

PROPERTY REPORT

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ABSOLUTELY G-FABULOUS

Gary Fell's latest creation in Asia

Buyer Straits

Penang's foreign appeal

Idling Engines

Slow recovery in Vietnam

Blank Canvas

A home on Phuket

Modern Danish

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CELADON

GFAB ARCHITECTS WAS STARTED IN 1999 BY GARY FELL AND FROM ITS BASE IN BALI HAS SINCE DESIGNED PROJECTS THROUGHOUT ASIA. *PROPERTY REPORT* RECENTLY CAUGHT UP WITH ITS FOUNDER TO DISCUSS THE LATEST ADDITION TO THE PORTFOLIO, CELADON, AS WELL AS PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE AND HIS LONGSTANDING FASCINATION WITH THE REGION.

| by LIAM ARAN BARNES

As with many members of Southeast Asia's Western diaspora, Gary Fell's initial trip to Bali back in the late 90s was slated to be a brief business sojourn. A decade and a half later, however, and he continues to call the region home.

Fell's first Asian foray, as project architect on the flagship Four Seasons Sayan resort, lasted more than two years and was completed in 1998, by which time the celebrated British architect was in high-demand. His flourishing reputation, coupled with the region's newfound luxe appetite saw a handful of private commissions come Fell's way and Gfab was soon firmly established.

Since its inception in 1999, the firm has gone on to claim a plethora of awards and plaudits for its exclusive, high-end

design of residential, resort and occasional public sector projects in countries including Indonesia, Thailand and Australia.

Situated on a remote hillside overlooking the Gulf of Thailand, Gfab's latest development, Celadon, is a holiday home built for a Provence-based English family on Koh Samui's west coast. The property has already garnered great interest for its innovative architecture, awe-inspiring location and meticulous adherence to eco-friendly design.

Celadon is one of the island's choice residential properties and further cements Gfab's position as one of Southeast Asia's most sought after architecture firms.



What inspired and influenced you to get involved in architecture?

As a child I always loved to draw. My father was a carpenter/joiner so I was surrounded by building works and exposed to various trades which at the time I took for granted, but in retrospect can see influenced my career decisions by osmosis. It seemed natural to become an architect and from age 14 that was the only thing I wanted to do. I went through a period of thinking — largely due to poor career advice at school — that it was something of a "stiff" profession that couldn't accommodate someone like myself and turned to painting and graphics before perversely studying philosophy for two years, which bored me to tears (though I still read books by critical thinkers). Ultimately I elected to return to architecture school with a new passion and determination to carve out my own approach to the discipline. The rest, as they say, is history.

What is it about Southeast Asia that draws Gfab to work primarily in the region?

I find the region fascinating and cannot imagine living and working anywhere else. Asia builds, and the opportunities for a developing practice are immense due the abundance of potential commissions. Back in the UK, many of my peers are working on interior projects and are offered scant opportunities for new, ground up construction unless they are part of larger, more established practices. The sites we get are invariably challenging and our work has developed in response to such challenges. That said our current workload is not confined to Southeast Asia alone and we hope eventually to undertake commissions in Europe and beyond.

In which particular countries does Gfab plan to expand?

At present we are working on commissions throughout the region, but also in India, Turkey, Australia and Uganda. This year we are looking at projects in the USA and China. There is no actual "plan" to expand operations per se, we take each project on its merits — if it interests us we pursue the commission, if it doesn't... We view architecture as an inherently "international" profession and see no reason why architects here should not undertake commissions anywhere really. Naturally the conditions of international practice require us to work closely with architects and consultants in the project's country, this can be rewarding and frustrating by turns.

What is the most challenging and rewarding project Gfab has worked on to date?

Without wanting to appear to "cop out" here I would say that every project has its challenges and rewards, to cite one as "most" would be to somehow belittle others. Naturally some projects offer more scope for us and have special places in our oeuvre. Samujana comes to mind — few architects are offered the opportunity to develop a project like this where 30 houses are of unique design and they are responsible for master planning, interiors and landscape as well as the architecture. This project is one which has been part of our office for almost 10 years and allowed me to meet my wife, so I guess I would have to cite this as the most rewarding!

