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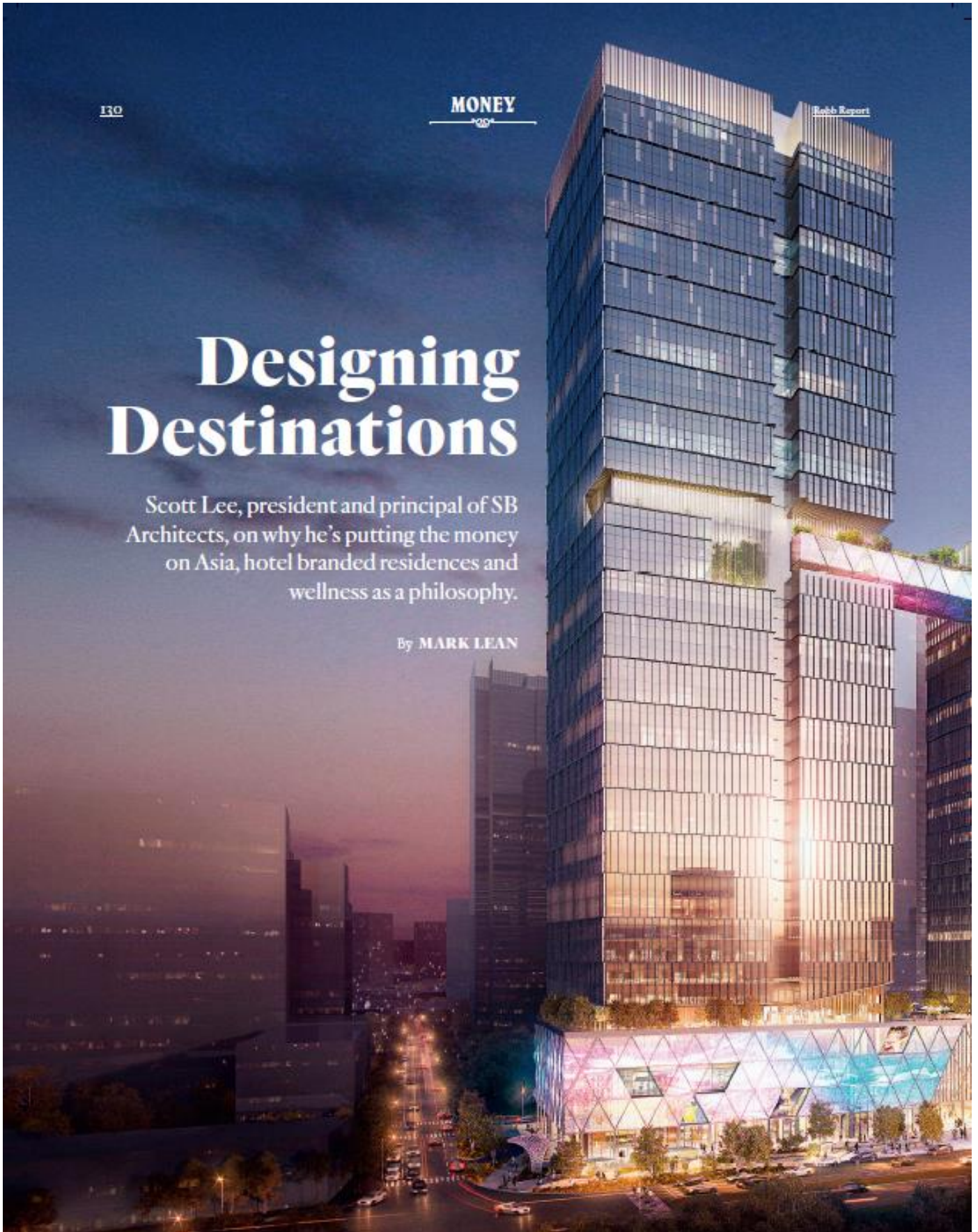


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Designing Destinations

Scott Lee, president and principal of SB Architects, on why he's putting the money on Asia, hotel branded residences and wellness as a philosophy.

By MARK LEAN





The San Francisco-headquartered firm SB Architects has a reach that spans hospitality, mixed use and residential projects. In Southeast Asia, the company is working on projects like a spectacular dual-tower development in Vietnam. Internationally, its impressive client list includes Park Hyatt, Rosewood, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, Edition Hotels, Four Seasons and The Ritz-Carlton. Over evening cocktails, Scott Lee, the firm's president and principal, talks creative strategies, the secrets to effective teamwork and hospitality trends to note.



What are the elements you put in place before starting a project? We immerse ourselves in the region and we discover the essence of a place. It's an interesting time for hospitality design. It's becoming a slow evolution that we should be inspired by the past, juxtaposing the new with the old. For instance, in historical buildings it's about restoring the building to gel with the period in which it was built rather than do something contemporary. Researching and trying to understand a place is essential; their design drivers, whether it's the topography, the geology,

Golden Pebble Winery in Dalian (above left) and Mission Hills Haikou.

“We immerse ourselves in the region and we discover the essence of a place.”

the culture, the built environment, the flora and fauna – these are the things we look towards for inspiration.

Can you tell us a bit about your work in Asia?

