

## THE HOT SEAT

**SURYA JHUNJHNUWALA**  
Managing director,  
Hind Group

### A SENSE OF PLACE

HOTELIERS ARE HARNESSING HERITAGE AND HISTORY AS VALUE-ADDS FOR SOPHISTICATED WORLD TRAVELLERS.

"I was first taken by the beautiful windows. And if I'd seen the original wood floors, I would have wanted it even more!" quips Surya Jhunjhnuwala of the 10 neoclassical town houses along Keong Saik Street that make up his hotel, Naumi Liora, which opened last year.

What captures attention is the beautifully restored period facade, painted a vibrant tangerine. Jhunjhnuwala admits he'd been eyeing the property for a while, even when it was still The Saff Hotel, and was thrilled when he got the lots through an auction in November 2011. "We were excited about the history of the building. It is a heritage building designed in the 1920s by Westerhout & Oman, one of the leading architectural firms then," he says.

"But even more exciting was discovering the building's original beauty

– bits of which had been covered up by past owners. For example, we ripped up the carpets and found beautiful, original timber flooring from the 1920s – which we took great pains to restore."

To build a boutique hotel with a distinct heritage feel was a conscious decision for Hind Group, which will be relaunching its six-year-old modern city hotel Naumi on Seah Street later this year. "The two hotels offer very different experiences but deliver the same brand of Naumi hospitality culture," he says. "At Liora, we don't just provide comfort and luxury, we also offer character and history. But it's not for everyone: some people ask why the floorboards make so much noise."

"Liora is for those who want to experience a different Singapore, as opposed to what you'd get from a hotel at

Marina Bay or Orchard Road. We are small players – if we don't stand out, we'll be lost in the crowd."

"There is a bigger market for historical hotels in Europe, where they're usually located in quirky areas. But I believe that Asia will soon catch on to the trend. It's a natural progression – you build your skyscrapers and high-rise buildings, then you start to rediscover your heritage buildings."

"If I find a good property with the right pedigree and history, I would love to do another heritage hotel – in spite of the pain and stress of dealing with the authorities," he says. "A small hotel with 50 to 150 rooms would be ideal – at Naumi, we are all about the personal touch. For me, 120 to 150 is the sweet spot – beyond that, the guest becomes just a number." ☺