

# perspective

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INSPIRING ARCHITECTURE &amp; DESIGN

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## AN AESTHETICAL JOURNEY

Iconic Thai decorative elements and motifs feature  
throughout 137 Pillars House in Chiang Mai, Thailand

### + SIR TERRY FARRELL:

After 50 years in the industry, the founder of Farrells talks about his journey to becoming an architect

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HK\$48  
US\$18  
€15

# Beyond Enchanting

*The aquamarine waters surrounding Phuket, coupled with the access to copious adrenaline-pumping water sports and a somewhat hedonistic party vibe have beckoned many from across the globe for decades. But the new generation of resorts on the island is bringing a whole different crowd to this sunny paradise, and Keemala is one of the most exciting new developments*

TEXT:  
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PHOTOGRAPHY:  
Courtesy of Keemala | [www.keemala.com](http://www.keemala.com)

**While most tourists visiting Phuket head to the likes of Patong Beach or Ban Karon**, an astounding amount of development has popped up further north on the island, where the atmosphere is decidedly more chic and design-driven. Undoubtedly one of the most exciting and highly-anticipated openings of late is Keemala, a unique resort nestled on a slope amidst the rainforest and located a mere five-minute drive from Kamala Beach.

As part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World group, this is not the Phuket of bachelor party or 'Spring Break' fame, but rather a wellness retreat, aimed at taking care of its guests' minds, bodies and souls. "We have started to see a lot of medical tourism here in Phuket, and we wanted to create something truly different, something that focused on wellness," says Tanapong Somnam, Keemala's executive director, hotel operations. "For that reason, we decided to base the concept behind the resort on four fictional clans, all who embody the spirit of ancient Phuket settlers."

The story goes like this: once upon a time, in the days of the ancient maritime trade routes, an epic journey began merging eastern and western worlds. A caravan heading for China travelled together and the people formed



*From top*

The only two-storey option at the resort, the Tree Pool Houses reflect the We-ha people and incorporate suspended furniture and cocoon-like beds and loungers. Perched on a slope and nestled amidst a rainforest, Keemala looks like something from a futuristic movie, yet the beaches of Phuket are easily reached by a short drive

a strong bond. While crossing the Indian Ocean, they encountered a major storm; the surviving ships were scattered in the roiling sea through the dark night. Once the storm passed, the battered caravan found itself adrift. With the guidance of skillful navigators, they followed the stars and landed on an island in the Andaman Sea known today as Phuket.

Keemala and its grounds have been designed as an expansion of the surrounding landscape, making use of natural features such as mature trees, streams and waterfalls and integrating these into the overall design. The architecture of the four different villa types reflects the skills and way of life of each of the different fictional clans, and offers guests a range of unique accommodation options, each with their own individual pool.





*Left*  
The Tent Pool Villas were inspired by the wandering Khon-Jorn tribe and feature an outdoor shower along with a stand-alone bathtub



Through the Clay Pool Cottages, the earthiness of the Pa-Ta-Pea clan is reflected, while the Tent Pool Villas have been designed to reflect the nomadic lifestyle of the Khon-Jorn tribe. The We-ha people worshipped the universe and chose to live suspended from trees to be closer to the sky and they have been represented by the Tree Pool Houses. Finally, the Bird's Nest Pool Villas were inspired by the Rung-Nok community and encompass their opulent way of life.

Designed by Thailand-based firm Architect Space, the majority of the building materials throughout the resort are natural, and resources found on site have been recycled. Wherever possible, the design is environmentally sustainable and the construction complements the surrounding ecosystem. Pisit Aongskultong from Pisud Design Company completed the interiors for the project, and also had the creative vision for the resort.

The design focus for the landscaping utilises the concept of 'life' and 'village', and the existing topography and trees have been kept in their original condition, with many of the villas having been designed to incorporate these rather than removing them from the property. Plantings are mainly food related, such as fruits, vegetables and local herbs, and this creates a heavenly aroma that permeates across the resort. Many of the fresh ingredients can also be found incorporated into dishes at the resort's restaurant.



From left  
At Mala Spa, each spa treatment has been designed to  
incorporate elements of traditional healing rituals  
from Thailand • A local artist designed the mosaic  
flooring in the lobby that traces the journey  
of the four clans on their way to Phuket




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The resort's Su Tha restaurant serves up a range of dishes from across the world. Of special note is the Healthy Living Cuisine version of the menu where dishes are prepared with living, raw and macrobiotic ingredients

Amid the garden, guests can also meet Keemala's three resident water buffalos and learn about their daily routine and significance to Thai culture. Born in the province of Phattalung in southern Thailand, the trio was rescued from the slaughterhouse and now make their permanent home at the resort.

At Su-Tha restaurant, meals are served up inside an interior that echoes the theme of the four clans. Fabrics have been created to represent each tribe, and these have been used on the soft furnishings, produced by ethnic minority groups in Thailand under the Doi Tung Development Project,

by the royal patronage of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Walls are crafted from wood, and feature elegant carvings and relief patterns.

And when you have slept, swum and eaten to your hearts content, the team at Mala Spa is available with a range of treatments to help you de-stress and relax. Keemala also hosts guest holistic practitioners who take up residency at certain times in the year. These gurus of wellness are present to conduct in-depth workshops designed for those who are looking to focus on inner wellbeing, and include sound healing, somato-experiencing and trauma release, traditional Chinese medicine, Mayan traditional massage, aromatherapy, vibrational attunement and Maori traditional healing.

No matter what option is chosen for accommodation, degustation or pampering, guests can be assured of a truly remarkable stay which is, as the resort's motto states, 'Beyond Enchanting'. ●

The Bird's Nest Pool Villas reflect the members of the Rung-Nok clan and offer a variety of sea, rainforest and resort views

