



# Rising to Stardom with Star Residences

ALAN KOH, THE AGE OF LUXURY LIVING SHARES  
HIS JOURNEY OF GREAT SUCCESS.

BY ANU VENUGOPAL

**For Alpine Return's Chief Operating Officer Alan Koh, life is a celebration of finer details.**

A charismatic personality with a beaming smile, his entrepreneurial journey and rise to the top reads like a well-crafted script – a life peppered with challenges, hardships, humour, perseverance and endurance. These elements and his positive, pioneering and persevering qualities have led him to the successful and glamorous lifestyle he leads today.

Growing up in the rustic Chua Chu Kang village in suburban Singapore, Koh was an ordinary boy who helped out with endless chores at home but always managed to find time climbing durian trees and shaking mango trees to get fruits. Koh spent much of his time observing his father who had his own coffee shop and a plastic factory – a father's spirit of entrepreneurship inspiring the son to create his own success later in his life.

After completing his National Service duty at age 20, Koh held dreams of pursuing tertiary education in the United States close to his heart. However, he faced his first major hurdle – as his father was against him “going so far away”. With the idea of making his dreams a reality, Koh had to seek his own funds for his studies in the island of Hawaii.

“My education was partially self-funded. My mom subsidised me in my first year while my sister in London chipped in to fund my entire studies. Not wanting to rely completely on my sister, I also took on part-time jobs to fund myself in order to complete my studies,” he recalled.

Not one to allow challenges get the better of him, Koh took everything in stride. He worked in the United States and pursued a Masters in Workmanship. He received a Degree in Finance but decided to carry on with an MBA in Finance, armed with the belief that it would help him in his career.

Fate had other plans in store for Koh. When he returned to Singapore, he found it difficult to get a job in the finance industry because he lacked the finance experience. He decided to try a different route by writing in to property developers and other marketing firms dealing with sub-consumer products, believing that his short term experience in the US in property management and leasing would prove beneficial to them. However, he was 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. I knew it wasn't the end of the world, and whatever that comes along would just be challenges and not obstacles. This positive thinking is something that I practiced then and I continue to practice today,” said Koh, at the contemporary styled Star Residences showroom in Jalan Yap Kwan Seng.

Thanks to his sheer determination and never give up attitude, Koh who was born in the year of the Ox and is also a Taurus, stood strong in his perseverance in attaining his dreams – a respectable job in his home country.

His efforts were not in vain. Koh joined consultant firm Jones Lang Wootton Singapore as a Property Manager, responsible for the property management of the Orchard Road Shopping Centre in the Lion City. It was also there where he had initial brushes with celebrities, meeting local Singaporean Chinese drama personalities and having “yum cha” sessions together.



#### Creating Winds Of Change

A man with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, he came across a magazine one day, with The Banyan Tree Hotel & Resorts Chairman Ho Kwon Ping on its cover.

"I picked up the article and read about him and how he was so particular and passionate about what he does. He was very detailed in his explanation of how he turned around the project from a useless tin mine to a healthy, profitable resort," Koh said.

The article made a lasting impression on him and prompted him to want to work for Ho. In the span of year, the young Koh wrote unsolicited letters to Ho every few months, requesting to grant him an interview. His continued efforts finally got the attention of the Chairman who granted him an interview and hired him. Ho revealed that the reason he hired Koh was that he knocked on the door so hard that he didn't have any other choice but to open the door for him. The resilience shown by Koh in the early years of his career gave him a competitive edge, a quality he holds to when he faces challenges even now.

