feel far away. This was a requisite, as the Royal Palace wasn't overlooked in any way. ▶





**FRONT, MIDDLE AND REAR LEFT:** Sriracha Sanga offers a Thai interpretation of contemporary European design. **RIGHT:** The 101 bar (left) is in addition to 363 bedrooms, the hotel has 41 serviced residences.



► The garden features a complex, angular swimming pool, which surrounds a central island of trees, fountains, trees and decking areas. There are 21 ground-floor cabana rooms and duplex suites providing direct access to the water via terraced steps, with the pool's edges providing a meander of private space. But while all the rooms are inward looking, the interior styling, direction and art on offer reflect the culture of the whole country. HBA worked with Thai artists, all born after 1961, a policy that delivers a contemporary atmosphere in the public areas.

"We had an enlightened patron," explains Ian Carr, Design Director of HBA Singapore and lead designer on the project. "It takes a great effort and a real will to promote modern Thai culture in this way. The space feels more like a National Gallery, in fact I've heard that there are arranged tours for locals, who want to see the art on display."

HBA has made much of their chosen, and entirely apt, repeating motif – the lotus. "We've used the emblem throughout, but without obtrusiveness," points out Carr, and it's there on the artisanal stone flower buds on the front

entrance wall; the large leaf fountain in the lobby and smaller metal steps for fruit; and the flowers also adorn silkscreen art over the beds.

The bedrooms themselves are divided into four categories – deluxe, premium, executive and cabana, and are situated in two wings. Each room has a balcony featuring lacquer rattan tables and chairs by Kenneth Colegrove, matched by the interior chairs, sofa and a "Pigalle" writing desk. As Carr points out, all the furniture has been made for the hotel. "A lot of it is bespoke, all of it is custom-evolved – even if it means we made



lotus revisions to make it fit into the Siam."

Each bathroom is glass-walled, with an electronic privacy blind on call at the touch of a button. "Every second property we do these days features some kind of interplay between the bathroom and the bedroom. In a lot of places modesty goes out the window," he notes. The end result opens up the guest's space, and makes a key feature of the marble freestanding bath.

The main lobby, although a 14 meter high space, retains an intimate feel. The concierge and reception desks sit at opposite ends, not hidden, but not immediately in your line of sight either. Each is situated in front of alabaster backlit walls, with the reception desk flanked by a water feature and one of the hotel's standout art pieces – a three-dimensional wall mural by Khun Panamee.

Along the ground floor public corridors, looking out onto the garden are huge floor-to-ceiling Venetian wooden shutter doors.

The corridors lead onto the two restaurants

– Sra Bua, a handsome, dark and intimate room serving Thai fine cuisine complex with a top table sheltered by its own brass garb, and the much slicker brasserie, Europa, a successful Thai interpretation of contemporary European design looking out onto the garden, which you soon realize is the design focus for the whole property – an ethos in cliché, but in this case entirely appropriate "urban resort" resortier.

Indeed, the way the whole hotel revolves around the garden can be readily observed at the Siam Kempinski's gym and fitness centre – rather than hidden away on the ground floor or basement, here it is situated on the top floor, with full-height windows offering a panorama view, matched only by that from the Terrace Suite. "The hotel owes so much to green space," concludes Carr. "In a way, it reinforces all the elements inside, the way we've incorporated Thai life into the design in a very naturalistic way." ■

#### EXPRESS CHECKOUT

**Siam Kempinski**  
111/11th Floor  
10110  
Bangkok, Thailand  
Tel: +66 212 1000  
[www.kempinski.com/th/siamphuket](http://www.kempinski.com/th/siamphuket)

► 363 bedrooms, 62 suites, Additional 44 serviced residences.  
► Executive Lounge, Spa Spa, Terrace  
► 100% local sourcing  
► 100% Green Lodging  
► Grand Ballroom, four meeting spaces and six boardrooms

Operator: Kempinski  
Architect: Evans Lee Partners  
Designer: Walsh & Associates (PH)