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DESIGNING WHAT PEOPLE FEEL

From the appealing sensuality of Noema Resort Pererenan to the renewed legacy of Sari Pacific Jakarta, HBA in Indonesia Principal CHRISTIN CASTILLO reflects on creating spaces that balance architecture, emotion, and the human instinct for connection.

Words: REFA KOETIN

For Christin Castillo, meaningful design begins with the harmony between architecture, space, and emotion – a philosophy that has guided his journey from architecture into interior design. Balancing the precision and discipline of architecture with the fluidity of interiors gave the Principal of HBA in Indonesia a sense of equilibrium and, in that balance, clarity.

Today, Christin's visual and creative direction has shaped a number of iconic contemporary spaces, including hospitality landmarks such as Sari Pacific Jakarta and Noema Resort Pererenan.

In conversation with *Prestige Indonesia*, the seasoned architect reflects on his design journey and what lies ahead for both himself and HBA in Indonesia.

Meaningful luxury is about what works, what flows naturally, and what stays with you long after you leave a space

Your career began in architecture before evolving into interior design. What first drew you to architecture, and how has that foundation continued to shape the way you work today?
I pursued architecture because of my love for the arts, from visual expression to freehand drawing and sketching. I also saw it as a noble profession. At first, it took me some time to fully embrace it, as architecture can be very rigid and precise. The passion did not develop overnight, but through the continuous process of crafting design, I eventually found peace in it. Transitioning into interior design later allowed me to see projects from both the inside and out. It gave me the ability to think more fluidly, to imagine and engineer details as I draw them, shaped by my understanding of architecture.

You began your journey with HBA as a Senior Designer and now lead the Indonesia studios as Principal. How would you describe HBA in Indonesia today, and which of its values resonate most closely with your own design philosophy?
I oversee both the HBA Bali and HBA Jakarta studios, and my role extends beyond project delivery to include running the business as a whole. I started with HBA Singapore in 2013 and was later tasked with establishing our Indonesia offices in 2015. Fast forward to today, HBA in Indonesia has made a significant contribution to the hospitality design industry, not only in scale, but through the timeless spaces we create for our clients. We always strive to design spaces that feel effortless, achieved through a collaborative culture that brings out the best in everyone involved.

When approaching a new project, do you instinctively think in architectural, spatial, or emotional terms?
I'm glad you mentioned all three, because design cannot be approached from only one perspective. Architecture, space, and emotion are all interconnected. At HBA, one principle every designer holds true is creating a "design that gives form to emotion".

In an era where aesthetics are often shaped by trends and social media, how do you create spaces that still feel timeless, grounded, and deeply human?
My main priority is always to centre the design around the guest experience. A space should create a reaction and evoke emotion between the built environment and its user. While many designs aim to inspire immediate admiration, that impact naturally softens over time, allowing the space to transition into a more subtle backdrop for everyday experiences. Much of this comes from the use of tactile, honest materials. The more organic a space looks and feels, the more deeply it connects people to human nature. Timelessness, to me, comes from creating environments that feel emotionally resonant rather than driven purely by trends.

Where do you tend to find inspiration?
Local context plays a significant role in how I find inspiration. There is always so much to draw from through culture, place, and people. What interests me most is creating a narrative and story that become the project's DNA. From there, we can build different chapters of that story, allowing it to shape and guide the design in every form and detail.

Your work on Noema Resort Pererenan captures a more introspective side of Bali. What emotional experience did you want guests to feelthere?
We wanted the space to feel welcoming and embracing from the moment guests arrive, almost as though they are cocooned within the arches of the lobby. As their attention gradually shifts upward towards the kite-inspired art installations suspended across the ceiling, the intention is to create a sense of awe within an environment that feels both unexpected and immersive. These visual cues serve as a preview of the many stories each space holds, while the way nature, landscape, and water elements intertwine throughout the property creates an experience that is difficult to forget.

How did the spirit of the Pererenan neighbourhood shape the design and atmosphere of Noema Resort?
I feel we captured the spirit of Pererenan well. The area sits on the brink of transforming from a calm, natural landscape into a vibrant, bustling community, and we reflected this transition through the cycles of sunrise and sunset, drawing inspiration from the colours and tones of dusk and dawn. At the same time, being part of the greater Canggu energy meant creating spaces that encourage activity, play, and social connection throughout the resort, from the play areas and meeting rooms to the spa and F&B venues. The experience remains grounded in nature, from the sculpted landscape elements to the rooftop views that open out towards the horizon.

On the more urban side of your portfolio, projects such as Sari Pacific Jakarta carry strong emotional associations for many people. How do you modernise without losing that sense of familiarity and memory?
It was quite a challenge. We were very careful to preserve the spirit of the venue and remain connected to how it is remembered through its rich history. Through thoughtful narratives rooted in local Betawi culture, we translated these inspirations into the design elements, art, and décor throughout the project. This was balanced with clean lines, a more streamlined spatial flow, and impactful focal points, such as the iconic crystal bead chandelier inspired by local weaving traditions, wrapped around sleek hourglass-shaped column treatments. I believe we successfully introduced a sense of timeless modern luxury while breathing new energy into Sari Pacific Jakarta.

How important is cultural sensitivity in your work, particularly for places as layered and spiritual as Indonesia?
HBA's global design approach has long been centred on responding thoughtfully to local sensibilities, cultural nuances, and the unique identity of each destination. I believe cultural sensitivity should always be "always on". There is far more to gain from embracing it than overlooking such an important aspect of design. People visit destinations and venues in search of meaningful experiences, and cultural connections play a vital role in shaping those experiences. By being sensitive to place and context, we can create climate-driven designs, integrate local craftsmanship, and align spaces with the destination's cultural rhythm and identity.

Are there any current projects or collaborations that you are especially excited about?
This is a breakout year for us, especially as we celebrate a decade of design in Indonesia. Alongside several collaborations leading up to our October anniversary event, we are working on a few exciting projects. One is a hotel in the heart of Mega Kuningan, inspired by Jakarta's vibrant cityscape of lights, neon, and movement. Another is a golf clubhouse in Bali, where I even took golf lessons to better immerse myself in the sport and its culture. We are also designing a lifestyle hotel in Bogor inspired by the spirit of outdoor adventure, scenic landscapes, and serenity.

What does meaningful luxury mean to you today?
Over the years, this journey has taught me that luxury has evolved. It used to be defined by what you could immediately see, but today, meaningful luxury is about what works, what flows naturally, and what stays with you long after you leave a space. For me, it is when you walk into an environment and everything feels effortless. The aesthetic is not generic or overly theatrical, nor is it simply a showcase of technology, yet you can feel the quality in every detail. The finishes, textures, and atmosphere register both visually and tactilely, creating emotional resonance where everything feels right.

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