Starry-eyed and passionate about the out-of-the-box company and his unconventional mentor, Koh was responsible for the marketing of branded resorts. From 1994 to 1997, he oversaw the photo shoots for the resort, handled layout details of the brochure

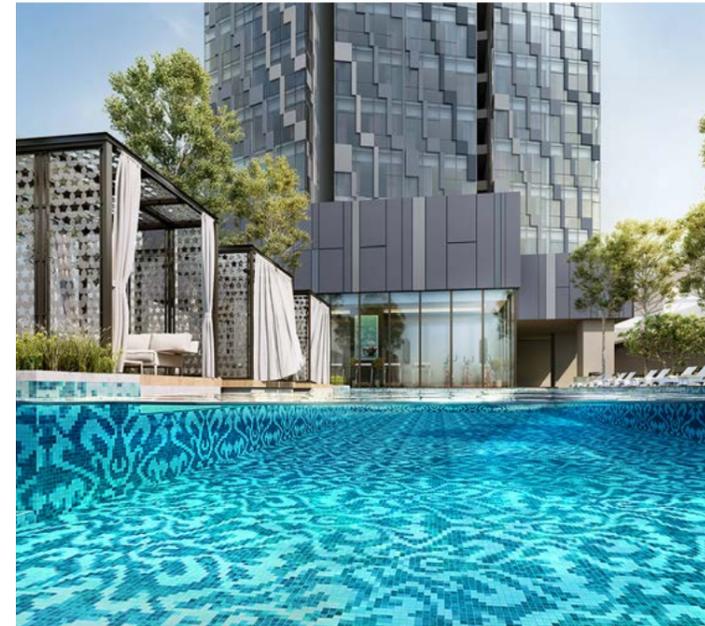
and supervised the photographer on backdrop settings. It was also there when he understood and appreciated the finer details of a building.

"Ho was my inspiration and also my mentor. I was inspired by him, his personality, passion and charisma. He was not just the head of the company but also the brand. Like the late Lee Kuan Yew, when he speaks, people want to listen, and that is something I could connect with," revealed Koh.

It was also at Banyan Tree, when he learnt the importance of being innovative and creative, and using these elements to stand out from others in the market. He also picked up an eye for detail; a quality that would prove to be extremely useful in future projects including Star Residences.

#### Crossing Borders, Exploring New Frontiers

Whether by accident or pure coincidence, his foray into Malaysian shores started long time ago before joining Alpine Return as COO of Star Residences. Back then, he was Senior Vice President at CapitaLand Limited, a government linked company (GLC) that had shares in two projects in Malaysia – Citibank and MRCB – The KL Sentral Project. He was sitting on the Board of Directors when he was tasked to turn around Suasana Sentral condominium, which owed RM20 million to the contractor.



"Together with the team I managed to turn around its cash flow to become positive and profitable after that. It was my first taste of the Malaysian property market and got to know more about it. My real involvement came about when I was asked to do the second phase of Suasana Sentral, Suasana Sentral Loft, which was also inspired by my experience at Banyan Tree," said Koh, who later took on the role of Senior Vice President at Pacific Star Group, a real estate fund management company.

After his encounter with the real estate development in Malaysia, the ever enterprising Koh joined SP Setia, in the well-known KL Eco City project. There he lent his expertise in investment and real estate as Head Group Investment and Development, for the RM 6 Billion integrated development comprising of boutique offices, grade-A offices, retail, hotels, and luxury apartments.

#### A Star Is Born

Just as King Midas is known for his golden touch, Koh is recognised as the one who has the ability to turn developments into golden ventures. He continues to create history by raising the benchmark of luxury living and shopping, now in the heart of Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle. As his projects have a knack of attracting capital appreciation, one can't help but wonder if his success in the industry is written in the stars.

His latest venture and treasured project is the Star Development - a mixed-use development comprising Star Residences, a development by Alpine Return Sdn Bhd. Soon to be a 57-storey tower and two 58-storey towers, the development's most-exciting phase is the Ascott Star KLCC, with 471 units in 58-storeys. Star Boulevard consisting five blocks of six-storey units for retail, food and beverage as well as lifestyle entertainment outlets.

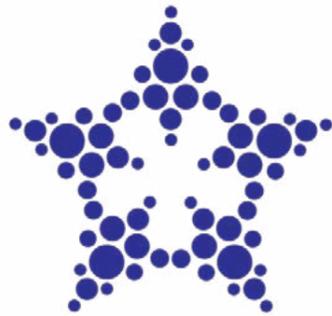
His journey with Alpine Return started in 2007, although the land at Jalan Mayang was acquired seven years earlier. During that time, CapitaLand Limited, the company he previously worked for owned shares in the joint venture. Joining forces with UM Land and Bolton (now Symphony Life), CapitaLand sold its share to the other two companies, and Alpine Return consists of the recently-formed partnership today. 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 the joint venture company.

