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# Oku - Regent Phu Quoc

BLINK Design Group creates a vernacular spectacular with Regent on Vietnam's paradise isle of Phu Quoc

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IHG

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Oku - Regent Phu Quoc — Photo by IHG

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The prime movers in placemaking have teamed up with the last word in authentic Asian luxury to create a stunningly unique resort experience perfectly timed to open as South East Asia roars back to life.

This is the story of the making of Regent Phu Quoc, the new jewel in the crown of Regent Hotels, which opens its doors in April 2022 to a world longing to rediscover the romance of travel and crying out for experiences of beguiling authenticity.

It is the story of the ultimate collaboration between a hotel brand that has become the *sine qua non* of timelessly elegant escapes, and BLINK's visionaries who live and breathe destinations, immersing themselves in the vernacular and diving deep into local culture, art, craft and design before conjuring up experiences that become a true exploration of time and place.

And it's the story of the birth of something very special on an island transforming from best-kept secret status, whispered amongst the cognoscenti, to its emergence as the region's hottest destination. A statement of intent from a brand with an auspicious history, part of the mythical lore and the cultural DNA of the East.

Phu Quoc transcends cliché as a true island paradise; a gem of rarest jade reposing in the turquoise waters of the Gulf of Thailand. An island comprising 99 verdant peaks, 28 pristine islets, 20 unspoiled beaches, and some of the warmest smiles in Asia. Fishing villages, pearl farms and pepper plantations provide charming glimpses into Vietnamese customs spanning generations, while more than half of the island has been protected as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since 2006.

It was against this backdrop that BLINK's best design brains were summoned to pool their knowledge and inspirations with the vast hotel and resort experience of the Regent brand and its new owner, InterContinental Hotels Group.

The goal: create a luxury resort experience imbued with the soul and culture of Phu Quoc in an enviable location on the island's most beautiful and longest beach on its serene western shore.

The vision: a place where sunlight pervades and the sparkling waters of the gulf enchant from every angle; a tranquil environment for relaxation, swathed in natural textiles and Sign In

minimalist decor. A place where traditional Vietnamese and modern design merge.

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BLINK founder Clint Nagata says the design group was honoured to be trusted with the master planning, architecture and interiors for the resort.

"This is a very special project, from the brand involved to the uniquely beautiful location and a rich local culture full of traditions and artisans, and on to the timing of its launch," he said. "It was right in our wheelhouse in terms of delving into the art of placemaking; going very deep into the cultures, materials and traditions of the vernacular before we even put pen to paper."

The brief was to create an all-suites and villas luxury beach resort, consisting of Ocean View Suites, Garden Pool Suites and opulent Pool Villas from one to seven bedrooms, private infinity pools and plunge pools, as well as six food and beverage concepts with Regent's elegant take on 'wow factor' and incorporating the brand's penchant for storytelling. A grand ballroom and event spaces, a Regent Club, and a cutting-edge spa concept were also required.

Informing the master plan above all, says Nagata, was making the most of the breathtaking gulf waters and sunset. "This meant utilising a multi-dimensional approach for every major guest-facing space, deliberately spread horizontally and stacked vertically so that all guests enjoy an optimum view of the natural setting."

The sense of arrival begins with a processional staircase to the lobby. Guests are greeted with an iconic space, framed with a modern interpretation of Vietnamese roofs and featuring luminous laquerwork with the delicate duck eggshell inlays for which the region is famous.

Nagata says the initial architectural ideas were steeped in the Vietnamese vernacular. "This is a country with strong local culture and traditional architectural heritage. One of the structural systems commonly found is the wooden truss system, known locally as the *Bovi*. We have abstracted that feature and developed it into subtle patterns that feature on screens, carpets and accessories."

One of the key elements in the masterplan is the courtyard-like villas, each with its own infinity pool and plunge pool and layers of privacy and intimacy. This is inspired

by another key feature in the Vietnamese vernacular known as *Gian Nha*.

