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KING OF RETAIL

MRCA President
Dato' Garry Chua's
insatiable appetite for the
F&B business and building
sector is inspiring

FLYING HIGH IN THE AVIATION ENTERPRISE

GTA CEO Dato' Nonee Ashirin
shares her insights as
a woman in the aviation
and aerospace industry

ALAN KOH RISES TO STARDOM WITH STAR RESIDENCES

THE MAN WITH THE MIDAS TOUCH BRINGS
A CELEBRITY FEEL TO HIS LATEST PROJECT



“Reinvention. The Highest Form of Flattery”

Imitation may be the highest form of flattery, it's true. However, I am swayed to suggest that “Reinvention is the highest form of flattery”. After all, whatever exists now has existed before. This conceptualised reality is captured in the good book, with *Ecclesiastes 3:15* extolling that “*Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before*”, exemplifying a lesson in reinvention.

It was a lesson that even the late Steve Jobs was aware of, having ingeniously built the giant Apple empire via the process of reinvention. Alpine Return Sdn Bhd Chief Operating Officer Alan Koh agrees with Jobs entrepreneurial-like statement which he paraphrased as:- “Apple is nothing new but a borrowed idea from other (products) which was further reinvented”.

The wheel has come full circle for Koh who has infused every project he undertakes star appeal with his Midas touch and visionary outlook. Held in high regard by industry peers, his confident, maverick super-slick approach to developments have seen new benchmarks set in the city with nothing less expected of the upcoming Star Residences touting a glitzy residential cum commercial development in the heart of Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle. This exemplifies Koh's acute understanding that entrepreneurship calls for innovation and reinvention.

This sense of reinvention goes a long way in ensuring survival in business and life opines Malaysia Retail Chain Association (MRCA) President Dato' Garry Chua. He identifies the future trend as drones capable of delivering groceries to one's doorstep which is already taking place in China. The savvy Entrepreneur of the Month called it a day after years spent at ICI Paints (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd and Jotun Paint Malaysia in search of entrepreneurial adventure.

He urges retailers and businesses to embrace change by taking on the e-commerce platform for their businesses to boost their physical outlet presence as well. The refusal to adapt to change and reinvent oneself Chua says, can result in one's business becoming extinct just like dinosaurs.

Director of the unique Batik Boutique Hotel in Kuching, Sarawak Jacqueline Hong switched careers mid-way through her lucrative banking career to pursue her dream of owning her own hotel outfit. Reinventing the wheel with her uniquely themed hotel, she also established Tanoti and her own factory conceptualised out of her fascination with traditional fabrics.

Last but not least, meet aviation queen Dato' Nonee Ashirin whose love for this industry was honed when she followed her father to aviation shows as a child. Today, her aviation empire focusing on engine products for airplanes which she retails continues to grow, even as she considers venturing into property investment and new manufacturing facilities.

On the industry front, there will be the exciting 100 Most Influential Young Entrepreneurs (100MIYE) 2017 awards organised by Armani Media Sdn Bhd coming up on 24 November at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur. Let's see who will make it into the top 100 hotspot.

Till next month, keep reaching for the stars!

Yvonne Yoong

Editor

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On The Cover



Alan Koh
Chief Operating Officer
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RISING TO STARDOM WITH STAR RESIDENCES

Alpine Return's Alan Koh's glitzy journey to the top has not always been smooth but the Entrepreneur with the Midas touch has taken it all in his stride and lived to tell his rags-to-stunning riches true story

By: Yvonne Yoong



An artist's impression of the grand entrance leading to Star Residences



Star Residences Chief Operating Officer Alan Koh's life reads like a well-crafted script with elements of humour, hardship, perseverance and endurance finally adding up to the glamorous lifestyle he is now living to a hilt. Although on the surface, everything looks glamorous and his life reads like something out of the pages of Tinseltown, the ever-smiling Koh shares that his entrepreneurial journey and climb to the top has not always been easy nor smooth-sailing all the way. In fact, he affirms that the journey has been fraught with challenges and rejection.