"When I first came in, the development was called Jalan Mayang, and there was no other identity.

I was tasked to look at challenges of doing away with the proposed mechanical car parks, which I managed to do, while separate the building so that all units would have a good view of the Kuala Lumpur City Centre," explained Koh.

Armed with a keen interest in hotels and resort since his student days in Hawaii and his experiences at Banyan Tree close at hand, Koh enhanced his vision and conducted research on other W hotels in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Beijing, Taiwan and Bangkok. Based on the research, he then created a 40-page design concept for the development – and the future of Star Residences was sealed.

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STAR  
RESIDENCES

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“The inspiration for the birth of Star Residences came from W hotel in Taiwan when I was invited to have lunch by a friend at one of its Chinese restaurants. That was my first time stepping into a W hotel, I immediately fell in love with the concept. I was inspired by the bold colours, sexiness, artistic and flamboyance of the hotel,” admitted Koh.

Koh chose the name Star because it was easy to pronounce, understood and has international appeal. Absorbing ideas and concepts during his travels, he knew that he wanted a project that is not an ordinary apartment but one that is distinguishable and have an element of sex appeal. A talented artist on his own right, Koh created the development's logo, a special star that also includes a love star.

“The star logo itself carries a lot of meaning. In order to have all these elements of good luck and good Feng Shui; I developed a star logo using 65 circles with 5 sides having 13 circles on each side. What came out was a lucky clover in the middle that forms the heart of star. The special star also has a five-sided clover leaf, which represents good luck and prosperity. I give the dots or circles bold colours to give its sexy and youthful look. The final result is a super lucky and prosperous Star that has elements of sexiness, boldness, and flamboyance,” added Koh.

“The star (sing) emblem, made of gold finishing reflects elements of huangching (gold) denotes good FengShui. It signifies that buyers are buying into a gold development and is all linked backed to the star, radiating luck, success and opulence.”

The star element is incorporated in the concept and details of the development and is reflected in the ambience, environment and warmth of the upcoming 5 Star luxury condominiums.

Star residents will be able to take advantage of the developments class, 100,000sf contemporary facilities, including an Olympic length swimming pool, KTV room, Sky Park, with the added bonus of gorgeous views of the world renowned PETRONAS Twin Towers.

While there are no requirements for green building features for the property, Alpine Return's grand project has several features in place -including rainwater harvesting, solar panels for common lighting and most impressively, recycling air condition heat that will empower water heater in common areas. Koh's philosophy of working with nature will also be reflected in the creatively designed development, with two large trees being preserved and relocated once the development is completed.

The star development will also feature a huge artistic mosaic feature wall at all the 3 Towers of the Sky Park, measuring 20 metres wide and 20 metres high. This adds an artistic flare to the development.

#### Star Tributes

Koh's artistic and creative talents will also be demonstrated in the development's 6-storey high podium facade. In a six months project of love, Koh himself designed and created a feature for its podium, taking into account the right material used for stars, its movement, weight and shine. Once ready, visitors to the site will be able to see thousands of stars wrapped around the building shimmering on a windy day, truly a sight to behold. The standout concept will be a meaningful one, especially for those who visit the boulevard and walk through another of Koh's extraordinary idea – the Star Walk Of Fame.

“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 Aquaria KLCC, Malaysia lacks tourist landmarks especially in the city so there aren't any tourist spots for





visitors to visit so I came up with 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 said.

The first celebrity featured on Malaysia's own Star Walk of Fame is none other than our own Jimmy Choo, illustrious shoe designer and international celebrity. Choo's friendship with Koh began as an introduction by a common friend at his previous office at KL Eco City at The Gardens Mall. The two shared similar interests and their friendship blossomed.

"The Datuk Jimmy Choo equation came about as he is someone I have chemistry with, having talked at length about the interior design when I first met him eight years ago. He just asked me "Is it size eight? I'm going to make you a pair of shoes," recalls the beaming Koh on the delightful incident.

