

Hotel Vagabond

media coverage table

Media Outlet:	Straits Times
Date:	19 December 2015
Headline:	Live the wild life
Kind of Coverage:	Feature
Readership:	1.2m

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2015 THE STRAITS TIMES

Live the wild life

The once roaring nightlife activity that took place in a row of shophouses in Syed Alwi Road has been replaced with a different kind of wild inside the 1950s Art Deco building at No. 39.

Hotel Vagabond is filled with wild animal sculptures, provocative art and dark, sultry interiors – and that is just in the hotel's lobby.

Mr. Satinder Garcha, founder of Garcha Hotels which the 42-room Hotel Vagabond is a part of, says: "It was everything – but a hotel when I bought it three years ago. It had been an illegal workers' dormitory, a brothel and a bicycle shop. To put a luxury hotel in a building that wasn't built for it was a challenge."

Step into the four-storey hotel and you will come face to face with two life-size, gold-painted elephants strapped on either side of the lift box.

Guests walk up to the solid brass rhinoceros desk to get their keys, while a golden baboon, shaded partially by a brass banyan tree – a clever design feature to hide the columns in the lobby – watches over those at the bar.

The backdrop to these animal fixtures is a sexy interior, filled with red chairs and velvety curtains, which are used to close off certain areas when needed.

Named The Vagabond Salon, it is reminiscent of old Parisian salons, where the French would gather to share ideas and talk about art and music over food and drinks.

Aply, the walls of The Vagabond Salon are covered in myriad framed artwork and photographs including works by Israeli-born photographer Tal Shpanzer and Berlin-based painter Michel Platnic. There are also reproduction works of French artist Henri Matisse and Brooklyn-born Jean-Michel Basquiat.

The collection of artworks is an installation by South London artist Peter Millard.

Food comes from the 5th Quarter, a 70-seat contemporary grill restaurant focusing on smoked, cured and pickled meats from its in-house charcuterie.

To put the whole look of the hotel together, Mr Garcha, a 44-year-old property developer and first-time hotelier, sought the expertise of famed architect and interior designer Jacques Garcia.

This is the first hotel in Asia for the Frenchman, who is best known for his work on Hotel Costes in Paris and, most recently, The NoMad Hotel in New York.

Calling Garcia-designed hotels "some of the most timeless hotels", Mr Garcha says: "His décor is not trendy or of the latest design fad. He did the Costes hotel 19 years ago and it's still the coolest place in Paris."

It turned out that the designer was a "massive indophile" who was thrilled by Hotel Vagabond's close proximity to Little India, says the hotelier.

"When he proposed using elephants as a décor, I was worried it would be clichéd. But when I dug deeper into his designs, I found that Jacques loves the elephant – he got that from India – and he puts motifs and figures of the animal in every project," says Mr Garcha, who declines to divulge how much he invested in the hotel.



Garcia was also "cool" about letting the owner put his own touch to the hotel's designs.

In the cosy rooms and suites, photographs shot by Mr Garcha hang above the beds, blending well with the handpainted screens that hide the bathrooms. The pictures include pictures he took on his travels and some of his own children.

The Singapore permanent resident and father of four says: "The pictures go with the theme of being a vagabond. They're very random images from all over the world – some are abstract while others are of people I've interacted with as I travelled."

Room rates at the two-month-old hotel start at \$300 for a Classic room and the most expensive option is the Vagabond Suite, which starts at \$800.

Aside from having guests appreciate the art on the walls, Mr Garcha hopes to contribute to the vibrant arts scene here with the hotel's artist-in-residence programme. Artists from all over the world can apply for residencies ranging from a week to three months.

The last resident artist was Captain Planet, a DJ-producer who ended his two-month stay last week. As artists have to mingle with guests during their stay, he spun at the hotel lobby on various nights.

The Vagabond Salon has also been designed to host film screenings, monologues and dances.

Mr Garcha was inspired by the iconic Chelsea Hotel in New York. The 250-room hotel often had the who's who of the art world, such as short-story writer O. Henry and Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, staying there. He says: "My concept was to create an ecosystem here that would promote the art scene. It's not just about looking at art on the walls, but it's also about what goes on in here."



The pictures go with the theme of being a vagabond. They're very random images from all over the world – some are abstract while others are of people I've interacted with as I travelled.

MR SATINDER GARCHA, owner of hotel Vagabond, on using the photographs he had taken for the rooms



NEW COLLECT
Australia's Most A
Designer Furnit