

PROPERTY REPORT

SINGAPORE MALAYSIA INDONESIA

www.property-report.com *The Trusted Source For Real Estate News*

THE
ELITE
COLLECTION

ASIA'S FINEST REAL ESTATE

www.property-report.com/elitecollection

VILLAS • LAND • CONDOMINIUMS • RENTAL • SERVICED APARTMENTS • MARINE

Leading the way in KL

ONE KL is Kuala Lumpur's most expensive condo, boasting '94 apartments, 95 swimming pools'. Carmen Chua of ONE KLCC Sdn Bhd explains why the duplex-only residence is setting new standards in the Malaysian capital.

Carmen Chua

**Executive Director,
ONE KLCC Sdn Bhd**

Carmen Chua is the eldest daughter of Datuk Chua Ma Yu, one of Malaysia's most influential and well connected individuals, with a long-standing prowess in stock market investments. By the time Chua graduated from the London School of Economics in 2004, she had completed internships at the research arms of Merrill Lynch and Deutsche Bank, a term at UBS Investment Bank and a spell at the *Asian Wall Street Journal*. After returning to Kuala Lumpur, she started working with her father's investment company, CMY Capital, soon focusing her energies on ONE KL and becoming Executive Director of ONE KLCC Sdn Bhd. ONE KL soon made headlines for its pioneering design, featuring 94 duplex units each with a swimming pool, while its prized location by the Petronas Twin Towers has also helped it become the most expensive condo in the capital. Despite her tender age, Chua is Honorary Secretary of the Kuala Lumpur Business Club and also played a key role in the government's move to abolish the real property gains tax (RPGT) to reboot the languishing housing market.



ming pools. So, you can imagine when you drive by at night, you're going to see all these blue pools lit up. It's going to be amazing.

Many condos in the KLCC area were launched a couple of years ago and are still selling. What are your thoughts about the rush of projects in this area?

To be honest, I think the KLCC area is too congested. There will be an over-supply of condominiums, as more units are still coming online. Although the government is becoming more pro-active and more pro business, releasing more information and changing regulations to stimulate the property market, I think those steps and measures taken by the government were sufficient only to create sufficient liquidity to absorb the current supply. There are still launches of thousands of units coming onto the market and I'm concerned, because those products are all perfect substitutes for each other.

If you think about it, why do you buy a property? It's either for investment or for private stay. If it's for investment, it's very clear: you buy location, location, location and you buy the product. What makes your investment stand out from the rest, what makes it different? If you're going to buy something completely identical to the rest of the market, you're not going to see significant capital appreciation or see your rental yield being sustained, compared to if you buy a project that truly stands out. For me, there will only be three Grade A, international-standard buildings in KL, Four Seasons, The Binjai and ONE KL, whose capital and rental yields will be supported.

What makes ONE KL unique?

Our tagline was '94 apartments, 95 swimming pools'. This

ONE KL has been quoted as the most expensive condo development in Kuala Lumpur. Is that true?

Malaysia real estate is still very cheap compared to our international counterparts. However, we're still lacking in good-quality, international-grade buildings, and this is where ONE KL has positioned itself in the niche market. ONE KL has set benchmarks in Malaysia for pricing. Having launched at RM1,000psf in 2005 and set a new pricing standard at RM1,800psf in March this year, we've paved the way for new benchmarks in recent months. ONE KL, although known as the most expensive development, is differentiated by the product and the quality, which justifies

the premium that the market has placed on it.

Do you visit the site much and observe the construction progress?

I visit the site once a week, every Tuesday, for a full day of site meetings with Shimizu Corporation, our design-and-build contractor, as well as all the consultants involved in this project. We monitor all progress on site and discuss any design and technical issues that may arise. The design team from Shimizu is based in Tokyo and Singapore, while its KL team focuses on construction.

Who else is in the ONE KL team?

