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全新
中文
版

DAVID TANG
ON HIS FIRST BET
鄧永鏘 · 旗開得勝

KEVIN CHAU
THE GREAT INDEPENDENT
周國勳 · 獨行俠

WYMAN WONG
FUNNY MAN OF FASHION
黃偉文 · 架勢

BACCARAT
MAGAZINE

02

全新中文版
SMART CASHUAL
GREAT ESTATES
LOUNGE



THE WINNING LIFESTYLE



30



131



134



122

GREAT ESTATES

- 122** MODEL HOME | Colour by the River |
Green Living
- 126** SHANGHAI PROPERTY | The Ivy |
New Developments
- 128** HONG KONG PROPERTY | Knight on
Wyndham | Abergeldie | Monticello
- 130** HOLIDAY VILLAS | Soneva Giri
- 131** PROFILE | Kush Serviced Apartments
| A Cushy Life
- 134** CHEZ MOI | Lumen Kinoshita

A CUSHY LIFE



‘Dinesh and I are quite young and we feel that we understand what young people want. So we’re far ahead of the curve than a lot of developers who are in their 40s, 50s, 60s ...’

Alexander Bent and Dinesh Nihalchand – founding partners of Kush

The young men behind hip brand Kush are new to the property business, but it has not stopped them stamping their cool and edgy mark onto serviced apartments in this town. *Karen Ting* records their enthusiasm.

There is an easy rapport between 29-year-old Alexander Bent and 33-year-old Dinesh Nihalchand. The two founded luxury serviced apartment brand Kush last year, and this month launch their flagship apartment building in Hollywood Road. It will be the third Kush: the first opened at 255 Des Voeux Road West in July, closely followed by one at 111 High Street. What the young men have achieved in less than a year since purchasing the three buildings is no small task, especially since neither of their families are in property and they are newcomers to the field.

The Kush boys were born and raised in Hong Kong. Bent, the more laid-back of

the two, graduated from the United World College in Shatin before studying business and Mandarin (and yes, he speaks Cantonese, which comes in handy when dealing with contractors) in the UK. Nihalchand (Dino to his friends), a former banker who speaks with flair and conviction, attended Island School and studied business logistics at university in the US. The pair shares a like-minded vision and drive, and an entrepreneurial streak that led them to becoming their own bosses. “I always aspired to build something like my [late] father, but I never thought I could,” says Nihalchand. “I never thought that given the structure I had in place – you get a degree, you work for a big bank, you follow that line – that I would have the opportunity to find something on my own. I’m so happy that I’m able to fulfil that dream.”

Bent concurs. “I always wanted to start my own business and felt restless in my previous job. My parents are not entrepreneurs, but they started a school [the Hong Lok Yuen International School] many years ago, so maybe I got some of that drive from them.”

BACCARAT: How did you two meet?

ALEXANDER BENT: We met at a dinner in 2005. Dino asked me what I was doing and when I told him I was buying and selling small units he said he would like to come out with me to check out apartments. The next day we bought an apartment – we had known each other less than 24 hours!

DINESH NIHALCHAND: I was celebrating my 31st birthday that next week and I wanted a new direction in life.

How did you get into the property market?

AB: I bought a place just after Sars and I was going to live in it, but I didn't like my job, so I sold it and used the money to buy two smaller places. That was around the time I met Dinesh.

DN: After we bought several places, we were getting to know each other. There was no company set up. We were borrowing our own for investment purposes. We tried to test the rental market and rented two places. When we did that, our financial model became more crystallised, and it struck us that we should do something on a larger scale.

How did the Kush concept come about?

AB: The concept of serviced apartments isn't that original; the difference is that Dinesh and I are quite young and we feel that we understand what young people want. So we're far ahead of the curve than a lot of developers who are in their 40s, 50s, 60s. Our target market is 23 to 40 years old. We wanted to create something edgier than some of the serviced apartment models out there; also something that can stand the

test of international scrutiny. Because if you look at a lot of the serviced apartments in Hong Kong, if you took them from here to US or England I don't think the brand would survive because the competition is a lot fiercer abroad.

DN: We recognised that whatever there was at the time we came up with the idea – the existing competition – were leaders because they were the only ones in town. In the past year, the market has come up with a lot more fragmented players, a lot of smaller places. We have tried to differentiate ourselves through style-driven elements, branding and service to become the best in our class.

Why did you name it Kush?

AB: In Sanskrit it means happy and in English cushy means comfortable, so it has a comfortable feeling to it.

DN: We came up with the name in about February last year. We were having a few beers on his terrace [laughs].

Was it difficult to secure funding?

