

THE ANSWERS WITH...

PETER REMEDIOS

The design principal and managing director of Remedios Studio talks about origins, design philosophy and why he would rather not choose the 90-degree angle.

Words: Kenneth Tan

AS THE DESIGN principal and managing director of Remedios Studio, Peter Remedios is synonymous with high-end hotel and resort design. His clients include some of the world's most famous hospitality groups, such as Aman Resorts, Hyatt International and Mandarin Oriental. Remedios has also worked on luxury residential projects, such as Gramercy in Hong Kong, and Qujiang Rose Garden in Xian. In Seoul, his firm has worked on a series of restaurants from The Parkview and French dining room Continental to Zest and Atrio Italian restaurant.

For Remedios, who possesses a Portuguese-Macanese heritage, a chance work trip to Madeira led him to discover ancient Portuguese sea routes as well as an ancestor, who was a ship's captain and had been buried in Malacca. "I've found the whole mixing of cultures intriguing – and we see so many commonalities in the Macao 'balichao' and Malaccan 'belachan' even," he says.

Meanwhile, Remedios's design philosophy of discerning a project's unique personality has led to notable breakthroughs. Since 2010, his studio in Hong Kong has been the base for his work, which has ranged from an ultra-luxury villa on The Peak to the renovation of Four Seasons Hong Kong. The studio is also currently working on several projects such as The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto renovation, The Ritz-Carlton, Suzhou, a Healthcare Community project and a luxury residential project in Qujiang.

For Remedios, the first rule in his design book is "to go for the extraordinary".

In your 30-plus years in design, what have you found to be the greatest secret in achieving the perfect result?

It is passion and persistence by never giving up. My grandfather was something of a character, very wise. I was no more than six or seven when he told me: "Son, nothing worthwhile in life is achieved without endeavour." This notion of never settling for less stuck with me. It's a positive kind of persistence. When I was doing The Ritz-Carlton in Kyoto, there was a height moratorium and the lobby was less than three metres in some areas. I said: "My goodness, how can we do this for a hotel lobby?" I asked the engineering team to help me achieve what I wanted. When they told me

I couldn't do this or that – it was 10.30 at night – instead of giving up, I got up and poured everyone a cup of coffee. Ultimately we got an extra 30cm so we got there in the end. When you follow standard practice, you get standard results. We try to go for extraordinary.

What was in your mind when you set up your own studio in Long Beach, California?

As a studio, we are driven by the end user. Early in my career, I was a bit cocky, like most designers, but I've matured in that respect. I use the parallel with being a good chef. If you do fusion well, you better know what you're doing. You should know the classic ways of all the five mother sauces of French cooking. A part of my work is traditional and classical – once you know how to find balance and symmetry, then at some stage in your life, you feel that you're ready to break the rules. So setting up my studio in Long Beach, I was ready to take responsibility for that. I can do that.

A key feature of your work is in allowing each project to develop a unique personality. What is the process you employ to arrive at this realisation?

Design solutions are based on the end user and revolve around the length of stay. I go with a thematic approach for shorter durations, to transport the user. At hotels, rooms and public areas where usage is across a few days, there is a sense of theatre. So we look to infuse drama that envelop you in the lap of luxury. Just like a fashion product – like buying a Hermes bag – you are buying into the lifestyle of Aman, Four Seasons or The Ritz-Carlton.

Doing residential projects – whether it's a high-rise, multiple towers or a single residence – the approach is different. These are personal spaces and we aim to deliver an enduring experience; which is why we practise architecture, landscape and lighting disciplines. Our understanding has been developed from years of being frustrated sometimes with external teams as it is important for us understand how the people in these homes lived.



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The success of the Gramercy Hong Kong project arrived partially by accident. During the 2008 financial crisis, I was working in California as many architectural and design firms were going belly-up. We hit the reset button – and working on Gramercy – we knew we couldn’t make everyone happy all the time. I asked the developer who the buyer was. And we looked into that – identified that would-be buyers were young professionals returning to Hong Kong. The other big market was investors. So we figured that if a buyer sees that your project is ready to move in with their bags, then you would be ahead of other developers offering basic products. Looking at their lifestyle, and knowing it would not appeal to families with children, I said let’s not do two bathrooms but one master bathroom that doubles as a powder room. So the developer ends up saving on building two bathrooms as well. That project was so successful that they sold 130 units or so in a day.

In another instance, when we started on The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto, the Japanese were wary of a foreigner working in the Florence of Japan. Kyoto is their centre of art, history and literature. They were very mindful of us coming in to interpret that. For us, it was creating something that felt like it belonged in Kyoto. We settled on the idea of *machiya* – the traditional wooden townhouses and the era that straddled their samurai past and modern history. I had to

come up with words to remind me to be on track by asking, “Does it capture Kyoto?” and that word was ‘mysteriousness’. That’s why the staircase at the hotel flows naturally like a piece of origami that disappears into the floor. We worked on it for months, and finally we found out how to do it with the structural engineers – by cantilevering out the side column – and it looks almost like a piece of art with the moon rising out of it. So these are the things we do that make me think of myself as a movie director.