A lesser known or totally unknown fact about Koh revolves around his humble beginnings growing up as a child in the rustic Chua Chu Kang village situated in the suburban of Singapore where he had to help out with the endless chores which is a far cry from the savvy COO with an entrepreneurial streak who comes across as well-immersed in the ways of the world that the industry is accustomed to.

"I always tell people I grew up in the countryside but nobody believes me. They say, 'Alan, you don't act like one or behave like one. Maybe that is because I've been to the US and became Westernised. I see a lot of things and travel a lot also so basically, that also opened up my eyes and I learned a lot from the buildings that I visited,'" says Koh.

The village, which bears an uncanny and coincidental resemblance to the rib-tickling antics of Singaporean Comedian Phua Chu Kang he says, had chickens, ducks and pigs running around, until the Singaporean Government banned the rearing of pigs there. The funny antics of the much-loved Actor playing a Contractor in the sitcom series was something Koh could relate to in vivid detail considering he was involved in the property business, albeit overseeing real estate investment and management.

Koh looks back fondly at his young years spent shaking the mango trees and climbing the durian trees. Observing his father who had his own coffee shop business and a plastic factory who never worked for anybody in his entire life, Koh's father was his first role model. However, the all-important question for him was how to arrive to where he wanted to be from this initial point.

After completing his National Service with the military in Singapore at the age of 20, a resolute Koh wanted to pursue his education in the US. However, his father was not agreeable so Koh had to seek his own funds.

"My education was self-funded. My mom subsidised my first year while my sister in London chipped in to fund my entire studies. I also had to fund myself by working part-time in the US in order to complete my studies," he recalls.

Not one to drawback in the face of challenge, he took everything in his stride. He worked in the US for a couple of years and pursued his Master of Business Administration (MBA). Koh earned his first Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) Degree in Marketing in Hawaii and, feeling that his first MBA wasn't good enough, he pursued his MBA in Finance to help him in his career.

However, when he came home to Singapore armed with two MBAs, he found it tough to get a job. "I wanted to get into the finance industry but it was very difficult because I didn't have finance experience," he recalls.

However, because he had a short stint in the US in property management and leasing, he concluded that this career route was possibly the best way to go. Thus, he wrote to property developers and other marketing firms dealing with sub-consumer products but got rejected more than 100 times.

"I felt rejected and down but ultimately, I brought myself up again to be stronger – much, much stronger than before.

"So basically, that's how I got started and got to be strong to feel that it is not the end of the world, and that whatever comes along would just be challenges and not obstacles. That kind of thinking is positive and still remains as something that I practise till today," recalls Koh.

Not one to give up, the sheer steely determination meted out by Koh who is born in the year of the Ox and under the Taurus star sign admits to being strong-minded, even as he jest that he is a "double bull" in terms of being resolute and persevering in attaining his dreams.

Eventually, he joined the Jones Lang Wootton Singapore consultant firm as a Property Manager handling property management for the Orchard Shopping Centre in the Lion City where he used to meet local Singaporean Chinese drama celebrities there who would go there to "yum cha" which was his initial brushes with celebrities and stars.



FATE STEPS IN

As fate would have it, he came across a magazine one day on whose cover was Banyan Tree Chairman Ho Kwon Ping smiling back at him. The Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts is mainly a branded resort concept – either at the seaside, mountain resort or unique cultural space where they position themselves to be.

"So, it was very interesting when I picked up the article and read about him and how he was so particular and passionate about what he does. It was so detailed the way he talked about how he turned this project around from a really useless tin mine to a very healthy, profitable resort," he adds.

Koh shares that the article prompted him to want to work for Ho and it took him one year, unsolicited, to write in to

him. He kept sending him letters every three months until he received a call from Ho who called him in for an interview.

"He told me Alan, do you know why I hired you? You came in so hard knocking at the door so I had no choice but to open the door for you! So, that's how I got into Banyan Tree. My mind was made up that I wanted to join this company and I got in after one year. That was my first hotel exposure," recounts Koh.

