



# SLAVE TO THE BEAN

Random dispatches from the inferno  
Bill Barnett





# INTRODUCTION

From the beginning...

I'm sitting bare-naked on an airplane at 38,000 feet up in the sky, and can't help but be absolutely mesmerised by my left foot. It's been said the human condition is flawed, though in this instance the fatal error is a gaping hole in one black sock that has grown an evil head and been cast out into to an uncaring world.

Let's skip the nude toe scene and take a moment to reflect on this year, which somehow descended into disruptive chaos. Maybe better to just say the world is bent over and choking with a case of bad juju. Even the spin-doctors have gone stone cold mute like those stone faces on Easter Island.

And yet, throughout the days of no end or no beginning, I've found myself amazed, perplexed and somewhat disturbed by the scenes playing out before my eyes. 'Bah Bah Black Sheep' is playing in my mind's playground as I try to make sense of all this sheer randomness.

During the year I burst out of the seams of Asia, headed Down Under, hip hopped the Equator to Africa, took on Europe and as usual returned for quick doses of North America. El Nino was my seatmate, as my usual magic bus journeys skyward encountered hostile erratic weather that constantly pushed me to the edge of my seat.

The days we have in this crazy mixed up existence should not be discarded or wasted. Never get too comfortable or sedate, as the adventure remains just a keystroke away. Taxi ride, plane, train, boat or just opening the door and walking beyond that familiar neighbourhood... you never know when you will fall down an adrenalin-infused rabbit hole.

Of all my travel seductions, Asia remains my dark, haunting, slightly debauched mistress. The attraction can perhaps best be explained by the maxim that in the Old World, history is in the books, while in the New World, there remain endless opportunities to catch unwritten history up around every bend.

That's where the edge is, just past that sharp left turn coming up at any moment. But don't blink, or let your mind wander, as you might miss it.



Bill Barnett

P.S. I have to thank the following individuals for putting up with my entirely random rants, moans and general angst. Patience is certainly a virtue, but clearly not one from which I suffer. So a shout out goes to 'brandman' David Keen, editors extraordinaire Jules Kay and Liam Barnes, Brent Madison for his original photo, and Jason Gagliardi, who provided the cover portrait and design and the illustrations for each column, digital chaos from disturbia; all done, apparently, on his iPhone and iPad. Last and most importantly, kudos to Pranu, Lily, Alex and Thomas.

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# JINGLE ALL THE WAY

I've somehow jingled my way to what is nearly the end of another year and these end-of-year columns always demand that I look in any given direction, whether it's forwards, backwards, up or down. My preferred journey would of course be sideways; staying non-committal and living close enough to the edge to feel an occasional updraft. The show however, must go on.

The year twenty fourteen has seen real estate plunder and plod across Southeast Asia, and despite all this clamour over ISIS, Ebola and the death of print newspapers, the landscape is pretty positive for property. All you need to do is turn to the weekend edition of one of those decaying periodicals to see that real estate symposiums are in full swing.

I vaguely recall last year asking for any reader with somewhat violent tendencies and a small weapons cache to shoot me if I guested the term 'awesome' at any point during the year. In 2015 the same shout out goes, except apply it to 'lifestyle'. I've not heard such as lame excuse for a vanilla, one-size-fits-all term since 'hip'. Sadly, 'lifestyle' is now the 'hip' term.

Despite the introduction of such abominable phrases and the fact that all of mankind has been absorbed in smartphones for the past 12 months, many have still found time to buy real estate with near religious zeal. In this day and age, Mary and Joseph would no longer need to resort to

a barn and manger to bring the baby Jesus into the world; they could simply snap up an affordable new condo in the suburban wilderness, although there'd be little room for a visit from the Magi.

Clearly it's not just me who has let my imagination run wild in 2014; Asia has also embraced its inner fantasy life. Be it Tuscany, Beverly Hills or Portofino, the West is now being replicated here in the East with more lookalike residential developments springing up than was once imaginable. In this trend I must frankly disagree. It's pure nonsense to live in a Gothic mansion with tipped roofs for snowstorms in a tropical climate. Yet more are cropping up everywhere, and in all manner of shapes and sizes.

Looking ahead to the big, bad '15, or at least trying to, my looking glass is gladly obscured. It may well be the remnants of a holiday hangover that are clouding my vision, but I can just about make out some light at the end of the festive tunnel. Perhaps someone can finally explain what exactly the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) really means and how it's related to the property and the tourism sector? But for now it remains as understandable as Latin – and no, that's not a 'Livin' la Vida Loca' reference.

As property in the East becomes even more expensive, real estate in the West, with its

offers of long-term yields and debt leveraging, will continue to attract Asia's ultra-rich. Furthermore, the volatility of the Russian rouble and the insatiable appetite of Mainland Chinese means that geopolitical events look set to be drinking buddies with your favourite broker. But it's still anyone's guess who will pick up the tab at the end of the night.

In a universe gone mad, our part of the world remains a strong source of energy – not unlike those ancient alien landing zones. The quest for property perfect has travelled far this past three sixty-five, and is poised to plunge into the mid-part of the decade as strong as ever.

Will the momentum continue? I guess it all depends on what side of Santa's list you found yourself on Christmas Day.



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BIKINIS &amp; MARTINIS | JAN 2015

# THE BASEMENT TAPES

Sometimes at night when the rain is pelting down like a chorus of mad monkeys on bongos, and the wind howls in the coconut trees just like rabid rain dogs, I settle down for the night, stoically waiting out the cusp between the rainy season and the promise of sun.

My only comfort lies in the soft tones of Chet Baker, who seems to understand just what I need at that very moment. As for Coltrane, he's spending the evening at an out-of-towner.

Every year, for as long as I can remember, the bad craziness of the monsoon has laid waste to my soul. There are of course the real casualties – the ones whose long run ended on the front page of a local newspaper – accompanied by a natty headline and a slug-line of smiling policemen. Deportation and extradition were the easy ways out, as an unfortunate few ended going up in smoke at the local wat. The Big Sleep comes to us all sooner or later.

Slowly over time the wild wind turns around as the West Coast waves flatten, and thundery showers dot the sky late in the evening. It's all about the bark, as a waning bite is playing out fast, just like a fighter who goes in too hard and heavy early on and ends up being boxed out, stranded on the ropes and waiting for the inevitable knock down.

My island has changed this year, with a clean sweep of the beaches. It's been a decade since the Asian tsunami wiped the sands of Phuket. Now ten years later, it's happened again. History seems to have sustained one of those repetitive strain injuries and the rubber band fix has snapped back, hitting it straight in the face. There's no telling what will come next in the uncharted journey.

That said, it's nice to have the large swaths of majestic oceanfront returned to a state of semi-paradise. My mood lightens as the rain falls into just a slow drizzle. A meeting at the Crux without a flashlight, Bible or ring of beads has been avoided once again. Is it the nick of time? Yes, but then it always is.

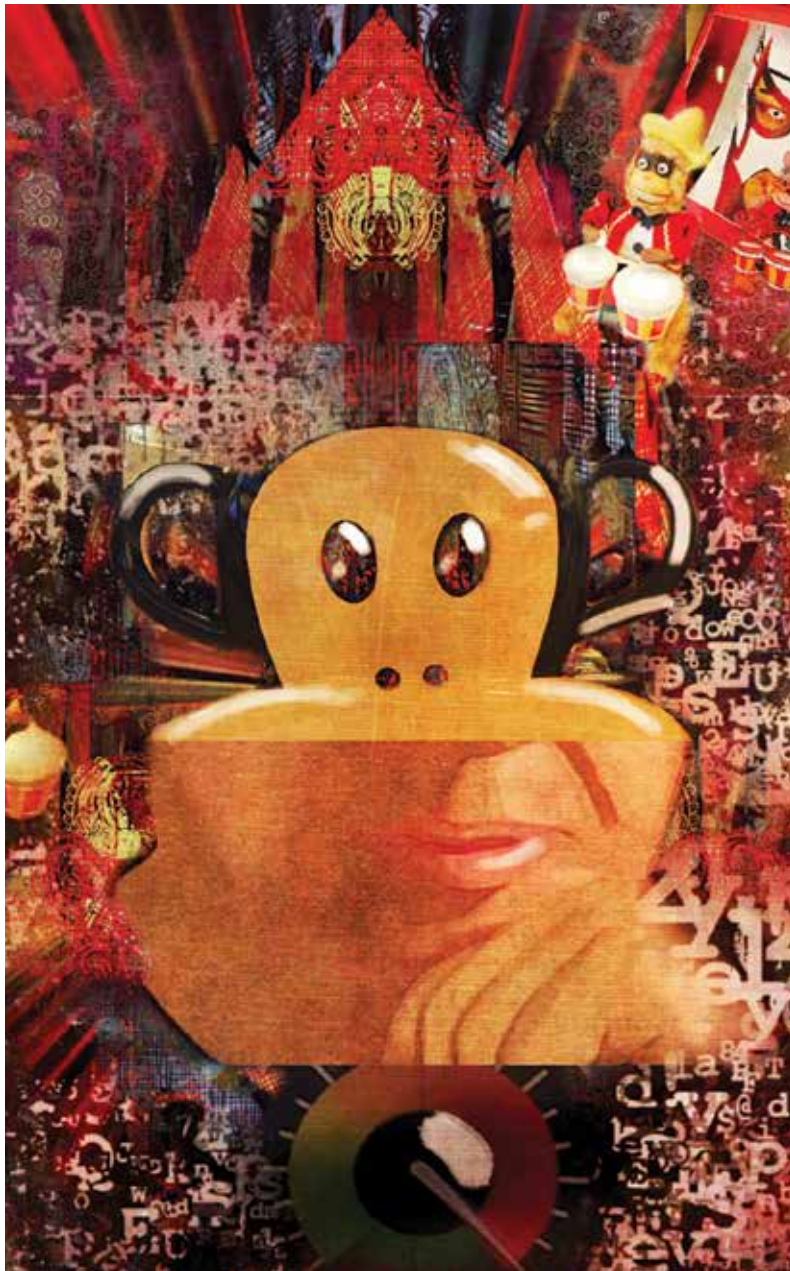
We, the imports of Dante's Inferno are a strange lot; escape artists, fugitives, snowbirds, and some of us even a work in progress or reinvention. What's the statute of limitation, as religious Botox prolongs the sagging lines? I've long given up worrying what anyone thinks. As long as the flip-flops sit on the doorstep, the next page is worth waiting for.

