

/ WORDS SASHA GONZALES

# CLASSIC MEETS CONTEMPORARY

*The new Rosewood Phnom Penh acknowledges the city's growing outlook as a modern metropolis, while embracing its traditional character and colonial heritage.*





**M**ake your way around the new Rosewood Phnom Penh, in the heart of the Cambodian capital's business district, and the first thing that strikes you is how it effortlessly combines elements of past and present.

**CREATING [A] SENSE OF PLACE BY DRAWING FROM PHNOM PENH'S HERITAGE WAS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO REINTERPRET THE DESTINATION THROUGH THE CONTEMPORARY LENS OF A GLOBAL TRAVELLER.**

From its art pieces to its fabric panels and even its carpeting, the luxury hotel draws together threads of history, nature and culture in a design that sits at the nexus of international and local, contemporary and traditional.

**INSPIRATION: "PROUDLY LOCAL"**

Stewart Robertson, designer and director of the Melbourne-based design company BAR Studio, oversaw the Rosewood Phnom

Penh project. His aim was to embrace the essence and character of Phnom Penh, while acknowledging its outlook as a modern metropolis.

To get a sense of the history of the place, Robertson and his team explored the city and spent time in the National Museum of Cambodia.

They then envisioned a space that sits at the meeting point of colonial heritage and the urban present. The design blend of past and present was subtly incorporated throughout all the interiors of the project.

"The inspiration was proudly local," says Robertson. "This is best observed in some of the art pieces, like the ancient Cambodian animal gods and temple guardians that have been recreated as modern sculptures, and the art pieces whose classic timber carving frames have been reinterpreted for the 21st century."

Other decorative elements take a cue from Cambodian craft. For instance, the fabric panels were inspired by the country's centuries-old ikat method of textile patterning. The custom carpet also references traditional

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The sculptures, which were recreated for the 21st century, draw inspiration from ancient Cambodian animal gods and temple guardians.



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Natural and traditional materials are a common feature throughout the property.

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The interior captures the essence of the country with a blend of Khmer architectural aspects, the country's French colonial heritage and Cambodian craft techniques.





Stewart Robertson,  
designer and director of the  
Melbourne-based design  
company BAR Studio.

ikat dyeing, and local artisanal prints feature as art pieces.

### DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS

The Rosewood Phnom Penh is located in the iconic 39-storey Vattanac Capital Tower, the city's first true skyscraper. Robertson's brief from Rosewood Hotels & Resorts was to create a distinct experience within the building.

"We were tasked with creating an urban sanctuary, a calming oasis and a retreat from city life," he explains. "We really thought about the guest experience and how the guests

would feel in each of the spaces, based on our philosophy of evoking residential-style comfort, while still providing a sense of where you are.

"Creating this sense of place by drawing from Phnom Penh's heritage was the perfect opportunity for us to reinterpret the destination through the contemporary lens of a global traveller."

In setting the tone of an urban sanctuary, Robertson looked at creating a unique arrival experience to soften the transition from the bustling city.

Upon entering the property, guests are guided through a series of rammed-earth

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Natural light, combined with an earth-toned colour palette, create the perfect setting for savouring French and Cambodian cuisine.



**“WE’RE ALWAYS DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM THE DIFFERENT CULTURES WITHIN WHICH WE ARE WORKING, AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT, BUT WE ALSO HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL EYE.”**

wall fragments, over six metres high, that resonate with the romance of ruined temple walls gradually overgrown by jungle, and the lush tropical vibe of a colonial manor garden.

Passing through the canopy-sheltered porte-cochère, framed by artisanal carved

timber panels, they arrive into the ground-floor indoor-outdoor lobby.

“Here we wanted to draw a parallel to a cool, shady private veranda of a colonial house; something to make the guest immediately feel at home,” Robertson adds.

The theme continues in the 175 residential-style guestrooms and suites: think calm and serene interiors, soft, comfortable furnishings that guests can’t help but want to relax on and sink into, and tactile materials such as dark timber, mosaic tiles, brass, fabric panels and sumptuous textiles.

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The Cambodian-inspired accessories are reminiscent of the treasured collection of an avid traveller.

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Even the restaurants make a luxurious statement with neutral tones, modern lines, dark wood and marble.



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To inspire the feeling of being in a private home, the rooms and suites also feature shelves of art and eclectic accessories that guests can peruse.

Because the hotel occupies the top 14 floors of the building, Robertson's other objective was to frame the spectacular views over the city and Tonlé Sap and Mekong Rivers from the guestrooms.

To achieve this, his team used leather-covered sliding screens to allow daylight to penetrate to the bathrooms while maintaining privacy, and strategically placed mirrors to maximise daylight in the rooms.



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**ROSEWOOD PHNOM PENH**

**LOCATION** / PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA  
**GROSS FLOOR AREA** / 24,500M2  
**COMPLETION** / 2018  
**DESIGN TEAM** / BAR STUDIO, SV DESIGN AND BOND DESIGN STUDIO





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 One of Robertson's aims was to frame the spectacular views over the city and Tonlé Sap and Mekong Rivers from the guestrooms.

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 The cosy sitting area invites guests to contemplate the horizon while providing residential-style comfort.



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By the windows, they placed sofas and large round tables that double as dining or work spaces – these elements invite guests to contemplate the horizon as well as provide residential-style comfort.

**“AN EFFORTLESSLY LUXURIOUS EXPERIENCE”**

The fact that Cambodia is still an emerging economy did not affect Robertson's vision for the project in any way. This is because he focused more on drawing from Cambodian heritage and applying to this base a contemporary design style.

There is no “bling” here; the design team went for a restrained, non-ostentatious aesthetic, resulting in authentic environments that are approachable and inclusive.

“Because of the way we work, and the

projects we work on, you could say we have a philosophy of ‘the designer as traveller’,” Robertson says.

“We’re always drawing inspiration from the different cultures within which we are working, and acknowledging the local environment, but we also have an international eye. Our hotels mix a sense of the place they’re in, with our experience of being out in the world.

“With Rosewood Phnom Penh, the calm and serene interiors are a response to the light and shade of traditional spaces. But the richness and glimmer and sheen of elements such as dark timber, mosaic tiles and sumptuous textiles, weave in the moments that, overall, create an effortlessly luxurious experience.”