Hospitality design whizzkid, Zoltan Varro's new building in Koh Samui ditches Western architecture clichés

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For a tropical paradise well-known for its high-end luxury spas and posh resorts, it's no surprise that there's a very particular Western influence when it comes to the design and architecture of the Thai island's traveler-centric structures. For VARRODESIGN, it was necessary to go against that grain to create something that could still feel grounded in Thailand while meeting the expectations that the typical clientele would have.

Photos of C Villa (photo credit: Lesley Fischer)

Video of C Villa (video credit: Jay Tolmachov)

Sculpture design video (credit: VarroDesign / C Villa)

Sketch of the building (credit: Zoltan Varro)

Spaces to meet the perceptions of travelers

What would you expect while on a trip to Thailand? That was the question that led the conception and creation of C Villa, a new vacation apartment complex on the gorgeous island of Koh Samui in Thailand. The goal for the team behind its creation was to ensure that there was not a single moment of disappointment, allowing your travel-brochure imagination of the perfect Thai vacation to be fully realised. With this in mind, the team at VARRODESIGN knew that it was necessary to tap into local cultures and traditional Thai architecture and to figure out how that could be incorporated into a sleek, modern package.

The two faces of the island

"There's a duality about Koh Samui," says Zoltan Varro, the award-winning designer behind C Villa's elegant look. "Thailand conjures images of traditional wooden huts on glistening sandy beaches, the natural beauty. But equally, Koh Samui is popular for contemporary villas and its modern nightlife." Zoltan wanted to incorporate this duality of Thailand into the building for a space that can at once embrace its guests in natural beauty while also creating a contemporary and luxurious environment.

Nowhere is this more apparent than on the ground floor of the hilltop building, which Zoltan explains was the biggest "challenge" of the property's design. C Villa's owner was initially concerned about this floor, which was not able to offer the sprawling vistas that the upper floors had and was close to neighbouring buildings. It seemed like an impossible challenge for VARRODESIGN. "But those limitations of this project, or any project, are where I find my inspiration," says Zoltan. "I promised [the owner] that by the end he will love the ground floor more than any other area in the property."

A space for introspection

These restrictions became advantages, with Zoltan instead choosing to turn inwards and craft a space that was not trying to desperately look outwards like any other property in Koh Samui might. In this, a 'secret garden' was created, highlighting that duality. Above: the modern, luxurious, open space for entertaining, hanging out in groups, and basking in Thailand's glorious natural environment. Below: a private space, sheltered from the world where guests can relax in a more traditionally designed space. It's a sanctuary from the larger communal spaces, where guests can receive traditional Thai massages, cool off in the small pool, or surround themselves with the tranquil peace of their own private garden rife with palm trees and local plants.

Homage to traditional local techniques

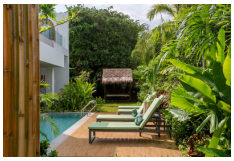
This sense of privacy is something that Zoltan felt was sorely missing from nearby properties, and particularly he was struck by all the numerous Miami-style grand villas that are popular among Koh Samui's elite. "These contemporary buildings with huge open spaces are nice," says Zoltan, "but they don't really fit into the expectations of a vacation in Thailand." Nor are they particularly well suited to deal with the extreme tropical weather. As it always does, VARRODESIGN looked to local architecture and design to find the answers: "These traditional buildings have been made the way they have for 100s

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of years, and so they have all the practical answers."

Through this the middle floor of C Villa, which is where the kitchen and large infinity pool are located, became a three-walled space, mimicking the atriums used in local buildings but with a modern twist. With one wall removed, the view to the natural vista is not hindered in any way, while still sheltering the common areas inside from neighbouring buildings as well as the heat and the tropical weather.

Iconic local features

The final piece of the puzzle came together with the building's signature arches that reach out from the middle floor. Inspired by the same motifs throughout Koh Samui's temples, this created an iconic modern twist on something that the Thai people have been familiar with for years. "It's easy to identify," says Zoltan about this particular feature of the building, "it's easy to talk about, which makes it memorable." This same arch motif was used within that atrium, too, which punch through the 3-walled box to turn it into a softer shape and allow a breeze to flow through the space - and adorned with bamboo for that final local touch.

Zoltan is an award-winning designer whose intuitive and emotive approach to his work with VARRODESIGN has led to his recognition globally, having completed projects throughout Europe, the UK, South America and now Asia. "It's like first meeting with someone and getting to know them," says Zoltan of his intuition-led design approach, "you try to get a feeling for their vibe and learn about them." With C Villa, this allowed him to "size up the technical advantages and disadvantages, what to emphasise, where to deemphasize."

Saluting the sun

Perhaps this is best highlighted by C Villa's own logo, a spiritual figure reaching up to the sun that was itself born from the matching decorative statue that floats beside the large pool facing Koh Samui's largest Buddha sculpture, the Big Buddha Temple. C Villa is a space designed to feel safe and free, to embrace its guests with intimacy and closeness but to simultaneously have them feel open and alive. To expect anything less would be a disservice to Koh Samui.

Architect & designer: Zoltan Varro / VarroDesign

Project architect: Laszlo Kekesi



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