

# MONOCLE

A BRIEFING ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS, BUSINESS, CULTURE & DESIGN

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**100!**

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## National treasure Singapore

### Preface

A first look at this smart new Singaporean stopover.

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Singapore's status as a business city is undeniable but the enterprising young state's hotel options have long languished at the staid and sterile end of the spectrum. Fittingly, given its stellar reputation for food, it's one of the Lion City's homegrown hospitality kingpins – The Lo & Behold Group – that has provided a smart new 37-room hotel that bucks the trend entirely.

The Warehouse Hotel at Robertson Quay on the banks of the Singapore River was a storied spot even before the developers broke ground two years ago. As *MONOCLE* arrives by taxi, the elderly driver behind the wheel is waxing lyrical about the area's colourful history: first it was a furtive meeting place for bootleggers and then a *godown* (warehouse) for stock-piling spices shipped across the Straits of Malacca in the 19th century. It's a far cry from the manicured streets of the neighbourhood today.

"We want it to be a real portal to local culture," says Wee Teng Wen, the genial managing partner of The Lo & Behold Group (plus 12 envelope-pushing restaurants here besides), who's standing in the lobby of his first hotel venture. Although the 120-year-old building is all but untouched on the outside – save for a few licks of white paint – its exterior has set the tone for the tasteful interior revamp. Opened in January this year, the building is distinctively low-rise next to Singapore's gleaming glass-and-steel towers – and is recognisable by the silhouette cast by its three pitched roofs.

Inside, a custom-made pulley-and-wheel light installation by Singapore-based firm Asylum (which is also behind most of the furnishings in the venue) spans the length of the lobby's



01

- 01 Riverside hospitality at its finest
- 02 Reception with Asylum's light installation
- 03 Restaurant Pó
- 04 Reception desk
- 05 Innovative cocktails reflect the building's storied past
- 06 Asylum founder Chris Lee (left) with Wee Teng Wen
- 07 The River View suite: no two rooms are alike

### Q&A

**Wee Teng Wen**  
Co-founder, The Lo & Behold Group  
Singapore

We meet the man behind the renovation, whose many hospitality ventures are setting a new benchmark in the city-state.

#### Q Can you give some background to the Lo & Behold group?

A The group was started more than a decade ago and we opened with a rooftop bar called Aloof. We now have 12 venues across Singapore, ranging from Tanjong – a beach club on Singapore's best strip of sand; White Rabbit – an abandoned church that we converted into a restaurant, and art deco-style bar The Black Swan. The list goes on.

#### Q How do you keep each project distinct?

A We've been fortunate enough to secure very beautiful places. The consistency is the rigour with which we approach each space and distil the idea and concept.

#### Q How has your experience of opening restaurants helped with the Warehouse Hotel?

A Hotels are a natural extension of our strength as a group – in concept, design and guest experience. At our heart we are about creating a good time for our guests and a hotel is like one long extended meal: it's 24 hours instead of just three. — JAF  
[lobehold.com](http://lobehold.com)



02



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### \*FOOTNOTE:

The pastel-pink tiled rooftop pool features a special light installation by artist Dawn Ng, who is Teng's wife.



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vaulted ceiling. Its design is a nod to the machines that once lugged sacks of spices and grain through the one-time warehouse. The moody glow cosies up the cavernous open-plan reception, which includes a hushed lounge divided by sections of brown-leather sofas, velvety green armchairs and brass-and-marble coffee tables.

The sunken bar on the left adds a dash of dusky film noir to proceedings, while bartender Andrew Zeng's inventive cocktail list conjures flavours that guide guests through the building's past. Think peppery concoctions to evoke the tastes of the building's role in the spice trade, moonshine-based highballs to signify its darker days of distilling and a few fruitier numbers for its time as a disco in the early 1990s.

Head upstairs and the second-floor river-view suites have been shaped to accommodate the roomy roof space and exposed beams, leaving no two rooms the same. There's a uniquely Singaporean air to proceedings here: the Matter Prints-designed bed linen carries a silhouette of the hotel, while tea is a custom blend from local outfit Amuse Projects served in cups from duo Mud Rock Ceramics. It's a classy touch to back the city-state's talent.

"From the beginning we wanted to work with regional designers and artists," says Asylum founder Chris Lee. "And where else can you find a *popiah* [a rough-and-ready Singaporean take on a spring roll] restaurant in a hotel?" he says, nodding to ground-floor venue Pó, which is headed by chef Willin Low. The hotel's restaurant also eschews western expectations with a smart communal dining experience where guests – seated on rattan chairs around circular green-flecked marble tables – are invited to assemble their own *popiahs*.

All in all the space is a fitting recipe for showcasing a distinctly homegrown take on building a boutique hotel – an idea that we hope is here to stay. — (M)  
[thewarehousehotel.com](http://thewarehousehotel.com)