Ho is not only very hands on but also different in his approach and it was from him that Koh developed an eye for detail. Over there at Banyan Tree, a young Koh oversaw the photo shoots for the resort and handled the layout details of the brochure and supervised the photographer while deciding the backdrop for the setting.



Left: Sky Park Pool at Level 58

Far left top: A breathtaking view of the city from the vantage point of Star Residences

Far left bottom: Pure indulgence awaits in the luxe living area

"Ho was my inspiration and also my mentor. He's also the brand for Banyan Tree. He appeared regularly on television and other media and was also on the Board of a few directorships for the Government. So basically, he is not just a mentor but really, he's truly somebody like the late Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. When he speaks, people want to listen – he has that kind of personality," affirms Koh.

It was there that Koh picked up a sense of detailing, mentality and culture that was prevalent with the Banyan Tree branding that would serve him well in terms of future projects which he would develop as in Star Residences.

"When I developed Star Residences, I purposely came up with a name that is meaningful. When you do a project and put in all the elements of the star name in place – then it's really something else. When I talk to the buyers, they feel there's a story behind Star Residences which makes them want to buy into the project because it's got impression," says Koh.

During the course of his life's journey, Koh discovered that fate would intervene to determine he would have some big breaks in his career and the occasional brushes with stars and celebrities at different intersections of his life.

When he was working part-time in Hawaii at a Thai Restaurant which catered to celebrities and superstars for instance, he glimpsed the late Michael

Jackson and Tina Turner dining there.

At this point in time, with the wheel coming fully circle, destiny has seen to it that he undertakes the development of the high-profile Star Residences which is in some ways, the sum total of the star-studded journey on which Koh has had the privilege to embark on.

STAR APPEAL OF STAR RESIDENCES

Koh's sterling reputation and composed confidence precedes him so much so that he's known for his Midas touch of turning developments into golden ventures.

The projects Koh undertake after all, have a knack of attracting capital appreciation. Known among industry circles for his penchant for success and entrepreneurial streak, his maverick-like confident approach to launching developments have certainly set new benchmark standards for the city.

His ability to reinvent himself and his projects while aiming for the stars comes second nature to the enterprising COO who believes that the secret to success lies with the power of innovation.

Taking a leaf from the late Steve Jobs, Koh paraphrases what Jobs used to affirm in that - "Apple is nothing new but a borrowed idea from other [products] which was further reinvented".

Thus, Koh sees wisdom in reinventing the wheel in excellent offerings already in existence and elevating the concept to revolutionary effect in terms of approach.

"The inspiration for the birth of Star Residences came from W Hotel's DNA," he enthuses sharing how the concept for the development was birthed. This entailed a sojourn around an elite selection of W Hotels worldwide.

"I have always been fascinated with hotels since my university days in Hawaii. The real inspiration for Star Development's design and concept came from W Hotel in Taiwan when I was invited to one of the Chinese restaurants.

"That was my first time stepping into a W Hotel. I immediately fell in love with the concept and was inspired by the bold colours, sexiness, artistic features and flamboyance of the hotel," he enthuses.

Koh says that to enhance my vision, he visited and did research on other W Hotels in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Beijing and Bangkok. "That research forms part of my 40-page design concept framework for Star Development.

I choose the name Star as it is easy to pronounce and understand and has international appeal. I wanted a project which is not only easily distinguishable but must have an element of sex appeal.

"The idea of developing an extraordinary lucky star was one of the criteria that was in my mind. In order to have all these elements of good luck and good feng shui in place I developed the Star logo using 65 circles with five sides having 13 circles on each side," he adds.

Koh says what eventually emerged was a lucky clover in the middle that forms the heart of the Star logo.

"With this in mind, I gave the dots or circles bold colours to exude a sexy and youthful look. The final result is a super lucky and prosperous Star that has elements of sexiness, boldness, and flamboyance," he enthuses.