With Morpheus in Macao, it was different kind of hotel. For Lawrence Ho, I chose the hedonistic lifestyle – the people who come to Macao have done all the other world cities. I understand what their aspirations are – they are successful people who want to indulge. So I came up with this concept – a subtle feeling of being on a superyacht. That blends very well with Zaha Hadid’s architecture of the building. If you can choose any angle from 360 degrees, why choose 90 degrees? So I did that for Morpheus, and I went to Lawrence and said that the hotel is looking great but none of the furniture fits. And I told him that we could manufacture the hotel’s furniture – 11,000 pieces in all. So I worked according to his budget and delivered on time and on budget. I love those challenges.

For The Landmark Mandarin Oriental, we were converting an office tower into a hotel – that was quite a challenge. I discovered an idea of building the bathroom all the way to the window. By moving the bathroom closer to the window and natural light – we delivered a unique experience for guests who experienced sensations of being suspended almost over the city’s skyscrapers.

The first thing you do in the morning?

Nothing too unusual. I check my phone to see what’s happening. We live these lives where we can’t be separated from our devices.

What do you do that’s still analogue?

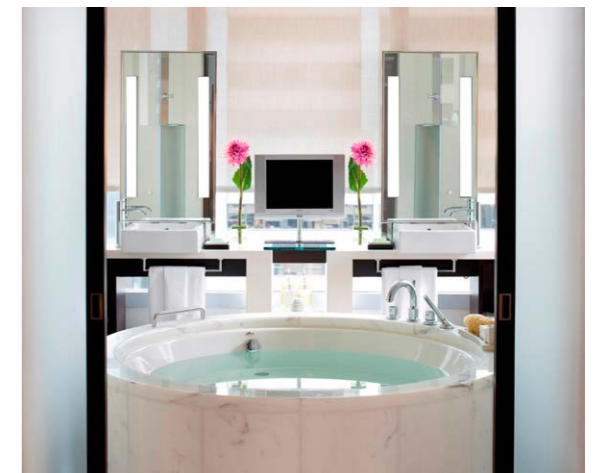
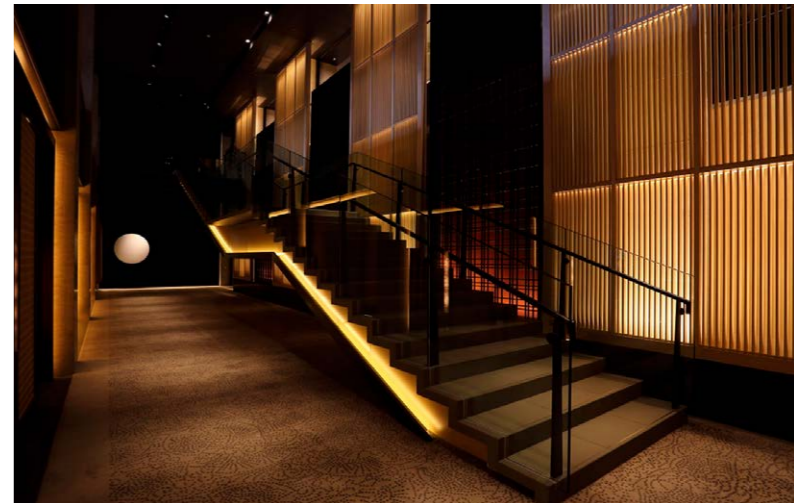
I still sketch by hand and I love it. There’s no replacement for that with all the digital technology. Otherwise, all our work product is digital – except my sketching.

What item in your wardrobe do you wear most often?

I’ve spent the last two and a half years in Hong Kong due to the border restrictions – I think I’m still stylish now but in a relaxed way. There’s one item in my wardrobe that I love; my Loro Piana loafers. They’re the most comfortable shoes I’ve ever had. You can slip them on and off and they are incredible in holding their shape.

