

# Hotel Vagabond

## media coverage table

|                   |                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Media Outlet:     | Blu Print                    |
| Date:             | February 2016                |
| Headline:         | La Vie Vagabond              |
| Kind of Coverage: | Architecture & Design Review |
| Readership:       | N/K                          |



# La Vie Vagabonde

Famous French designer Jacques Garcia converts a Singaporean shophouse into an idiosyncratic boutique hotel

**Below left:** 'Opulent' and 'sumptuous' are such overused adjectives they seem insufficient to describe Garcia's work. His projects like Costes in Paris, and recently, NoMad in New York, are simply magnificent—Hotel Vagabond is almost kitschy by comparison. What rescues it from vulgarity is the fine craftsmanship in every corner of the establishment. There is nary a nail, etching or termination out of place. **Below right:** Owner Satinder Garcha has a wildly eclectic taste in art. His collection includes unknowns and street artists peppered with pieces by Michel Platnic, Julia Calfee and Peter Millard.

**I**t's a red menagerie. There's the brass rhino reception desk, a monkey in Pharaoh's robes guarding the bar, and two 9-foot golden elephants book-ending the elevator. The walls are studded with the owner's diverse collection of art and oddities from around the world. Housed in a refurbished 1950 shophouse surrounded by cheap Chinese eateries, Hotel Vagabond hasn't officially been open a month but already it is a hot spot for Singapore's rich, artsy and chichi crowds.

The story of a hotelier-wannabe converting a leaky old shophouse (that had degenerated into a brothel, KTV lounge, and tire shop) into a boutique hotel is interesting but not new. Loh Lik Peng, Singapore's pioneer of adaptive reuse boutique hotels, has been there and done that, with older (1920s and 1930s), more decrepit structures

(flea, termite, and fungus-infested), housing even more nefarious activities (prostitution, thievery and opium consumption), in infinitely more colorful (Chinese criminal syndicate) neighborhoods.

How do you beat that? Well, you assemble an unbeatable team, which includes the hotelier and restaurateur with the golden touch, Mr. Loh Lik Peng himself. You get a French interior designer adored for his lush, grand and opulent style, Jacques Garcia, and you ask him to make your place idiosyncratic, playful and surprising. You partner with a sous chef of Gordon Ramsey, rising star chef Drew Nocente, to handcraft a specialty menu built on charcuterie. You reel in award-winning Proof and Company to design bespoke cocktails and bar bites. You offer something no one else has (at least, in Asia), an artist-in-residence program.





**Above:** Singapore is the new cocktail capital of the world, with a tight-knit community of famous international mixologists who have flocked over to support each other in their craft and inventiveness. The Hong Kong-based Proof and Company, which runs Bar Vagabond, is one such group who could not resist the allure of Singapore's increasingly neophile but discriminating market. **Left:** Two elephants silently bellow on either side of the hotel elevator. The as-built plans show the original height of the ground floor to be a lofty 4.3 meters or 14 feet. The Urban Redevelopment Authority revised the flood level in the zone, requiring the building floor to be raised by .7 meter or 2.3 feet from its original ground level. Acoustic requirements have lowered the ceiling, bringing the ceiling height down to 10 feet.



The men's and ladies' rooms do not at all feel like back-of-house, as is the case in many bars and restaurants. The attention to detail is just as impressive, allowing one to enjoy the Vagabond experience uninterrupted by discrepancies in quality. **Below:** On the way out of the washroom, many a guest has been startled by these three striking oil on canvas self-portraits by Marco Brambilla. They're not paintings, but a video installation. For the most part, the heads are perfectly still—until they twitch, blink, switch their gaze, or let out a sigh.

Finally, you rely on your discriminating taste and personal expectations of great hospitality, because you are after all Satinder Garcha, one of Singapore's richest men—a polo-playing, art-collecting, former dot-com start-up success, self-made millionaire, foodie, photography buff and global nomad.

