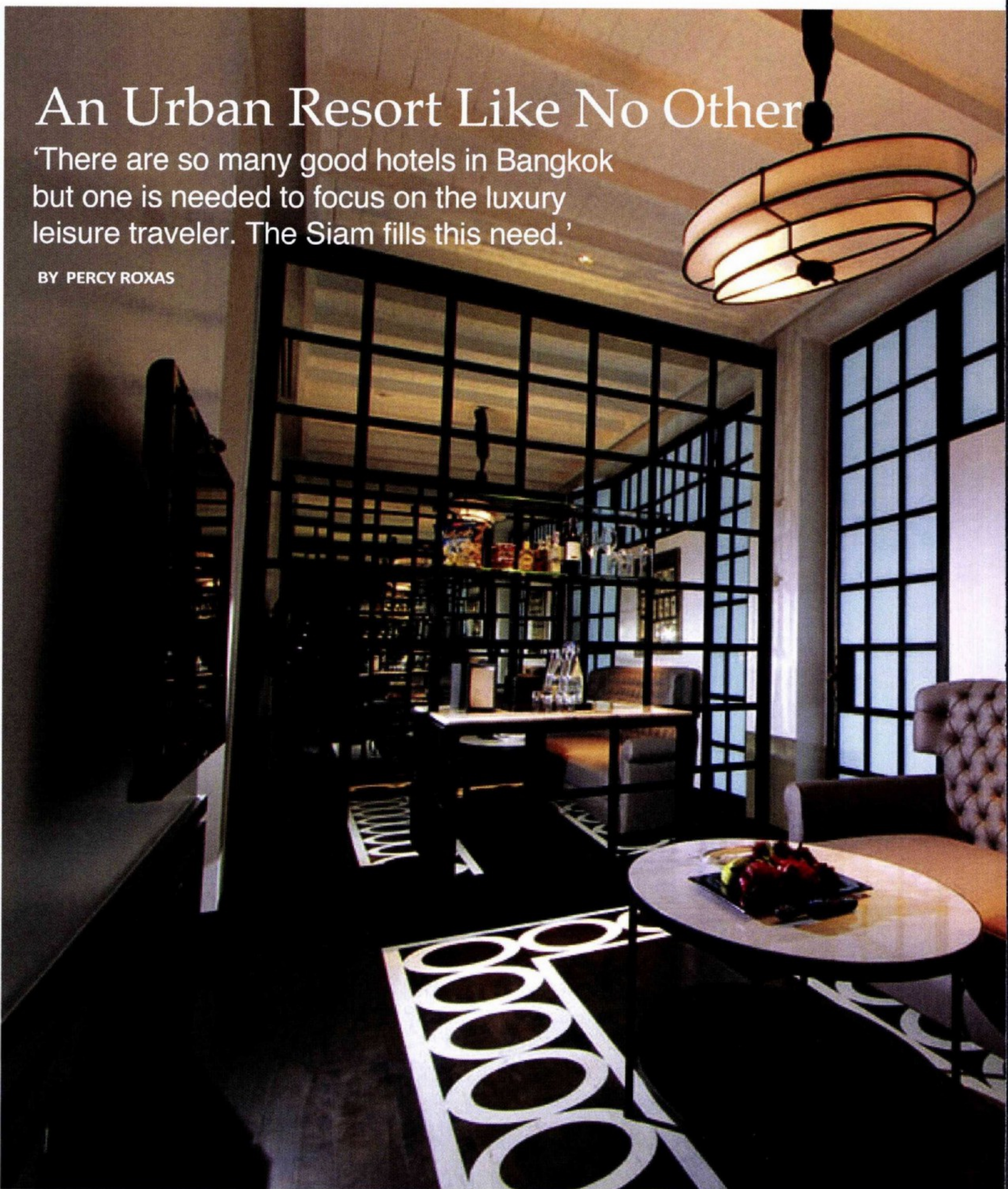


checking in

An Urban Resort Like No Other

'There are so many good hotels in Bangkok but one is needed to focus on the luxury leisure traveler. The Siam fills this need.'