I awake to a new day, as the passing thunder of supersonic motorbikes blasts into my brain.

The sun has returned, and the season has arrived yet again. Sure, things are going to drive me to the edge of sanity, manoeuvring around the clogged arteries of what passes for roadways and the madding crowd.

Waiting is not a trait I ascribe to. It's extremely over-rated. Meditation? The thought of being alone for too long in the arcane randomness of my own head is not a trip I want to take too often. As for yoga or self-help, in my opinion, these pursuits seem misguided and shallow. Caffeine, a bad attitude and old jazz are a completely different things. I keep a cynic in the basement at all times and when in doubt, pop down for a quick visit.





One of the legacies of the digital age is the return to the warm soaring sounds of vinyl. You can't really say it's retro with a nostalgic twist, but more a recognition of the superior highs and lows that come with the territory. Call in the soul survivors. Summer remains the same; a virtual return to vinyl with endless days of promise.

The Yin and Yang of the rainy season and sunny side with its hit song and flip side culture provide emotion and reflection. I simply couldn't put up with being happy all the time without putting a shotgun in my mouth, so the prospect of an endless summer is frankly quite frightening.

At the end of a good movie, it's time to go home and you may find yourself caught in the middle of a road rage incident or just taking a quiet ride with only the dim lights of the dashboard to show you and your companion the way home. It won't be any time soon, but come May, things around Phuket will be shifting as the sand does beneath the soles of my feet. It will be time to once again dust off the bongos and look to the sky for answers.

# A SUMMER SPENT ON THE CAMBODIAN RIVIERA



Jetsetters and trendy trippers on The Continent simply love to wax poetically about last summer's parties in Cannes or St. Tropez. You can even throw a little Ibiza in as a topping, although I remain perplexed about why everybody returns home insisting, with a wink, that it's called 'ee-be-tha'.

Still, Euro trash be damned; a fine French rosé, daytime dirty dancing and a stupendous collection of seafood certainly sounds like a great way to waste a day. But then, living large is nothing for the real estate world. Buzz-worthy gems like 'ultra', 'mega', 'magnificent', 'awesome' and the ever-present catch-all phrase, 'luxury', cloud my thoughts like a cold winter's mist in Cusco. I'd also strongly recommend a swift kick in the rear end of anyone using terms such as 'authentic', 'experiential' or 'going local'.

If you really want to do the latter, dispose of all your possessions, find Jesus, or else start living out of a shopping trolley near the closet exit of a public transport link.

Speaking of Cusco, where did my secretary put those premixed pisco sours? Saying yes to day drinking after all puts me alongside my Continental cohorts, although I do lack the white beach garb and silly straw hat that makes wearers look like refugees from the Buena Vista Social Club.

Which brings me back to the Riviera. One of my favourite buzz phrases of all time came from a friend of mine, and avid brand man, David Keen who, while speaking at a hospitality investment conference session about Thailand's neighbour and the opportunities on its coastal areas, used the phrase, 'Cambodian Riviera'.

Sometimes if you wish hard enough things do come true.

Sure, the placid beaches along the country's shores may have been a regular summer haunt for the French colonialists in the early 20th century, but I think this slice of buzzology should be put on ice for at least another few years.

Back in my stomping ground, Phuket, we've been expanding the island's boundaries for a few years now under the moniker of 'Greater Phuket',

because, let's face it, who really gives a damn about Krabi or Phang Nga when we can add some Vegas pizzazz to the region's leading leisure real estate market? It's even made its way over the Sarasin Bridge towards the white sandy stretch of Natal Beach; Asia's very own version of The Hamptons.

There remains a clear and present danger of being too current. Flirting with edginess in an Uber-esque manner should teach us that in an industry with an ever-declining shelf life, the risk of falling over the edge and into oblivion is never more than a smartphone away.

One of the terms I loathe the most, however, is 'disruptive technology'. On hearing this I immediately want to throw myself under the nearest Uber taxi. That is, of course if the term still exists by the time this article is published. Hard copy be damned, but let's not even go down that one-way street.

Although property remains a matter of substance, how did we ever end up in this age of here today, gone tomorrow neologism? Can the world of real estate not just be itself, rather than desperately trying to seek out summers on The Continent or in The Hamptons? Can't it just sneak out back for a bit of day drinking and a dip in the pool?

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THE LATTER, DISPOSE OF ALL  
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# WHAT EVERY HIPSTER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT PROPERTY

Whilst the mid-1960s saw the seeds of change and counterculture begin to blossom; 2015 shows no such signs. Instead, we now live in a world of bad news for bad people. Yet looking back at a gentler time, I recall reading an online piece in Slate by John Buntin about the gentrification of urban slums and their transformations into hipster havens.

Naturally, my mind skipped entirely over the socio-political ramifications and I immediately took to dead reckoning how this phenomenon created an entirely new property class. Forget SoHo, Tribeca or those lofty realms of New York City, my life resides in Asia. For better, worse or, as the Thais say, 'same same'.

In this fast track, amped up setting, real estate never sits still. With a bad case of ADHD, fidgety developers continue to push the envelope, and in many cases redevelopment has been thrust aside in the search of all that is shiny, bright and brand new. What happened to the more unassuming, classic, yet casual, gentrification approach, where redevelopment is a favoured pathway?

One of the classic examples is the near nuclear destruction of old, seedy Singapore, and its transformation into one of the metropolitan marvels of the modern age. There are no sagging lines or signs of wear and tear – even the colonial buildings look like mock heritage edifices.

Penang on a limited scale has seen the old shop houses in Georgetown restored, but skyward condominiums edge ever close to the heavens on the historic Malaysian island.

On my own adopted island of Phuket, the property market keeps evolving into new mini urbanised clusters, with new neighbourhoods cropping up on the fringes of old, tatty local areas. The only sign of the merging of tribes is most often witnessed at the 7-Eleven, where all men and women become equal. Equality by convenience. Last year I wrote about the horrific spread across the region of faux real estate offerings. These run the gamut of tackiness from Tuscan estates to Venetian condos and Greco-Roman semi-detached townhouses. Mockness be damned; at breakfast I want my bacon piggy style.

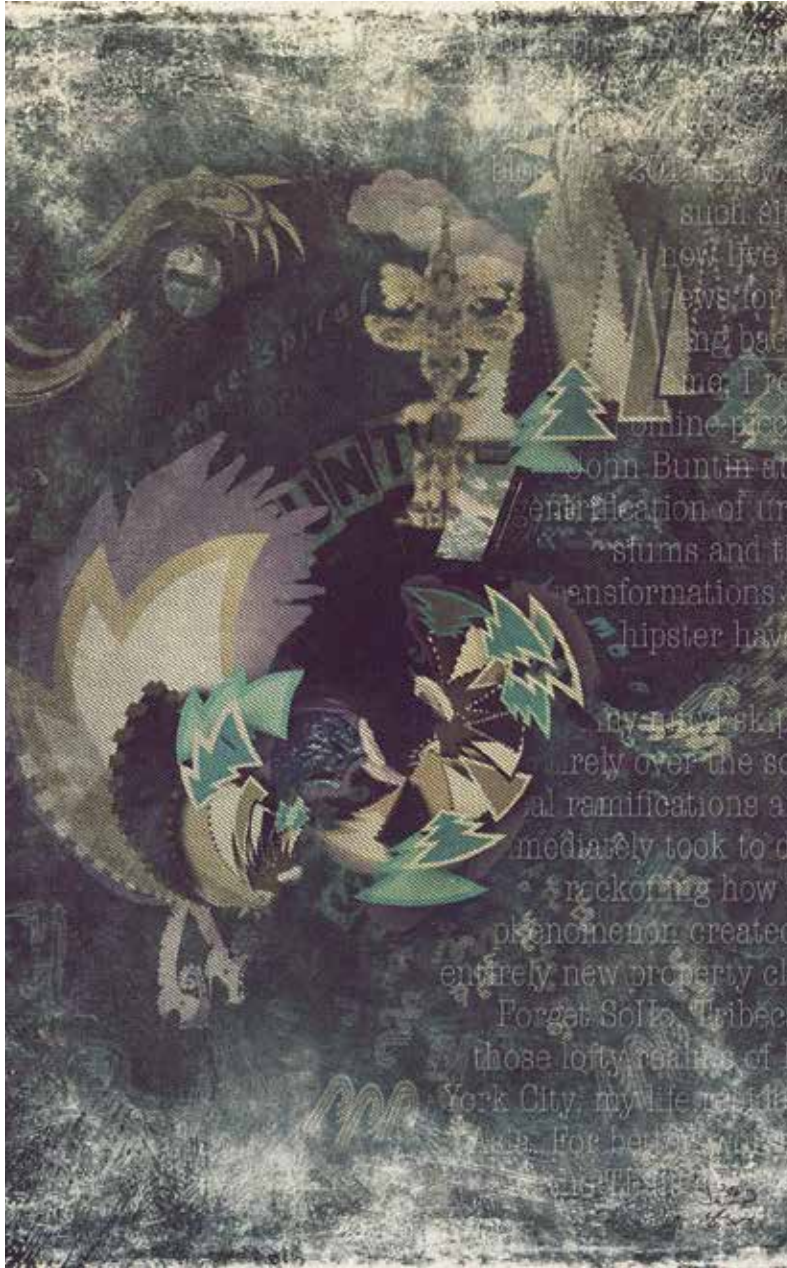
Gentrification, whilst a high-sounding concept, is at the end of day, about accessibility and a laid-back lifestyle. Perfection remains unattainable, as I have repeatedly learned in a life full of fabulous blunders and sidewinding. Who needs a yellow line to show you the way?