What lessons were learnt from the Celadon project and how did Gfab tackle the obstacles caused by the local planning regulations?

Celadon is set on a very steep site on Samui's west coast. The design is forced to negotiate these contours whilst opening up vistas to Koh Pha Ngan and the marine park. The design attempts to create a series of discrete views/vignettes from each of its spaces. In terms of design and approach the project is essentially similar to others we have undertaken in Samui where great views and sloping sites abound.

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Typically we tend to see our houses as effectively being "part" of the landscape. We use a lot of garden roof treatments which naturally would suggest a flat slab approach to our roofs which inexplicably are not allowed according to local planning laws in Samui. To circumvent this conundrum, we elected to employ largely shallow pitched slab roofs and a parapet to retain soil (over the pitched sections of the slabs), thus allowing our preferred green roof treatment and ensure views are not blocked by roofs.

To provide a more obviously pitched section of roof we elected to cover the main living spaces with a fabric (PTFE) membrane which allows light to enter the space without the accompanying solar gain. Deep overhangs conspire to ensure the space is kept cool, whilst timber louvred sections allow for good cross ventilation and removal of rising heat. This timber treatment is extended across the underside of the PTFE roof to create a ceiling treatment in contrast to the lower concrete elements.

The site is subject to slight noise from the unseen road far below — invariably construction trucks are the problem. To mitigate this we employed a shallow trough reflecting pool around part of the room which feeds the swimming pool with fresh water; the sound of the falling water knocking out the ambient noise entirely.

In what projects can we expect to see Gfab get involved in the future?

We have a number of resort and condo type commissions in our office at present. Also, some of this type of work begun before the global financial crisis are set to complete in 2013 and again, we hope that close examination by developers etc will lead to more commissions such as building types alluded to above. Naturally in saying this we do not seek to suddenly become "tower architects"; our preference is to enjoy a range of work at varying scales and allow our projects to cross pollinate.

How important is the incorporation of eco-concepts in Gfab's projects?

We feel, in all honesty, that this is not some "badge of honour" in this day and age, rather a "given". Any responsible architect has to be interested in creating energy efficient projects. Yes, it is important but to a large extent it should go without saying. What is lamentable perhaps is that many clients, particularly commercial developers, are unwilling to spend the small amount extra required to create a building requiring less energy. We believe this will change over time and in fact are starting to see this already. We feel that to a large extent the government initiatives (with respect to tax and duties etc) offered by European countries need to be adopted by Asian countries with the same vigour; ultimately the success of any eco/green approach has to first make economic sense and when countries treat energy efficiency as something to be taxed like a luxury car etc, there is little hope in such approaches gaining a wider appeal.

For now we can only push an agenda and hope that our clients are as responsible as we are. ■



