

Nature and History meet at Pullman Kaifeng Jianye

Singapore design studio LTW infused this Chinese resort with elements inspired by Kaifeng's rich cultural heritage, and the area's natural beauty.



The pottery reception desks

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For LTW (<http://ltwdesignworks.com/home>), a sense of place is important in each and every one of their projects, and Pullman Kaifeng Jianye (<http://www.pullmanhotels.com/gb/hotel-8509-pullman-kaifeng-jianye/index.shtml>) is no exception. Located in the ancient Song dynasty capital in northern China, this resort hotel is filled with subtle references to the arts of this era, which ran from 960 to 1279 A.D.

“During the Song dynasty, the arts, poetry, ceramics, textiles and silks were beautiful,” says Lim Hong Lian (H.L.), Founder and Principal Partner of LTW, the interior design firm responsible for the indoor spaces at Pullman Kaifeng Jianye. Headquartered in Singapore, LTW is renowned for its luxury hospitality and residential design, having worked on interiors for the likes of the acclaimed Four Seasons Hotel Seoul (<http://www.fourseasons.com/seoul/>).

For H.L. and his team, the building’s architecture was also a starting point, and it too drew on Song dynasty influences. “The roofs gave us great inspiration. You can see they’ve maintained the curves of the Song dynasty roofs – they’re very gentle compared to other dynasties,” says H.L., adding, “There’s no other way except for following the architecture. It made it easier to decide the volume of the space inside – we just followed the curvature very honestly.”

Inside the hotel, guests are greeted by vast, open spaces and views on both sides through soaring glass windows. Three giant pottery forms act as reception desks. LTW commissioned Korean artist Lee Hun Chung to create these pieces, which are at least 2.4 metres long. “We deliberately made these counters very irregular, so that the forms are individual,” says H.L.

Behind the counters sits a huge artwork, also by a Korean artist, Ran Hwang. Depicting a wonderfully warped Song dynasty building, this statement piece is made entirely of buttons.

Offsetting all this is the floor here, in dramatic black and white. “We deliberately made it very random. We didn’t want to comply with any set geometry,” says H.L.

In contrast with these awe-inspiring elements are several cosy pavilions done in Chinese fretwork. “Because the void is right there, we wanted to create somewhere more intimate for guests to wait for friends,” says H.L.

The guestrooms and hospitality spaces boast a similar sense of intimacy. The executive lounge area, for example, features dark wood screens that create a sense of relaxed privacy. Cabinets in celadon reference the Song dynasty’s talent for ceramics, while artwork on the walls references poetry from the era.

The guestrooms, meanwhile, are all decorated in a soft, muted and earthy palette, creating a calming atmosphere that’s perfect for this nature-based resort. The local wildlife and plant life come through in these private spaces: the chrysanthemum, for example, is the city of Kaifeng’s local flower, and symbolic interpretations of it adorn carved, lacquered walls and light fixtures. Silvery butterflies can also be found fluttering across guestroom walls, and coloured threads brought together to create decorative butterflies also feature in the all-day dining area. “You can find many different butterflies in the area’s wetlands,” explains H.L.

Along with Song dynasty arts and culture, the wetlands were a key source of inspiration for LTW. “Because of the wetlands, we wanted to use materials like river reeds and bamboo,” says H.L. These come through in screens, and in wall and ceiling coverings.

At Pullman Kaifeng Jianye, no detail has been forgotten, and it is all the little, subtle references to Kaifeng’s history and to its natural beauty that make this hotel unique. Indeed, unique and original designs are something LTW is known for – when they are in charge of the interiors, no two projects feel the same. This, says H.L., is what sets their studio apart. “You can’t have a fixed style. This way, you’re not afraid of people copying you, because you’re always moving forward. The only way to do that is to be very honest with the design, and to not be superficial.”

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