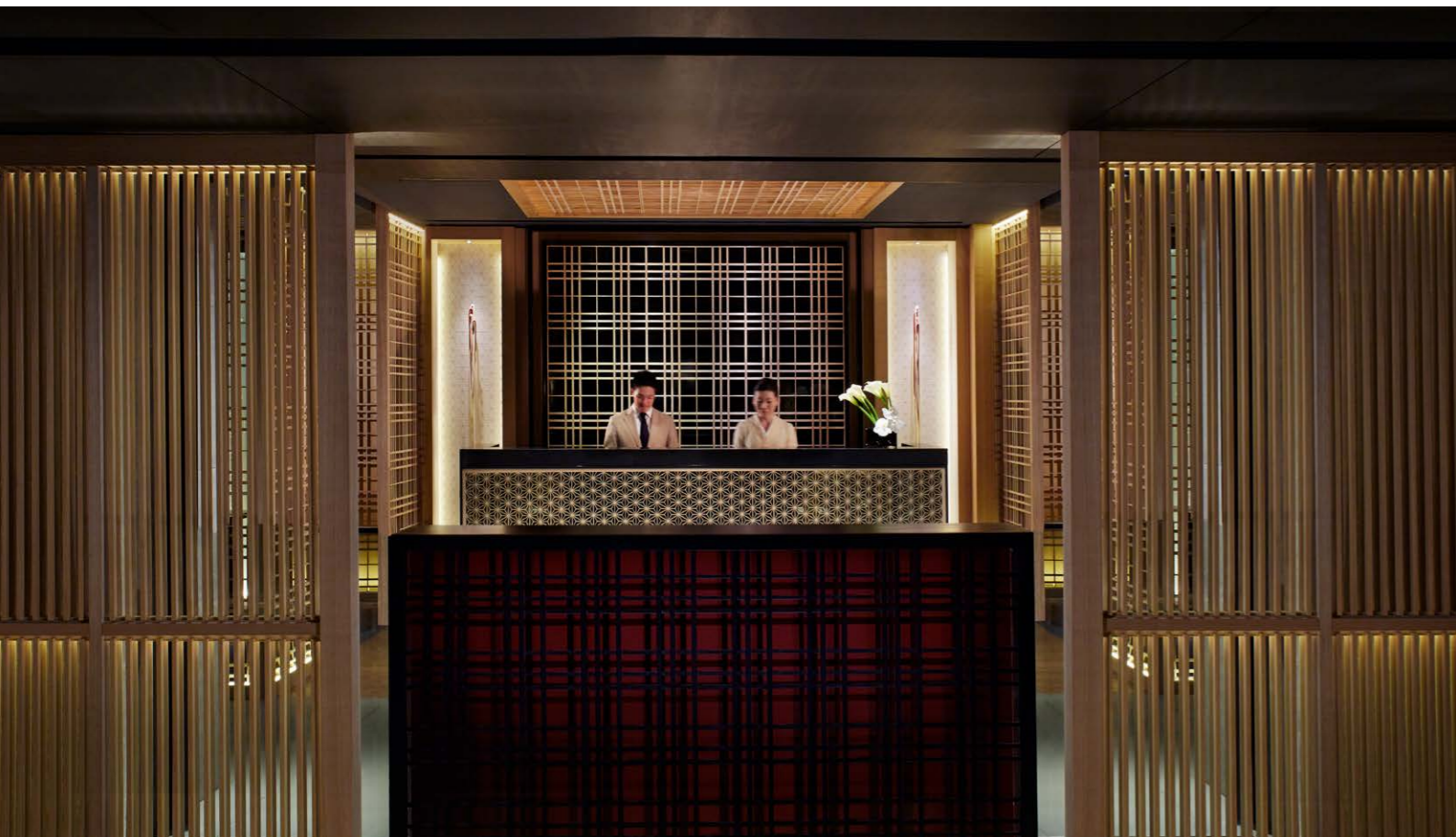
What do you most crave at the end of the day?

At the end of the day, what I crave is a moment of peace and tranquillity and time with family. COVID has maybe been a wake-up call for a lot of people who are driven by their success and making money. You forget the people in your life, the time together – that’s something not to lose sight of.



Top, center and facing page: the interiors of The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto pay homage to the traditions of Japan, with patterned motifs created by local artisans as well as the incorporation of Zen rock gardens and water features.

Above: the Remedios Studio’s design of The Landmark Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong’s suite bathrooms reflects the hotel’s positioning as an exclusive, luxury retreat in the heart of the city’s business and fashion district.





Top: Morpheus Macao's interior design concept was driven by the building's unique architecture and inspired by superyachts.

Above: located close to the Mid-levels escalator and within walking distance of Hong Kong's prime shopping, entertainment, cultural and financial centre, Gramercy was designed to be an oasis amid the hustle and bustle of the city.

How do you find calm?

I've always been an avid sailor. In my younger days, I was doing sailboat racing. Now it's about powerboats, it's a lot easier. I'm a certified yachtmaster – sailing gives me that peace and tranquillity – it's a connection with nature and I find the sea calming.

The most recent thing you added to your collection?

In terms of work, we have a sister company called Reimagine where we create products such as the furniture for Morpheus. From a personal side, I'm putting together a theatre and sound system for my new home.

What is the most exotic location you've visited?

I've been to a lot of exotic places, such as going to the middle of nowhere on horseback to survey the space (when I've never been on a horse before). Or a hacienda at some hillside town. I've always loved a sense of relaxed luxury in nature and more recently I've fallen in love with Queenstown in New Zealand. It sits in the middle of alpine forests and lakes and is incredibly beautiful. It checks a lot of my boxes. That's the kind of exotic I like – pampered exotic.

What does success look like to you?

I've come to redefine success in the past two years. For me now, it's the ability to do what you want, when you want to, on your own terms. When you achieve that, you've succeeded. **R**

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