Upon joining Alpine Return, Koh invited Choo to view the development and the shoe-designer extraordinaire took a liking to the creative STAR brand. He was happy to be associated with the brand and agreed to be its Brand Ambassador. Choo is the first celebrity to endorse and lend his hand imprint to the Star Walk of Fame.

"I have always admired Datuk Jimmy Choo as being the pride of Malaysia. He is not just creative, but is able to brand himself into what he is today," Koh revealed further.

Koh shares that by the end of the year, a few international celebrities will also have joined in this line-up. In all, he hopes to have 36 world-renowned celebrities leave behind their hand imprints on the glamorous walkway which residents and the public alike can enjoy visiting and taking pictures. Once the development is completed, the Star Walk of Fame will feature three to four celebrities every year, and the company plans to have numerous stars from different arenas to fill the spaces.

Koh has ambitious plans of creating a one-stop destination for tourists, who will be able to explore the star boulevard, be star-struck by the Star Walk of Fame and enjoy themselves at the F&B outlets. The COO believes this will not only

provide Public Relations and Branding mileage for Star Development but also for Malaysia as a tourist destination.

"We have also talked to the Kuala Lumpur City Hall about land setback. In every development there is always a land setback of 6 metres. DBKL gave most of it back to us because they believe this will create something for Malaysia, a must place to visit apart from KLCC and Twin Towers in the city," said Koh.

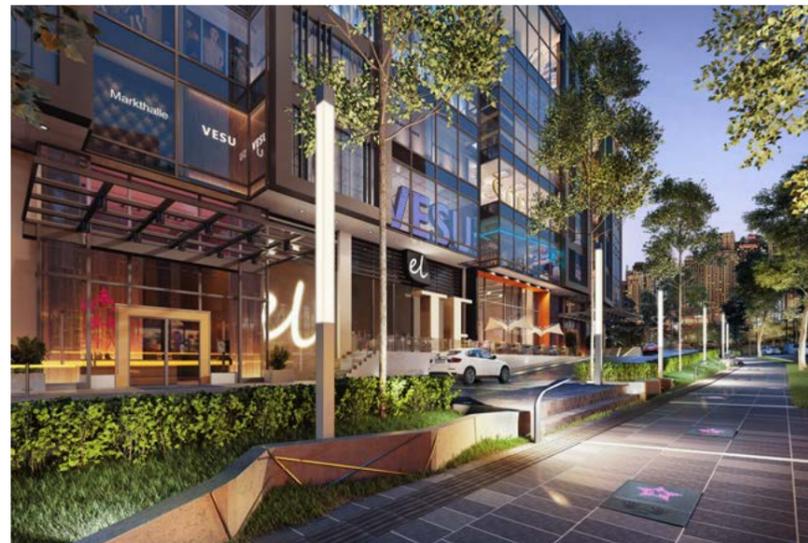
The star appeal of this project is evident in the number of units sold. Already, Tower 1's 557 units that was launched in November 2013 is already completely sold out while the take-up rate for Tower 2's 482 units that was launched last year recorded over 90 percent sales. The recently launched Tower 3 - witnessed a tie-up with international serviced residence operator The Ascott Limited being engaged to manage the project. Slated to be completed by 2021, the Ascott Star KLCC has its share of admirers, and is experiencing brisk sales - with the strength of the Ascott brand creating credibility and assurance of quality.

Positioned as a developer of quality residential and commercial properties, Alpine Return's link with The Ascott Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Singapore's CapitaLand Limited has grown to be one of the leading international serviced residences owner-operators. Engaging The Ascott was a natural choice for Koh as it pioneered Asia Pacific's first international-class serviced residences since the opening of The Ascott Singapore in 1984.

The first phase to be completed will be the retail sector, scheduled to be completed in Quarter 3 this year. Koh and his team are currently sourcing for premium tenants with quality first-rate brands as the design concept is looking at providing a platform for future Michelin star restaurant, with the aim of putting Malaysia's finest chefs on the culinary map of the world.

