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THE EDGE MALAYSIA
APRIL 14,
2014

Maisson to bring traditions to life

Newfields Property Management Sdn Bhd is off to a good start in reviving the abandoned Platinum Damansara project in Ara Damansara. Relunched as Maisson, the development will see some changes to its design, plan and concept, inspired by the multi-generational family unit and community living of yesteryears, according to executive directors Khoo Boo Tee (right) and Seow Voon Ping.





The 8.9-acre Maission will offer 1,247 serviced apartments with built-ups ranging from 500 to 1,385 sq ft

Banking on revival of Platinum Damansara

BY E JACQUI CHAN

For nearly seven years, the abandoned Platinum Damansara project sat grim and grey, an eyesore in Ara Damansara, Selangor. The project has been given a new lease of life with Newfields Property Management Sdn Bhd stepping in to revive it.

"In fact, an individual who lives in a bungalow nearby told us when he visited our sales gallery, 'I'm going to buy a unit just so that you can finally finish this project!'" says Khoo Boo Tee, Newfields' executive director.

Newfields Property is the property arm of Newfields Group of Companies, which also has a boutique advisory firm. The property arm was established in 2004. It launched its maiden project, the 52-acre integrated commercial hub, Puchong Gateway, in southern Puchong in 2007. The company's profile was raised with the successful launch of the eight-acre residential project, The Sanderson, in Bukit Serdang in 2011. The Sanderson achieved 80% sales within two months of its launch and was completed in November last year.

Now, Khoo and fellow executive director Seow Voon Ping are banking on the revival of Platinum Damansara, now renamed Maission, to further raise the company's profile.

The 8.9-acre Maission development will offer 1,247 serviced apartments with built-ups ranging from 500 to 1,385 sq ft. The units are priced at an average RM700 psf.

Reward in completion

Maission was not an easy project, to say the least. According to Khoo, it was launched at RM400 psf in 2004 and comprised four blocks of serviced apartments with a guaranteed returns scheme, and an office block. What drew Newfields to the project is the location.



We are happy that we will deliver a much better product than what they would have received if the project were to be completed then." — Khoo

"When the project was first launched, Ara Damansara was not yet a prominent location. The infrastructure has improved a lot since then and opened up different parts of Petaling Jaya. The environment here is pleasant and the surrounding bungalow developments give the place a premium feel," shares Seow.

Newfields started the process to revive the project in early 2011 and it was intended to be relaunched shortly after The Sanderson's launch. However, as often the case with such projects, the process took much longer than the developer had anticipated.

"We finally cleared everything and got the go-ahead in October last year. Because we are not a big name, our biggest challenge was convincing the 680 people who bought units in 2004, the creditors and contractors that we can do this project.

"For the buyers, the revival of the project has been a long time coming. They have been servicing their loans all this time and were frustrated and angry," says Seow.

Due to the increase in cost of construction and materials since 2004, the buyers were asked to top up 25% in price. Naturally, there was some resentment, he says.

"Not only did the design look outdated, we had to change the layout, upgrade the finishes and create more useful areas as it was originally designed as a hotel. The buyers were concerned but we explained to them the concept and showed them what the new units would look like. After that, there were no more complaints.

"The buyers just want to get their units, but for us, it's not just about delivering the products to them; we also need to sell the rest of the units to make mon-



ey. We have to think about our future customers and what kinds of designs and finishes are required to achieve a certain level of pricing."

The original plan includes restaurants and tennis courts, all of which will be replaced with facilities more suited to current lifestyles. Among the new facilities are a 50m infinity pool, a multipurpose hall, a gym, a children's playscape, several gardens and a 2.3-acre landscaped deck and sky garden. The office block will be converted into serviced apartments.

"With a hotel, you're not worried about lighting because the lights are always on. But with residential, lighting is very important. We have to align the rooms to allow more natural light to come in. And because it was designed as a hotel, the air conditioning was centralised, which has to be changed as well," says Khoo.

"We are also changing the pipes and wiring. A lot

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Developer targets home occupiers

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of things need to be redone and with better quality [materials]," says Seow.

From the get-go, Seow and Khoo wanted to develop Maission as a residential property even though it sits on commercial land. Some of the buyers have raised the possibility of keeping the guaranteed rent scheme, but the developer was quick to shoot it down.

"I think this location is more suited for a nice residential product and keeping it residential would mean better security as fewer strangers will be coming to the development. The location is accessible, especially to a larger part of Petaling Jaya and Subang, but it is not sitting in the middle of the city where there is good traffic for a hotel," says Seow.

Khoo notes that a good number of the buyers are investors, with some coming from Penang, Sabah and Sarawak.

Even though the initial issues have been ironed out and the project is off to a good start, they admit that there are things they wished they had done differently. Chief among them is the 25% top-up sought from the buyers.

"We did the costing three years ago, but the cost has gone up since then and this has reduced our profit margin. But we have made a commitment; we can't go to them now and ask them to pay more. It's something we have to accept and we have to deliver," says Seow.

"Part of the reward is completing the project. We are happy that we will deliver a much better product than what they would have received if the project were to be completed then," says Khoo.

The gross development value, including the 25% top-up, is RM850 million.

Going back to basics

Most baby boomers and Gen Xs would remember childhoods spent running free in a neighbourhood where everybody knew everybody and a house was home to several generations.

It's this multi-generational family unit and community living of yesteryears that inspired the concept of Maission, says Khoo.

"If you look at the design of most high-rise residential property today, there is very little open space and common areas, and developers tend to squeeze all the facilities into a small area. There are pockets of land on the Maission site which we will turn into usable spaces for the residents," shares Seow.