WRITTEN IN THE STARS

Indeed, Koh's life seems to not only have been scripted from the start - but also written in the stars. So much so that not

only is Koh living the life of his dreams – he is also raising a new benchmark standard for luxe living and shopping in the Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle.

Testament to this is his latest pride and joy as reflected in Star Development – a mixed-use development comprising Star Residences – represented by an iconic 57-storey tower and two 58-storey towers which now includes the Ascott Star KLCC Kuala Lumpur and Star Boulevard consisting five blocks of six-storey units for retail, food and beverage (F&B) and lifestyle entertainment outlets.

Success it seems, comes easily enough, with Koh's Midas touch and entrepreneurial spirit attracting a steady stream of buyers, even despite the current slowdown in the economy.

The star appeal of this project is evident in the number of units sold. Already, Tower 1's 557 units that was launched in November 2014 is already completely sold out while the take-up rate for Tower 2's 482 units that was launched last year recorded over 90% sales.

The recently launched Tower 3 - Ascott Star KLCC Kuala Lumpur witnessed a tie-up with international serviced residences operator The Ascott Limited being engaged to manage the project.

Ascott Star KLCC which is slated to be completed by 2021 with the commencement of its operations by July 2021, is also witnessing brisk sales.

All this is very good and well, given the current uncertain economic climate. However, unfazed by the dictates of market forces, the ever-enterprising Koh's solution was to optimistically market his project overseas including countries like Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, with China being the key market.

Despite the property market currently experiencing weakened sentiments, Koh believes the economy will continue to improve from the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) performance hovering around 5% since he opines the ringgit has stabilised lately.

"The export market is rewinding so I think that overall, Malaysia has stabilised unlike a few years ago when the currency dropped a lot. The currency has improved so the property market should improve.

"With the uptrend, I foresee that

next year till 2021 onwards will see the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) link being completed. The High Speed Rail (HSR) train from Singapore to Malaysia will also augur well for the country to attract more tourists from Singapore over here."

CAPITALISING ON STAR RESIDENCES

"Star Residences is a very special and unique project because it has got all the elements of star appeal in it. The name itself is not just for namesake but it is actually associated with celebrities," says Koh adding that famous Malaysian-born, world-renowned shoe couturier and Star Ambassador Datuk Jimmy Choo lent his name to the Star Walk of Fame.

This star-led partnership with Choo resonates with similar parallels in both their lives stories – progressing from humble beginnings before being thrust into the international spotlight with Choo taking global prominence in the fashion industry on the world stage.

"The Jimmy Choo equation came about as he is someone I have chemistry with, having talked at length about the interior design scheme at my previous office in KL Eco City, The Gardens Mall in Mid Valley City when I first met him eight years ago, having been introduced by my client. He asked me "Is it size eight? I'm going to make you a pair of shoes."

Koh was at then the Head of Investment and Development S P Setia Berhad who had helped out with the masterplan for the entire 24-acre development. This covered all the components of the integrated development as in residential retail, three blocks of Grade A office buildings and some strata offices.

A year-and-a-half later on Koh's birthday, Choo presented the gift to him at a private dining room in Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur and signed the back of his shoes of which there are only two such pairs – one belonging to Choo and the other, Koh which he wore that night.

From that initial last meeting whereby Koh was introduced to Choo by a common friend, and upon joining Alpine Return years later, the former invited Choo to be the Brand Ambassador of Star Development. Koh's career with United Malayan Land Berhad (UMLand) earlier on saw him being seconded by

Capitaland Singapore which sent him to develop Susana Sentral, a joint venture project between UMLand and Malaysian Resources Corporation Berhad (MRCB).

After the successful completion of Suasana Sentral Loft, he left to join a real estate fund in Pacific Star Group based in Singapore. A call from S P Setia saw him joining as Head of Investments and Development overseeing the master-planning of the RM7 billion mixed integrated development comprising commercial office buildings, retail strata offices and residential apartments.

And, the rest as they say, is history.