"When we first launched, the market was experiencing a downturn, so our target was 50 percent locals and 50 percent international. We went into new markets like China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea. We also employed Samsung C&T Engineering & Construction Group as the contractor for Star Residences to give 5 Star quality for the development.

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*“We are not copying but rather reinventing the design and ideas. Using a little bit of concept from here and inspiration there, I put it all together. Hopefully this will sell and so far it has been going successfully”*

Samsung is known as a developer in Korea 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, formerly known as KL118 or Warisan Merdeka, which will be Malaysia's tallest building,” said Koh.

This year Alpine Returns focus on launching the glitzy project overseas including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and China. The move is advantageous for the developer as Hong Kong's property prices are up the roof and many are looking at buying a reasonably priced home outside the bustling city. Similarly tensions between the vastly different South and North Korea have raised the level of Korean property interest to invest overseas.

Many investors in Korea want to diversify their portfolio to other Asian country. In South East Asia, Malaysia is still the cheapest in terms of value per square foot,” said Koh.

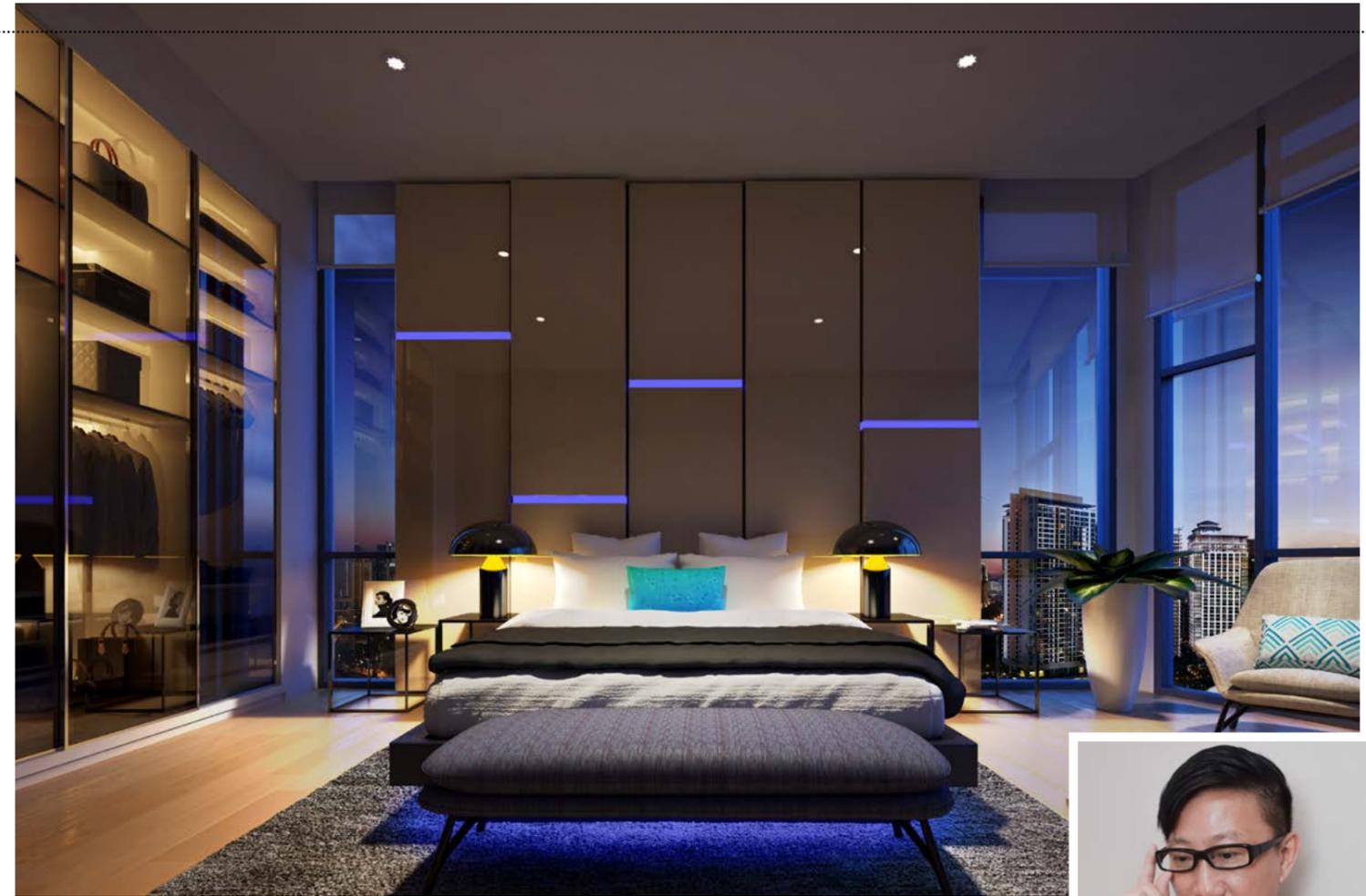
**The Malaysian Property Market**

Despite popular opinion that the property market is weakening, Koh believes the economy will continue to improve. The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is hovering around 5 percent and the ringgit has stabilised lately.

“The export market is revving up so I think that overall, Malaysia has stabilised unlike a year ago when the currency dropped a lot. I think the currency has improved quite a bit now so the property market should remain stable. With the uptrend, I think that next year until 2020 onwards will see the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) link being completed. Malaysia is also building the High Speed Rail (HSR) train from Singapore to Malaysia which will augur well for the country to attract more tourists from Singapore over here,” he added.

With the ringgit strengthening recently, Koh feels the market will continue, with a possibility of an uptrend in two years, once the MRT infrastructure is done and for Star Residences it is bound to bring better value for property owners. He also lauds the government's plan to freeze the development of a millionringgitproperties in the country, which is implemented on a case to case basis.

“There are projects that are not feasible but they go ahead anyway and this adds supply to the market. When a project cannot carry through in terms of sales and cash flow, it becomes an abandoned building and it is no good for the city. However, the market as it is now is still alright, I don't see signs of projects going bust so far, the other projects I know off are moving, said the hands-on Koh.