Their collective genius has put together an experience designed like no other in Singapore. At the time BluPrint visited the hotel, the artist in residence was a DJ. In exchange for several weeks' stay at the Vagabond, he performed several nights and "created some exquisite mixes for the hotel," says Suzy Goulding, Vagabond's PR and Communications representative. The hotel will accommodate up to two artists at any given time. "We would love to have artists of different persuasions," says Goulding, "except perhaps for painters, because for obvious reasons we wouldn't want paint sloshed around in our beautiful rooms."

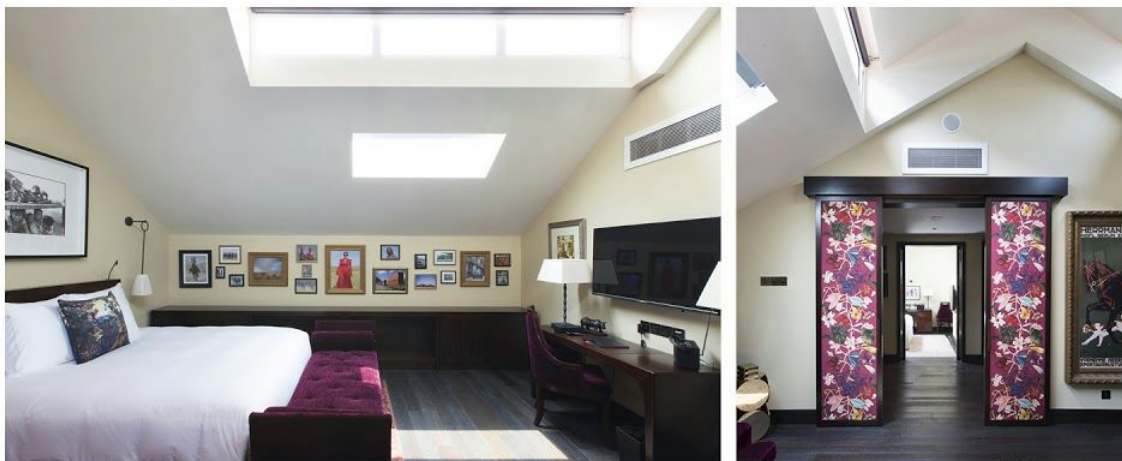
On the ground floor, it is all about the interior design. There is nothing to indicate

one is in a former shophouse in Singapore. In fact, context is irrelevant. The concept of the gathering spaces in Hotel Vagabond (or *Hôtel Vagabond* with a silent h and staccato French syllabication) is that of a Parisian *salon*. The goal is to go on an immersive experience, cosseted and inspired by a film showing, exhibition, musical or dance performance, or a poetry reading—and of course, the great ambience and F&B. Says Garcha: "We want to introduce guests to forms of art and artistic expression they may not have encountered or experienced before."





**THE VAGABOND MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE STAYING AT A GUEST COTTAGE OF AN ECCENTRIC, RESTLESS BACHELOR RELATIVE WHO HAS RUN OUT OF SPACE FOR MEMENTOS OF HIS TRAVELS IN HIS OWN HOME.**



Although most of the hotel guestrooms are twice the size of the original shophouse bedrooms, it's still a tight squeeze because each room now has a small wardrobe, lavatory, toilet and bath. In the original plan, five rooms shared a communal kitchen and toilet. (See second and third floor plans). The spacious rooms pictured here are another story, however. An attic floor plate was added to the old structure, and the roof bumped up in order to accommodate a suite and mini-suite. No expense was spared in insulation and low-e glass to minimize heat gain.



## GROHE

Grohe Philippines offered four hospitality projects in Singapore for BluPrint to feature and we chose Vagabond Hotel because of its adaptive reuse and the happy marriage of vintage and modern design. Interior designer Jacques Garcia chose Grohe fittings of mostly sleek, no-nonsense lines, such as Veris and Ondus, and complemented these with fittings from the Grandera line, whose sweeping forms with masculine edges harken to an early 1900s era of grandeur and elegance.



