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The Hulafeni Fushi
Resort in the Republic of
Maldives, designed by
Singapore's
C&CSTUDIO, was
awarded the 2006
WE Ching Award.



A world away

By Marge D. Hansen

Natural context and bold design decisions win one boutique design firm top honors for an environmentally sensitive luxury resort.

The Republic of Maldives is a hospitality haven with one spectacular sun-splashed resort after another bathed by the Indian

Ocean. The string of more than 1,000 coral islands stretches across approximately 600 miles from north to south. Enticing and exotic, it's a remote, watery world accessible only by boat or seaplane.

"The Maldives is a special place of naked beauty. It is one of those rare locations where you'll find an island with white sandy beaches, a coconut palm and nothing else," says Carl Ettensperger, Managing Director of C&CSTUDIO in Singapore, whose firm is the 2006 winner of the Will Ching Design Competition for its work on the Huvafen Fushi Resort, located on the North Malé Atoll.

The Will Ching Award honors exceptional achievement by a firm of five or fewer designers. "Small firms provide the industry with a fresh outlook," says S. Russell Groves, Principal of S. Russell Groves in New York, and one of the judges for the



competition. "By the very nature of their size, their design voice can be more singular and direct. Small firms can be light on their feet and more flexible in responding to a client's needs. As a result, the design output can be more inventive."

Huvafen Fushi is a perfect example of Ettensperger's straightforward design philosophy: Create what is most appropriate for the location, function and style of each project. Every assignment is initiated with the intention to stir emotions and make people more aware of their senses and surroundings.

In recent years, Ettensperger, a graduate of the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif., has worked on some of the most celebrated projects in the hospitality industry. His spaces are not just visually pleasing; they are comfortable, purposeful environments as well.

The incredible and all-encompassing natural elements were the inspiration for and the essence of the C&CSTUDIO team's ingenious design for Huvafen Fushi. Guest

bungalows and pavilions have expansive outdoor decks with private plunge pools, open-air waterfall showers, sunbathing terraces and outdoor dining areas. Daybeds float over the water to minimize the distance to the ocean and maximize the glorious panorama of sea and sky. Relaxing hues ripple through the resort's neutral, natural color palette.

Master planning can look good on paper, but on-site adjustments always have to be made. A major design consideration, particularly at a luxury destination like Huvafen Fushi, involves ensuring visitors have the privacy and seclusion they are paying for. Today, the opportunity to have an unobstructed view of endless sky and water is rare for many tourists who come from any of the world's major cities.

"When you stagger buildings so they fit into a site more naturally, there are concerns about looking around corners and being able to see into someone else's space," Ettensperger says. "If you construct bungalows out over the water, you don't have the



The Aquum Spa (left) at Huvafen Fushi, suspended over the ocean, is the world's first underwater treatment room.





The natural elements were the inspiration for the resort. Relaxing hues ripple through the neutral, natural color palette.

opportunity to use landscape materials as a screen." Therefore, careful positioning and, in some cases, re-positioning of every bungalow was not only view-enhancing, but a practical concern as well.

A long wooden walkway meanders out to the Aquum Spa, one of the resort's showstoppers. Aquum is suspended over the water and offers the world's first underwater treatment rooms. Mesmerized spa visitors can gaze through oversized aquarium-like windows as schools of tropical fish swim past.

Huvafen Fushi was designed to showcase authentic island textures and incorporate the soothing, ever-changing movements of the ocean and sky into the architecture. The roof of the Celsius Restaurant is shaped like the swell of a wave traveling through the ocean. In the lounge and reception areas, sand covers the floor, and Ettensperger used the Infinity Pool as a watery canvas to display unique fiber-optic lighting effects.



"We were just knocked out by the beauty of the shooting stars, the Milky Way and to see that stars are actually different colors," Ettensperger says. "I worked with Bo Steiber of Bo Steiber Lighting on the idea of creating a reflection of the night sky in the pool. It's not an exact copy; just an impression to amplify the experience. He took off with the idea and created something magical."

And to heighten the lighthearted, relaxing spirit that envelops Huvafen Fushi, it was suggested that guests adhere to a "no shoes" policy on the island.

Ettensperger's favorite part of this project was seeing the dream become reality. "I have a lot of respect for this client, who took the initiative and had the imagination necessary to create a place that fits so well into such a remarkable setting. It is wonderful and rare to have a client willing to take such risks," he says.

The C&CSTUDIO team was on an extremely tight schedule for this project — less than a year from initial design through construction — but

Ettensperger, who established the firm in 2001, looks forward to having more opportunities and challenges like this one. "I think in the future — particularly in the high-end hospitality market — we will see smaller design firms doing what they do best, rather than large firms continuing to do things in a standard way," he says. He knows the market and understands that high-caliber guests are looking for an extraordinary experience in a place like no other in the world.

"As we began to review the entries, Huvafen Fushi Resort stood out as something quite unique," says Clara Igonda, a Principal of CNI Design in Los Angeles and a Will Ching Competition judge. "There is no artificiality here. C&CSTUDIO used simple materials and let the colors and natural beauty of the location come through. What they did with the lights and the water is magnificent. They created a poetic place. This, to me, is one of those rare projects where you say to the designer: 'Bravo!'" ■