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E&O Hotel Penang revamps Heritage Wing, doubles down on social media

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Eastern & Oriental (E&O) Hotel Penang recently launched its refurbished Heritage Wing featuring its revamped guest rooms, as well as new and refreshed food and beverage concepts for the holiday season.

The refurbishment was done in collaboration with branding and design group Sedgwick Richardson, which worked closely with the E&O team to redefine its brand story and experiences, while staying true to its heritage and sustaining its timeless identity. Appointed on 1 March, the agency aimed to express the brand in a more contemporary fashion by strengthening its iconography – timeless symbols of heritage, authenticity and classic style that could travel further in time and also geographically.

To help the 134-year-old hotel engage with a new generation of digital travellers, a set of social media guidelines was created with content designed for a phased campaign leading up to and beyond the launch of the refurbished Heritage Wing. Detailed photography styling was incorporated into the brand guidelines to direct this phased campaign.

Both parties had a customised brand immersion session involving cross-functional teams and heads of departments to craft the brand story, design the bilingual core values and brand promises cards for all employees to live the brand promises. Sedgwick Richardson delved into E&O's historical archive to recontextualise the brand story and brought it to life through an immersive exhibition, featuring a narrative that wove the brand promises with its heritage across a series of exhibition panels and displays.

In a statement to *A+M*, Carolyn Peh, assistant GM, branding group strategy and communication said it challenged Sedgwick Richardson with the defining of the E&O brand in a way that would work across a portfolio of diverse residential properties. "Through insightful brand research, creative thinking and storytelling, the team hit the nail on the head and captured the very essence of our brand," she said.

Peh added that the design process and thinking behind the refurbishment of the Heritage Wing is focused on retaining the treasured style of timeless elegance that is unique to the iconic landmark.

Prior to this branding project, Sedgwick Richardson has established a strong relationship with E&O focused on solving strategic branding challenges across its real estate portfolio. As such, it understood the needs of the brand. Also, having previously worked on The Peninsular brand in Myanmar, which is a hotel brand that extended into branded residences, Sedgwick Richardson's managing director of Southeast Asia, Dominic Mason said it understands the brand synergies between luxury hospitality and residential real estate.

Mason explained that it implemented experiential branding to facilitate the cultural value of the brand without losing its colonial charm. This was done by developing a set of hospitality experiences that transcend time.

"We looked back into the brand's past to establish those themes that have travelled through time and then we sharpened those themes into eight distinctive brand promises. Leading hotel brands are also big on iconography, so we focused on elevating the E&O's set of icons, rather than the logo itself," he added.

It's not about graphic design and logos, but about codifying a set of relevant experiences, icons and environments that reflect the purpose and personality of the E&O brand.

The short term goal is to increase the real and perceived value of the Heritage Wing experience through the brand, allowing room rates to increase and supporting more premium F&B offerings. In the longer term, the goal is to sharpen the E&O brand DNA so that it can "travel" overseas and potentially extend into areas of product merchandising and stand alone retail will drive growth.

E&O prides itself on its unique architectural design, as well as the rich cultural and historical fabric woven into the brand since it is located within George Town's UNESCO World Heritage Site. According to E&O, its commitment to delivering personal service over the years have played a crucial role in establishing a deep emotional connection between the E&O brand and its guests. E&O was established by Armenina hoteliers, the Sarkies Brothers, who also founded the Raffles Hotel in Singapore.

Despite services such as Airbnb and HomeAway becoming increasingly popular among customers, E&O said Millennials and Gen Zs are not its priority as a brand that is over a 100 years old with main customers "that are of a certain age". Nonetheless, it is mindful of "Instagrammable" opportunities within the hotel experience to help profile the E&O brand for the group of consumers dependent on digital hospitality services.

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