**Veris**  
Hand shower spray



**Grandera**  
5-port Diverter Trim



**Ondus Rainshower®**  
Shower head

Up on the second and third floors, one sees some evidence of the hotel's previous incarnation. The doors to guest rooms huddle in clusters of six, instead of neatly spaced along a corridor. If you look out the window of the bathrooms at the rear of the hotel, you can see a concrete spiral staircase—the fire escape of traditional shophouses in Singapore.

These tiny rooms are arranged like a U around a shared terrace with outdoor furniture. Step out onto the terrace and be greeted by bright red shutters gaily announcing their heritage.

Where the ground floor is blazing red and gold, the guest rooms are light and cheery, accented with bright, hand-painted wall-coverings. Like downstairs, the upstairs walls are laden with art, vintage doodads, and photographs taken by Garcia. Little brass rhinos graze on writing desks. The bed and bath linen are fabulous. The bath fixtures are the sleekest from Grohe. It's modern and Old World all at once. It feels you're staying at a guest cottage of an eccentric, restless bachelor relative who has run out of space for mementos of his travels in his own home. *C'est la vie Vagabond.* ■

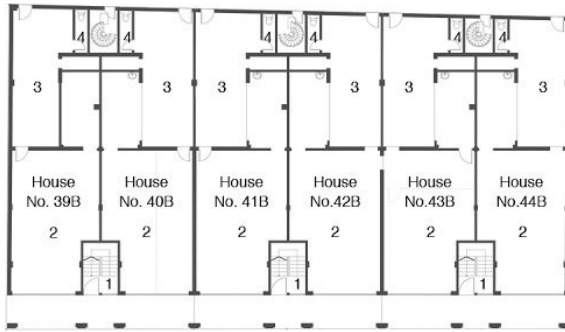
**Above:** The layout of the suite and mini suite reflects a growing trend in ensuite bathrooms in hospitality projects—open plans that incorporate the lavatory and bathtub with the bedroom. **Right:** Kryptonite or Emerald City? The bottle green glow is from the original glass of the three stairwells facing Syed Alwi Street. This one leads up to the suite.