BY PERCY ROXAS





“Incredible!” You can’t help but mutter the word after seeing The Siam, the latest addition to The Sukosol Hotels group, and described by many as Bangkok’s premier urban resort. From the outside, there is very little indication of what awaits inside this luxury retreat, set in one of Bangkok’s most historical districts. But the moment you step inside, you grope for the right words to describe what you see, only to find yourself speechless, as wonder after wonder meets your eyes, teases your imagination, and engulfs your senses. Bangkok has never had a hotel like this...until The Siam.

It all started when the lease on land owned by the Sukosols – three acres of premium property fronting the river – ended in 2005. The land had been leased to a seafood restaurant and when it expired, the family thought it was time to do something with the prime riverfront site. When Kamala Sukosol, the matriarch of the clan, eventually asked her children for ideas on what to do with it, the youngest – Krissada Sukosol Clapp (Kriss) – always the most creative among the siblings, was immediately inspired.

Kriss is the creative director of the family owned Sukosol Hotels. He is a famous rock singer and film actor in Thailand who describes himself as one with a “love for distinct details.” Like his mother, Kriss has been collecting antiques through the years and owns a sizeable collection. He thought it would be great to build a hotel on the land to showcase this collection.

From the start, the idea was not to build just another hotel. “Given the legendary Thai hospitality family’s creative background and reputation,” says hotel general manager Jason Friedman, “it had to be unique; it had to be different in every aspect.”

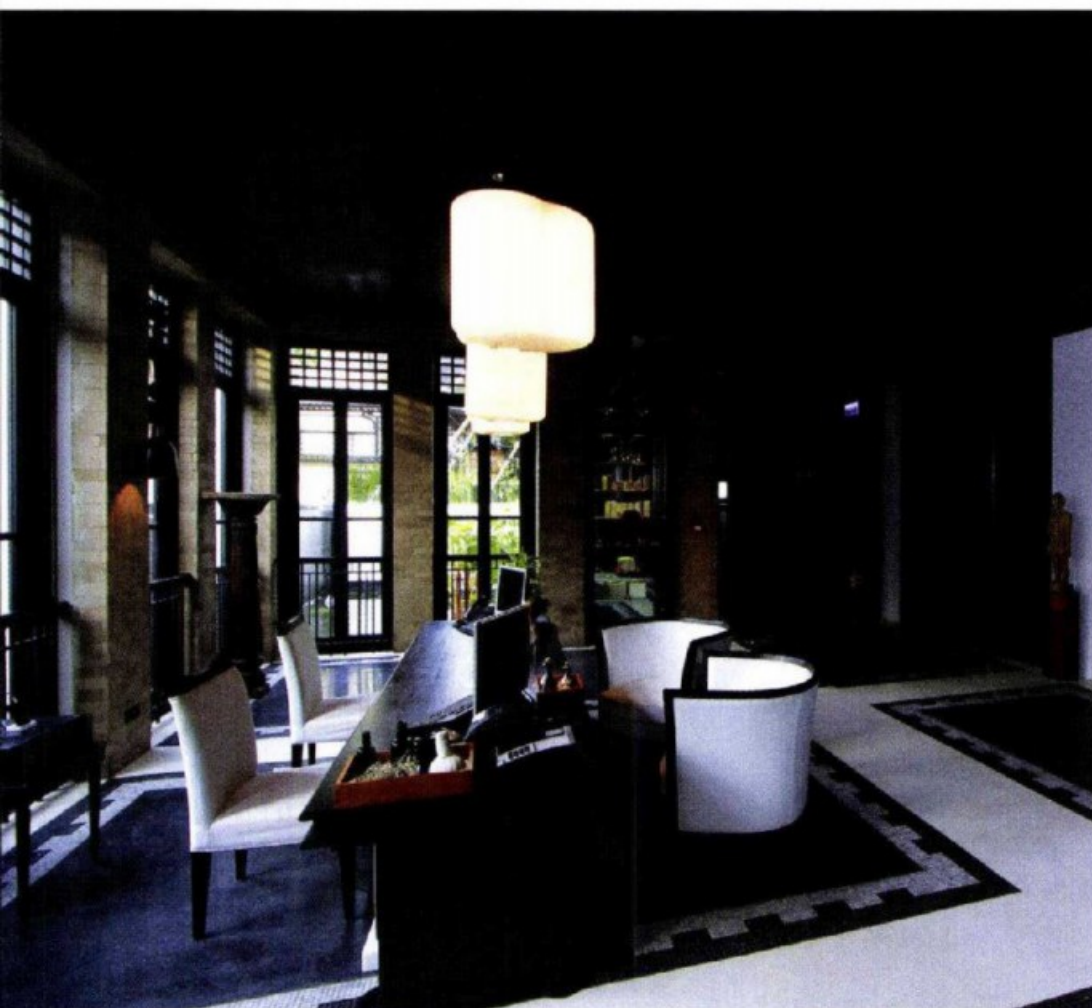
The idea grew and evolved, “organically” Friedman points out, from getting renowned American designer Bill Bensley onboard, to him meeting the family, to recruiting the executive team. “We sort of just clicked, nothing was forced, and everything fell into place,” he says.

