

PROPERTY REPORT

Luxury real estate, architecture and design

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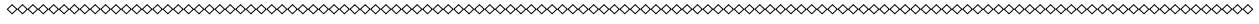
FRANCO-VIETNAMESE RURAL HERITAGE

BY JULES KAY

La Vallee de Dalat is a 10,000 sqm residential project inspired by French heritage architecture and situated in Vietnamese hill country, a mile above sea level. Dalat was once the summer capital of French Indochina, and colonial settlers chose the area to escape the heat and humidity of Southeast Asia's lower elevations, and to revel in the airy nature of a place now commonly referred to as the "City of Eternal Spring". Only seven villas will be built on site, each one nestled into a pine-covered hillside overlooking a lush valley and rolling mountains. The gradual slope of the location enabled Asiatique, the project's Ho Chi Minh City-based design firm, to design homes that feature spacious terraces or decks on each level and thoughtful consideration was also given to landscaping and infrastructure, resulting in a well-planned community that is both beautiful to look at and easy to access and navigate.

DESIGN FOCUS
La Vallee de Dalat

Dalat native Le Ngoc Khanh Tam is the woman behind La Vallee de Dalat, and she recently moved into the first villa with her husband, Barry Israel, an American lawyer and investor who helped finance the project. Property Report asked her about the concept and design features that make this project so unique.



Why did you choose the hills of Dalat for this project?

For one, Dalat is my home. I grew up here and I've always loved the cool, fresh air, the pine trees, the flowers everywhere, the lakes, the views, and the fresh food. I especially love the changes in climate, with it often being sunny in the morning and then rainy later in the day, leaving a delightfully fresh smell in the air. Moreover, my husband and I have an appreciation for the history of Dalat – “Le Petit Paris” as it's also called. For him, that interest was developed during his time as chairman of Danao International Holdings, which used to own the Dalat Palace Hotel and the Dalat Palace Golf Club. For me, it began long ago, when I was a kid. I grew up looking at the Dalat Palace Hotel. I always marvelled at its French architecture, and its place on top of a big, beautiful hill, overlooking the lake. But we also chose Dalat for the opportunity. To date, all the real estate development in Vietnam has been in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and on the coastline. We believe that Dalat – because of its weather, increasing golf opportunities and the natural trend toward second-home development in the mountains – is on the verge of a legitimate boom.

What specific design features in the houses are drawn directly from French heritage architecture?

When the French founded Dalat around the turn of the last century, they demonstrated homesickness for the Landes, Savoy, Brittany and Normandy. That's evident in the colonial-era relics still scattered about Dalat. Over the years, we've learned to distinguish the Norman villas from the Savoyarde, the Corsican from the Landaise. Most had sturdy stone foundations, chimneys, terra cotta roof tiles, small, multi-pane windows and louvered shutters. Some had long, wooden balconies running along the broadest facade, others had covered terraces. Some were designed with spacious, step-up verandas; others were laid out with three bedrooms on a single floor. We've incorporated a lot of those features into the first villa. For instance, the foundation is extremely strong, and we've got covered verandas that run along the broadest facade. We sit out on the veranda off the master bedroom in the morning — with our coffee and pastries, of course — and take in the sweeping view of the valley below and the ridge on the other side. That said, our villas are also influenced by villas I've seen in California, where they often build on the side of a hill or mountain to take advantage of the views. I wanted villas that had both the French influence and the American focus on great views as the centrepieces for the development.

What distinctive elements did Asiatique bring to the design?

Asiatique spent a lot of time in Dalat, looking around at the old villas that still exist here. They took photos of them all, and then classified their features — beams, roofs, balconies, et cetera. That research informed their ideas. They did their homework and when they developed the

master plan, they looked at the house from every angle first. All of the bottom three villas will be slightly angled, so that they don't block the views of the villas above. Feng shui was part of the planning, from the original design through construction. The houses back up to raised land and look out to an open view, which is an important feng shui principle. In addition, each house is oriented in an ideal feng shui direction. Inside the house, we employed the floating principles with no hidden corners or dead air. We took special care to have open interiors to create a healthy environment. All doors and windows follow feng shui measurement principles to foster prosperity and health. We also followed feng shui principles on location of the kitchen, bathrooms, bedrooms, doors and windows, and the staircase.

Which aspects of the design and materials used create a more contemporary feel?

Stone and wood are the primary materials in the first villa. Limestone was used for all the countertops and flooring in the kitchen, the bottom level family room, the exterior staircases and decks, and some of the bathrooms. The master baths are wood, and there's some marble in the bathroom between the office and one of the bedrooms. Although we want to keep the basic exterior design, the interior can be customised to a buyer's specifications. Room and bath sizes can be adjusted. We selected EBM windows and doors, but a buyer can select another brand or go with all wood windows. We have wide-plank hardwood floors in most rooms, custom-made by Truong Thang Company. They also built the kitchen cabinets and one bath vanity. We used limestone from Viet Stone Industries in the kitchen, bathrooms and main room in the basement, and on the outside decks and staircases. Finally, we used Saigon Interiors lacquer furniture and accessories as accents in several rooms, including two bathrooms, the main entry room, living room and several bedrooms.