As the Asia that we know slowly disappears before our very eyes and devolves into a shrink-wrapped product that lasts six months, what about redeveloping land, houses, hotels,

communities in a more sustainable manner? As they say, you don't know what you have until it's gone.

PS: I forgot to add 'hipster' to my 2015 buzzword bin. Hopefully it shall not appear again in this column. After all, this is a term that peaked in the '90s, and should have been left there to decompose.





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# BEANTOWN: THE COFFEE DRINKERS' GUIDE TO ETIQUETTE

Is this really the end? All I can see is pitch black, as my eyes can't adjust to even a tiny ray of light in my own personal nanosphere. I've always wondered what happens when you die, and surprisingly there are no God-like instructions to take me through the dark portal into the after-life.

In the next instant, I grasp the finger-sized hole in my espresso cup, expertly tilt it, and take the plunge into the welcoming arms of caffeine land. 'Yes, I have tasted the bean and it's good' – I silently mutter to myself as I walk straight out the door of the coffee shop and into the deadly rays of the thermal Phuket tropical sunshine.

Pinching myself just to check that I am really alive, my jumpstart to the day has its desired effect. Another run scored, and I remain a stone's throw away from the big sleep.

Broad daylight is nobody's friend, be they an ageing supermodel or a tattered fifty-something consultant who has increasingly more lines on the corners of his eyes than a coked-up '80s musician figure might have shot up their nose. Lines, lines, it's always more lines.

Somehow, the older I get, the more comfort I find in the company of the bean. We then come to the truly tricky part, that cultural exchange and yes, coffee drinking does have a clear set of rules of engagement. Let's not get biblical here,

or even flout the fine lines of the democratic process, but when you jump on the coffee train, you had better be willing to punch the ticket and enjoy the ride.

One of my biggest frustrations (and trust me, as my angst-ridden wife will attest, there seems to be an endless list), is the ability to obtain seating in one of those comfortable posh lounge chairs at Starbucks. Even the walk inside makes me nervous, and puts me in a panic-like state, sweating as I weigh up the odds.

All too often, there is someone parked in a seat with the chair opposite only used for a purse, shopping bag or worst of all, a backpack. My readers all know how I feel about backpacks, so let's not even go there. Sadly, we live in an age of vanished hospitality and slack manners. Worst yet is finding someone camped out for the day, showing no sign of consuming anything. Money can't buy you love, but it ought to buy you temporary comfort at Starbucks. Moving on to the not quite as comfortable, but still more cosy than those wooden chairs, are the couches and ottomans.

If you don't understand what the latter is, please stop reading immediately as you are too dense to read this article or even understand the pictures in this magazine.

Return home to your PlayStation immediately and continue doing all-nighters with your only real friend, that lunatic called Red Bull.

I've digressed, and must apologize. On the couch back at the coffee shop is a twosome or threesome conducting job interviews or perhaps some sort of business meeting. This current trend towards working out of coffee shops or even those hip communal workspaces is offensive. If you can't afford an office, go out and get a job, but whatever you do, don't make me listen to public renditions of your idea for a cool new app, or the even more lame thoughts of getting out of the box.

Equally annoying in my lead up to caffeination is the obnoxious habit of asking for my name to be put onto a coffee cup by some young trainee who cannot pronounce the name Bill. Has humankind sunk so low that we cannot even figure out which coffee is ours and can't these people understand that we are offended by the faux Americanized theory of personalization?

Join the Jehovah's Witnesses or start selling Amway products if you really want to get on a first name basis with strangers.



At times my anger and rage border on the edge of madness. Sadly there are no coffee police in the world, and much as I'd like to thrust that non-purchasing loiterer's backpack out in the street in the hope that a speeding bus will run it over and tear it to shreds, I take a moment, inhale, and revel in my own false set of coffee etiquette. This is after all what separates us from our friends in the animal kingdom.

My thirst for life and coffee seem interconnected and entwined in dark despair with moments of humour, together with the hope which accompanies me on each trip to the dark continent of the bean. As for happiness, this fleeting concept is never more than a sip away, as long as I can brave the savage tribes inhabiting these haunting aromatic places. I'll be just fine as long as I can continue to remember my name.







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# GET BACK IN YOUR BOX



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I was recently sitting in a residential design meeting with an army of master planners, landscape artisans, a project management team and all manner of odds and sods. We were tasked with creating an Asian entrepreneur's vision for a one-of-a-kind real estate offering.

After a revivalist-style kick-off session, which lacked only Tony Robbins and free-flow Red Bull, the enterprising fellow jumped to his feet, and on the way out of the room, gazed upon the consultants and uttered the tormenting, shallow line, 'let's all think outside of the box'.

Naturally, after a gracious twenty-second pause to ensure there was no imminent re-entry, everyone around the table burst into fits of laughter, and knowing glances were shared at the expense of the entrepreneur's overused and expired business slang.

Surprisingly, it's almost impossible to trace the foundation of where the term came from, or why it even exists.

Creationists would have us believe the big man upstairs invented the earth and human race as we know it in just six days. Did he get all of this from a box, or was he just working towards the weekend and the promise of a peaceful Sunday?

Evolutionists, on the other hand, point to apes as our forefathers, but to my knowledge these creatures much prefer trees and natural habitats to the confinement of a box.

Going back to the prehistoric days of cave dwellers, could it be argued that these underground homes were in some way box-like? Perhaps it's only linear thinking that has us all believing boxes have four walls and are standard in appearance? But wait, what about rounded hatboxes, or long eloquent boxes for custom-made guitars, and even those candy heart-shaped glitter traps that only come out around Valentine's Day?

I'm happy to argue with anyone who is mildly interested that boxes have been given anentirely bad rap. Look, for example, at what a shambles those clunky gift bags have created for Christmas.

The joy of unwrapping Pandora's Magic Box has been relegated to grab and go, with instant gratification and sheer laziness again to blame.

What's most concerning is the damage being done to millions of young minds by hip college professors and idealist tech thinkers who are constantly encouraging the youth to get out of the box.

But why? Is it really better to be on the other side, standing naked before an unforgiving, vicious and demented public? I it really good to find yourself in a place where you can't even hide from mad, stray mountain lions that'll rip your flesh from the bone before finding the nearest cave in which to sit out the 'me decade'?

Young minds and the future of humankind are being yanked away from the wellness, peace of mind and relative comfort of the box. Even real estate has been skewed in such a way that form over function has been abandoned and self-imposed style has taken centre stage.

My immediate plans call for a return to the box. You can all dwell in the darkness of the unknown, but rest assured, I have settled into the box for the duration. If anybody needs me, open the flap – I'll be in there smiling.

# I WANT CANDY, WE ALL WANT CANDY

Exotic, erotic and a tad esoteric. I'm not quite sure how the term 'candy' became so ingrained in pop culture. One of my mainstream touch points is undoubtedly the Bow Wow Wow version of the song 'I Want Candy', bellowed out by the feisty Annabella Lwin, who skipped the bark and went straight for the bite.

In fact, sexual angst and real estate seem to be perfect bedfellows, and the ensuing heat is certain to fog up the office widows. Have I passed that all too familiar landmark; the veritable point of no return? It's close, but no cigar just yet.

Last week I attended the sixth instalment of the annual AOCAP Conference in Singapore. For those not up to snuff with their industry acronyms, the long play version of the name is Alternative Ownership Conference Asia Pacific. Was that a big yawn from the cheap seats? Okay let's go for the shorter version.