As luck would have it, over the years Kriss developed a relationship with Bensley – dubbed by some as the king of exotic luxury resorts – during his search for antiques. When Kriss told Bensley about the project, he immediately agreed. In fact, the globally famous designer, who is responsible for about 150 hotels and resorts



around the world, was even quoted as saying this about the resort: "I am most excited about The Siam, as I know it is going to turn heads on the competitive hospitality market of tomorrow." It is doing that already.

Kriss and Bensley catalyzed a team inspired by that vision: a hotel providing "a luxury experience embracing every moment and every individual with sincerity, integrity and a passion for service; a memorable experience for all." Their creative union – and the subsequent contributions of the other family members – resulted in a most amazing hotel that is to be the hotel group's "crown jewel."



A visit to the hotel easily explains why. From the architecture of the main building to the minutest element in the rooms, this urban resort is obviously one borne out of love.

Here is one hotel in Bangkok where the primary motive isn't just to meet financial targets. Here is one hotel built not only to please its target guests – the ultra high-end luxury leisure travelers who want nothing but the best in their holiday – but also to help give a larger meaning to their visits and enhance their experience of the destination. Here is Bangkok's ultimate resort – the city's only resort for luxury leisure travelers, says Friedman.

"There are so many good hotels in Bangkok, but none catering specifically to the luxury leisure traveler," Friedman says. "Because of this, if you are going on a grand tour of Asia or Southeast Asia, Bangkok kind of disconnects you from the grand experience. The Siam fills this need. It's the missing piece. With The Siam, we can now provide the luxury leisure experience in Bangkok."

Indeed, The Siam is more than just a luxury resort. It is an experience. Kriss and Bensley made sure of that. The hotel is like a priceless work of art. The overall setting was built around the theme reflecting the period of King Rama V (1853-1910), regarded as an era of Bangkok's greatest grandeur; a theme that jibes well with its location in one of the city's most historic outposts.

"Around the world," says Friedman, "when luxury leisure travelers visit, they stay in the old part of town. Similarly, The Siam allows guests to live in the old town, to really know Bangkok actively, not just enjoy a passive experience that doesn't even scratch the surface. From the hotel, they can jog in the early morning around the palaces, and maybe end up in a discreet soi where they can revel in some unique local experiences. They can even explore Bangkok by boat from our private pier."

With all that one can enjoy in the resort, guests will probably stay and try to enjoy it to the full. Everything in the hotel is inspiring. The deliberate creation of open spaces – lots of them – not only makes the resort bigger than it actually is, but also lends an aura of serenity that you want to enjoy for yourself. "It's full immersion here," says Friedman.

The design elements, including the valuable antiques, priceless vintage pieces, charming curios, the muted color scheme, and more make even the simple tour of the resort a journey of discovery... an exploration of serendipity. While walking around, one will not fail to notice striking pieces of art and history, significant collectors' items, amusing conversational pieces which are rare finds today. The unmistakable Art Deco accents all over remind visitors of a grander time when travel was indeed a luxury only a few could afford. And yet, the feeling is not pretentious, just enriching.

That the Bt1-billion resort was built with only 39 rooms means that privacy and exclusivity of guests are the main goals. And comfort wasn't sacrificed for pompous frills either. Unlike other city hotel properties, where size was always maximized to mostly ensure profitability, the luxurious suites rather than rooms at The Siam, are meant for "experiential luxury". Not only are they the city's most spacious and elegantly appointed, to say the least, they are also tailor made to meet the requirements of the luxury leisure traveler: a real joy to be in.