Apart from Shimizu Corporation, the architect for this project

is SCDA Architects of Singapore. We've also engaged a facade consultant, Arup from Australia, which designed the curtain-wall system for the Swiss Re headquarters in London (at 30 St Mary Axe). The skin of this building is entirely curtain-walled, so it's completely aluminium cladding and glass, not cement and paint and aluminium-framed windows. Even the type of glass we use is of the highest specs, as we use the low-e, double glazed glass curtain wall system, so there's less heat and less noise.

For lighting, we use an international consultant called DJC, an Australian lighting team. They've done the lighting for the entire facade, all the interior spaces and apartments, and all the swim-



Water world: As well as a pool in each of the 94 units, ONE KL will have one communal pool. Below: ONE KL (bottom left) is situated opposite the Mandarin Oriental and close to the Petronas Twin Towers.

made the building the first of its kind and other developers have since followed suit, which is proof that the lifestyle concept works. When we first launched, that was the main feature that caught people's attention, plus the fact every unit is a 21ft-high duplex and we have a prime location next to the Twin Towers, right opposite the Mandarin Oriental hotel.

Furthermore, we've set the benchmark in terms of quality. We always emphasise quality because in Malaysia there's no building of international standard. Our project has always been about design and the quality we'll deliver. So, when we first launched, apart from the swimming pools, which will be maintained by our own property management company, it was about the design, spatial efficiency and the fact it was designed for the user, rather than the user having to fit into an apartment.

Our attention to detail has also set us apart. For example, we have a car park designed specifically for sports cars, such as Ferraris and Lamborghinis, and large cars like the Phantom and the Bentley. Shimizu did a simulation and studied all the turning points and gradients of the ramps, so cars that sit very low will not get scraped. We've also studied various construction methods and waterproofing. This project has many firsts for Malaysia, as well as the world in terms of revolutionary architecture and engineering. We even have biometric (fingerprint) access control and high-speed private elevators!

How did the concept of a pool in every apartment come about?

When we started with the architect (Soo Chan), he started off with a design of duplex units featuring an indoor courtyard and garden. But we thought it would be hard to maintain trees indoor, to control the growth of roots, that there would be a problem with clogging up drains and pipes, and that this may even cause cracks in the building. So, we thought, we might as well fill up the space with water. That's how the concept of swimming pools came about.

So, it was almost by accident?

Almost by accident, yes.

You mention there are no international-standard buildings in KL. Why is that?

Developers in Malaysia tend to build with a very high profit margin and they tend to cut corners and not really spend on the finishing. If your development

were selling at RM800psf, for example, they'd look at a 50% profit margin, so that's RM400psf, then after you deduct land costs you're left with about RM250psf for construction costs, which is why in the end you get tiles and spray paint, things like that.

Another interesting fact to note is that in Singapore, where land prices are high, development costs break down to about 70% for land and 30% for construction. In Malaysia, it's the reverse, with 30% for land and 70% for construction. Thus, more can be spent in Malaysia on ensuring that the finishing and specifications are of the highest quality.

What makes you different?

The reason we were able to put the best into this building is because we're not a property developer. Our intention was to build something that would represent the family. It was about building a trophy building, something that would completely revolutionise

lifestyle, something that would be evergreen, something that would last, be a legacy in KL and a landmark.

Do you think coming from outside the property industry has helped your company?

Yes, I do. In Malaysia, the property industry is very crowded. It's like the red ocean, where it's bloody and everyone does the same thing. There are no new ideas. This is where the new generation of developers comes in. These are ones who have brought in new ideas, new concepts, and the definition of quality has changed.

Everyone's becoming more design wary and understands what good design means. Everyone understands the concept of lifestyle and how important this is now. The buzzword is lifestyle and it's a reflection of international exposure, because people are more travelled, they've studied abroad, and there's a mix of a more international crowd and way of thinking. In that sense we're very different from our previous generation.

ONE KL is definitely different. It had no public launches and doesn't even have a website. How did you sell this project?

Our marketing strategy was completely different. We never advertised, we never even had a showroom, we never had road shows. We basically sold from our own database. Our profile of buyers is very, very different, composed of 8% foreigners and 92%

Continued on next page