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"A traditional house is often composed of small compartments and courtyards," says Nagata. "These individual spaces create transition and different experiences within the Home Me Latest News Opinion World Panel Explainers HNTV Calendar

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same house. Our spatial zoning presents a contemporary interpretation of *Gian Nha*, blurring the boundaries of indoor and outdoor."

The finished product is suffused with delicate Vietnamese craftsmanship and intricate thought processes. The villas gradually reveal themselves to their inhabitants, presenting moments of joy and little epiphanies. On a practical level, this also allows great flexibility so that spaces can be separated, creating a lock-off unit for different amounts of guests in different types of occasions. The larger villas also feature separate quarters for maids or drivers.

Nagata said the iconic waters of the Gulf extend into the resort itself, reflected and amplified by some 206 pools scattered throughout the villas and the property.

### **Culinary journeys into magical spaces**

Rice Market, Regent Phu Quoc's all-day dining space, affords a glimpse into the everyday life of the locals. Drawing inspiration from the rice market, the restaurant spills onto the central courtyard, inspired by the vibrant street markets of Vietnam. Ingenious twists on rice mills and water wheels along with burlap rice bag textures offer up eye candy in a relaxed ambiance.

OKU is the showpiece fine dining restaurant, a French-Japanese Omakase atelier and salon de boeuf. It sits at the heart of the resort, a celebration of intricate Japanese woodwork, evoking the feel of a Parisian brasserie with a hint of new orientalist.

Meticulous attention to detail pervades, from the cuisine to the interiors. Precision and perfection were BLINK's watchwords in creating this icon in the making. "Just as an Omakase Chef pays special attention to select ingredients to create a meal as an artistic expression, so too does the woodworker as the precision and perfection of his joinery becomes a work of art," explains Nagata.

Classic elements of the brasserie are reinterpreted: Globe lights, patterned floors, cozy banquettes and modern ironmongery details. The wall murals, textiles and lacquered surfaces are inspired by traditional details and reinvented to reveal a new design aesthetic.

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Imagine whiling away long tropical nights in a true hideaway suffused with speakeasy vibes and offering new excursions in mixology. The Jade bar is the hidden treasure of Regent Phu Quoc, only revealing itself at dusk. Inspiration was found in the jade coloured waters of the Gulf, as well as the rich tradition of jade in Vietnamese culture, handed down from mother to daughter as an heirloom. Sophisticated shades of jade and layers of intricacy lend an opulent, old world feel. The arrival experience is purposely concealed during the day.

An exclusive Regent Club sits atop the resort's main tower, overlooking the entire property. The ethereal image of crisp silhouettes against the stunning sunsets of Phu Quoc inspire the design of the rooftop pool area. Gradients of colour at the feature wall, flickers of golden tiles mimic the reflection of the sun against the clear blue waters. In the most private area of the Club, a library inspired by the tropical botanical gardens and local plants offer a sanctuary for guests. The Regent Club is a perfect place to watch sunset with a perfectly crafted Gin and Tonic.

### **A journey with twists and turns**

Nagata says that while relaxed luxury and privacy are key concepts for the discerning modern traveller, BLINK strove to bestow a feeling of discovery upon guests. "We wanted to create pockets of space and a sense of epiphany within the resort to remind guests of the natural beauty of Phu Quoc. Not only can guests enjoy ocean views, but we scattered little landscaped courtyard spaces throughout the resort's public areas.

"For example, some public bathrooms will open up to a courtyard with flora and natural lighting or a corridor may also turn a corner into a natural enclosure. We wanted to remind guests of the peaceful feelings that nature and her beauty brings, and with that, enhance the property's calming and relaxing atmosphere."

BLINK's design journey also contained the unexpected. "We began this project with BIM Group, who entrusted much of the design direction to us and the Regent Hotels and Resorts team," adds Nagata. "Part way through the design, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) acquired Regent, and we pivoted to transform our design from a more neutral colour and material palette to something a bit more colorful to match with IHG's vision for Regent as part of their top end luxury brand offering.

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"This change in direction, while simple in theory, was challenging to accommodate Home Me Latest News Opinion World Panel Explainers HNTv Calendarwithout starting from scratch but also respecting the owner's original construction

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