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*Carmen  
Chua*

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# Distinctly Carmen

DARLING OF THE PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY, **CARMEN CHUA** FOCUSES ON CREATING ENVIABLE LIFESTYLES WITH NICHE PROJECTS

**T**HE WORD MEDIOCRITY DOES NOT exist in Carmen Chua's vocabulary. Driven on challenge with only seven years in the property development industry, she has already attained feathers in her 'safety helmet' so to speak. Known for being "lifestyle builders that focus on niche unique projects", Carmen explains that the projects her company undertakes are synonymous with innovative luxury residential developments and high-end lifestyle living. With the goal of being a leader in setting new benchmarks for design and high-end lifestyle living comparable to that of international standards, their innovation paid off.

Her first venture in property as a luxury lifestyle 'builder', ONE KL was the first residential development to feature the innovative "94 Apartments, 95 Swimming Pools". It went on to receive 'Best Development' under CNBC's International Property Awards, in addition to the SIA Architectural Design Award. But what's amazing is that the 29-year-old and eldest of Tan Sri Chua Ma Yu and Puan Sri Sharon Chua's four children, proved her mettle, excelling in an industry fairly different from what she studied at university (she graduated with first class honours in economics from the London School of Economics). She says, "My father is my greatest teacher. He does not accept mediocrity and expects excellence from everyone. Of course this means hard work, determination and dedication. He's always told me 'There is no ambition without passion' and 'If you're going to do something, you have to do your best and be completely focused'. This is the main reason why we take on projects one at a time. We are completely hands on and completely focused on each project, paying the utmost attention to every single detail of every part of a project."

A graduate of the traditional British girls' boarding school, Benenden in Kent, UK, (where Princess Anne once studied), Carmen

says that she was already being groomed to take the investments path from a young age. "Ever since I was 16, I interned every summer at investment banks and research houses. Even at that age, my father had instilled in me the importance of fundamentals in any investment, and work at research houses reinforced this belief. He was adamant that all decisions made must be fundamentally sound, based on a solid foundation and on numbers. And that relates very much to the brick-and-mortar work I do today."

On completing her education, Carmen returned to Malaysia to work with her father in the investments arm of his company, CMY Capital Group. Although she was whisked off to the office the day she arrived back, she smiles in appreciation of her father's foresight and good intentions for her. While running a portfolio and making her own investments, an opportunity arose in the property arm of her father's organisation which led her to establish an impressive and reputable name for herself, in the property line.

Having received much acclaim with the exceptional outcome of the award-winning ONE KL project, Carmen shares about her next big venture – Malaysia's first six-star development, The St Regis Kuala Lumpur. "Our vision for ONE KL was to create a development that would completely revolutionise lifestyles, as well as the world of architecture and engineering, and ultimately raise the benchmark of Malaysian real estate to that of international standards. We have the same vision and aspiration for The St Regis Kuala Lumpur," she says, trying to hide her excitement over the development she deems as her "dream project".

She continues to talk about the construction of the St Regis Kuala Lumpur, just as a proud parent would of her child. "It will feature a

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KK CHAI FROM YIPIEYAYA STUDIO ■ WORDS BY MICHELE THESEIRA

PEOPLE  
Who's Who

LEADERS

## AT A GLANCE

### COMMON GROUND

"Look out for works by Warhol, Picasso and Botero at St Regis Kuala Lumpur," says Carmen who has a significant collection of Andy Warhol's works herself

### HOBBIES AND PAST TIMES

Architectural photography, collecting art, reading architecture magazines and following developments around the world



*“My father is my greatest teacher. He does not accept mediocrity and expects excellence from everyone”*

**SHARP AND SAVVY**

Carmen Chua thrives on challenges with unwavering dedication in all that she sets out to do

208-room six-star hotel with 160 branded residences for sale. The Residences at The St Regis Kuala Lumpur will be Malaysia's first luxury residence to offer full hotel services to its residents. This will be managed in line with the brand's unsurpassed reputation and heritage for excellence and bespoke service," informs Carmen of the new concept recently introduced to Asia. She equates this branded residence to a limited edition saying, "There are only 160 of these St Regis residences of which owners will have the entire hotel at their disposal!

"With a global name such as The St Regis, one is assured of the brand's promise and the fact that the residence and service levels will be comparable with those offered by the hotel brand. Owners will benefit from the high quality associated with the name, an assurance that's difficult to match in a non-branded residential environment. Access

to hotel services such as concierge, room service, housekeeping, F&B, business centres, fitness and spa treatments – all these add value and give rise to greater capital appreciation."

Thrilled by all the services that the hotel will be delivering to the St Regis Residences, Carmen tells of the thick design guide, a prerequisite given by the hotel operator regulating minimum standards expected of a St Regis. This called for strong emphasis on interior design with the highest quality of finishes and fittings, plus understanding the demands of connoisseurs of luxury – evoking excitement within the young lady boss. "That is the other thing; a luxury brand partnership such as this guarantees the kind of quality, expertise and tradition that savvy investors consider to be well worth the additional cost. The value is placed on the superb levels of service and attention to detail involved."

While the partnership with Starwood to develop The St Regis Kuala Lumpur shared synergies, along with Carmen's dedication to design, the St Regis Aficionado elements also seemed to coincide with many of Carmen's passions and interests – food and wine; fashion and design; art and literature; speed and sport; society and philanthropy; spa and relaxation. Besides, she adds, "Branded residences also provide a sense of security, in the knowledge that not only will the property be well maintained, but also give buyers peace of mind in terms of capital appreciation as well as rental yields." All this and more made the project additionally attractive and profusely challenging, captivating the all-the-more determined Carmen, who said that construction began in the last quarter of 2010, and will be completed before 2014.

An adept young lady who's perfectly at ease in the company of royals, heads of states, diplomats and dignitaries, corporate big-wigs and noted society figures – it seemed only apparent that at some point Carmen would cross paths with the St Regis brand, both nonpareil in their dynamics. With her keen eye for the tiniest of details, driven on challenge and a meticulous approach to all that she sets her mind to, who else better than Carmen to take on such a project? She says of the hotel, "It's not only renowned for its reputation of noble lineage but its dedication to delivering an unrivalled guest experience, that has been and still is synonymous with its acclaimed style and six-star hospitality for over a century."

While she currently has her mind, heart and soul completely engulfed in her dream project, she has no intentions on giving any clues whatsoever on where, what or with whom, she plans to sink her mind, heart and soul into, in the near future. But, whatever it is, no doubt it will be something of a paragon of distinction. ■

HAIR AND MAKE UP BY RAY FROM A CUT ABOVE; ATTIRE FROM VALENTINO; BELT FROM CHRISTOPHER ROSS