One topic that caught my attention was the drift of the term 'timeshare'. Set for relegation, the once familiar tag has now been re-jigged as a seemingly more respectable 'vacation ownership' or 'alternative ownership'. Perhaps the Ministry of Silly Words is hard at it again? There remains nothing more verbose than a reformed sinner.

Heading up to the hill bearing a heavy cross, the very life has been sucked dry, bolstered by a soulless sense of trying to fit in. Timeshare

remains a known in a world gone banal and bland. Growing up, many of us had an edgy aunt or uncle who was perhaps out on the fringe, only visiting on the odd occasion. Mine was a cool, older step-uncle who drove a soft-top Porsche, rocked up to our house with a different woman on each of his visits and carried a hip flask filled to the brim with Makers Mark bourbon.

My recollections of him remain to this day of fast cars, tall leggy lady friends and just enough angst and dark humour to take the edge off of a brand new razor. I can't remember what happened to him, and time vanishes the past at an agonizingly fast pace. Maybe it's better to retain the dream-like apparition when the alternative is probably far more mundane?

When playing cards, you call a spade a spade, so what's wrong with 'timeshare'? The term might not be trendy, but at least it's a truth. It's also one of the oldest leisure real estate products out there, and for all the bad raps, the sector has a strong legion of satisfied buyers, impressive products and has also provided careers for many property professionals.

At heart I continue to be a hotelier and note that many of my colleagues look down their noses at the concept of focused selling and marketing. Hotels are, of course, the only domain of elegance, grace and refinement... not.

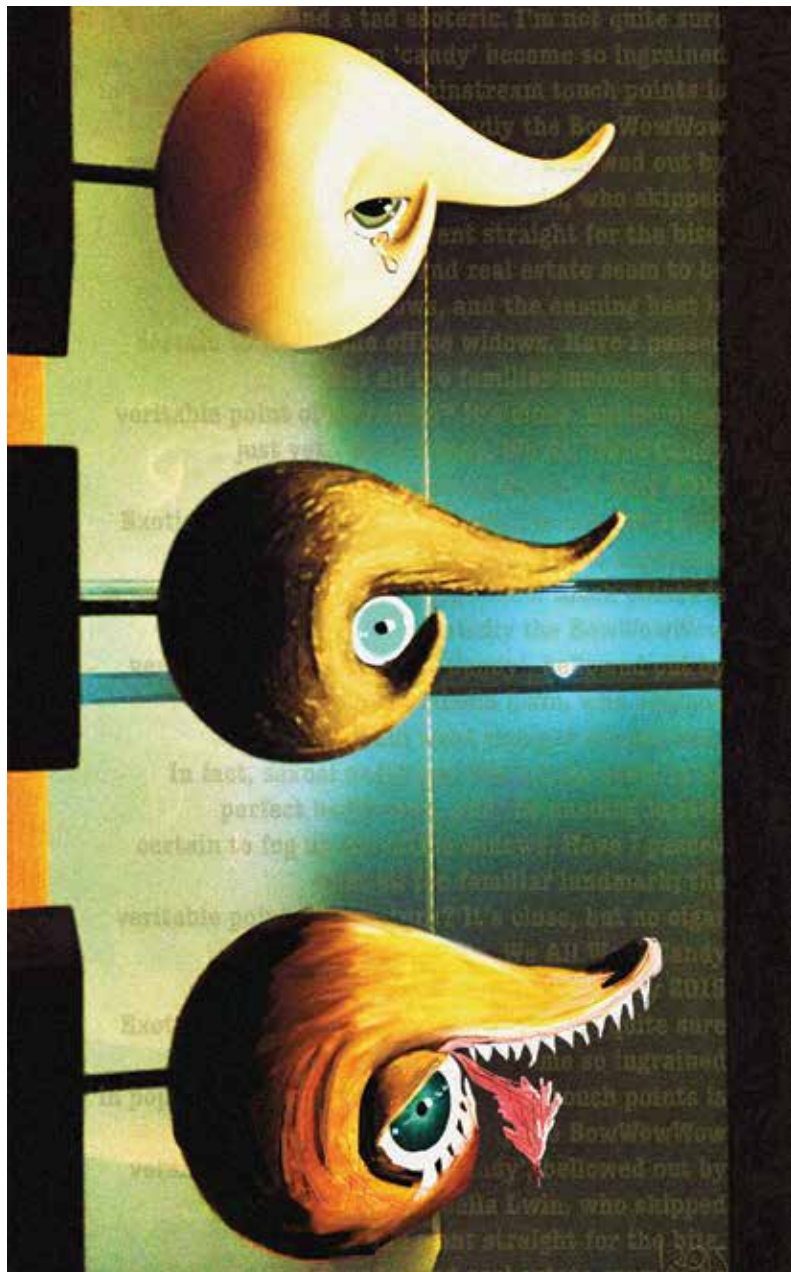
These days everyone can travel and the bad omen of mass tourism is a modern day plague of epic proportions. Just check out the latest version on YouTube of travellers behaving badly. My point is that people living in glasshouses have no business throwing rocks or, in an Americanized version, firing assault-grade weapons.

Any branding person worth his grain of salt will tell you that a stereotypical name has to be understandable, approachable and ultimately touch a chord in the consumer deep down in those dark places where jacked-up emoticons rule supreme.



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# GHOST IN THE MACHINE

The mere image of a deranged Jack Nicholson hacking his way through the door with an axe in *The Shining* is enough to give anyone nightmares, let alone his bloodthirsty grin and infamous line, 'Here's Johnny'.

If you are familiar with the film and the Stephen King novel on which it is based, you'll know that the theme of a haunted house in the middle of nowhere is not for the faint of heart. In fact, from chainsaw massacres to exorcisms to the walking dead, the dark genre of sinister thrillers seems to thrive on empty houses.

London's thoroughbred real estate market has, of late, taken on a similarly arcane tone. A sustained, supernatural skyrocket of capital appreciation has left a toxic vapour trail in its wake for locals. Enter the overseas speculators who are snapping up any property with a pulse. 'Tick, tick, yes, sir, we have a pulse... call your solicitor immediately and let's close this deal.'

Nowadays, the British capital's market is dominated by these international buyers who are only interested in capital play and give little thought to the short-term. Damn the renter for even bothering to exchange pleasantries with the owners' committee; it is passive investment as it finest.

And this is the real nightmare for locals who find themselves amidst a genuine housing shortage. Prime land is snapped up and sold off in a speculative rage leaving little hope for communities to grow and paving the way for the emergence of ghost towns.

This situation, however, is not totally unique. During the economic rise of the United States' middle class in the 1960s and 70s, there was an exodus from urban downtown areas to the newly minted suburbia (call in the *Stepford Wives*). Once bustling city centre residences fell into decay and morphed into crack houses or worse. The soul of the city was stolen in the middle of the night and discarded in front of an ignominious shopping mall.

Even resort real estate has its own ghoulish tales of eternally vacant property. Years ago I read a book titled *Whiteout: Lost in Aspen* by Ted Conover, who chronicled the shifting tide of the famed ski town that embraced suave outside real estate buyers and cast out the local population to live downstream in a more affordable climate. Sure, the demands of the property play and houses of the millionaire and billionaire set still required servicing, but at the expense of an arduous commute. There is always a seat at the back of the bus for those really wanting to work.

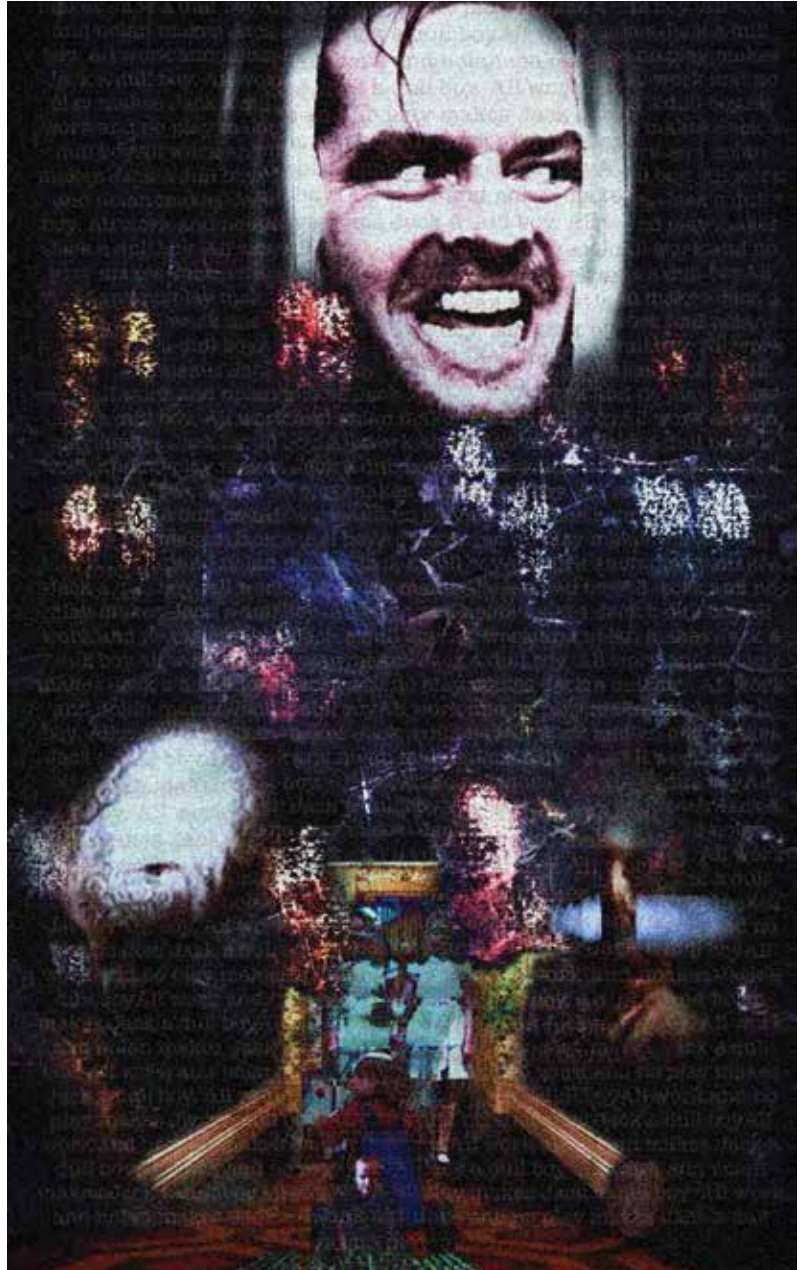
I am in no way poking a stick at London property buyers or demonizing them – the UK press is doing a great job of that already. In this goofy, upside down world, who doesn't want to buy in a stable marketplace? But The Big Smoke's real estate tagline in 2015 is undoubtedly 'buy-to-leave'.

