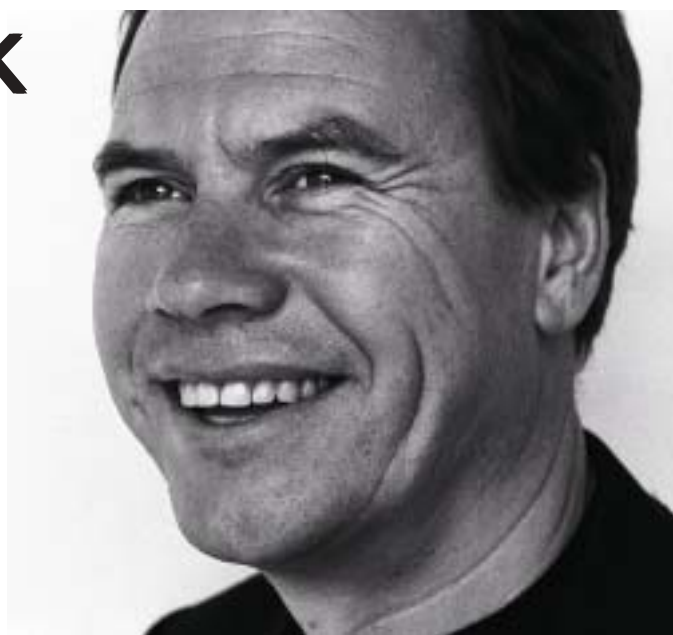


yoo, Yamu and Starck

How one of the worlds most successful real estate brands came to Phuket.

An interview with John Hitchcox, Chairman of yoo Ltd.



Established in 1999, yoo Ltd., is a collaboration between John Hitchcox and Philippe Starck. John Hitchcox is one of Europe's most innovative design-based property developers. He co-founded The Manhattan Loft Corporation, one of the most successful development companies of the last decade, and is credited with establishing loft living in London. As well as London and New York, yoo have previously completed projects in Hong Kong, Miami, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Sydney, Tel Aviv, Madrid and Boston. The company has recently been awarded the interior design contract for the Cape Yamu project in Phuket.

Cape Yamu is located on Phuket's east coast. The project will become a gated residential and resort community with 38 residential villas and a brand-name 75 room 5-star hotel. Renowned Amanpuri architect, Jean Michel Gathy, will design the villas.

How did yoo become involved in Yamu?

One of the local investors was very familiar with Starck's work in New York and mine with Manhattan Loft Corporation. Having read several press articles about the yoo collaboration, he decided this was the best-fit product for the site and contacted me directly to discuss it.

What are the attractions of working in Phuket?

The main attraction of Phuket as a site is that it is a retreat for many different nationalities but maintains a very distinct Thai atmosphere. The actual site, Cape Yamu,

is unique, being a peninsula with 360-degree views looking across the Andaman Sea.

How are you approaching Yamu from a design perspective?

The design of Cape Yamu takes as its starting point the cultural background of materials and textures of Thailand. Add to this the contemporary modernity, wit and humour that Starck brings to every design challenge and the combination allows for a very dramatic project to unfold. As the design is centred on individual villas, yoo is able to create a series of fluid interiors that have a direct relationship with the landscape and sweeping views across the emerald coloured sea, creating a special place on Phuket.

You're working closely with architect Jean Michel Gathy on Yamu. How is this working out? Are your approaches complementary?

The collaboration with Jean Michel Gathy is still in the early stages. It goes without saying that he has unprecedented design expertise all over the world and has a very pivotal relationship with Adrian Zecha. Gathy and Zecha saw the site together and immediately saw the appeal and tranquillity of the site. Starck and Gathy have a mutual admiration and respect for one another's design talent.

Both Modern and Classical interiors are being offered by Yamu. Can you explain both approaches?

The villa design is not simply a choice of a 'classical' or 'modern' interior. Essentially

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key lifestyle ambitions for the interiors run through all ideas, such as courtyards; the movement between interior and exterior spaces, relationship of bedrooms to the central living space, transparency of views to the sea, to name a few. The design of the interiors will use traditional materials such as timber screening with contemporary detailing, followed through into the expression of the roof and harder materials, such as white Thassos marble to bring a crisp coolness to the humid summer months. Phuket has short, heavy rain showers, so the design has canopied ex-

ternal walkways to protect the passage from interior to exterior spaces, as external living is a significant element in traditional Thai design. The most tangible contrast will be the classic interior complemented by an adaptation of a Thai sala roof, whereas the modern villas could be echoed by a mono-pitch roof, both still beautifully detailed in timber construction.

What significant challenges has yoo faced on Yamu?

Challenges on Yamu? Like many projects there are investors or purchasers who would

like to have bespoke personal elements incorporated into their own individual villa. Trying to create a canvas for opportunities is always a challenge. Offering choice for materials to the interior is always an ambition for yoo, however, too much choice can be overwhelming and lead to a lack of homogeneity in the site. With Cape Yamu, we are trying to create a visual consistency through materials and landscaping across the whole peninsula.

Do you foresee yoo undertaking other projects in Thailand? Would you,



ABOVE: Exterior perspective of the Cape Yamu concept villa.

RIGHT: The concept villa ground floor plan.

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for example, consider a Bangkok condominium project?

Yoo considers projects where our offering can be showcased to full advantage; Bangkok could be a great location as it is a very diverse global capital. The critical criterion in choosing a destination is the possibility of creating a good local partner relationship.

What do you think of the standard of Asian design? Do any Asian designers influence you?

Asian design is like European or American design, in that there are some fantastic projects, some mistakes and projects that just add to the urbanity of a place. Asian design influences everyone at some level. Whether it is sitting down in a tea ceremony in Kyoto or walking through the temples at Angkor Wat, if you are visually aware of your surroundings there are always amazing things to focus on. As for Asian designers who influence us? Where do we start - fashion? Architecture? Graphics? It is difficult to focus on individuals.

How does yoo, from the perspective of a success-

ful international real estate developer, view the Thai villa market?

We have been watching Phuket grow significantly over the last few years with an influx in demand from Hong Kong and Europe. Phuket is a beautiful island and is one of the only in Thailand which is serviced by an international airport. This makes it popular with villa owners and potential owners as they have easy access to it.

Do you foresee other big names in design following your lead into the Thai market?

Perhaps; yoo's offering is unique as we are the only truly global design and development house, and others often follow where we lead!

What other projects in Asia are you currently undertaking? Will Asia become a significant part of your business in the future?

We are interested in many projects throughout Asia, and not focusing on just one place. Asia is, and will continue to be, a significant part of our business. ■