

HOTEL REVIEW

BILL BENSLEY'S MOST FANTASTIC LUXE HOTELS

| BY MICHAEL CULLEN



SHINTAMANI ANGKOR BENSLEY
COLLECTION POOL VILLAS



JW MARRIOTT PHU QUOC EMERALD BAY
RESORT & SPA



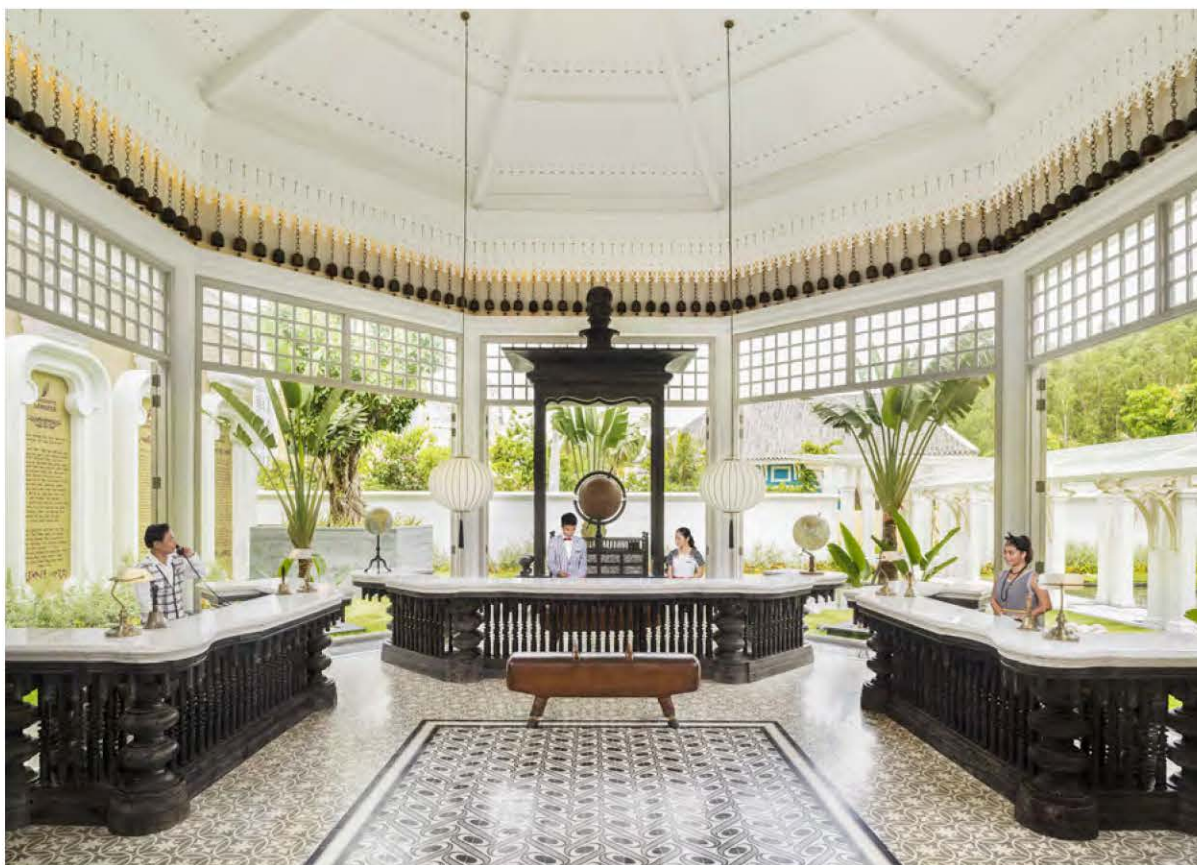
THE SIAM, BANGKOK

The name behind many genuinely spectacular and unique resorts is American Bill Bensley, a qualified landscape artist and interior designer. After graduating with a Master's in Urban Design from Harvard, he developed his style working in Asia before opening his first BENSLEY Design Studio in Bangkok in 1989. Since then, Bensley has brought over 200 resorts, hotels, and palaces to life in 30+ countries.

Luxurious havens in locations like St Kitts, Puerto Rico, Seychelles, Maldives, India, Nepal, and

South East Asia boast brands like One&Only, Capella, Rosewood, Oberoi, JW Marriott, Ritz, InterContinental, and Park Hyatt. Bensley has twice been recognized in Architectural Digest's Top 100 and was inducted into Hospitality Design's Platinum Circle Hall of Fame.