When done right, the real estate industry's contribution towards a strong social fabric can be inspirational, but when it ignores the surrounding community, that's when the real trouble starts.

A cooling off period and regulation implementation seems inevitable in London, but the question remains: can the appreciation trend continue? Maybe there is something to be said about that devil you know, versus the one you don't. Unless his name is Johnny, that is.

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# MY ALL-NEW AUTHENTIC FUGACIOUS SELF

Greetings from Tweetland. I have some tragic news – my Instagram account has been hacked which means I cannot regale you with selfies of bottles of Veuve Clicquot blowing their tops like some overheated volcano, or that oh so comfy posh business class seat en-route to Frankfurt.

'Whoops!' I made some places more exotic – Istanbul for example – although I have to say *Midnight Express* still gives me the shivers.

Mankind or shall we say humankind, or perhaps the more depictive 'totally us' are seemingly hell bent on a pathway to regression. I'm not referring to returning to caves or starting to walk like monkeys (apologies to those creationists amongst you; the Jesus thing is entirely too hard to work into this article so let's stick with an evolutionary theme).

What hotel chains, glossy magazines and brandkind are now telling us is that travellers no longer care about standards, uniformity or that higher plane of thinking which has led to bathroom telephones, turn down chocolates, neatly folded toilet paper, and of course, the ominous hanging bag on the doorknob containing a newspaper.

Don't you know that print media is dead? Just the mere act of reading this magazine makes you obsolete. Okay, I'm going to give you a break just this once, but please don't let it happen again. There will be consequences, and if a maid called



Judy knocks twice on the door, for God's sake don't answer it. Stick your head back under the sheets and try to sleep through the night. Yes, we have digressed, so let's get back on topic...

Just yesterday, I received an email from a friend asking for recommendations for another friend. Ah yes, the ominous and loathsome creature known as a 'friend of a friend' (otherwise known as a FOAF). Anyway, this person was actually a FOAF, but to complicate the matter they were getting advice for the FOAF's soon-to-graduate daughter. Hence, we now have the term DOFOF (daughter of friend of a friend).

She is traveling to Bali in a few months and wanted advice on hotels, but stop there for a moment, things were about to get out of control. The email had all the sprinklings of a disaster waiting to happen, which in this case referred to 'being authentic', 'going local' and 'creating memorable experiences'. I'm not saying, of course, that the instruction was over the top, as there was no mention of 'artisan', 'glocalness', or worse still, a left turn into the 'quest for spiritual vision', or indeed the absolute worst thing of all – homestays.

Referring to the latter, frankly speaking I absolutely hate people who want to stay at my house. There is a reason why God created hotels (one for our Christian readers). Did he get it right? Late on the sixth day before knocking off

for a Saturday night boozefest, he noted the dangers of drink-driving and decided to make a place for the truly intoxicated to sleep it off.

Mind you, friends can come over to visit, but please make sure there is an escape plan. Show up with a suitcase at my door and you can expect to be left standing in the rain while you wait for a taxi to the nearest hotel. I fully advocate the full use of such an accommodation choice.

This, of course, brings us to the subject of Airbnb. While there are some great deals to be had, photos of dead relatives and dusty antiques are not my idea of a holiday abroad.

In fact, the mere thought of not being able to order a late night cheeseburger is beyond comprehension. Mind you, who the hell is Lester?

Now getting back to this whole authentic experience. I'm not so sure all travellers want to shed their inner inhibitions and live like the locals. Go to any tropical island and the idea of getting up before dawn to go to the market and buy meat which has been stuck unrefrigerated on a tricycle since the night before, or those eggs basking in the hot sun all day, whipping up a tasty dish pretty much consisting of rice and mystery meat, and then taking a cold shower outside as the mosquitos nip at your ankles before doing the laundry in a rusty bucket. Once all this is done it's still only 5:46 in the morning. For God's sake this is a holiday? Go back to bed.

You must be getting my gist, and while I am all in favour of the banishment of loud colour in hotels rooms, bad brand standards and their ilk; there still has to be a specialness attached to hotels or travel that transports us away from the dull and the ordinary. I mean this in a good way – not waking up to the sound of roosters or having to make my own toxic three-in-one Nescafe coffee.

Thankfully, in the end, authenticity will fall on deaf ears in the short span of a year or so – maybe less. It will soon be replaced by something even more dreadful, full of hash tags and urban dictionary angst. The reality remains that the Twittersphere is full of all things fugacious and wild, so please understand we are only looking for a place to stand in line, and waiting for the next selfie to appear.







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LET'S GET BACK ON TOPIC...

# DUSK TILL DAWN IN BANGKOK

Last night I was three blocks away from where the tragic bomb blast exploded at the Erawan Shrine in Bangkok. Like so many nights when I am in the capital city, I stay at a nearby hotel and so often walk around that same corner to capture the unique flavour of a truly special place.

Call it routine or else a beckoning call to the heart of Thailand's great city. I'd opted for an early dinner at Central Embassy's EatThai. Sitting with a friend and chatting over some wonderful food, messages started coming in on my iPhone about a bombing nearby. Looking around the eatery, dozens of faces were staring into the luminescent glow of smartphones and an eerie silence seemed to grasp the moment.

With more details of the event starting to roll in, my next move had to be contemplated given the nearest path back to the hotel was directly through ground zero. Roadways were being closed and my friend figured a quick trip home was their best move. I saw no other option but a walk up the street and play it by ear on getting through the chaotic maze.

The streets were somewhat quiet, yet bizarrely, tourists who were unaware of the nearby incident were wondering about, totting fast food bags and chattering about sights along the avenues. Nearing Amarin Plaza and the Rajaprasong

intersections sirens howled, police blew whistles, traffic was redirected and the bright lights of camera phones nearly blinded me.

Getting near to the bombsite out of sheer necessity, the cordoned off areas were crowded and a helpful security officer guided me through a parking lot shortcut which led me safely back to my hotel. The General Manager was in the lobby, surrounded by security staff, marshalling instructions and dealing with angst-ridden guests.

Riding up in the elevator, as dashes of chill music set the mood, I thought back to the reality that in another thirty minutes I'd most likely have been walking right past the Erawan Shrine, returning back to the hotel after dinner as I so often do, taking in the street flavour. Was it luck, timing or the sheer randomness of life that took me out of harm's way?

Travel for me is a true passion. Certainly it's my work, but in reality I love the exploration, experiences and diversity of discovery. It's remained a constant my entire life. I often think that the inability to move about the world to new places and people would be the ultimate prison or confinement of my soul.