We have various projects in Vietnam. We have two 40-storey towers in Ho Chi Minh City. We have a handful of spa and



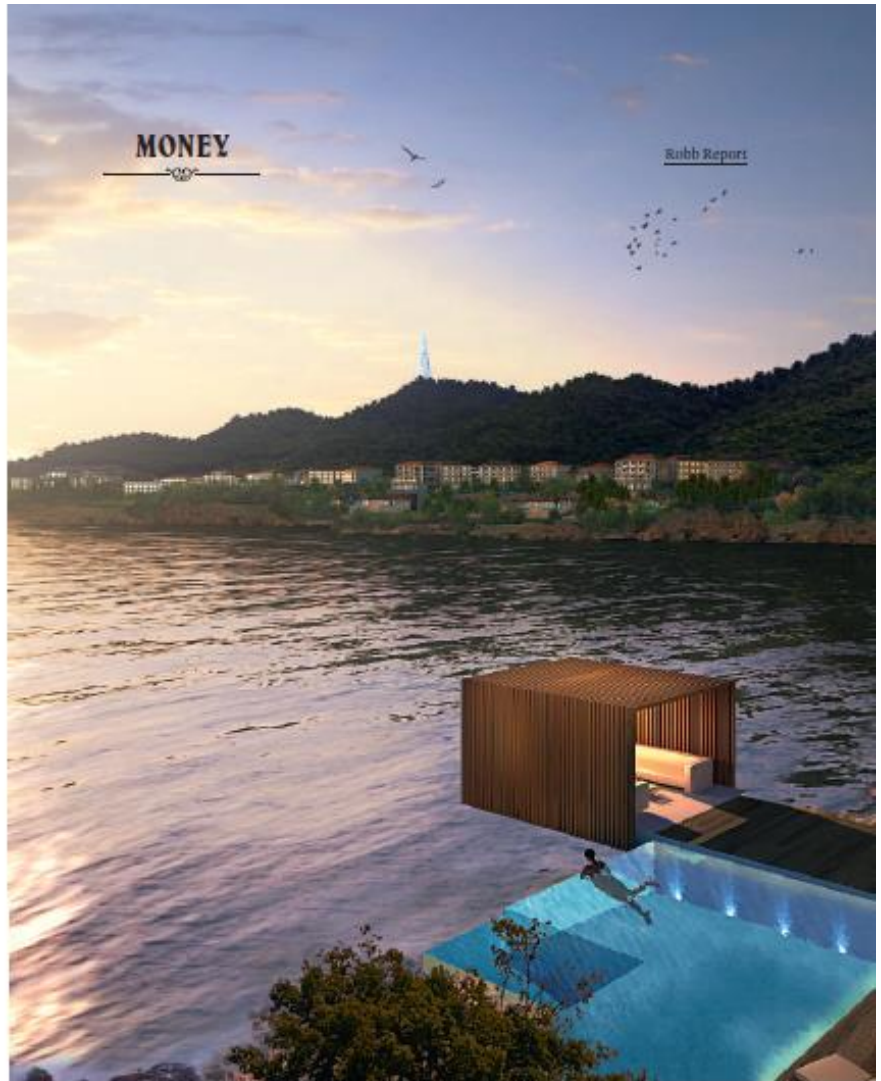
hospitality projects in Phu Quoc and Ho Chi Minh City. We have had a presence in China for the past 15 years. We worked on developments like Mission Hills Haikou, Jade Shores in Qingdao and Golden Pebble Winery in Dalian. Recently, we are looking more towards Southeast Asia.

What are the current trends for hotel-branded residences? We have approximately 100 on-going hospitality projects. I would say around 90 of them have branded residences associated with them. The ratio between hotel rooms and residences is



changing. It started with 100 hotel rooms and 10 residences. We are working on projects now where the ratio has flipped. It's now 10 hotel rooms and 100 residences. In fact, we are now doing a project in Park City, Utah, where it's a 100 per cent for-sale product. The next trend we're seeing is that there are standalone residences without any hotel element. I think for the discerning owner who's looking for a second, third or fourth home, they feel more comfortable buying (for example) a Four Seasons-branded residence. This is because they know the level of quality that such a brand brings to a development. We are seeing this in both urban and resort settings.

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As all developments are different, how do you select the right types of people to work on them? Our job, prior to any architectural work, is to assemble a group of people to make the project happen. For example, in the upcoming Six Senses project in Florence, we understand what the brand wants and how the hotel will operate. Our notion of this project is to restore the villa to its original lustre, adding pieces to it by contrast, which are very modern. We would bring on the most appropriate landscape architect and interior designer to complete the team. We compose the team based on their experience, so it's a symbiotic process with people doing what they are best at.



Jade Shores in Qingdao and Scott Lee.

What trends in hospitality are you noticing?

Wellness is not just a spa anymore. It's a resort within a resort. At one of our projects, Dorado Beach, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, the spa is a place where you can spend the entire day. Wellness is expanding beyond the boundaries of the spa and going into areas such as sleep, diet, nutrition and the farm-to-table movement. We are placing a big bet that wellness is here to stay. It's not a passing trend. Wellness and fitness is the new currency. These days, it's not about what car you drive or what brand your watch is. It's about how well you are. www.sb-architects.com