His signature is unmistakably lush, detailed, lively, playful, and even seductive. He is on a never-ending quest to create his studio's best-ever work. So let's introduce you to three Bensley-designed resorts in South East Asia. ❖



JW MARRIOTT PHU QUOC EMERALD BAY RESORT & SPA

Majestically positioned on Vietnam's largest island, Phu Quoc, the JW Marriott Emerald Bay Resort & Spa is a time-warp step back to early 20th-century French colonial university days. According to the Bensley-created storyline, Lamarck University, founded in 1880 and abandoned in the 1940s, was resurrected in 2017 as a magnificent five-star beach resort with 234 sea-facing rooms, villas, and suites.

Bensley's varsity-themed details are at the property's core, from the oversized Phu Quoc ridgeback dog mascots flanking the grand driveway to the uniforms, trophies, and photographs honoring the school sporting teams. This eclectic yet charming institution is bathed in shades of sunshine yellow, jade green, and bubblegum pink.

Each resort building is a 'Department,' with architecture and furnishings reflecting the faculty. For example, the Department of Zoology guest rooms may feature photos of primatologist Jane Goodall, study sketches of mammals, antler chandeliers, and animal prints.

The Department of Physical Education provides complimentary fitness classes, free

weights, cardiovascular equipment, bike rentals, boating, kayaking, and snorkeling. Recreate your past track and field glory at Lam U's running track. Or chill at the Sand Pool, Shell Pool, Sun Pool, or Whirlpool.

All-day dining with international and Vietnamese options await at the Department of Architecture's Tempus Fugit ('time flies' in English). Sip artisanal cocktails created by lab-coated mixologists from the Department of Chemistry Bar. Stroll the French Colonial-inspired Rue de Lamarck for its artisanal boutiques, galleries, and daily entertainment. Snack on Parisian-style sandwiches, pastries, or desserts at French & Co. Or head to beachside Red Rum for the "catch of the day."

Take home unforgettable moments dining at Pink Pearl. Madame Pearl Collins, the (fictional) dean's Vietnamese wife, was known for her lavish parties and French cooking skills. Each evening the restaurant takes on a theatrical overtone, with opera performances or live pianists and violinists adding to the roaring opulent 1920s theme.

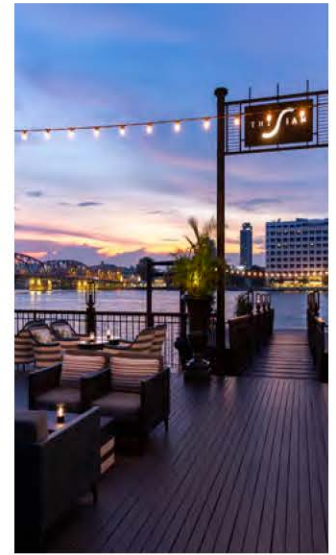
Select educational options from the complimentary 'Curriculum Activities' in the

'Student Book.' Take classes in calligraphy or get crafty in lantern-making. Test your balance at paddleboard yoga, pick up DIY wellness techniques, or explore Phu Quoc culture with guided excursions.

Don't be fooled by Chanterelle Spa's playful Alice in Wonderland theme with its checkered floors, study sketches of mushrooms, an uneven hallway of arches, and odd-sized photo frames enveloping the walls. Chanterelle Spa provides the perfect combination for a rejuvenating experience with its skilled therapists, natural products, and magical surroundings.

Bensley's fantastical designs, outstanding storytelling, and JW Marriott's famed service have consistently seen Emerald Bay Resort & Spa Phu Quoc voted one of Asia's and the World's Leading Resorts & Spas. ♦

<https://www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/pqcjw-jw-marriott-phu-quoc-emerald-bay-resort-and-spa/overview/>



THE SIAM, BANGKOK

The Siam, a 38-suite-and-villa luxury urban resort on the Chao Phraya River, stands apart in a city overflowing with upscale hotels. Just 15 minutes upstream from the Grand Palace, The Siam's sleek motor launch is the most spectacular way to arrive.

Thai entertainer Krissada Sukosol Clapp collaborated with Bill Bensley to create "something out of the common" and to home about 10,000 of Clapp's lifetime collection of antiques and collectibles. The Siam is not some dusty museum but a carefully orchestrated immersion into bygone eras.

The design ethos? A striking mixture of Art Deco, traditional Thai, and colonial vintage using a dramatic black-and-white color scheme with dark woods and neutral fabrics. The central hub is three interconnected buildings with soaring ceilings, a profusion of plants, water feature-filled courtyards, and light-flooded atriums.

All suites, conceived for maximum comfort, have carefully curated designs with nods to the Thai-style Art Deco, luxe modern amenities, own-label toiletries, and butler services. In the main building, the spacious suites are

individually themed, while the private pool villas with roof terraces and their individual stylings are nearer the river.