It's far too early to explain or understand what is behind the Bangkok bomb except for one clear motive – that killjoy hash-tagged as terrorism. Terrorists would have us live in fear behind

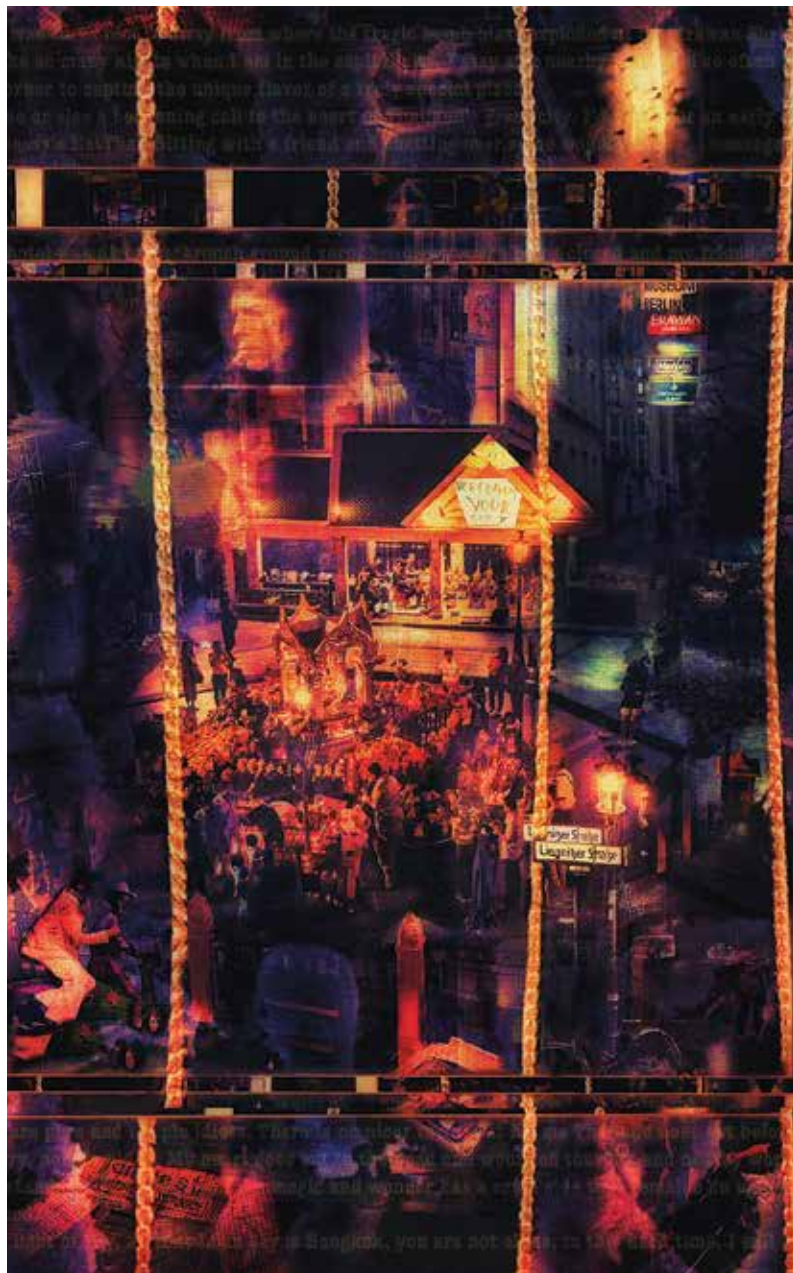
closed doors, hovering about in cramped corners, unwilling to leave the known for the unknown. It's tantamount to spiritual abduction, or losing your soul to the devil.

As I sit on a plane this morning typing out my feelings in the light of day, after a long dark night I can only vow that yes I will continue to visit Bangkok as often as I can. I will still stay in the same hotel which has been my home away from home so many times for the past eight years, and yes I will still walk past the Erawan Shrine and the Rajaprasong intersection as part of my journey to and fro.



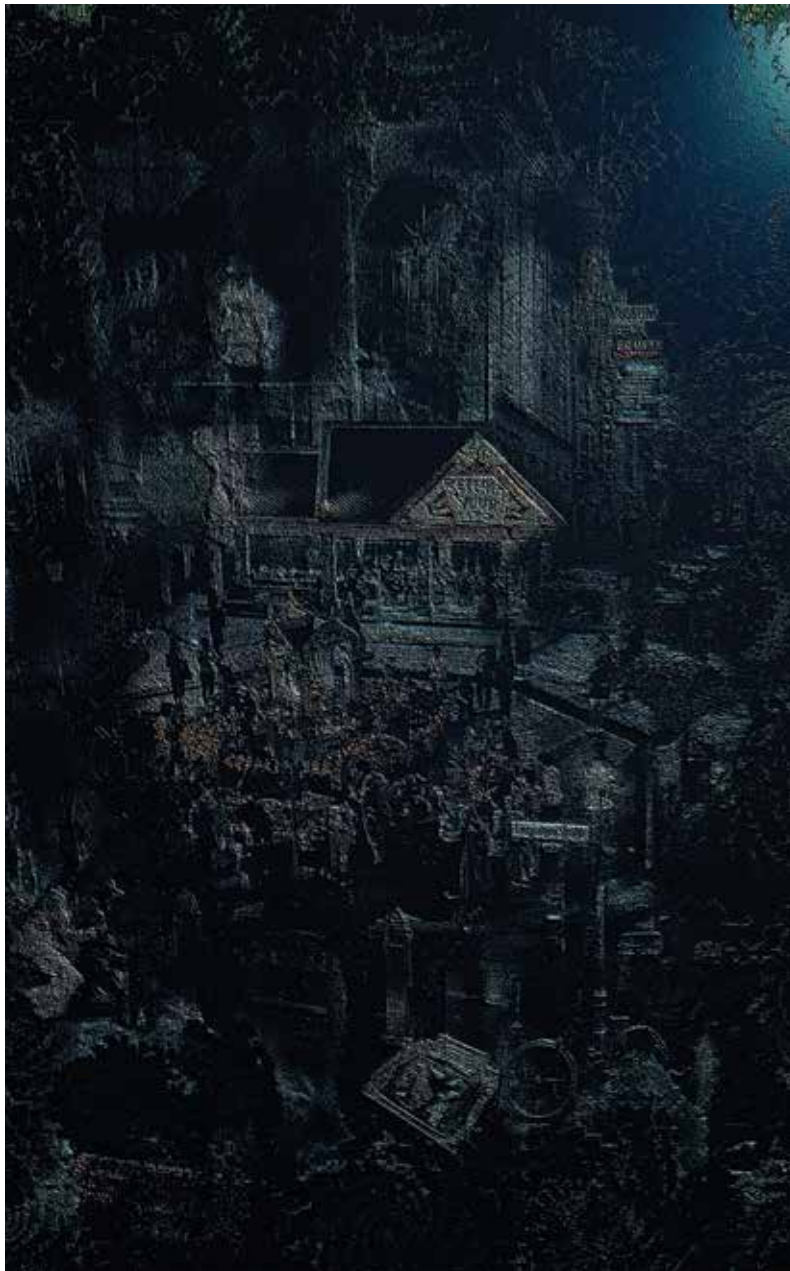
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TRAVEL FOR ME IS A TRUE PASSION. CERTAINLY IT'S MY WORK, BUT IN REALITY I LOVE THE EXPLORATION, EXPERIENCES AND DIVERSITY OF DISCOVERY. IT'S REMAINED A CONSTANT MY ENTIRE LIFE. I OFTEN THINK THAT THE INABILITY TO MOVE ABOUT THE WORLD TO NEW PLACES AND PEOPLE WOULD BE THE ULTIMATE PRISON OR CONFINEMENT OF MY SOUL.









Travel is by nature a trip into the unknown, terror attacks, plane crashes, shark bites and bad airplane food are just a few of the many dangers hanging over the heads of those who embark on journeys. Bangkok remains one of the world's great cities and it joins the ranks of New York and London and so many other places that have felt the blow of terror. Do I avoid those great metropolises of the West? No. So why should I avoid Bangkok?

Mind you, I have no death wish. Syria and Yemen are not high on my travel itinerary, and to me, thrillseekers to war torn areas are pure and simple idiots. There is no nicer term. But Thailand does not belong in the same category, nor should it.

My heart goes out to the dead and wounded tourists and nearby workers and innocent bystanders. This life for all it's magic and wonder has a cruel side that remains an ugly flip side to all that is good.

In the stark light of day, all that I can say is Bangkok, you are not alone in this dark time. I will be back again standing next you in admiration and joy, just like I always have. See you soon. My passion for travel remains undaunted, unflinching and absolute.

# THE HORSE YOU HAVE TO RIDE

I don't fancy myself as an absolute 'hater' of things, except maybe for the rising number of idiots who lug lumbering backpacks down airplane aisles, unknowingly slapping innocent passengers in the face. To those I rightly say: 'please take the bus, or stay home until you locate that missing black suitcase'.

I do, however, hate the term 'lifestyle' – in every way and manner. Nowadays, real estate developers are apparently selling more than luxury flats, lofts, penthouses or townhomes. The beast of burden has got sales folk offering anything from concierge services to yoga, wine cellars, golf simulators, life coaches and so on...

You'll note that no luxury offerings tout a 7-11, though, which remains a serious oversight that any day drinker or businessperson who's spent the previous night entertaining can attest to. After all, what man who's missed dinner and finds himself rolling through the door at 2am in a wrinkled Armani jacket doesn't want to indulge in a microwave hot dog before lapsing into total unconsciousness?

But enough about me. The real issue here is the total absence of originality in the property industry. Real estate leaders should be implementing innovative ideas rather than following tired trends like dotting sheep. Similar to the hotel industry, real estate appears to lack vision at the moment like at no other time in history. Indeed, hotels

are suddenly being rebranded as radical lifestyle offerings with a major focus on 'communal spaces and informal boutique services'.

I don't mean to burst the bubble, but any 19th century peddler on horseback could have had the same experience in a halfway house. How far have we come? Sorry to say, not far.

