

india

mondo

arc

AN INITIATIVE BY STIR

ISSUE #17
₹500





THE BUSINESS OF SPA-TIALITY

When the spa-pundit, **Ingo Schweder**, CEO and founder of GOCO Hospitality speaks, it is advisable to whip out pen and paper to take notes. The journey of the multi-award-winning expert in the field of spa and hospitality is studded not only with accolades but emblematic destinations and exceptional experiences. Schweder shares with **Mrinalini Ghadiok** of **mondo*arc india** his invaluable insights.

A young start. Hailing from a family of designers and design-related professionals, Schweder's foray into design was rather natural.

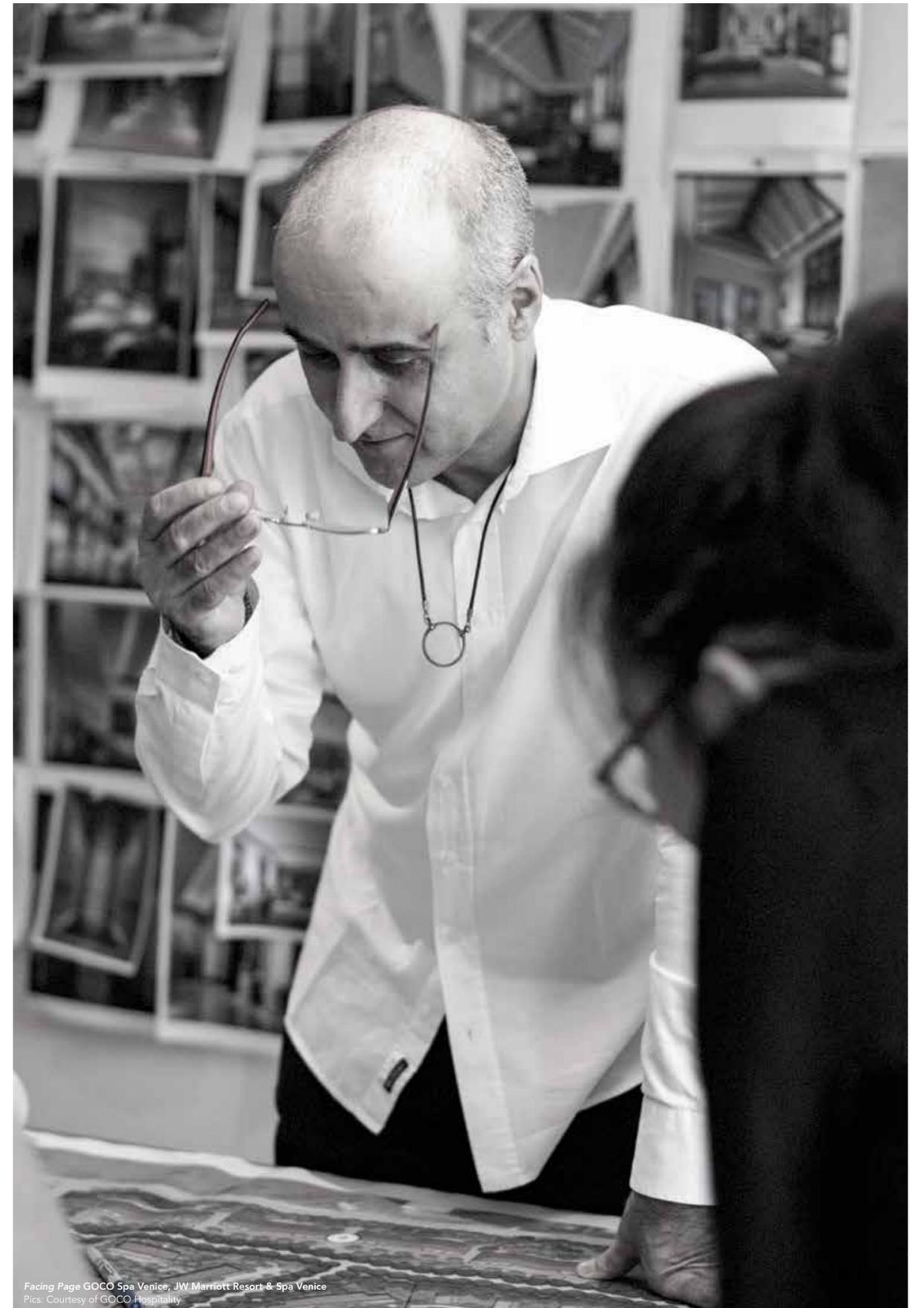
"My interest in this field stemmed from my childhood. My entire family was into design in some way or another. My extended family had a high-end bathroom and kitchen fit out company and my grandfather was a property developer. Therefore, we were always engaged with architects and designers."