DN: The funding took care of itself once we presented the business model to an investor. We did not go on a campaign because I wasn't sure when I would leave my job and Alex wasn't sure if he would do it full-time. So with our own personal experience of investing, it took one conversation with one investor and we decided to start with 100 serviced apartment units before we went out on a pursuit to buy the buildings.

How did you identify the buildings?

DN: All three buildings were acquired in the last quarter of 2006. We came to Sai Ying Poon a lot to get a flavour of the area . . . but it was less about property than

creating a brand, marketing and delivering an operational platform that tenants can enjoy. That's really the business.

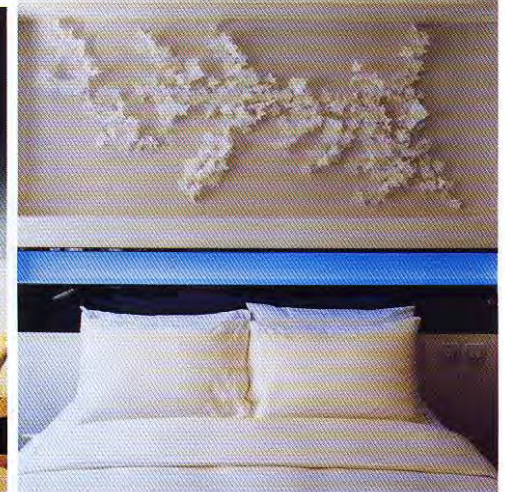
What makes Kush special among its competitors?

AB: It comes down to living a very hip and edgy life within the urban environment. For me, that's what Kush is.

DN: Kush is an experience that you won't find in other serviced apartments. It's about comfort and lifestyle – this alleviated experience that Kush brings to the table is the essence of the brand.

What are your plans for the future?

AB: The most valuable thing to us is the brand. In the long run we want to become a management company and manage other buildings. We will also look at expansion in other countries including India and China.



KUSH

Owner: A wholly-owned trademark of Kush Concepts Ltd

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Kush serviced apartments – something edgier than the competition



111

Opened: August 2007

Location: 111 High Street

Property type: Twelve floors of one-bedroom apartments and 10 floors of two-bedroom apartments. There are two commercial loft spaces on the first and second floor. All 22 units measure 750 square feet

Rental: From \$35,000 per month



Surrounded by schools, a church and residential buildings in a quiet street, 111 High Street is a peaceful enclave within a busy district filled with local colour. Its one and two-bedroom layouts are ideal for those needing a longer stay period, or young couples and families. "Because of the spacing and the layout, I prefer 111 High Street," says Nihalchand. "I can see myself living here because I grew up in the area."



222

Opening: Mid-October 2007

Location: 222 Hollywood Road

Property type: 48 650-square-foot apartments spanning 24 floors with either stark black or sultry brown interiors

Rental: From \$30,000 a month

255

Opened: July 2007

Location: 255 Des Voeux Road West

Property type: 10 units over five floors – four unfurnished apartments of 1,000 square feet and six fully furnished flats of 550 square feet

Rental: From \$22,500 per month

Renovated from a traditional five-storey walk-up, the facade of 255 sets a stylish tone for the interior while retaining the integrity and structure of an old building. The staircase is fitted with an automated lighting system and each floor level is indicated in traditional Chinese characters – a thoughtful detail reflecting the owners' respect for the building's heritage. The units have a dark colour scheme, with black, dark brown and beige as the main tones. Highlights include a hidden kitchenette with Smeg kitchen appliances and a marble counter top that can be used as a dining table or a bar.

With a golf driving range and putting green on its roof terrace, 255 reflects the Kush mantra of "living hip, being social and staying active". It is also co-founder Bent's top choice: "From the design perspective I love 255. It's very much for a guy who's young and wants a good time – it's funky and cool."



Like all Kush apartments, the units in this building are stylishly furnished with modern conveniences including Bang & Olufsen phones, a Bose DVD entertainment system, 42-inch plasma television set and iPod dock. Thoughtful details such as a towel warmer, mood lighting and a washing machine and dryer make each of the 48 units a home away from home. "It's going to be very unique from the design perspective," says Bent. "We are going to take the edginess in 255 and expand on it – the tones, materials and colours are slightly edgier. There is an open-glass shower, so guests can watch their partner taking a shower," he continues excitedly before concluding: "It's very much about an urban lifestyle and a hipness that represent Kush."

■ To incorporate the lifestyle aspect of the brand, Bent and Nihalchand have launched the Kush Envy card providing a host of dining and entertainment choices for guests. Highlights include access to Volar and Halo, two of the hottest spots in town, the Intercontinental hotel's spa and, for those seeking a thrill, Sideways Driving Club. "All of these partners were established through our personal relationships and are places where we would like to go," says Nihalchand. "We pick the ones that emulate our brand."