HOSPITALITY

The CEO of The Langham Hospitality Group, Bob van den Oord, has helped a firm founded in 1865 stay with the times. Plus: How to export Cantonese cuisine and the importance of a human touch in hospitality.

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At your service

Hong Kong-based luxury hotel company Langham Hospitality Group (LHG) owns four brands including The Langham Hotels and Resorts (TLHR). It will open The Langham, Custom House, Bangkok this year, closely followed by TLHR outposts in Venice, Riyadh, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur.

LHG's CEO, Bob van den Oord, who has spent more than 20 years with the group, joins us at The Langham, Hong Kong's Cantonese restaurant T'ang Court to chew over the challenges and the opportunities ahead.

You've described LHG as having a 'British heart, Asian soul and global mindset'. What does that mean?
Having been with the group for 23 years, I've often thought about how best to articulate who and what we are. And to do that, we have to go back to where we came from. It all started in London, so with all our hotels around the world, we try to bring a little bit of that Britishness, from serving afternoon tea to creating club lounges that are modern interpretations of the old gentlemen's clubs. With our headquarters in Hong Kong, we've tried to instil our Asian soul into our hotels through offerings such as the traditional Chinese medicine-inspired Chuan Spa platform and our Cantonese restaurants, T'ang Court and Ming Court.

In November 2025, LHG rolled out a suite of AI tools for guests and employees. How do you balance technology and the human touch?
AI is becoming increasingly important for any business, and we want our group to be at the forefront. We have a whole team that's focusing on new initiatives that are AI-driven, because we want to make the experience easier and better for our guests. For example, we've introduced Experience Agent in a few of our hotels and will eventually offer it at every property. The tool allows guests to call, Whatsapp or email us across 50 different languages and receive instant responses to commonly asked questions. And if guests want to speak to a real person, they can do that too. We've freed up time for our colleagues to do their jobs even better.

The Langham in Bangkok is opening in the 138-year-old Custom House building, while The Langham, Kuala Lumpur will occupy a new tower. How do you combine different eras?
We're more than 160 years old and very proud of our legacy, having been the first grand hotel in Europe to use elevators, as well as being the first hotel to serve afternoon tea. But we're equally interested in the future, which is where we bring in new ideas, services and amenities. A great example is The Wigmore in The Langham, London, where we took the quintessential British pub concept but made it modern and posh. We got Martin Brudnizki to design an iconic neighbourhood bar where you can enjoy a beer and toastie but also a martini.

TLHR's three-Michelin-starred Cantonese restaurant T'ang Court is also now on Australia's Gold Coast and in Jakarta. Why?
We've run Chinese restaurants for a really long time, and I would say that Chinese food is one of the three most popular cuisines in the world. So it was a very easy decision to export T'ang Court overseas. We've also set up our own culinary academy where trainees are taught by our master chefs.

What's next for TLHR?
The Langham sits at the luxury end of the market, which means that every property is expensive to build and run, and thus needs to be in a market that can command a good average room rate. As such, we're looking to be in more gateway cities but also in more iconic resort destinations.
langhamhospitalitygroup.com

T'ANG COURT MUST-EATS
Expect thoughtful hospitality and timeless interiors at T'ang Court, one of Hong Kong's most beloved Cantonese restaurants. And don't skip these dishes.

STIR-FRIED DICED JAPANESE WAGYU BEEF WITH SPRING ONION AND WASABI
This melt-in-your-mouth dish marries buttery wagyu with sweet scallions.

BAKED STUFFED CRAB SHELL WITH CRAB MEAT, ONION AND CREAM SAUCE
Filled with local flower crab, Alaskan king crab and (you guessed it) an onion cream sauce, the shell is topped with crisp golden breadcrumbs.

STIR-FRIED LOBSTER WITH SPRING ONION, RED ONION AND SHALLOT
Three types of onions are used to spotlight sweet, tender and wok-fried lobster.

A SLOWER TAKE ON FAST FOOD

WRITER: Joseph Koh

The new interiors of McDonald's flagship store in Hong Kong's Admiralty Centre are as much of a feast for the senses as the menu. The lighting is turned down, mirrored ceilings abound and a 22-metre interactive screen resembles a TeamLab digital artwork more than a fast-food joint. This is the outpost that sets the pace for other McDonald's in the region to follow.

Stepping up to the plate was Australian design studio Landini Associates, which tried to redefine what modern casual dining could be. But this isn't any old outpost: the 9,000 sq ft store is one of the busiest McDonald's in the world. "Located in the heart of Hong Kong's business district, it's a powerhouse, serving more than 1,000 guests per hour during peak periods," says Randy Lai, CEO of McDonald's Hong Kong.

"The brief was to make space for more seats, a bigger kitchen and store rooms, and better staff rooms," says Mark Landini, the studio's co-founder.

Though the site had expanded into a neighbouring unit, the overall capacity was also upped to 326 diners, leading Landini Associates to create a medley of dining zones, from a long table for large gatherings to window seats for solo diners and a cosy, low-ceilinged dining alcove for smaller groups. "We've created spaces of respite," says Landini. "Everyone lives such chaotic lives in small, noisy spaces and there's no reason why you can't do that in a quick service restaurant."

As a way of avoiding harsh direct lamps, the designers crafted a sumptuous LED screen, with bespoke graphics and colours that morph throughout the day. "We didn't want it to feel like a video wall that would distract people," says Landini. "Instead, we've created a series of moods. The animations are bright and fast in the morning because of the high takeaway orders and darker and more evocative in the evening."
landiniassociates.com

DESIGNER MARK LANDINI ON REMAKING MCDONALD'S
"There's no reason why you can't sit in a nice chair when you're eating a hamburger," he says. "I've always been of the opinion that McDonald's could actually create iconic furniture that people would want to buy."

IMAGE: Andrew Meredith