

A Pleasing Seametry

Three decades into a celebrated career in hospitality design, Teo Su Seam charts an independent course with Seametry Studio, a practice that starts each project with one question: what belongs here? *By Asih Jenie*

Every seam holds two things together without either losing its shape. It's a tidy design principle that describes the recent years of interior designer Teo Su Seam's career. After more than three illustrious decades as a name partner at award-winning hospitality design firm LTW Designworks, Teo has seamlessly transitioned into establishing her own studio.

The opportunity came through conversations with Joe Cheng, founder of Hong Kong hospitality design firm Cheng Chung Design (CCD), conversations that led to the creation of an independent practice backed by CCD. She called it Seametry Studio, a fusion of "seam", drawn from her own name, and "geometry". "Seam is about the less tangible things: emotion, culture, memory and the connections we form with a place," she shares.



"Geometry brings the discipline: proportion, structure, precision and clarity. One gives a space its soul; the other gives it form."

BUILT ON THE COLLECTIVE

Teo's years as one of a few partners have imparted wisdom with which she leads her practice. "One of the biggest lessons has been recognising that leadership is less about doing everything yourself and more about creating the conditions for others to do their best work," she elaborates. Having CCD's backing, she adds, helps her to take a longer view. "I don't feel everything has to happen immediately. We can build carefully, invest in the team and allow people to grow into larger roles as the studio evolves."

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SEAMETRY STUDIO



This spread, clockwise from bottom left: Teo Su Seam, the founder of Seametry Studio; brass, marble and warm timber come together in Seametry's redesign of the Korean Air lounge at Incheon; one of the lounge's nooks creates a sense of retreat; a sleek yet cultural aesthetic permeates the various environments within the lounge

For all that the studio now answers to her alone, Teo is firm that none of the work is hers alone to claim. "I often compare it to a chef in a kitchen," she says. "You may recognise the name of the chef, but behind them is an entire brigade. Design is no different... it is never about 'I'; it is always about 'we'."

Her current brigade is the very same team she partnered with previously, which operates from Singapore and Bangkok with a common language shaped by years of working together and a collective design sensibility that continues to define the practice. The studio now numbers around 44 designers and professionals, with satellite support from the Philippines and Brisbane, and a brand new Singapore office to move into next year.

WHAT BELONGS HERE

Several current projects feel especially meaningful to Teo right now, chief among them the rebranding of Korean Air's First Class, Miler Club and Prestige lounges at Seoul's Incheon Airport, a commission Seametry won through a competition. The LAX lounge has also since been completed, with JFK due later this year. "The project was originally signed during my time at LTW Designworks," she says, "but I led the design with the same team who are now with me at Seametry."

The upcoming crown jewel in the studio's portfolio is Four Seasons Okinawa, a project novated from LTW to Seametry. "I sometimes joke that I have been nursing this baby for more than 10 years," Teo laughs. She is also equally invested in two high-end residential developments in Tokyo's Roppongi and Azabu districts.

Reading a place before designing for it has become a signature approach at Seametry. "As a designer, I'm always looking for the clues a place gives you: how people move through it, what they touch, what they preserve, how daylight enters a room, even what they choose to leave empty," she says. "We don't begin by asking, 'What should this look like?' We begin by asking, 'What belongs here?'"

ON TRUE LUXURY

Ask Teo where hospitality design is headed, and she starts with what guests are actually seeking. "Today, guests are looking for something more meaningful than beautiful interiors," she says. "They want to experience the culture, landscape and character of the place they have travelled to." Well-being, she believes, will only grow more central to that, though not in the form of, say, bigger spas. "It begins with the architecture itself: natural light, proportion, acoustics, materiality and our relationship with the landscape," she explains.

Technology has a role too, so long as it knows its place. "The best technology, to me, is intuitive and almost invisible," she says. "It should make life easier without constantly reminding you that it is there."

She also sees the traditional categories blurring. "Luxury residences are increasingly being designed with the sensibility of a five-star hotel... At the same time, airport lounges are becoming much more hospitality-driven," she says, pointing to the Korean Air lounges as proof. "An airport lounge isn't just a place to wait for a flight; it has become an integral part of the traveller's journey."

It's a shift that has changed how Seametry approaches every brief. "We are no longer thinking in rigid categories of 'hotel', 'residence' or 'lounge'," she says. "We think about the rituals that happen within them: arriving, resting, dining, gathering, working or retreating."