An experience of a lifetime. Schweder has worked in the hospitality industry for over three decades, creating iconic properties that have stood the test of time, space, trends and technology.

"As Managing Director of the Rafael Hotel Group in South Asia, later Mandarin Oriental Hotels and Resorts India, I guided the setup and establishment of Ananda in the Himalayas. While at Oberoi Hotels as Group Director of Operations, I headed the birth of the hotel's Vilas Collection. As a member of the operational board of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, I was responsible for the worldwide operation of the Spas and Resorts division on five continents."

A brand new brand. Schweder's insight and in-depth knowledge of the hospitality sector identified a void that he felt compelled to fill.

"I created GOCO Hospitality in 2008 in order to provide the hospitality sector with a turnkey source of expert insights on wellness. I had observed that what the market needs in the wellness hospitality sector in terms of design and operations were often misaligned and created separately. I saw that the new direction was to have dedicated professional services as a 'turnkey offer' in order to drive excellence in this growing market segment. We now have a company with over 35 senior experts from 12 different nations dedicated to wellness hospitality. Design is an important part of our full range of wellness hospitality consultancy services, which also include market research and



Facing Page GOCO Spa Venice, JW Marriott Resort & Spa Venice
Pics: Courtesy of GOCO Hospitality



The Spa at Steigenberger Frankfurter Hof



Jumeirah Guangzhou



Jumeirah Guangzhou



GOCO Retreat Ubud

financial feasibility analysis (in partnership with Horwath HTL Health and Wellness), concept development, pre-opening services, and management.

We develop the overall look and feel, the space planning and adjacency, and then work with the owners and the interior designer to create spaces that ensure a great customer experience and are operationally highly efficient and effective."

Creating a distinct niche. While hotels sprouted across the vast landscape and spas emerged abound, Schweder's concern rested at "too much too similar".

"I observed that there was too much repetition in spa designs and that the concepts were not tailored to the location

and the cultural environment in which they operate or aligned to the target market. At GOCO Hospitality we want to change that. Spas are much more complicated spaces than people often realise. In order for them to work effectively, they need to be designed carefully right from the very beginning, and that means being designed for a specific market segment and its needs. There are many excellent architects and interior designers in the industry that can create spaces that are very aesthetically pleasing, but very few of them are consumers of wellness services or understand the technical operational requirements of a spa. This is where GOCO Hospitality comes in, supporting and guiding this key phase of the development."

The first-born. The first impression has now become a lasting impression - Schweder's initial concepts are still being incorporated into projects 25 years later.

"The first spa I was involved in was the Shangri-La Taipei. This was back in 1992 when on the 43rd level we created an entire floor with the first ever spa suites - a spa within a spa. We had eight spa suites overlooking the city, all with their own thermal experience, jacuzzi and relax zone. It was a stunning success and this concept has now been adopted by numerous top spas around the world."

Distinction is differentiation. Three mantras for creating unique spa experiences that set themselves apart in the ever-flooding market today. Schweder argues that spas add value.

*"A spa needs to:
...be authentic to the local culture and environment
...meet the specific needs and desires of the target market
...effectively express the location and needs of the guests"*

"Design is a strong way in which spas can differentiate themselves and stand out from a sometimes-crowded market. There should be no one-size-fits-all design for a spa. Design should be tailored to the location as well as the target market. I am often inspired by observing the marketplace and the macroeconomic and lifestyle trends around the world."