**BEFORE**



- 1 Mini shop
- 2 Shop
- 3 Backyard
- 4 Toilet

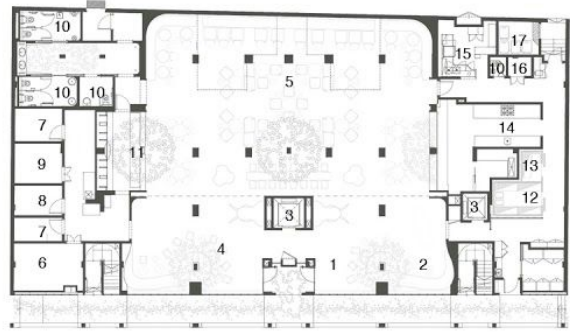


FIRST FLOOR

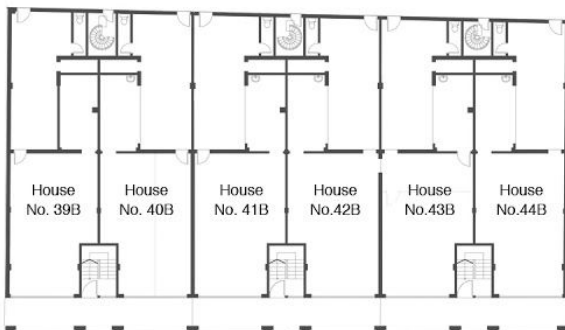
**AFTER**



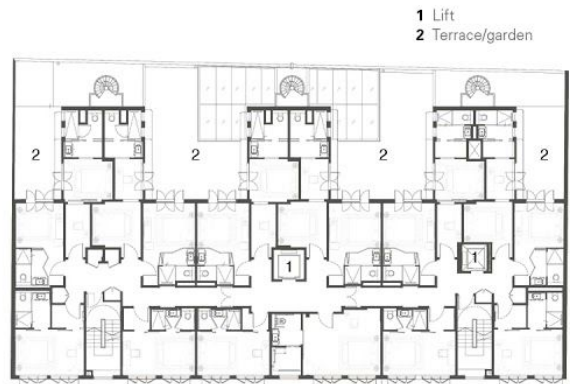
- 1 Hotel lobby
- 2 Reception
- 3 Lift
- 4 Lounge
- 5 Restaurant
- 6 MDF room
- 7 Storage room
- 8 Server room
- 9 Switch room
- 10 Toilet
- 11 Bar
- 12 Chiller
- 13 Freezer
- 14 Kitchen
- 15 Ware washing
- 16 Dry store
- 17 Refuse bin center



FIRST FLOOR

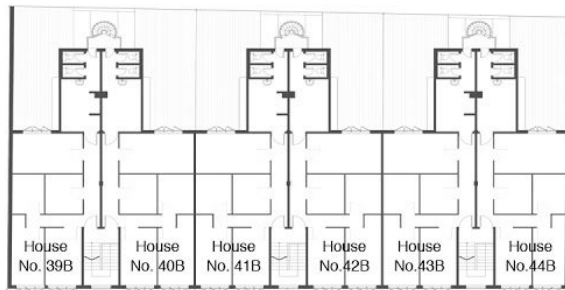


SECOND FLOOR

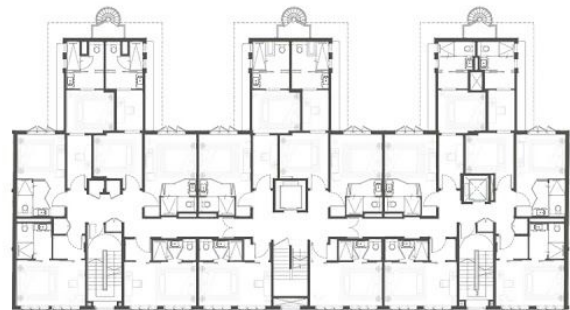


- 1 Lift
- 2 Terrace/garden

SECOND FLOOR

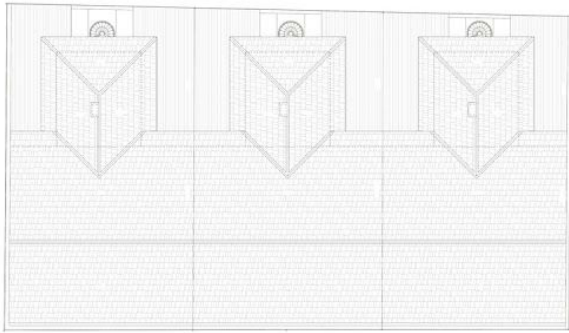


THIRD FLOOR



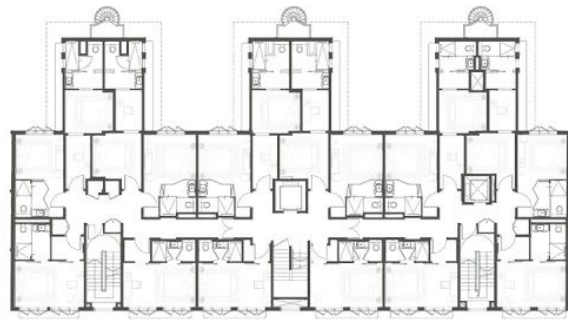
THIRD FLOOR

## BEFORE



ROOF PEAK

## AFTER



ROOF MEZZANINE



### DAMAGE TO THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE

The old structure suffered a leaking roof, which was removed and replaced to match the existing roof profile and material.

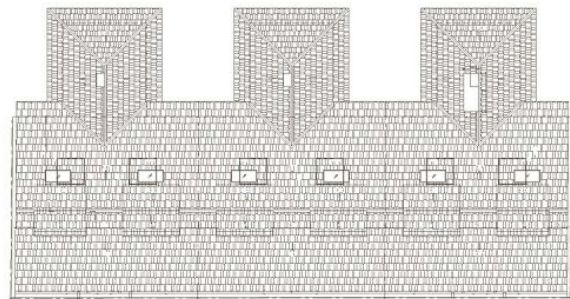
There was some tilting in units #39 to #40 (the two left-most houses in the row). The floor slab was uneven with a difference of 33 millimeters or 1.3 inches.

There was minor damage to some windows, but all existing timber doors and windows were restored to mint condition.

**Right:** The green artificial turf of the terrace is garish against the red shutters in the afternoon sun. But if one is feeling neighborly—and if it isn't muggy out—it can be quite pleasant here in the evening. It's unnerving, however, to be visible to one's neighbors while one is at the lavatory or working at the writing desk. The shared terrace also removes the option of sleeping with the shutters open. Hotel management is considering adding shrubbery so that guests may feel a greater sense of privacy.

### ALTERATIONS

1. No demolition was done on the structure, however, the three existing spiral staircases that terminated to the ground level were cut off at the 2nd storey level to allow more space at ground level.
2. No structural changes were made. The existing structural cadence was retained. There were no wooden or masonry columns and/or beams that needed to be replaced with reinforced concrete.
3. Instead of three entrances (one for every two sets of houses), only one main entrance was retained at the center.
4. At the ground floor level, full-height windows in matte black steelwork were employed along the whole stretch of the 5-foot wide walkway to achieve a holistic view of the approach. These replaced the previous bifurcated shophouse facade.
5. A roof cover was added over the courtyards between shophouses to create a spacious restaurant below and interstitial roof decks above.
6. On the 2nd and 3rd storeys, new wall boards and an STC40 wall system was recommended and constructed for improved acoustic performance.
7. Also on the 2nd and 3rd storeys, glass windows were replaced to improve the acoustic performance of the fenestrations. In some rooms, glass doors were installed. The acoustic engineer specified, "Aluminum doors and windows with aluminum extrusion in powder coated finish glazing, c/w 17.52 mm thick clear laminated float glass."
8. An attic floor plate was added, as well as two access steel staircases, and reinforcement of three existing spiral staircases.
9. A new roof was installed.



ROOF PEAK







Happily, the African wildlife populating the hotel is restricted to metal and artwork...no endangered animal skins or tusks were used in these interiors. The brass rhino reception desk by French sculptor Franck Le Ray is just one of the prominent pieces among countless conversation starters in the hotel. (Image courtesy of Vagabond Hotel)

**BEFORE**

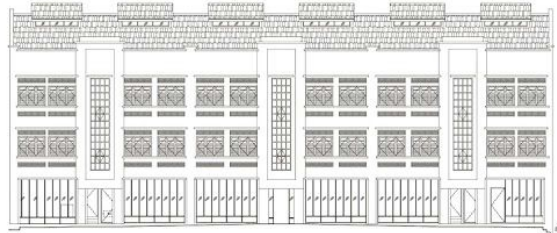


**FRONT ELEVATION**

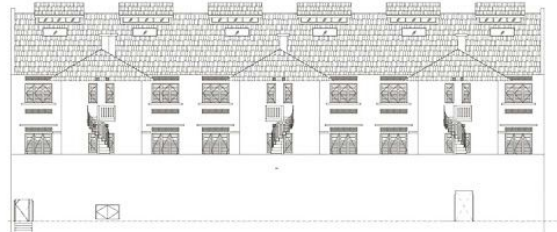


**REAR ELEVATION**

**AFTER**



**FRONT ELEVATION**



**REAR ELEVATION**