

Celebrity Skin

Samuel Beckett, Donald Trump and the Candy Brothers would no doubt make for an eclectic celebrity red-carpet parade at any property award ceremony.



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It's 6:49 a.m. and in the distance my straining ears pick up those reverberating guitar opening lines from the song Hotel California. Peeking outside the window, I can make out a pick-up truck overloaded with Burmese construction workers, stopping off at a nearby ATM on the way to build a luxury villa on some cliff top nearby. No doubt the songs roll off a pirated "Best Of" Eagles compilation CD, which continue to regenerate interest in a band that hits the stage in wheelchairs and make my own less than trim waistline seem moderate.

In a world stuck in Bieber-fever and still mourning the loss of a fairly left of centre Whitney Houston, sitcom dream catchphrases like Best, Top, Greatest, Bestest (only available in the grammatically challenged China market), or any combination thereof, continue to attract followers. The shallow passion cannot be likened to any type of religious group, but is more akin to the cult-like attraction of Steve Jobs. Brands make a statement in the need for recognition, creating an only child syndrome complete with disinterested parents, unreturned phone calls and a surrogate maid. With the boarding school cloud over an uncertain horizon, angst is a given.

Celebrities and awards increasingly rear their star-studded heads in the spectrum of real estate development. I recently returned from a trip to the Philippines, and while waiting at a hidden gem – an illy espresso airport kiosk open at five in the morning – I gazed up at property developer's

“LIFE IN
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ENTWINED.”

celebrity skin. Massive lit billboards with Donald Trump and Paris Hilton screamed out about luxury condo living and my most loathed term of the moment – “lifestyle”. Yes, even in this Karaoke mango nation in Asia, famous faces spur the impossible dream.

On the global stage, we've wept at the Grammy's over Whitney, and gawked at the fashionista fest The Academy Awards. Mind you, I really don't understand the ultimate winner “The Artist”, aside from throwing me into a dozing stupor. Even the dog couldn't rescue the film, and I like dogs. Of course, it was the French Connection that gave it kudos, so we must throw it some slack, but it's wishful thinking that art films take us to a higher plane or make us smarter. France simply has the same smart marketing team as the cigarette industry, which kills people, or McDonald's which fattens them up before a similar fate.

Meanwhile, back in Thailand that special time of year has also arrived, the launch of the Thailand Property Awards. How timely! Whether we like them, loathe them or don't even have an opinion (Barack Obama, are you listening?), they remain a strong draw card for both

developers and ultimately we are told, purchasers. I know the brand pitch, and if the truth be known, in some sectors it can actually be demonstrated. Premium pricing and increased sales pace for hotel branded residences, for example. It's a premium and therefore icing on top of a chocolate cake. Now look at awards, and the question is do they really add value? Enhance reputation? Boost transactions on the last remaining units? Or do they just make a nice press release?

It's hard to quantify. Life in Propertywood and Hollywood are at times entwined. Samuel Beckett's play, “Waiting for Godot” spun off a number of movies and other adaptations. One of my favorites is the illusive “Big Night”, a bittersweet and very funny movie of two Italian brothers who lobby for a famous musician Louis Prima to visit their upstart restaurant. One of the best lines is Prima saying “Sometimes you cut it too fine, then all you taste is the garlic.” Having participated on judging panels for a number of years for various events, my thoughts turn more to those cage fighters, Libyan freedom fighters and wacky Iranian fundamentalists. Mix them all together and selection sessions often range from self induced coma's to street fighting in Syria.

What should be a big picture discussion turns into quips, backbiting and local steer wrangling. But then again, put more than one person together in any scenario be they husbands and wives, political parties or a bar room showing a big sports event, and all manner of chaos is bound to happen.

Ultimately awards say something – be it some sort of gratification, a slap on the back or even photo opportunities. I have two small girls at home and sometimes a high five is needed to make them eat their breakfast. It is the best motivator to make it through the day.

Thankfully the mind jarring state of mind from hearing Hotel California has come and gone, red carpets are waiting and the shiny little awards will reward a select few. Personally I like garlic, it fends off the other judges as we tackle the task of choosing the “Best of the Best”.



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