For maximum entertainment, delve into the resort's shared spaces. Catch a film perched on antique wood and red velvet 1930s French cinema seats in the Screening Room. Listen to LPs in the Vinyl Lounge. Play billiards on the full-size antique table and browse the period-style Library with rare, first-edition hardcovers. Workout in the fully equipped modern gym alongside vintage pieces. Learn Muay Thai skills in the kickboxing ring. Check out the Jim Thompson boutique and Bensley Gallery.

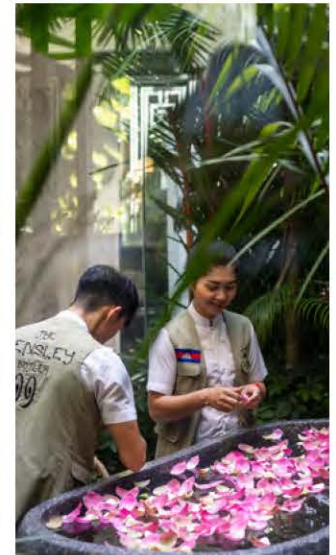
The opulent Opium Spa, with its Turkish hammam design aesthetic, offers facial, body, and massage therapies, steam rooms, and tailored multi-day packages providing supreme rejuvenation of the body, mind, and soul. Esteemed artist Ajarn Boo, who inked one of Angelina Jolie's tattoos, applies "Sak Yant" tattoos, a sacred and traditional body art.

The all-day dining at Chon Thai Restaurant features authentic local delicacies and an excellent breakfast offering. The conservatory-style Story House restaurant, under the expert

eye of Chef Blair Mathieson, brings an exciting menu filled with ingredients and techniques from around the world.

Catch some rays while soaking up exceptional river views from the resort's infinity pool and sample refreshing creations from the Bathers Bar. The Pier is a must for sunset cocktails while the theatre of Chao Phraya River unfolds. The Siam's free boat shuttle glides to downstream riverside sites, including IconSiam and RiverCity. The resort's river city location, secluded setting, unique architectural touches, and curated ambiance create an unforgettable stay. ❖

<https://www.thesiamhotel.com/>



SHINTA MANI ANGKOR BENSLEY COLLECTION POOL VILLAS

The splendor of UNESCO World-Heritage Listed Angkor Wat draws people to Siem Reap. The now-completed USD150 million infrastructure makeover of roads, footpaths, and cycleways makes the destination even more accessible and enticing.

Choices of where to stay abound, though the Bensley Collection Pool Villas are heralded as providing the ultimate luxury private stay in Siem Reap. Conceptualized as a hotel within a hotel, this intimate 10-villa knockout in a walled enclave adjoins the Bensley-designed upscale Shinta Mani Angkor resort.

Your experience starts with your Bensley Butler assisting you with fast-track immigration at the airport. A seamless transfer to central Siem Reap's leafy French Quarter, and your butler is introducing you to your villa. Immediately striking is the maximalist Art Deco design with gilded trimmings, arched doorways, geometric patterns, and molded walls inspired by the swirling robes of the famed King Jayavarman VII.

Simultaneously, the villa's voluminous space pulls you in. Step past the private 30ft pool and garden to the first pavilion, your bedroom.

An expansive floor-to-ceiling sliding glass door overlooks the pool, while the glass wall behind your bedhead showcases a lush private garden and bathroom pavilion.

The outdoor bathtub is adorned with a mesmerizing pattern of pink lotus petals. The room offers every imaginable requisite—tailored bed linens, Bluetooth speakers, smart TV, curated art and quality fixtures, and fittings fill the villa. Your customized mini-bar has an espresso coffee machine, signature teas, an ice machine, and dual fridges.

The villa's Skylounge provides restive views of the tree tops, pool, and garden. Enjoy butler-served breakfast, late afternoon drinks, or even a massage. Or do as Bill Bensley prefers, and have the butler make up the Skylounge's king-sized day bed, complete with mosquito nets for a romantic night under the stars.

When the need for a cocktail strikes, Bensley's Bar, with over 30 Gins from all corners of the world, is the only place to hang out. Chef Chanrith's remarkable 7-course Khmer degustation menu features elevated yet authentic Cambodian cuisine at the resort's Krooya restaurant. While on-site, Khmer

Tonics Spa is your wellness sanctuary for serious pampering.

And as an added philanthropic benefit, visit the Shinta Mani Foundation Boutique, where the entire profit assists underprivileged Cambodians. A portion of your room rate also supports the Foundation, which provides free hospitality training and job placement for local young people and supports rural families through education, healthcare, and micro-loans.

For tours and sightseeing, your butler can assist with your itinerary, including visiting Angkor Park, Tonle Sap, national parks, museums, the highly acclaimed Phare The Cambodian Circus, artisanal villages, cycling, and more. Really whatever you want, this stunner of a boutique resort can help make it happen. ❖

<https://shintamani.com/angkor/villas/>