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life

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Local storeys

The sleek Warehouse Hotel (right), crafted from an old godown along the Singapore River, has dim interiors and decor that hint at its vice-tinged past. **Natasha Ann Zachariah** highlights new independent hotels that play off their locales. D4&5



DESIGN: MARLONE RUBIO ST PHOTOS: LAU FOOK KONG, ONG WEE JIN



**Natasha Ann
Zachariah**

To create compelling and distinctive experiences for their guests, many hotels now draw from the

heritage and personalities of their respective locations.

Three new accommodation options – two boutique hotels and a hostel – have opened recently, each influenced by the atmosphere and history of its individual building and neighbourhood.

The Warehouse Hotel in Havelock Road, which is housed in an old godown along the Singapore River, hints playfully at the area's vice-ging past. There used to be gambling dens and alcohol distilleries there.

The interiors are dark and sleek, with furniture in shades of brown, black and green.

The check-in counter has a pair of handcuffs on display. In the rooms, there are other sexy touches such as tassel whips in the mini-bars.

Far from the madding crowd is Villa Samadhi Singapore, housed in a black-and-white colonial building in Labrador Nature Reserve.

Run by an antique lover, the hotel is inspired by old Malaya and features vintage items from the region, such as a Burmese bank-teller coun-

ter that serves as a check-in desk.

While these two hotels hark back to the past, Coo is firmly in the present: It uses the retro-cool vibe of Tiong Bahru as a cheery decor motif for its lobby and bistro.

For example, graphic prints featuring the neighbourhood's iconic Art Deco walk-up apartments decorate the walls and ceilings of this 11-room hostel in Outram Road.

The Straits Times checks in with these properties.

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A slice of its naughty past

THE WAREHOUSE HOTEL
Where: 320 Havelock Road

The Warehouse Hotel in Havelock Road is not shy about the sordid past of its neighbourhood.

The 37-room property is housed in a 121-year-old godown along the Singapore River.

The area had a reputation for harbouring secret society members, gambling dens and prostitutes. It was also known as a place where homemade alcohol was sold on street corners and in alleys.

As a nod to the neighbourhood's colourful history, the hotel marries the unfinished, utilitarian warehouse aesthetic with the kinkier vibe of a place for illicit trysts.

In the cavernous lobby, pulleys – common fixtures in old warehouses – and naked lightbulbs hang from the double-volume ceiling.

Inside a glass display area built into the check-in counter, there are a set of handcuffs, an ashtray and bottle openers.

Rooms come with a "Minibar of Vices" while some rooms have open-concept bathrooms or tubs placed behind clear glass.

The hotel is run by The Lo & Behold Group, which is behind chic lounges and restaurants, including the two-Michelin-starred Odette at the National Gallery Singapore and The White Rabbit in Harding Road.

The interiors were done by Asy-



pioning local brands.
Lifestyle brand Matter Prints designed custom bed runners, which have a pattern showcasing



An open-concept bathroom (above) in the new 37-room The

design studio.

Mr Chris Lee, 46, Asylum's founder and creative director of the project, was also inspired by the Fritz Lang sci-fi silent film, *Metropolis* (1927), to create two Brutalist-looking feature walls of patterned, glowing squares.

For the hotel's in-house restaurant, Po, he went for a nostalgic theme. The cosy 52-seat restaurant features rattan chairs, green Calacatta marbled tables and terrazzo flooring - creating an old-school feel.

The hotel is also big on cham-

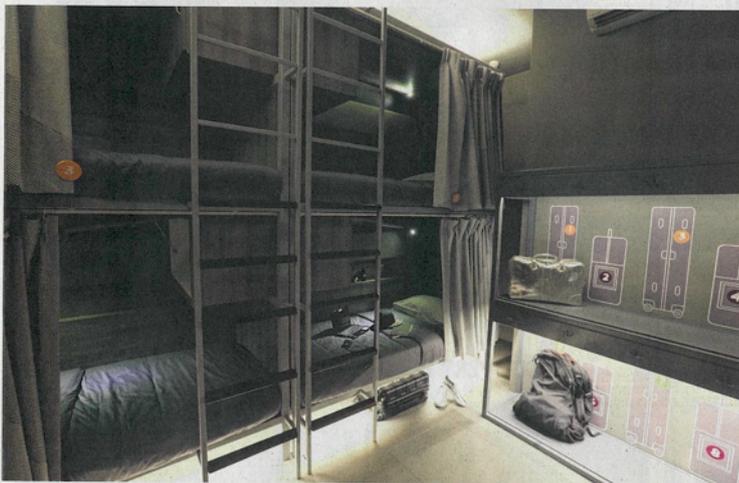
house, while the minibars are also filled with treats such as Salted Egg Yolk Potato Chips by snack company The Golden Duck and complimentary tea from speciality tea company A.muse Projects.

Prices start at \$295++ for the River View Room and go up to \$495++ for the River View Suite.

Mr Wee Teng Wen, 37, managing partner of The Lo & Behold Group, says: "The hotel tells a very unique Singaporean story and will offer a truly authentic experience and be a prism to local culture, rather than be just a pitstop to eat and sleep."



warehouse Hotel; and the nostalgia-themed restaurant, Po (left). ST PHOTOS: LAU FOOK KONG



A dormitory (left) in Coo; and the bistro (above) on the first level. ST PHOTOS: LAU FOOK KONG

Coo way for like-minded millennials to meet

COO

Where: 259 Outram Road

Tiong Bahru, an enclave that mixes retro charm and cool design-centric businesses, has no shortage of quirky boutique hotels. But a new hostel hopes to tap into a different demographic: the millennial traveller on a budget.

Housed in a four-storey conservation shophouse in Outram Road

and comprising 11 rooms with 68 beds, Coo blends nostalgic references with rechie frills.

All over its walls and ceiling are graphic prints featuring "kopitiam uncles", Tiong Bahru's iconic Art Deco architecture, local kueh and "Bob", a neighbourhood tabby cat.

In a bistro on the first level, an abstract map of Tiong Bahru fashioned out of neon lights is suspended from the ceiling.

The four-month-old hostel takes it one step further with a social media-like "digital interest matching tool" to get guests mingling even before they arrive.

Once travellers have booked their stay at the hostel, they can log on to Coo Connect to create a profile. They can find others who will be staying there at the same time and link up with like-minded travellers to plan activities or chat.

The idea, says Coo's founder Silas Lee, 51, taps on millennials' love of digital connectivity.

The former head of corporate banking for Asia Pacific at Barclays bank, who is running a hostel for the first time, says: "The end game is to get people to interact face-to-face rather than just being a keyboard warrior. It is about connecting like-minded people and encouraging them to explore common interests."

The interiors were designed by Mr Colin Seah, 44, founder of award-winning multidisciplinary firm Ministry of Design, who also did the branding.

The design mixes cheekiness with clever functionality. For example, hallways to the rooms are plastered with house rules such as "Your mom ain't here, clean up after yourself".

Instead of a key card, guests are given wristbands so there is a lower

chance of them losing their keys.

The bunk beds are like cubicles where guests can draw the curtains for privacy. There are also lockers in the cubicles for valuables. Guests can hop on free bicycles provided by the hostel to explore the area.

Promotional prices start at \$30++ for a single bed in an eight-bed dormitory and go up to \$50++ for a single bed in a four-bed dormitory with an ensuite bathroom.