



The infinity pool on the 29th floor provides instant relaxation.



The 52-storey EQ boasts beautiful design details.

# Redeveloped hotel stands tall in KL

Well-thought-out design and differentiating factor give it competitive edge

By AMANDA SURIYA  
metro@thestar.com.my

AMID the rapid development that is reshaping the Kuala Lumpur skyline is the brand-new EQ.

Those in their 40s and older who grew up in the city will surely remember the site of the former Hotel Equatorial, a well-known landmark in the heart of the Golden Triangle with popular spots such as Blue Moon and Kampachi.

It has since been rebranded with a new identity – the modern and sophisticated EQ at the Equatorial Plaza – and its physical form now stands at 52 storeys high, a massive expansion from its former self that stood at 18 storeys.

General manager Robert Rick Lagerwey was busy chatting with guests when we visited the hotel that made its soft launch in March.

We were given a tour of the pristine structure and admired the visually-stunning additions, including the uber-swanky Sky 51 rooftop bar, dining area and outdoor deck.

"The new EQ is younger and fresher," Lagerwey said, adding that prior to the refurbishment, the hotel hosted a pre-closing party for its regular patrons.

And the refurbishment was expansive. For starters, the entire floor of Level 51 offers unrivalled views of the city.

As Lagerwey and his team led the tour of

Sky 51, he pointed out a metal staircase that leads guests to even more dizzying views of the city.

If you get even remotely nervous at such heights, you may want to steer clear, although Sky 51 is certainly tempting with its gorgeous decor.

Circular sofas enclosed like pods mark the outdoor area, while fine dining awaits guests at Sabayon.

Those in their 70s may remember slow dancing at the former Blue Moon in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, it is known as Blue, EQ's open-air rooftop lounge, designed to cater to both past guests and new patrons.

"We care more about people than policies and whatever we do, we do it well. Our approach is to listen to the customers, to give them what they want."

"The hotel already has a huge following," Lagerwey said, citing award-winning favourites such as Kampachi, the Japanese restaurant that has returned in its new form at EQ.

"Now we are taking things to the next level, becoming more nimble, more creative, encouraging our teams to share ideas and focusing on consistency and sustainability."

The restaurants have been designed to shine in their own "personalities" and visitors to Nipah can expect all-day dining of pan-Asian cuisine while Etoile has been reintroduced as a hip street cafe.

While designer Gillian Hung has been credited for designing EQ's uniform, the hotel's

interior design team has furnished its space with beautiful Asian accents. Modern touches such as high, sunlit ceilings flanked by large glass windows give the space a bright and airy feel while natural tones in wood, bronze and buff provide a warm ambience.

"Guests go for tailor-made experiences," Lagerwey continued, acknowledging that the hospitality industry was crowded and competitive where service is often the differentiating factor.

"We want them (guests) to feel at home; details matter."

This is evident as he shows us various rooms, where guests can wake up or wind down while enjoying the view of the iconic Petronas Twin Towers.

"The size of the rooms doubled when EQ doubled in size," Lagerwey said, adding that loyal patrons and new ones were even consulted on their preference for the thread count of bed sheets.

EQ also boasts other exciting additions such as its infinity pool on the 29th floor. The entire floor is dedicated to wellness and fitness. A large adjoining pool, fringed by frangipani trees provides a visual delight and instant relaxation.

"We let the customers decide who we are and we are known for not engaging in gimmicks," concluded Lagerwey.

Hotel Equatorial first opened its doors in 1973 and was closed for redevelopment in 2012.



Lagerwey heads the team at EQ.