Each room has been designed with a different theme such as the Elephant Room and Buddha Room to make sure each creates an experience that is unique, and "gives them a reason to come back," says Friedman. And for those yearning for a truly Thai experience, there are four traditional Thai teakwood houses – formerly owned by renowned socialite Connie Mangskau – where the likes of Jacqueline Kennedy, Henry Ford, John Rockefeller, and Roger Moore were hosted and feted. Three of these form the signature Thai restaurant and cooking school, Chon, while the fourth stands as a unique pool villa.

"The guest experience at The Siam harks back to the days of clipper ship travels, the days when the journey was as important as the destination," says Friedman, "Our guests are not in Thailand to shop at Siam Paragon; they are here for something more cerebral. They are here to see the temples, palaces, and other historical places; they are here to savor special experiences, a much different experience of Bangkok than they have ever had before." ■



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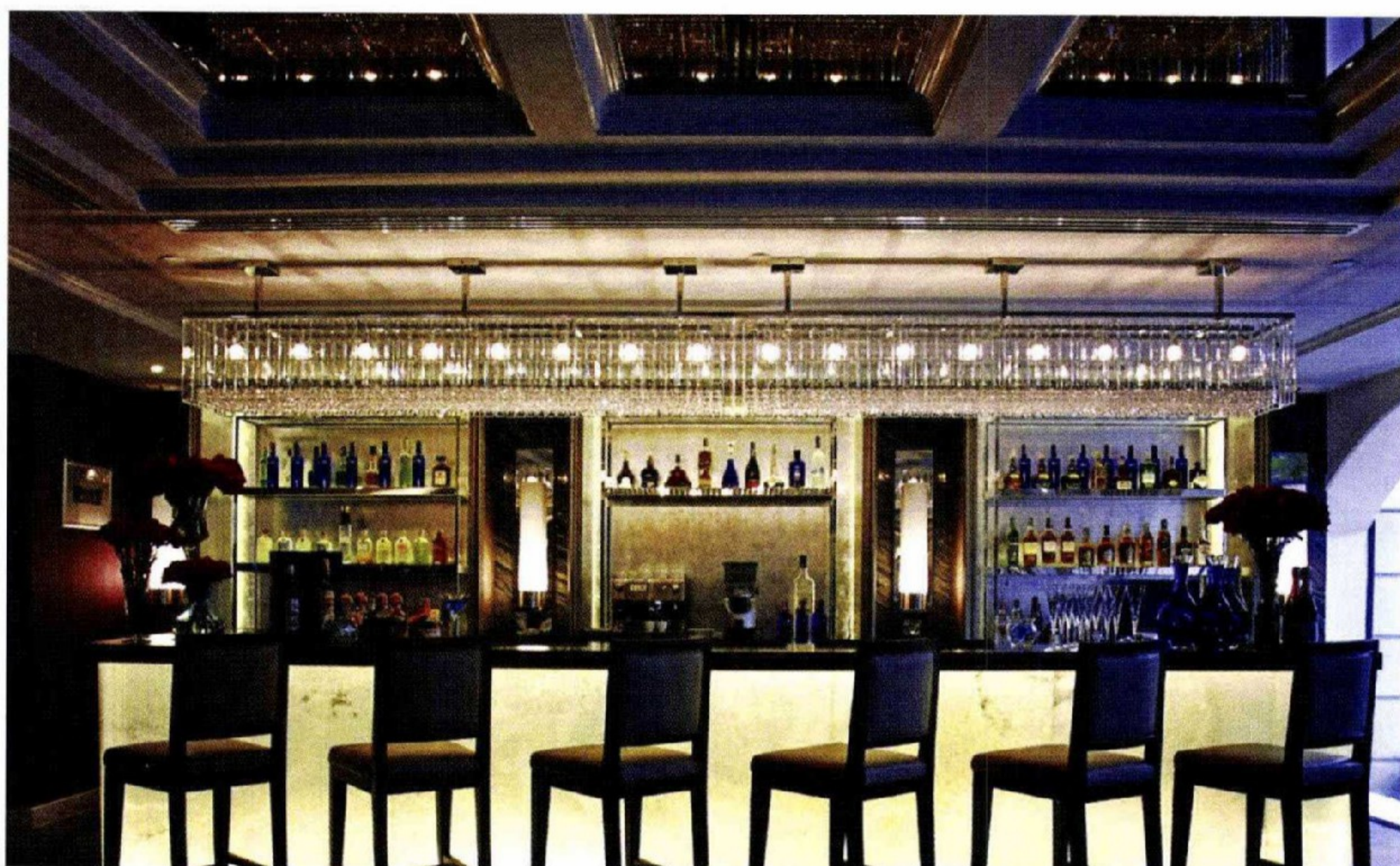


