

Old World Opulence and Eclectic Charm

The beguiling Hotel Vagabond is anything but predictable.

By Debbie Reyes Coloma

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Hotel Vagabond doesn't look impressive from the outside. Sandwiched between two of the most colourful and culturally significant heritage areas in Singapore – Little India and Kampong Glam – it is located in a discreet part of town that's slowly but surely becoming trendy. There's no striking hotel marquee and no capacious driveways to drop off or pick up guests. Even the black London taxi parked on the street fronting the hotel looks like a movie prop (it's not).



Mammoth bronze rhino-shaped metal reception desk.

But the engrossing interiors more than make up for lackluster exteriors as soon as you walk through the door. Nothing will prepare you for the almost surreal experience. A colossal elephant by the doorway, an enormous bronze rhinoceros at the snug reception area and the imposing golden Banyan tree at the bar, are all within your peripheral vision the minute you enter the hotel, and each is nothing short of epic.



Life-size elephant hoisting up the main elevator

“I wanted to create a heady and intoxicating atmosphere which demands interiors which are theatrical, luxurious, decadent and whimsical, so (Jacques) Garcia was an obvious choice given his design aesthetic of ‘all things in excess,’” says Satinder Garcha, the visionary behind Hotel Vagabond.

“Its location is a little off the beaten track yet very stimulating and provides a real taste of old Singapore to visitors. Whilst service and amenities are certainly luxurious, we’ve also worked hard to embed a sense of fun into Vagabond” he adds of the hotel at 39 Syed Alwi Road.



Sandwiched between two of the most colourful and culturally significant heritage areas in Singapore – Little India and

Kampong Glam – it is located in a discreet part of town.

Garcha turned the 1950s Art Deco building – comprising six adjoining shophouses – into a distinctive 42-room accommodation.

It is Singapore's first experience-driven luxury boutique hotel with a salon area to immerse guests in the theatre of art, food, drink and conversation. It is also the first and only hotel in Asia to feature interiors by the celebrated French designer Jacques Garcia, who is acclaimed for his design of Hotel Casters in Paris, Hotel Danieli in Venice, Hotel Mamounia in Marrakech and the Nomad in New York.

The **Vagabond Salon** is the heart and soul of the hotel. It's a modern interpretation of a Parisian salon.

“You may find yourself dining amidst a piece of performance art, sipping artisanal cocktails whilst being entertained by a cutting edge DJ or a jazz quartet, or just chilling out with other guests in the Vagabond Salon. At the same time, you can expect as a given the highest level of Old World hospitality and service,” he says.



The pillars in the Vagabond Salon are transformed into golden brass banyan trees.

Drinks are served from **Bar Vagabond**. It lists an eclectic rotating selection of handcrafted cocktails, artisan spirits and wines, and curated collection of rare and exotic teas and coffees. Dressed in thick red velvet curtains, the plush 5,000-square-foot Vagabond Salon is designed to work as a fully integrated, adaptable event space.

Guests can enjoy a five-star dining experience courtesy of **5th Quartet**, a collaboration between Garcha and renowned restaurateur Loh Lik Peng. Award-winning executive chef Andrew Nocente runs the 5th Quartet, which offers cuisine using traditional methods of curing meats with the aid of modern instruments.

Artist in Residence

Hotel Vagabond is the only hotel in Singapore to have a dedicated Artist in Residence programme, which exists to support artists – local and international, established and new – and allows guests to mingle with them in a unique setting.

With an emphasis on writing, photography and performance art of all kinds, artists are invited to apply for residences of up to three months. The Artist Cocktail Hour in the Vagabond will start at 6:00 p.m. – a time for hotel guests and other Vagabond clients to talk and interact with the artists in residence.



Artist Residency atelier. The only hotel in Singapore to have a dedicated Artist in Residence programme.

“I wanted to create somewhere where guests could immerse themselves in an artistic environment and also provide an opportunity for new and established artists to come and stay with us for up to three months and practice their craft, whatever that may be – poetry, performance art, photography, even DJ’ing. And all we ask in return is that they engage with our guests when practicing their art whilst they are staying with us,” stresses Garcha, who ranks 48th on the Forbes list of richest people in Singapore, with a reported net worth of US\$440 million.

Wall-to-wall art

Hotel Vagabond is also a space for art – both for pleasure and function. Every piece has been personally sourced and commissioned by owner Garcha. Every nook and cranny of the property is filled with art pieces that can rival any boutique gallery, including works of some of the world’s most accomplished artists.



Wall-to-wall curated art pieces.

The mammoth solid brass Rhino-shaped metal reception desk took eight months to create across villages in the northern Indian state of Rajasthan. The family that made it has been crafting armoury for Rajasthani royals for generations.

The pillars in the Vagabond Salon are transformed into golden brass banyan trees through delicate metalwork using centuries-old techniques.

A life-size elephant flanking the main elevator is iconic of Jacques Garcia's style and made painstakingly in France by artist Franck Le Ray.

The imposing monkey sculpture, also by Le Ray, forms the centrepiece of the Vagabond Bar.

A video art installation by Marco Brambilla, a Milan-born, New York-based video collage and installation artist known for his elaborate re-contextualisation of popular and found imagery, will entertain guests in the elevator.

Adorning the walls are striking photographs by Julia Calfee, known for her images depicting the glamour and excess of New York's Chelsea Hotel.



A nondescript 1950s Art Deco building – comprising six adjoining shophouses – on Syed Alwi Road has been transformed into an engrossing 42-room luxury boutique accommodation.

Garcha's original photography – from his international polo team wins, to his world travels – adorn the walls throughout the hotel, including each guest room.

A native of India and a citizen of Singapore, where he resides with his lawyer wife, Harpreet Bedi and their four children, Garcha's passions range from polo and film to technology and design. An entrepreneur by heart, he began his career in the US, founding People.com, a technology services firm in 1995. He sold the company to Monster.com in 2000 and moved to Singapore.

Vagabond Hotel is just the first rendition of his vision. More such ventures are planned.

Old world yet stimulating. Opulent yet comfy. Larger-than-life yet cozy. Hotel Vagabond is designed to allure, excite and intrigue. Even the name Vagabond is not accidental.

"I like the idea of 'Vagabonds' as wandering nomads, open to new experiences when they travel," says Garcha, who is also the founder and CEO of Elevation Developments, a residential property development company in Singapore recognised for its high-end, impeccably designed homes.

But make no mistake about it. The luxury boutique hotel has Old World hospitality at its core. You can expect first-rate service where the concierge would know your name and your preferences when you check in.

Opened in September 2015, Hotel Vagabond is the first of the Garcha Hotels. He will open at least one other property in Singapore in 2016 to be co-designed by Jacques Garcia and Anouska Hempel, as well as complete another hotel in Santiago, Chile.



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Passion for design

It was in Singapore that Garcha began pursuing his passion for architecture and design. He has since partnered with some of the most renowned architects and designers such as Zaha Hadid, Robert AM Kelly Hoppen, Jacques Garcia and Anouska Hempel.

Garcha won the prestigious Singapore Institute of Architect award in 2012 and the ARCASIA award for his development of “The Green Collection” in 2013. Facing Sentosa Golf Club’s Tanjong Course, The Green Collection comprises a sprawling 20-villa luxury landed in Singapore occupying a 71,600-sq-ft spot in posh Sentosa Cove on Sentosa island.

Hotel Vagabond may opulent on the inside and simple from the outside. But don’t judge a book by its cover.

Besides the promise of an extraordinary stay, Garcha will dedicate some of the proceeds from Garcha Hotels to support the Aashita Foundation. Established in 2011 in Jaipur, capital of India’s Rajasthan state, the foundation was set up to fully support and educate orphaned children and girls to adulthood by providing them with the ability to lead independent and fulfilled lives. It currently has 13 girls in its care, aged 6 to 13.

(Photos courtesy of Hotel Vagabond)

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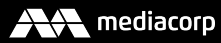


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