**Branding, A Marriage of Creativity and Innovation**

Koh is a strong believer that branding will deliver great success to the brand and business and with branding, Koh has been able to overcome challenges in positioning Star Residences as a must have luxury condominium amongst house and property owners. This is no easy feat as the entire KLCC area is filled with other projects coming up, due to its sought after location.

Throughout the entire process, Koh's branding strategies has differentiated Star Residences from the rest of the development with its creative and innovative concepts, unique styles, excellent qualities and workmanship which meet the needs of demanding and fastidious property owners.

Innovation is the secret to success and Koh takes a leaf of Steve Job's quote that Apple is nothing new but a borrowed idea from other (products) which was further re-invented. To this, he sees wisdom in reinventing the wheel of excellent offerings already in existence and elevating the concept to revolutionary results.

“We are not copying but rather reinventing the design and ideas. Using a little bit of concept from here and inspiration there, I put it all together. Hopefully this will sell and so far it has been going successfully,” said Koh.

**The Inspiring Visionary Master Developer**

Like every task or project undertaken, the visionary Koh experienced his share of challenges as he creates the Star brand to its peak.

“Before any project that takes place, it is only a blank piece of paper. The challenge is how to make it into a beautiful building, a landscape that sells, and a concept that sells. At the end of the day, this equals to value creation, the appreciation of a property over time, something that all investors want after purchasing a property,” said Koh.

Koh believes that to be successful one needs to think differently, not particularly outside the box but creativity is the most important factor, and the ability to reinvent, not just a product or service but also a person.

“Be inspired keep an open eye when you're travelling around the world. Take photos about things you can learn from. Once you have knowledge, it is also important to share these views with others, because there is a lot you can learn from the world. I may not be able to teach young entrepreneurs how to draw or be creative, but I'm happy to share my knowledge with the younger generation,” added Koh, who draws and goes for runs over the weekends to get away from his busy and productive lifestyle.

Koh's knack of attracting capital appreciation for the projects that he undertakes makes him well respected in the industry and it has been said that his sterling reputation precedes him. But what is most impressive of this man is his passion and commitment to his work that makes him stand out like a star. Indeed, the Star Residences has the right star behind its success.

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