Central to the development is the landscaped deck, which will house the infinity pool, children's playscape, gym and several gardens, among others. "I don't think many of today's high-rise residential development can give you this kind of space. It is designed to get the residents to come out and socialise. That's why the tagline for Maission is 'Bringing traditions to life,'" he adds.

As the deck sits about four-storey high, security is not an issue, says Khoo. "Even if you live in a gated and guarded landed development, you will still have security concerns. But here, to get to the deck, you have to go through a multi-tier security system. No one can have access except the residents. This allows the children to play and the adults to relax without worry."

There will be a sky garden on each block. Because the development sits on elevated land and is located in a neighbourhood of landed properties, many of the



Each block will feature a garden on the rooftop

BY CHU JUCK SENG/THE EDGE



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units offer unobstructed views of Petaling Jaya and the greenery of Tropicana Golf and Country Resort.

There are also two levels of retail space, measuring about 40,000 sq ft, which Newfields plans to retain for recurring income and have better control of the tenants.

According to Adrian Wang, managing director of CBD Properties Sdn Bhd, Ara Damansara will see an incoming supply of serviced apartments of close to 5,000 units in the next three years.

"There is a possible glut, but the new light rapid transit stations [next to NZX Square and along Jalan Lapangan Terbang Subang] can bring more people to stay in Ara Damansara. More commercial developments and activities in the area will also help in terms of demand," opines Wang.

While Seow acknowledges that there are a number of serviced apartment developments in Ara Damansara, he stresses that Maission is different as it is developed as a home for families and young couples, and targets home occupiers.

"We want to make Maission different — as a home where the residents will want to stay home and enjoy what we have to offer," he says.

"We want it to be a place where you want to come home to and stay home. You can go down to the gardens with your family, hang out with the neighbours or go for a swim. And if you feel like having a cup of coffee, you can just go downstairs to the shops. To us, this is a home," says Khoo.

Among the serviced apartments under construction in Ara Damansara are Titijaya Group's H2O Residences, Weida (M) Bhd's Urbana Residences and HSB Development Sdn Bhd's AraGreens Residences.

H2O Residences offers built-ups ranging from 750 to 1,000 sq ft and is priced from RM570,000 onwards. Urbana Residences has built-ups of 807 to 1,280 sq ft and is priced at an average RM700 psf. AraGreens Residences offers units ranging from 684 to 3,097 sq ft with prices starting at RM480,000. H2O Residences, Urbana Residences and AraGreens Residences were launched in 2014, 2013 and 2012 respectively.

Newfields has just completed its sales gallery on the site and started selling in mid-March.

"Before we started selling, the total take-up from the previous launch was 55%. Including the 55%, we have achieved sales of about 75%," says Seow, adding that many of the new buyers are from the neighbourhood and surrounding areas.

"Most of our buyers are home occupiers, which is what we wanted. We try not to attract speculators. We are straightforward: we don't give freebies or packages. They don't work and we won't be attracting the right people. One thing we have always stuck to is focusing on families," he adds.

"We haven't really started marketing the project yet. Due to its location on a busy road, those who drive by daily got curious and visited our sales gallery. We found that many are buying for their children and some for the elders because they live nearby. It will be convenient for them to have the family close by."

Wang notes that one of the completed serviced apartments, Oasis Ara Damansara by Sime Darby Property Bhd, is mostly tenanted by people who work nearby.

"A unit of about 700 sq ft can command a rent of RM2,000 per month. However, unlike Oasis Ara Damansara, which attracted a lot of investors, serviced apartments like AraGreens attracted more home occupiers. So, if Maission is selling to mostly home occupiers, it's not a problem," he says.

Newfields relaunched the project last Saturday and expects to complete it by March 2017. The developer is stepping up its marketing effort and hopes to hit close to 90% sales within the next six months.

Taking a different road

As Newfields does not have the name and abundant resources, Seow says the company has to do things a little differently from others in order to survive.

"In today's environment, you have to have a very good idea in order to be able to sell, and you have to be comfortable with the project. We have looked at some projects but did not feel comfortable with them. We didn't take them up because we didn't think we could add the kind of value the big developers could. Big developers have a lower cost base and financing," he says.

"We can't slug it out with the big boys because we can't compete on price. So, we focus on developments in good, mature locations and we have to think out of the box and be different. We take on projects like Maission, which are not the kind of projects big developers would consider."

Khoo and Seow do not foresee Newfields developing million-ringgit homes in the near future.

"We are looking at mid-range products, where bite-sized properties are more affordable. Our target market is people who can buy properties priced below RM1 million, and we believe there are still plenty of them around," says Seow.

Coming up next for Newfields is its first residential landed development in Ampang, which Khoo describes as a small project. As the company is the midst of finalising the project, he is unable to share any details.

"Normally, new developers will start with landed projects before moving on to high-rises and then commercial. We are working in the other direction," laughs Khoo.

"The margins for landed properties are lower, but it's a challenge we want to take up and show that we can deliver," says Seow.

At present, Newfields has a landbank of 16 acres in Puchong Gateway.

"Puchong Gateway is sitting on commercial land and we are looking at, perhaps, serviced apartments in the next two years," says Seow.

The executive directors expect Newfields to take on bigger projects five years or so down the road.

"Because land prices are high, we have to look at different ways to acquire land ... some through joint venture or profit sharing. We want to look into doing different products but yet remain true to what we believe in. Generally, we will stick to developing projects in the Klang Valley," adds Seow.