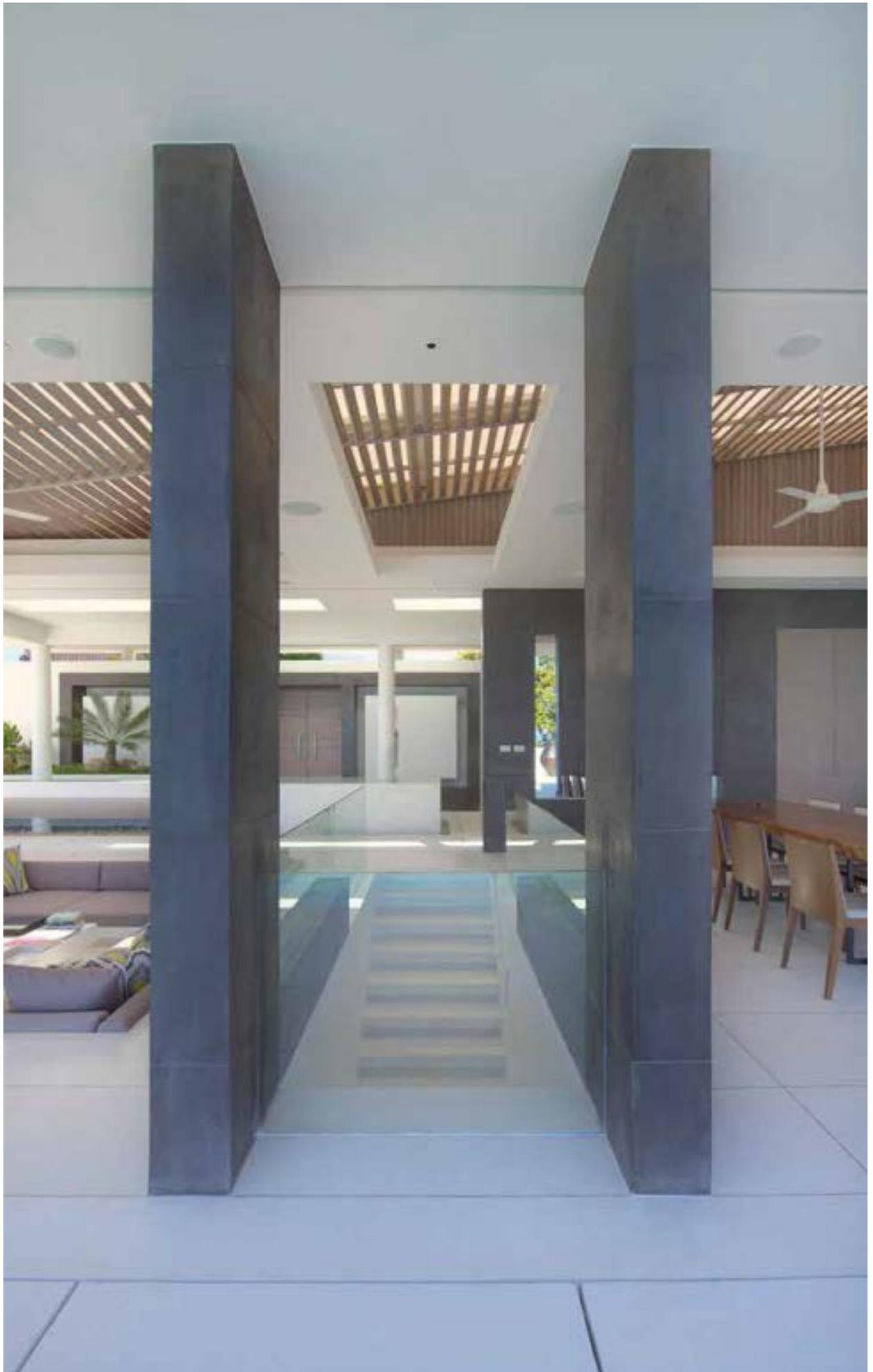


**CELADON'S ARCHITECTURE
WORKS WITH THE LAY OF THE
LAND, FLOWING GENTLY INTO
KOH SAMUI'S DRAMATIC COASTAL
VIEWS.**

INDEPTH
GFAB



CRISP LINES AND REFLECTIONS
CREATE A LIBERATING SENSE
OF LOCATION WITH OPEN-
PLAN SPACES DEFINED BY
ARCHITECTURAL SYMMETRY.





**BUILT INTO THE CLIFFSIDE
WITH INTRICATE STONWORK,
CELADON ACHIEVES A RARE
CONTEMPORARY DESIGN
HARMONY.**

**PLANTED ROOF TERRACES ENSURE
THE PROPERTY BLENDS WITH ITS
NATURAL SURROUNDINGS.**







**AN INTELLIGENT USE OF GLASS
ENSURES LIGHT FILLS THE
PROPERTY AND OCEAN VIEWS ARE
A CONSTANT BACKDROP.**



**SUBTLE DESIGN TOUCHES BRING
AN AIR OF SOPHISTICATION
AND SYMMETRY TO THE DESIGN
SCHEMES AT CELADON.**





**A NEW TAKE ON MINIMALISM
COMBINES SPACE AND
FUNCTIONALITY WITH COMFORT
AND ELEGANCE.**



INDEPTH
GFAB



SUBTLE MOOD LIGHTING BRINGS
THE VILLA TO LIFE AT NIGHT,
SHOWCASING CELADON' UNIQUE
ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES.