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The Imaginarium of Jacques Garcia: Hotel Vagabond, Singapore

BY LOW LAI CHOW | NOVEMBER 05, 2015





Hotel Vagabond.
(Courtesy of Hotel Vagabond)

It's dark, it's red, it's opulent. An overwhelmingly green artificial moss poodle greets you at the red carpeted entrance. And when you enter, it gets even more fantastical. A pair of majestic [Franck Le Ray](#) tusked elephants flank both sides of the elevator in the lobby, like a Dr Dolittle experiment gone slightly awry. Brass banyan trees swallow up the ceilings, branching out with their golden leaves. No shining knight in armor here; just a shinier solid brass rhino sculpture so in your face, you hunch nearer to see a woman huddled up behind it. You mistake her for a pianist; start to think the rhino is a baby piano... but soon realize the rhino is the reception desk of [Hotel Vagabond](#), and you are in the right place.

Well, hello to the world of [Jacques Garcia](#).



The ornate boutique hotel is the first hotel in Asia to be designed by the fêted French architect and interior designer, who is also known for helping the elaborate and romantic designs of hotels such as Hôtel Costes in Paris, La Mamounia in Marrakech, and the NoMad Hotel in New York.

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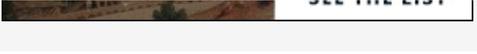
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The 1950s heritage Art Deco building, so chosen by hotelier

[Satinder Garcha](#) for its rich site-specific history —situated in the gritty, but up-and-coming Jalan Besar neighborhood of Singapore, with a slightly seedy past in its former incarnations as opium den, brothel and KTV lounge — the new Hotel Vagabond is merely the first hotel from Garcha to open its doors, with three more in Singapore and Santiago set to begin operations over the next two years.

A bit of trivia here: Jacques Garcia did not see the site before he designed the hotel, nor has he seen his complete work in person yet. A full opening party with Garcia is planned for next January, though no dates have been set yet (stay tuned at this space).

To the bar we go, where we meet Charlie B. Wilder, a.k.a. [Captain Planet](#), its first artist-in-residence who is involuntarily on a hunger strike. Just kidding. The DJ's merely skipped dinner this evening after a miscommunication placing a (local) food order. Two weeks into his two-month residency here, he has been out and about in the Lion City capturing its sounds... and even accidentally uncovered some less-known parts of Singapore, such as a strange ritual in the nearby Lavender heartlands, where he's seen seemingly possessed participants on woven bamboo horses get whipped repeatedly in public, while in their trance-like state. Obviously, he made a perfect sound recording of the whole thing, though whether any of it will ever make it to a Captain Planet mix is a mystery for now. "No one blinked an eye," he said of other passerbys who saw what was happening. What he saw, he found out later, was a traditional Javanese ritualistic dance called [Jaran Kepang](#). "It's like they had seen it all before."

Our eyes flickered over to the centerpiece of the bar, a brass monkey — um, Beastie Boys, anyone? — with an unflinching gaze, also by Franck Le Ray, a frequent collaborator of Jacques Garcia. What did flinch however, was a cheeky [three-panel electronic artwork](#) by [Michel Platnic](#) placed right outside the restrooms, with faces that mostly stayed still, but winked ever so imperceptibly once in a while. One can see how a slightly tipsy guest might stumble out from the Gents or the Ladies — and imagine he was more drunk than he was...

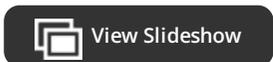
To the drinks now. A couple of facts about the bar: conceptualized by [Proof & Company](#), the bar menu is heavy on handcrafted (bespoke if you like it) cocktails with small batch spirits, plus craft beer and wines. Cocktails are grouped into 'contemporary - light, colorful, progressive' and 'retro - rich, dark, sophisticated'. I opt for the robust Vincent, a fitting concoction of the dark night, with Blood Orange Pu-erh Mancino Chinato, Maker's Mark Bourdon and Campari. It came topped with a shriveled, dehydrated slice of blood orange, and looked alive.

"It's strong; drink this if you want to get punched in the face," offers the hotel salonniere Stephanie helpfully. No pain, no

pleasure — and I'm happy to report, these tastebuds were delighted with these little bitter sips.

Hotel Vagabond (39 Syed Alwi Road, Singapore, 207630) is now open. DJ Captain Planet spins Wed-Sat from 9pm till late.

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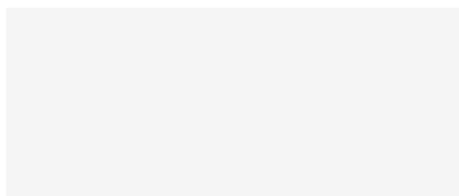
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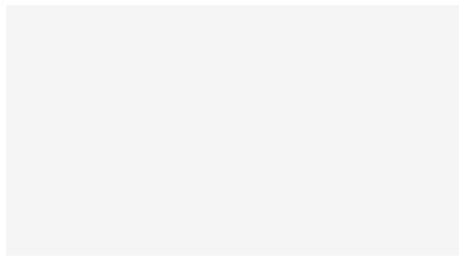
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