Meet the GM: Jason M. Friedman

A consummate luxury hotelier, Friedman honed his talent at some of the world's most unique boutique properties and luxurious 5-star establishments including Raffles (Singapore), Hotel Le Royal (Cambodia), Amandari (Bali), Four Seasons (Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai), and Qualia (Australia). He holds a Master of Management Degree in Hospitality (MMH) from Cornell University as well as a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology, specializing in forest and marine ecology/ecotourism development from Lewis and Clark College in the US. He has called Asia home since 1994, and is a PADI certified scuba instructor with over 2,500 certified dives as well as a renowned elephant polo player!

bar review

THE SAPPHIRE BAR
BAR REVIEW



Raising The Bar

The new hotel bar of Siam City Hotel Bangkok, Sapphire, recreates the carefree, flamboyant atmosphere of the Roaring 20s **BY PERCY ROXAS**

A new chic bar promising some of the most creative drinks and happening jazz in Bangkok was recently unveiled at the Siam City Hotel Bangkok on Phayathai Road. The place, called Sapphire Bar (after its brilliant blue signature cocktail), was actually an upgrade of the former hotel bar, part of the hotel's preparation for its official re-launching in October under a new name, The Sukosol Bangkok.

Sapphire Bar was modeled after a "speakeasy" theme in the Roaring 20s and now possesses a carefree, more flamboyant atmosphere – a trend engulfing Bangkok these days. Overall design and service ethos was based on the iconic period but the bar was also given a modern elegant and refined ambiance: high ceilings, polished wooden floors, expansive windows, plush sofas, and a palette of sapphire blue, muted purple, subtle green, and pops of red.

But the centerpiece of this place has got to be the beautiful, 5m-long black marble bar where resident expert, Julian Gebhard, gives guests a sample on the finer points of mixology. Try the signature drink – "The Sapphire," what else – a clever concoction that blends Grey Goose vodka, mango juice, orange flower water, and a hint of fresh vanilla. Topped with kaffir lime foam and with a special "loyalty gem" waiting for drinkers at the bottom, this drink perfectly encapsulates the bar's style, and is an ideal way to kick the night off.

Renowned classics of the cocktail world are of course present, but Julian puts a twist on convention by offering some signature drinks that have been localized with unique ingredient such as Thai rice vodka, lemongrass, chili, passion fruit, mango, and coconut. These are a must-try, if only to enjoy a bar experience Thai-style, albeit a bit on the uppity side. The extensive drinks menu also includes an

extraordinary selection of premiere spirits, champagne, premium wines, imported beers from around the world, and gourmet coffee and tea – so whatever your tippie taste and budget, there's something for you.

Sapphire's creative drinks make the bar a perfect spot to linger on whether for an intimate tête-à-tête, meeting with colleagues, celebrating special occasions, or for just plain chill-out with your friends. And you don't have to worry about getting hungry, as there is a unique selection of specialty bite-size cuisine tailor-made for sharing with the entire gang. Think dim sum, fresh sashimi set, and gourmet tapas platter – coming straight from the hotel's award-winning restaurants – one good reason of going to a major hotel bar. And for those with a sweet tooth, the bar has a decadent range of homemade treat available all day and night!

Bangkok's nightlife is famed for being so varied and exciting. There's always something new to discover, something new to experience. If you're looking for a new place to experience on the Phayathai-Si Ayutthaya roads area, drop by for a drink or two especially on Friday and Saturday when the houseband, James & The Gemstones performs. But any night, between 5 and 7 p.m., you can enjoy the Happy Hour when standard drinks are available on a "Buy 1, Get 1 free" basis. Cheers! ■

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