"He immediately accepted the invitation as he thinks Star Development has been creatively put together as a brand he would like to be associated with. He is the first celebrity to endorse and lend his hand imprint to the Star Walk of Fame. I have always admired him as being the pride of Malaysia. He is not just creative, but able to brand himself into what he is today," enthuses Koh further.

In all, he hopes to have 36 world-renowned celebrities leave behind their hand imprints on the glamorous walkway where residents and the public alike can enjoy visiting and taking pictures.

"When I first looked at this development, I noticed that it has got a very long frontage so I knew it could be turned into something very special.

"I know that within KLCC – besides the Petronas Twin Towers and Acquaria KLCC, Malaysia lacks tourist landmarks especially in the city.

"Since there aren't any tourist spots for visitors to really visit I conceptualised a logo revolving around the word 'Star' and incorporated a 200-metre Star Walk of Fame akin to the Hollywood Walk of Fame or Hong Kong Star Avenue. That's how the name came about," he enthuses.

Star Boulevard is poised to be Malaysia's latest tourist hotspot with the Star Walk of Fame located nearby the Food & Beverage (F&B) and Entertainment Hub. Once completed, the Star Walk of Fame and the other commercial F&B and entertainment hotspots will attract locals and tourists.

According to Koh, the star appeal of the development lies with its Star logo.

"It's a project that has got all the

ingredients of celebrities or star appeal in it. That's how I came to name this Star Residences. The retail element is also something special. We will be exploring restaurants, F&B and a Michelin-star restaurant that we will be bringing to Star Residences," says Koh.

"Star Residences is a vis a vis residential development promoting serviced apartments with unique artwork within a mixed-use project which also has a commercial retail component. There are basically three blocks of residences and one retail tower," he relates.

It is easy to see why Koh is all starry-eyed over Star Residences which he affirms has got all the elements of a five-star development, having poured his passion into this superstar development that sparkles with inspiration.

"Why do I say that this project has got all the elements of a five-star development? This is because the first thing I want to emphasise is that Star Residences' logo represents a very lucky star. It is a very special star as it has got a love star within a cluster of stars.

"The most prominent feature of Star Residences that excites me is basically the star logo itself which carries a lot of meaning. Right in the centre of Star logo is a clover which represents luck.

"There is a three-star clover leaf which is basically lucky while a four-star clover life is very lucky. This very special star has got a five-leaf clover so therefore, it is a very lucky and very prosperous star. And that's the heart and soul of Star development," he explains.

The glitzy development will also feature a rooftop area for the retail component which comprises a bar and dining area serving all types of local and international cuisine. A unique mosaic feature wall at the Sky Park measuring 20 metres wide and 12 metres high towers spanning three storeys will provide the wow factor and represent something special about the development in that sense.

"We've engaged Samsung C&T Engineering & Construction Group which is also considered a five-star developer and world builder of one of the main builder of Star Residences. This construction giant is best known for the construction of the world's tallest



buildings including the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur; Burj Khalifa in Dubai and now Merdeka PNB 118, which will be Malaysia's tallest building."

"We actually went to new markets like Japan and Korea because we employed Samsung as the contractor for Star Residences and Samsung itself is known as a developer in Korea. So there's some kind of branding and reputation there as people recognise the brand and want to buy. Samsung will act as its installer for security systems other than being the contractor for Star Residences. Star Residences will also have a Michelin-Star restaurant and last but not least, basically represents a five-star development," affirms Koh.

RAISING THE BENCHMARK

The four-acre (1.62 ha) development with a gross development value (GDV) of RM3 billion (USD700 million) represents Koh's comeback project undertaken by Alpine Return Sdn Bhd.

The project represents a 50:50 joint venture between established Malaysian property developers – Symphony Life Bhd (previously known as Bolton Bhd) and United Malayan Land Bhd (UM Land).

Alpine Return, has linked up with The Ascott Limited for the launch of its latest tower block. The Ascott, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Singapore's CapitaLand Limited is a leading international serviced residences owner-operators.