

MANSION GLOBAL

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Singapore Architect on Our 'Interconnected World'

Look for spaces with light and air, and unique features that make a building special, he says



Mr. Chan and one of his current projects: Five One Five, a new condominium building in Manhattan's Hudson Yards neighborhood.

COMPOSITE: COURTESY OF SCDA; COURTESY OF FIVE ONE FIVE

Architect Soo K. Chan is the founding principal and design director of SCDA, a design firm based in Singapore with more than 120 employees, and offices in Shanghai and New York.

In his role, Mr. Chan has worked in master planning, resorts and hotels, high-rise and high-end residences, commercial buildings and private homes. He's also worked in Asia/Oceania, Africa, Europe and North America.

Mr. Chan is both the architect and developer of Soori High Line, a new building in Manhattan, where apartments feature minimalist design and some even have private pools.

Currently, he is working on the architecture and design of a new condominium building in Manhattan's Hudson Yards neighborhood, Five One Five, which also shows off his classic minimalist aesthetic.

We caught up with Mr. Chan from Singapore to discuss the promise of live-work buildings, the value of well-designed spaces that incorporate the indoors and outdoors, and much more.

Mansion Global: Describe your dream property.

Soo Chan: As a designer and architect, my dream is having full control of a project. My dream was my hotel [Soori Bali] in Bali in 2010, and then Soori High Line.

The way I design for my current home is like the hotel in Bali and Soori High Line. I actually live in a lot of my own properties.

MG: Do you have a real estate property that got away?

SC: In 2004, I came upon a huge site overlooking the Indian Ocean in Uluwatu in Bali. I wanted to have a home that was cantilevered over the cliffs but it didn't happen.

MG: What does luxury mean to you?

SC: For me, it's not just material manifestation. It's a certain mastery of time—having the flexibility to do what you want in your time.

Having space that is private, and connected only when you want it to be is a luxury. So is opening onto some sort of private nature.

MG: What area do you think is the next hub for luxury properties?

SC: Areas where you live and work. You can build new or retrofit a building.

I'm designing next to Hudson Yards, and that's the new paradigm of mixed-use developments that will redefine luxury.

The neighborhoods around there offer opportunities to build. I believe in it. But one has to project a few years ahead.

MG: What's the biggest surprise in the luxury real estate market now?

SC: For ultra high-end luxury, what I've seen is a shortened cycle of the market. It goes up and comes down rather quickly.

It's not just happening in New York City, but all around the world. I see it happening in Singapore and Shanghai—the world is so interconnected today.

The same money goes from major city to major city.

MG: Where are the best luxury homes in the world and why?

SC: The best luxury homes are ones that are secluded enough, but also close enough to amenities. If you can identify a beautiful space that is just far enough to be on your own but have access to what you want.

That can be anywhere. If you're within an hour of a major metropolis, but within nature, that's great.

MG: What's your favorite part of your home?

SC: My wine cellar. It's a sanctuary. It was designed with a single piece of granite, and smells like oak and wine. It's a sanctuary and a place for congregating.

MG: What best describes the theme to your home and why?

SC: It's about connection to the landscape, and to nature. Indoor/outdoor space, those transitional spaces. In Singapore, which is really tropical, my house has pockets of courtyard and water bodies, and the line between indoor and outdoor is blurred.

MG: What's the most valuable amenity to have in a home right now?

SC: What I like to do, and I've tested it in different markets, is to create a pocket of nature. It's not just about having a balcony or terrace, it's about giving sense of privacy within city living.

If you can create a courtyard or terrace that's private that's even better.

We have 16 pools in Soori. They are quite private, and bring in light and air.

MG: What's your best piece of real estate advice?

SC: Location is obviously important. Look beyond finishes, for well-proportioned spaces filled with light and air. And look for unique features within a building that makes it special.

MG: What's going on in the news that will have the biggest impact on the luxury real estate market?

SC: In some cases, the excessive coverage of the media. But government interventions and special taxes, those all create a shock to the market and a sense of unpredictably.

But the news does affect the market.

MG: What is the best area now for investing in luxury properties?

SC: You have to find rarity, and good location. You also need to understand zoning of the area. Low density and well located properties ensure prices.

MG: If you had a choice of living in a new development or a prime resale property, which would you choose and why?

SC: I'd always want to choose an older building with a bit of patina, and introduce some new elements. I like having a sense of time. I like new buildings too, but sometimes they don't have that feeling of history.

The contrast between new and old is amazing to me.