

Shangri-La opens at the Fort with a young, modern vibe

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Shangri-La at the Fort general manager John Rice lights up this new lifestyle complex at Bonifacio Global City with his refreshing ideas.

When British author James Hilton wrote *Lost Horizon* in 1933, little did he know that his mythical happy place called Shangri-La would, in the modern world, evoke images of a five-star paradise. Today, the word Shangri-La has become synonymous with the hotel chain known for its Oriental charm, serenity and service. But that was yesterday. Today, the word acquires a new meaning when Shangri-La at the Fort opens on Tuesday, March 1 not just as a hotel, but as a lifestyle complex embracing its progressive neighborhood, the Bonifacio Global City(BGC).

John Rice, general manager of the Shangri-La at the Fort, explains during a preview for **The Philippine STAR**: “As a lifestyle complex, we look outwards, working not just with the hotel. BGC is known as the home of passionate minds, and our vision is to

deliver contemporary luxury in one place where people can collaborate, discover and explore the latest trends in a dynamic, energetic location.”

This lifestyle complex includes the Shangri-La Hotel with 576 rooms and suites, 21 function rooms, a Grand Ballroom that can accommodate 1,200 guests plus another ballroom, the Bonifacio Hall, that can take 500 guests. This early, the hotel calendar is already busy with bookings for weddings and corporate events starting this week until 2017.

There are 15 restaurants in this complex. Executive chef Joris Rycken is proud of the hotel’s seven dining destinations. He gave us a delicious taste of High Street Cafe, with its bookcase architecture, based on the idea of a chef’s library with a collection of global ingredients in nine food stations: rotisserie, seafood, Mediterranean, salad and greens, Japanese, Chinese, Southeast Asian and continental, and desserts. High Street Lounge is friendly elegance in a stylish setting, livened up by jazz and modern music. Canton Road presents modern Cantonese cuisine in a setting designed by Hong Kong-based Steve Leung Designers. It has nine private rooms. Raging Bull Chophouse & Bar, designed with an Upper West Side New York peg, offers gourmet comfort food ranging from grass-fed beef to seafood. Raging Bull Burgers is a burger shop with an offbeat locale and a rock-star attitude. Samba offers all-day dining with healthy, colorful cuisine inspired by the flavors of South America, Spain and the Philippines. Lively bands match the festive setting designed by Filipino architect Manny Samson, who also designed the Horizon Homes. Limitless was conceived by Shawn Sullivan as “a modern speakeasy inspired by the beauty of jewels. Guests enter the bar through a sleek wooden tunnel with the interiors of a handcrafted jewelry box, with mirrored glass, polished metal, emerald green and sapphire upholstery to create an environment for dancing, lounging and socializing.”

The other restaurants are run by dining retailers handpicked by Shangri-La: Maisen which is one of finest tonkatsu restos in Tokyo, founded in 1965; The Sugar Factory which is an American phenomenon visited by Hollywood A-listers with Kylie Jenner as

main endorser; Pink's Hotdogs which is a popular Los Angeles-based hotdog store; FOO'D by Davide Oldani, serving Michelin-star cuisine at fair prices, described as Cucina Pop Style, "an Italian spin on democratic fine dining"; Brotzeit, a contemporary resto offering Bavarian cuisine and German beers; Toby's Estate which boasts specialty coffee roasters; and Planet Grapes which has its cheeky tagline, "wine without drama." Shopping choices include Harley-Davidson of Manila, Gautier, Philux, Jewelmer and Ann Ong.

Shangri-La Residences offers modern apartment living for long-staying guests in 97 suites equipped with amenities such as washer and dryer, refrigerator and dining wares. Horizon Homes is a collection of 98 private homes on the top 20 floors. "Here, you buy a home for life and pass it on to the next generation," says GM Rice.

A most amazing feature of Shangri-La at the Fort is Kerry Sports, which is now Manila's most comprehensive indoor fitness and recreation center. Its 8,000 square meters of space on two floors offer everything that any fitness buff or sports lover can ask for — including an NBA-configured indoor basketball court with seating space for spectators! Kerry Sports manager Mike Montes, whose experience includes having personalities like Madonna train under his watch, gave us a jaw-dropping tour of the facilities at Shangri-La at the Fort which include a boxing zone; a functional zone featuring Synergy 360, a group training system for agility, balance and coordination; a cardio zone with state-of-the-art machines; free weight zone to increase power and strength; adventure racing zone where one can cycle, row, run, crawl and climb; core zone featuring the latest in abdominal and lower back equipment; squash courts; tennis courts; outdoor lap pools; yoga, spin, Pilates and multipurpose studios; spin studios; steam and sauna rooms; and an urban spa for therapeutic treatments.

Another unique feature is the Adventure Zone with its different play areas designed for various age groups, featuring slides, playhouses and board games. It has a cafe for the little ones and three fun themed party rooms for birthday parties complete with personalized invitations, party favors, a candy buffet and entertainment.

The design of Shangri-La at the Fort is a collaboration between foreign designers such as Shawn Sullivan of Rockwell Group and Filipino talents. Miguel Rosales, the hotel's art adviser, put in a modern vibe with a very Filipino flavor. At the lobby, the beadwork of Bea Valdes greets guests at the reception area. An acrylic on canvas by Sam Penaso hangs in front of High Street Cafe. Raul Isidro's work dominates the concierge. Jinggoy Buensuceso makes a statement at the grand staircase area as well as the Lobby Lounge with his black iron and steel works. Artworks by Mars Bugaoan, Anton Mallari and Noel El Farol are seen on hallways and lobbies.

Really grand is the Grand Ballroom which is designed like a Filipino jewel box in silver and beige colors, its chandeliers hanging like necklaces. To highlight its refined design, Bea Valdes made embroidery and applique panels, all done by hand-sewn construction. At the hallways, you see not colorful artworks typically seen in hotels, but instead, details and patterns seen in our *barong* Tagalog, as designed by Manny Samson. The hotel carries a lot of accessories designed by Cebuano artists and artisans.

The wow factor at Shangri-La comes from its beautiful and exquisite chandeliers made by Lasvit, one of the world's leading chandelier makers. Every chandelier seems to have a story or inspiration. There is, for instance, a chandelier that "sings" with the wind. You have to see and hear it yourself. The carpets are another eye-stopping element in this new hotel, with designs that redefine hotel design as you have never seen elsewhere.

"All lifestyle aspects are LEED Gold-certified," Rice proudly explains, "so there is a collaborative environment and community vibe that distinguishes it from other hotels." One tour that we accidentally took —because we went to the wrong entrance, the one for employees — is one we really enjoyed. Lesley Anne Tan, director of communications, led us through the basement halls displaying some 30 different artistic posters, each with a message giving different vibes: stylish, passionate, warm, dynamic, colorful, caring — traits which GM Rice wants each employee to embrace. "I want our staffers to develop optimism which leads to confidence that allows them to do amazing things."

And the words that made us look at this five-star Shangri-La with a bit of emotion:
“Bricks and marble and chandeliers don’t create a great hotel. A hotel is empty unless you have a heart and soul,” says Rice.

You can experience the Shangri-La at the Fort located at 30th Street corner 5th Avenue, Bonifacio Global City by calling (632)820-0888 or emailing slfm@shangri-la.com.