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# Marina Bay Sands covers its bets

Fengshui master says  
the integrated resort  
has many auspicious  
elements going for it



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When Marina Bay Sands (MBS) won the bid to build an integrated resort (IR) in 2006, geomancers had nothing very nice to say about its architecture, courtesy of world-famous designer Moshe Safdie.

The 55-storey towers look like ancestral tablets, some argued. The SkyPark is like a blade, cutting into the surrounding buildings, while the water features on top of the park will "drown" the buildings.

But ask Mrs Louisa Ong-Lee and she will pooh-pooh all this talk by her colleagues. "They saw only photos of it, which are in 2-D," she said. They did not see that the back of the three towers is actually curved, she said.

The SkyPark is curved too.

"Planes that come around will see a smile from their bird's eye view," she said. Plus, the SkyPark boasts different layers while a blade is flat, she argued.

The Singapore-born, United States-based fengshui master is now in charge of the \$5.5 billion mammoth and much-watched IR. She took over when her master, Mr Chong Swan Lek, also a Singaporean, died of lung cancer in 2008.

Right from the beginning, Mr Chong had worked with Mr Safdie to incorporate good fengshui elements into the resort's design, said MBS spokesman Val Chua. Casinos are big customers of fengshui masters in Asia and around the world.

Australia's Crown Casino, for instance, called in three fengshui experts when designing its hotel tower and the casino's internal layout.

Punters are equally serious about fengshui: Last year, a Taiwanese man threatened to sue The Venetian in Las Vegas after he lost US\$2 million (S\$2.8 million), which he blamed on bad fengshui in his hotel room. He said the casino-hotel dug a square hole on the wall of the suite he was staying in and covered it with a black cloth, which symbolises death.

While The Venetian shares the same parent company as MBS - Las Vegas Sands Corp - the three towers at Marina Bay Sands have nothing to do with ancestral tablets, and hence, death.

"They can represent three mountains or three warriors guarding the gateway to Singapore," said Mrs Ong-Lee, who is in her 50s.

The SkyPark is like a scholar's hat, symbolising new skills being acquired, while the three domes in front symbolise three coins, which stand for prosperity.

Its turtle-shell shape is also a common symbol of longevity.

The lotus-shaped Art Science Museum is designed like an open palm, a gesture of giving and welcoming, and the calmness associated with it is "a quiet balance to all

the buzz and activity", she said.

Then, there is a commissioned stand-alone art piece of swirling water called Vortex, near the event plaza, which creates an energy force that is like wealth being collected.

Still, despite fengshui being open to so many interpretations, Mrs Ong-Lee insisted there are rules and principles to the practice, which are guided by the so-called balance of the five elements.

In the case of MBS, its silvery white facade represents metal, while other businesses in the IR represent fire. Wood is represented in the landscaping and greenery, while water is all around.

It bodes especially well for MBS, too, that the IR is built on reclaimed land, or "new land" which comes with no baggage. "If you start off on a good footing, nothing much needs to be done," she said.

Over at Resorts World Sentosa (RWS), which consulted Hong Kong-born Victor Li, 49, the island

is apparently already blessed with good "qi", or energy, which flows from the Malay Peninsula. The bridges from the main island to Sentosa also bring in the good energy.

"When I first saw a plan of (RWS), my first impression was that it is shaped like a bat, which is an auspicious symbol in fengshui," he said.

Water also features prominently at this IR, with fountains, a lake, a marine life park and Waterworld at the Universal Studios theme park.

A park at the centre of the IR is also shaped like the Chinese symbol for yin and yang, which is meant to bring good fortune to people coming to the area.

These fengshui practitioners are called on not just for aesthetic elements, but also in choosing auspicious dates. The casino at RWS opened its doors to punters at 12.18pm on the first day of Chinese New Year. In Cantonese, 12.18 sounds like "surely will win".

Mrs Ong-Lee also picked an auspicious day - March 8 - last week for operations staff to move into MBS.

But as architect Richard Hassell puts it, fengshui's mix of knowledge and beliefs means some of it makes design sense while others are purely symbolic and iconographical.

"Because of this mix of domains of knowledge, it can be many things to many people," he said.

So whether these fengshui masters deserve their pay cheque is something that remains to be seen.



Singapore-born Louisa Ong-Lee, a US-based fengshui master, took over the Marina Bay Sands project from her master Chong Swan Lek when he died in 2008.

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