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The Resource | DESIGN

# On Familiar Ground

British architect and interior designer Andy Hall tells us exactly why embracing the 'strangely familiar' has worked so well at The RuMa Hotel and Residences.

EVER SINCE THE RuMa Hotel and Residences opened in late 2018, it has swiftly become one of Kuala Lumpur's favourite luxury hotels, not least because of its striking aesthetics. The tastefully appointed rooms and suites manage the tricky feat of looking simple and luxurious at the same time.

Returning to the hotel for the first time since its opening is Andy Hall, founding partner and leading design director at MQ Studio in Shanghai, whose razor-sharp eye has played a leading role in carving out The RuMa's distinct aesthetics. "A building has two lives: one that you design and one that it adopts after you have finished. I'm curious to see how these co-exist!" he laughs. Looking at the design process itself, Hall still insists it was relatively organic: "There really was no conscious effort on my part to make it distinctively independent.

"It was more an evolving idea that came about through the rigorous research of Kuala Lumpur in general and of Malaysia as a whole. We knew we wanted a product that was distinctly rooted in its location, but when we started our research, we weren't aware how this would finally become the hotel we now know. We played with the recurring idea of the 'strangely familiar'. This allowed me to explore ideas that, as Malaysian, would be recognisable, but left enough freedom to 'play' with them slightly, rather than adhering strictly to tradition."

Equally important is the hotel management Urban Resort Concepts' (URC) unique concept of hostmanship, a revolutionary new service culture where every experience is tailor-made. "The hosting of a guest in a hotel is a 'craft', while the production of the design of a URC hotel is a crafted and often

WORDS: RENYILIM. PHOTOGRAPHY: IAN TAN, ZHUHAIPHOTO.

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UR Spa has five treatment rooms, a couple's suite and a foot therapy lounge



UR Spa developed its signature treatments with Italian skincare brand, Comfort Zone.



The RuMa Hotel and Residences is Malaysia's first Urban Resorts Concept property.

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UR Spa's design cues reflect the hotel's colonial-era inspired aesthetics.

***Traditional weaving techniques  
– Hall's favourite element – are on display  
in the spa, gym and meeting rooms.***

custom-made solution. The RuMa is designed for guest experience at its core.”

From a design standpoint, this has meant going to extraordinary lengths to reflect URC's enthusiasm for all things bespoke.

There are, for instance, traditional weaving techniques – Hall's favourite element – on display in the spa, gym and meeting rooms that he recalls being “exceptionally difficult” to execute. “For UR Spa, we worked with bamboo strips to create traditional Anyaman Kelerai screens, for which a village in Terengganu developed a method of ‘opening’ the weave, so we could shine light through it. We still

wanted the original diamond pattern to be visible, and allegedly, an 80-year-old lady from the village was the only person who knew how to do it.”

As for the section of The RuMa that he's proudest of: “It has to be the copper ceiling and the grand staircase. This area was the most complicated to design, detail – and most importantly – construct. If it hadn't been for the amazing efforts of everyone involved in this project, from the owners, Ireka Corporation, to lighting designers The Flaming Beacon, these two things would never have happened.”

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