Residential developers are no better. Unless, of course, you think that having a car elevator installed so your Ferrari can collect you from the sofa, is ingenious. It's bad enough people not being able to find a sensible suitcase in their apartment, but with a bloody car parked in the middle of the room, they don't stand a chance. It almost makes you want to book a room at the nearest Holiday Inn (one which hasn't yet fully devolved into an 'experience'), lock the door, dim the lights and placidly rock back and forth in the safety of a standard double room.

It's been some years since Chris Anderson penned his technological tome "The Long Tail" about an entirely customized approach to life, but even now at expos and show rooms around Asia, all you see are those four walls: a bathroom, kitchen and the precious public area that now doubles up as a parking bay.

My point, and trust me I do have one, is about mind over matter and form versus function. Developers need to add genuine value to

the space in which buyers are actually going to live. Having a lifestyle starts with having a life, and this originates in the home – a comfortable, well-designed and welcoming place.

And when it comes hotels, well, call me old school, but I just want to hang out in a fluffy, white bathrobe, order room service and watch some HBO. Communal living? Just look what happened to communism.





# DEATH OF THE PROPERTY HIPSTER

Finally, it's over. The last mouthful of overpriced craft beer has been swilled, the carefully curled 'stache has been slashed and the pop-up tattoo parlour is eerily empty. The hipster is dead. Good riddance.

From the real estate perspective, the cliché-ridden counter culture character known as the hipster has been a blight on the entire industry. Sure, the chronically hip may have had an alibi for their absence in the form of the global financial crisis, claiming it drove them straight down the road to ruin – no dough for the inner-city condo or converted loft in the pre-gentrification neighbourhood – but real estate as we know it has had to look elsewhere for a home during these dark days. Indeed, hipsters at best are the lowest form of real estate reptile – they rent. Lounge lizards is perhaps the apt term to describe them.

Thankfully, the great year of 2015 has welcomed the fall of 'hipsterdom'. They have been banished to that dim netherworld where Donald Trump stores his extra hairpieces. Deep underground, deeper, in fact, than that proposed tunnel from China to the US.

And now for the good news – yuccies, enter, stage left!

Yuccies, for those not in the know are young urban creatives. They may share borderline traits, such as an appreciation of craftsmanship,

or the search for an authentic experience, with the dearly departed hipster, but there's no dark side (not yet, anyway).

Apparently, greed is an intrinsic part of the yuccie – more Gordon Gekko, less Llewyn Davis. So the good old days of greed and consumerism are back and the property industry is frantically rubbing its hands in anticipation.

Spanking new houses, condos and even exotic surreal estate investments are all being lined up. The edge is back on the razor, and yes, yuccies do shave daily with equally stunning news being the demise of the terrible tattoos.

At the top end of the market, these young urban types, whether they're successful tech startup founders, creative entrepreneurs or owners of trust fund-financed Peruvian restaurant and speakeasy bars, tend to be loaded with cash. Real estate is no doubt anxiously waiting, cheap bouquet in hand at the station as the money train, replete with yuccies, rolls in.

Okay, my worldview may be jaded. But let's face it, a few years from now, historians will be desperately erasing any evidence of the age of the hipster. Hell, those beards were just too reminiscent of Charlie Manson for me. As for the yuccie craze, I like it, but somehow can't get my head around how to pronounce it. Is it 'yucky', like, disgusting or, 'yucy', as in Lucy?

I guess small details such as this are important while we continue to live in a world where everything must be labelled and hash-tagged. Hash me baby and double down.

As for the down-and-out hipsters, they too have a chance at redemption. All it takes is a tube of Burma-Shave and a quick visit (by which I mean a laborious and incredibly painful trip) to the laser technician.



THANKFULLY, THE GREAT YEAR OF 2015 HAS WELCOMED THE FALL OF 'HIPSTERDOM'. THEY HAVE BEEN BANISHED TO THAT DIM NETHERWORLD WHERE DONALD TRUMP STORES HIS EXTRA HAIRPIECES. DEEP UNDERGROUND, DEEPER, IN FACT, THAN THAT PROPOSED TUNNEL FROM CHINA TO THE US.



# LIFE, DEATH AND A SHOUT OUT FOR BROS

It's been said that boys will be boys and girls will be girls, but my entire world, which is fringed with bro-hood, has been turned upside down in this, the age of the 'yucie'. What the hell is a yucie, you may ask? Thankfully, I can shout out that the age of the hipster has thankfully come to a sudden yet inevitable end.

Soon to be gone are the last shards of checked shirts or those burnt bits of 'hipsterness', such as the scraggly miner beards, followed closely by tattoos. Over the past few years I've been slowly driven insane by pseudo-intellectual talk of 'going local' or all things authentic. I'm a long-time expat and frankly could not wait to get out of Smallville, though in this instance it's a suburban Los Angeles nightmare of Stepford proportions.

While an alert has been placed throughout the Twittersphere, or judging from the immediate audience at hand, the mass of heads nodding in prayer to the light of smartphones, let's call it what it really is – Twatland. There, I have made up a new term. Perhaps a slap on the back is overdue, or maybe not.

Anyway, getting back in the groove, there is this year's banner hashtag of the yucie or young urban creative. No tats, and yes the monster of authentic angst is here, though this crew seems to have a materialistic edge. Is it better or worse? I've no idea, yet social awareness no doubt remains less than skin deep and the smell of plastic fills my overwrought nostrils.

Recently, I have returned from what can be best termed as a 'bacation' in Australia. Copious amounts of pork were involved to say the least, and the crack of dawn was punctuated by a strange silence from the pigs. A few of the boys (or more accurately, older men of a certain age) had gathered at Australia's Margaret River for a few days of wining and dining. Let's place the emphasis on the former rather than the easy way out of the latter.

This is our annual bromance trip, where women are seldom seen except at caffeine stops, wine tastings and eating establishments. It's not an outright mindful exemption of the fairer sex, but certainly on this Titanic expedition women and children have been thrust overboard and left to fend for themselves. The little ones will soon learn to survive on their own.

While this kind of soirée has gained momentum over the past few years, I have to say that certain cracks in the manhood are starting to creep in, and there could be dual cause for concern. One of the surest signs of a blurring of the lines these days is the male acceptance of, how shall I say, their unleashed desire for rosé wine.

The mere thought of BYOB can now be best summed up as a pale version of the truths or lies of life: laying helpless in front of a speeding car on a lone highway, staring at the screw top bottle or synthetic cork of watered down wine before the inevitable end of it all.

In days past, the gentlemen's scourge of white wine could only be vexed by the sight of a rose-coloured bottle. Had my wife snuck in and ordered before me? Yes, there are a rising

number of men who drink this variety of grape, but thankfully, it's most often practiced behind closed doors in the privacy of one's own home.

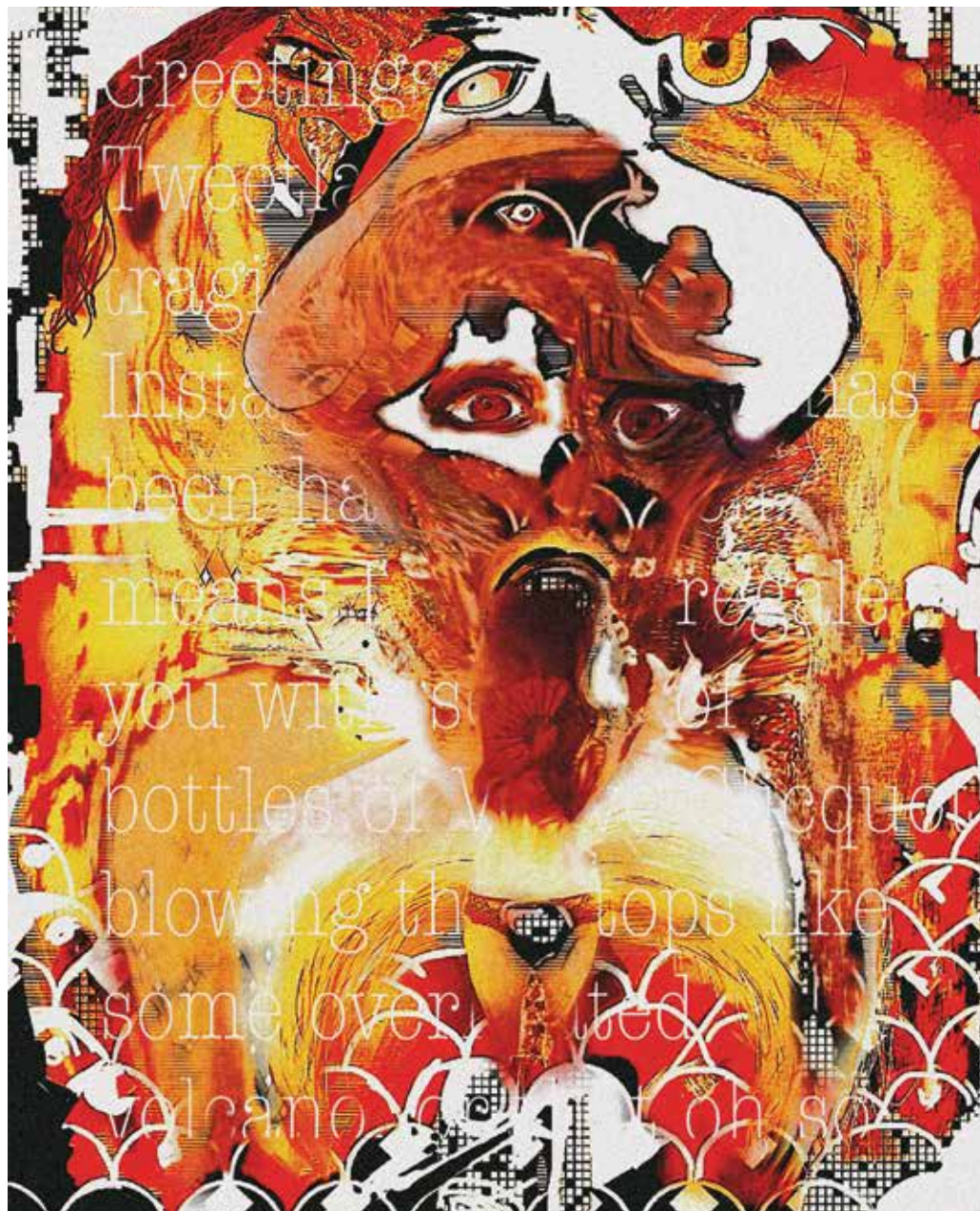
I've increasingly noticed that men are now coming out of the closet and starting to be seen in public with a glass of rosé, and at times throwing caution to the wind and ordering an entire bottle.

