

QUINTESSENTIALLY ASIA UNIQUE

ACCESSING THE INACCESSIBLE • WINTER 2011

ISSUE 2 • WINTER 2011

QUINTESSENTIALLY ASIA

QUINTESSENTIALLY ASIA
TIA LLY U N I Q U E
INSIDER TREATS
• GAILE LAIDAR
ALL • HOT HAVENS
COOL ART • MOVIE
MAGIC • CHOPPED
MEAT • BRAVE NEW
FASHION • COMING
OUT IN STYLE • ICE
COOL WATCHES •
BALLY TURN

ISSN 1742-3236



DEC
2011
261



ROBBIE ANTONIO HAS NEVER FIRED ANYONE ON TELEVISION, YET THE MAN WITH THE WORLD'S BIGGEST AND FASTEST-GROWING PORTFOLIO OF FASHION-BRANDED PROPERTY DEVELOPMENTS IS RAPIDLY BECOMING KNOWN AS THE DONALD TRUMP OF ASIA

THE APPREN

DEC
2011

263



Robbie Antonio is man with big plans. Some in the luxury business think of extending fashion brands to a new handbag or pair of shoes. He thinks in terms of skyscraper condominium buildings.

"Fashion sensibilities reflect your personality and taste. Likewise, your choice of a residence," he says in between bites of *xiao long bao* at Lung King Heen, Hong Kong's Michelin three-star dim sum eatery. "I recognised this affinity between fashion and real estate early on, and I wanted to leverage my personal relationships to take advantage of the association."

And leverage he has. Antonio has been a friend of Donatella and Santo Versace for a decade. So Versace was the first company he approached when he decided that his next apartment building should be designed by a star from the fashion world.

"The Milano Residences (in Makati, Manila), is the first residential project in Asia to have its interior designed by Versace Home," he says. "It is also the fastest-selling Versace project in the world, with over 80% of its units sold since the formal opening of our showroom."

But it would be narrow-minded for Antonio to restrict his property portfolio to Versace's sexualised elegance, and he is anything but that. Hence, he recently announced he will soon break ground on a building with interior design by Missoni. And that's not all. His company, Century Properties, which was founded by his father, has hired Hollywood celebrity and fashion designer Paris Hilton to design the Beach Club at Azure Urban Resort, a landmark project he is building in the southern part of Manila.

"We chose Paris because of her exposure to travel and so many aspects of design, including fashion," says Antonio. "We found there was no other personality who better embodied the fashionable, upscale beachgoer."

The speed with which foreign and local investors snapped up units in the Milano Residences has surprised some, who thought Manila might not be ready for such a leap into the luxury market. For Antonio, the pace of the sales reflects the anticipated 5% rise in real-estate prices over the next year, combined with the country's recent rapid industrialisation and its status as an alternative to the region's traditional but saturated investment districts. The appeal of the Versace and Missoni apartments may also be due to their restrained elegance, which reflects Antonio's design philosophy. >>



“Luxury is not necessarily the opposite of necessity, nor is it defined by extravagance,” he says. “It is about possessing discriminating taste, having attention to detail, and looking for unparalleled quality. These values define what our luxury developments stand for – collaborations with brands that exude refinement, quality, and exclusivity.”

Antonio, his father and his two brothers, all of whom work for Century Properties, the family business that opened its doors in 1986, have also spread their wings to other markets, including New York, where their Centurion Building was designed by I. M. Pei, the Pritzker-prize-winning architect. It is Pei's only ground-up residential project. New York was also where Antonio met Ivanka Trump, Donald Trump's daughter. One thing led to another, or rather to the father; and before long Trump and Antonio were hatching plans to build the Philippines' tallest residential tower.

“Trump Tower Manila will serve as the most important condo in the entire country,” says Antonio. “I measure our success by the degree to which we transform the local real-estate industry, and the extent to which we place the Philippines on the investment map. Trump Tower Manila is a destination that will literally and figuratively tower over other residences. Its height alone will definitively change the Manila skyline.”

As a second-generation real-estate developer, Antonio is conscious of his family's legacy, yet he is not intimidated by the way his father did things in the past.

“I look at real estate from a slightly different angle than my father,” he says. “He looks at it as a need; I want to transform ‘needs’ into ‘wants’, so that a potential client who hears about a Century project will aspire to own it, and I would want them to feel like they must have a unit in that building.”

Donald Trump is a controversial figure. It looked like he might run for the US presidency in 2012, until he withdrew his name from consideration this year. Even so, he still makes political statements, describing President





DEC
2011
265

Obama in an October 19th 2011 interview as "...a total and complete disaster." Also, several of Trump's companies filed bankruptcy petitions a few years ago. However, his career dramatically revived with the launch of *The Apprentice*, an American TV programme in which contestants compete for a job with him. Every week, a potential employee is forced off the show when Trump tells him or her "You're Fired!". He was paid US\$3 million per episode for the show's last season. Antonio might have been expected to feel some misgivings about working with Trump, yet he claims he has found the experience "invigorating."

"If there was one word to describe Trump, it's 'tenacity'," he says. "It's evident from the moment he walks into a room, discusses a business deal or lapses into a personal conversation. Rather than intimidate, Donald inspires. At this level in real-estate development I have met many very successful people. Yet

I still regard him as a cut above the rest. He is extremely charming, very witty, and unbelievably astute."

Maybe Trump and Antonio have developed such a good rapport because the New York developer sees a chip off his own block in the man from Manila. The success of Antonio's projects to date makes it seem unlikely that he will ever hear those famous words of dismissal from "The Donald". In fact, he is more likely to hear Trump ask where they can work together next. China might be an obvious candidate. Maybe Antonio could build a Versace condo on The Bund?

"We get invited to lots of countries by local developers, due to our experience," he replies. "We deal with them on an opportunistic basis. If the right opportunity presents itself, we would look at it very closely."

Spoken like a true Trump. ☺