What type of investors do you feel these villas will suit best?

Anyone with an appreciation for what we're developing here — a stunningly beautiful piece of land right next to a former residence of the last emperor of Vietnam (Bao Dai). It is quiet, has spectacular views and is the only self-contained, freehold, private, gated villa project in Dalat. We offer large lots averaging over 900 sqm, impeccable design, complete security and privacy and great infrastructure, which cannot be overstated given the fact it's slope-side land. In other words, we are looking for clients like us — people who value quality above all, appreciate the beauty of the location and seek a secure, private place in the mountains where they can take refuge from the heat and chaos of Southeast Asia.

For more information on the history behind this project, visit valleedalat.com ■

DESIGN FOCUS
La Vallee de Dalat



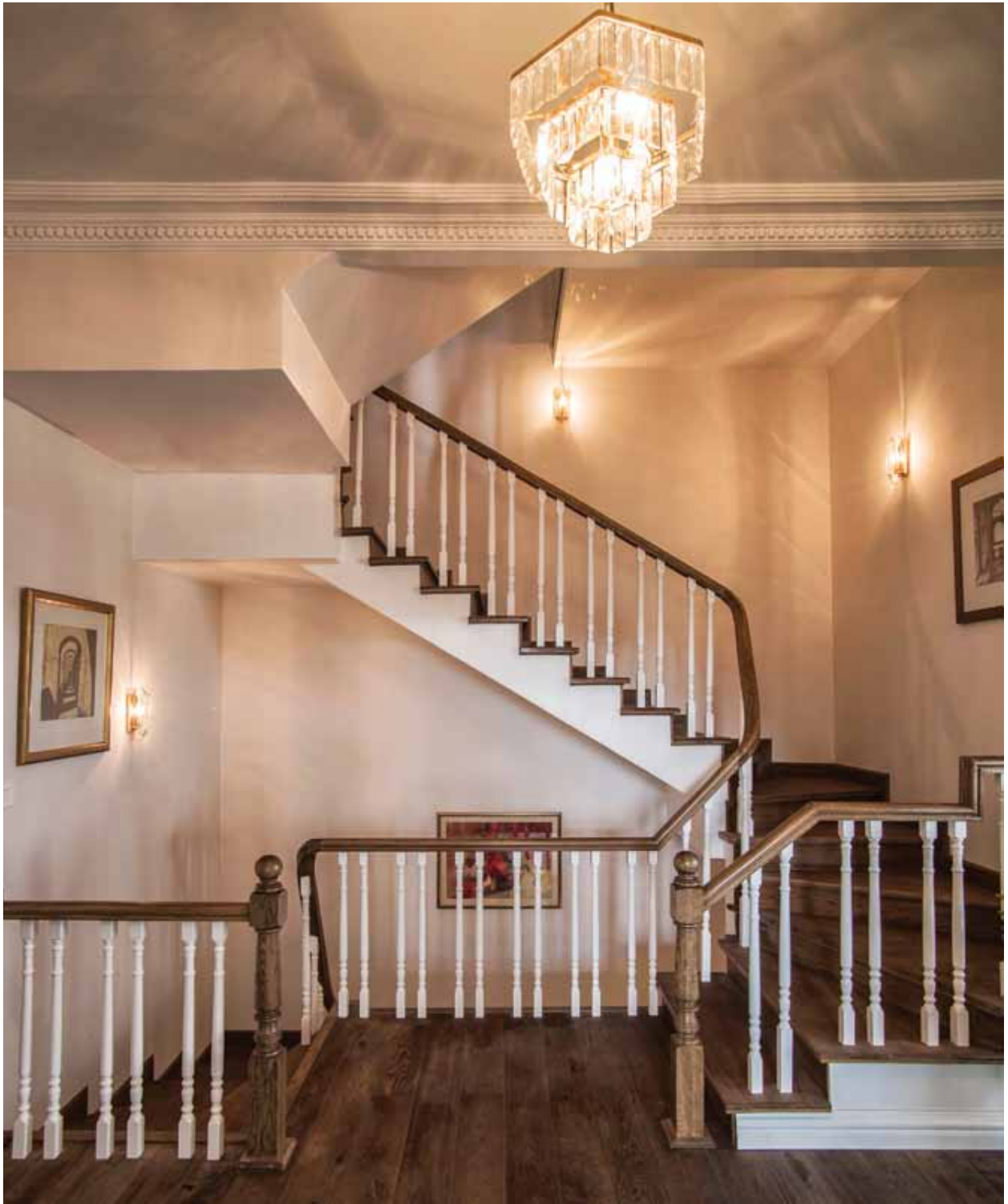


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