Mr. Gray comes out, and slang goes in one ear and out the other while tasty, fresh or that venomous term 'awesome' are out on the street in daylight, and let me tell you, it's not pretty.

We now have groups of men tag teaming bottles in a wicked warped aberration nicknamed bros. WTF? The writing has been on the wall for a long while. Those smartphones and tablets have also re-ushered in the use of the 'murse', or more appropriately, the man-bag. Botox is a unisex affair, as are entire lines of men's cosmetics and that absolute filthy trend of backpack use. Yes, I have digressed to a non-feminine item, but allow me to vent my hostility towards that vicious crew of hunchback imbeciles.

At the end of the day, 2015 has brought the general state of manliness to a sudden halt, and the apes are gnawing anxiously at the door, with darkness falling and backpack-wearing zombies gathering in empty fields outside our houses. Are we aware of the impending doom or the imminent banishment of a breed apart? No, all the men are in the bar, having a go at a tasty bottle of rosé, as modern civilization crumbles at our very feet. What a sad, sad end to being a man.





# UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH THE LIQUID KITTY

'Where did the chopsticks go?' I roar to the cowering waiter, as my angst rises to an alarming level that could escalate to a total flameout at any second. Dim sum is not tapas, and if I had wanted to eat with my hands, the nearby Bombay Boogaloo would have done just fine.

In the nick of time, a nearby diner who intuitively senses that all manner of chaos, violence and mayhem is about to erupt, offers me his own slightly used sticks, which he swiftly wipes off on his wife's Chanel jacket. Here, indeed, is a man who understands the nature of a hair.

The chopstick scare created a sinking feeling, which is further compounded by a regular stream of TV news bulletins about the devaluation of the yuan. Faced with the option of letting the ship sink, it appears that mainland China has decided to let it float amidst an ocean of uncertainty.

Exports will without a doubt prop it up, but will the move create a currency war amongst other Asian nations looking to grab honours on the global factory floor?

What were once general rules – buy low, sell high, anticipate capital appreciation, or even mitigate risk on rental yield – no longer apply. Be it Australia, Malaysia or now China, the stage just become increasingly more complex with the adding in of a true game-changer: rising and falling exchange rates.

Remember those lines from 'The Gambler': 'You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em / Know when to walk away, know when to run. / You never count your money when you're sittin' at the table, / There'll be time enough for countin' when the dealin's done'.

How true. As for China, so much has been written and discussed about the rage of domestic investors with their casino mentality over stocks and real estate and worship of the liquid kitty. But like the Good Lord, the kitty also has off days, and while a giving attitude sometimes prevails, it's recently been a case of take, take, take.

You see, although cats and dogs are different, the reality is that the beast must be fed one way or another. Property is no longer only about dirt, aspirations and true greed, it also requires investors to keep a keen eye on the fiddler on the roof – a multiplier of boom or bust that goes by the name, currency. My meal thankfully comes to an end. I hand back my slightly used chopsticks to the startled fellow at the next table and walk outside into the night.

Down a dark street, emanating from the distant shadows, I make out a sound – is that the purring of a kitty, or just my imagination?

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IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT WE'VE ALL BEEN DERAILED IN THE PLAID, MAD YEAR OF 2015 – DRIVEN A BIT NUTS BY ALL THINGS DISRUPTIVE. BLAME IT ON EL NIÑO OR THE TELEVISED IMAGED OF THAT LOONY GOON DONALD TRUMP BRINGING US FRIGHTFUL IMAGES OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN AMERICAN IN THE GREAT AGE OF DISGRACE.





# RUN ON FOR A LONG TIME

There have been times in my life when I've occasionally wanted to talk to God. Naturally, these moments were punctuated by sheer terror; like the time my airplane was hurtling towards a near-typhoon landing, or upon realising that I'd left a wallet full of cash in a taxi that was speeding off into the illuminated night. Pray? Sure, why not.

Realistically though, these random prayers sent skyward have less to do with religion and more to do with casting a Hail Mary towards a seemingly omnipotent, authoritative go-to guy in the sky. Or woman. Or being. Enter the concept of a big being, up there...

Certainly the question of where 'up there' must be discussed. Do they reside in a luxury condo in the clouds or perhaps in a more modest yet tasteful townhouse? No, let's elevate to an entirely more ethereal place – a country home complete with horses, dogs and, despite a fringed line of forest trees, an absolute absence of mosquitos.

Hold that thought and imagine being sat, on a blustery Manila afternoon, at the side of the road outside the dreaded Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 1. Gusts of wind shake the ageing taxi and my driver Tito motions me to remain in total silence, as we bow our heads and wait for a voice from above.

We eventually set off and, given it is still only 1 pm, I think it will be plain sailing to my hotel in Makati. But as soon as we clear the airport, Tito pulls over and explains that we can't go any further until we receive the next set of instructions from the voice above.

WTF, I think. Hearing voices is most certainly not a good sign. So this is where it is all going to end, on a roadside in Pasay City with only a corned tuna vendor and the faint glow of a distant Jollibee sign for company? Thankfully, as I ready to make a run for my life, the voice broadcasts from above. 'Above' in this instance, however, equates to the car headliner where a mounted smartphone is embedded into a foam device. Is this a miracle, or just the devil in disguise? Neither, I discover it's a route recommendation from Waze – a real-time community-based traffic app.

Tito explains that he has been absolved from a life spent mired in traffic via a voice that would guide us safely and swiftly to our appointed destination. Call it divine intervention, or a higher calling, but the trip is amazingly fast.

My point here – and there is indeed one – is just how far technology has come, while at the same time humans are becoming increasingly helpless. When I was recently sat on the MRT in Singapore, I counted at least 27 heads all bowed in near-religious concentration, staring into their own windows of the world. Smartphones? You bet.

There's no doubt that the modern age has come with a terrible price to pay – ultimately it's the great leap backwards. Even dishevelled property developers and real estate investors have lost their pure instinct and become slaves to tech.

My own humanhood has also been challenged in recent months. A few weeks ago, in a late dash to Tokyo's Narita airport, my English-language GPS suddenly shifted into Japanese, leaving me at the mercy of the city's notoriously complicated traffic signs.

Then, just a couple of days later, I found myself lost in a high-security building, you know the ones that don't have floor numbers in the lifts. In a moment of carelessness, I ended up getting off on the wrong floor, one level lower than my ultimate destination. Animal instinct kicked in and I searched frantically for the stairway. Rushing into a nearby fire escape I scampered up to the next level, only to be foiled by a locked, soundproof fire door.

After lying helplessly on the floor for some time, I eventually managed to crawl to my knees and shouted out to the heavens in disorderly prayer. Suddenly a man appeared at the fire exit and told me to come inside. I was home again, thanks to the divine presence up there on the 29th floor.







## ABOUT THE BOOK AND AUTHOR

Welcome to my nightmare... or as the author more adroitly puts it, 'waiting to recline'. Stow your tray tables and stay one step ahead of *The Big Sleep* as hospitality magus and Zen road warrior Bill Barnett takes you on a trip where the real terrorists are backpack-bearing travellers making nomadic treks up and down crowded airplane aisles, or businessmen wearing brown shoes, or that sub-species surely nearing extinction as its time on earth runs down: the bearded, tattooed hipster.

All things came to pass in the year of disruption. The author and eponymous highly-caffeinated *Slave to the Bean* checks in to see what condition his condition is in with this fourth collection of espresso opinions. Bill is once more back in black with this follow-up to *Collective Swag*, *It Might Get Weird* and *Last Call*. And as always, whether he's in his guise of heavyweight hospitality consultant, property prognosticator, conference junky or columnist, there's just no telling where the next journey will lead.

If too much is never enough, get more random verve from Bill Barnett at [www.C9Hotelworks](http://www.C9Hotelworks) or visit the sandbox of Phuket, where you might just catch a glimpse of a man in black getting his daily latte fix.

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