"Spa-consuming hotel guests achieve the highest room rates and average lengths of



The Landmark Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong

stay vs. non-spa-consuming guests. They book the biggest suites and consume more F&B in-house. Thus, their value to the hotel is far superior. They are, therefore, very important hotel guests.”

“Wellness, these days, is far more than just a spa. It is reflected in how we build, the type of paint we use, the fabrics we choose, the food we eat and the quality of the air that we breathe.”

Luxury, hospitality and the luxury of hospitality. There seems to be a paradigm shift in the perception of luxury, especially in the sector of hospitality. Are spas today synonymous only with luxury, or should they be made more accessible to the masses?

“Luxury is not about chandeliers and marble: the biggest luxury today is time. Luxury is also about experiences that are perfectly tailored to the needs of guests and a strong sense of authenticity.

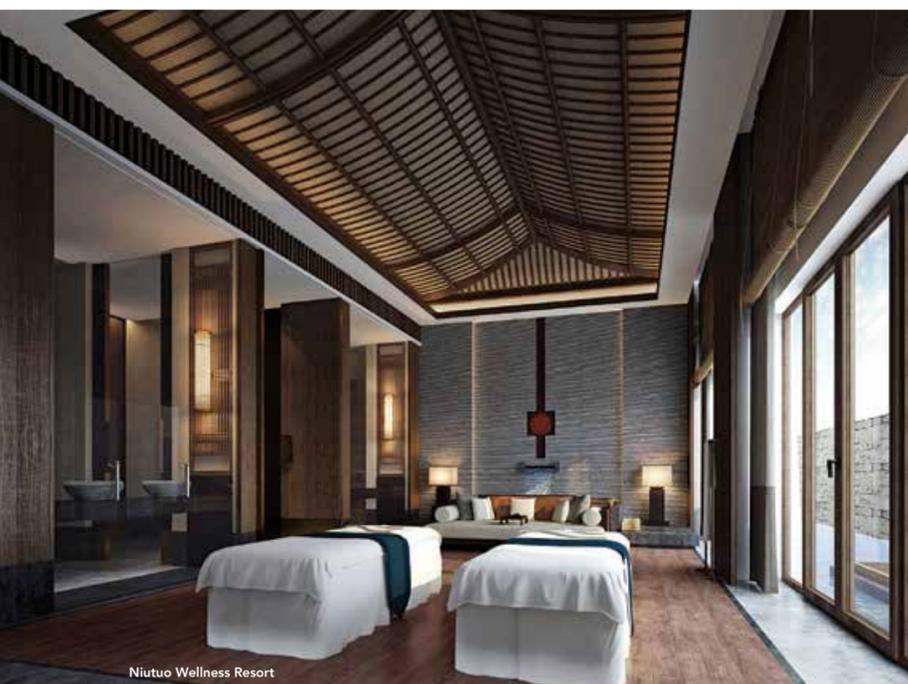
Spas are becoming more and more democratic. It is not all about luxury. People want time for themselves and to look inwards at their respective needs.”

“If hotels wish to provide the services that their guests are demanding, then they need to stay on top of the latest health and wellness trends. Wellness should not be about people’s income, but their individual needs. Obesity and diabetes are some of the biggest lifestyle diseases that we are faced with and the treatment of these do not require a luxury approach. In fact, it seems to be that these lifestyle diseases are mostly affecting those with a richer and more sedentary lifestyle.”

The India Story. Schweder’s relationship with India has been as intimate as evocative. His past experiences define the vision for a hopeful future.

“India is the birthplace of yoga and Ayurveda. It is the place where I learned yoga and this has stayed with me ever since. I love the vibrancy of the place.”

“India is a very exciting market. The country has a rapidly growing middle-class population with a growing interest in travel as well as health and wellness. However, one of the issues with the hospitality and spa market in India is that there are too many similar products and concepts. There is a huge opportunity for additional diversity and a more unique offering.”



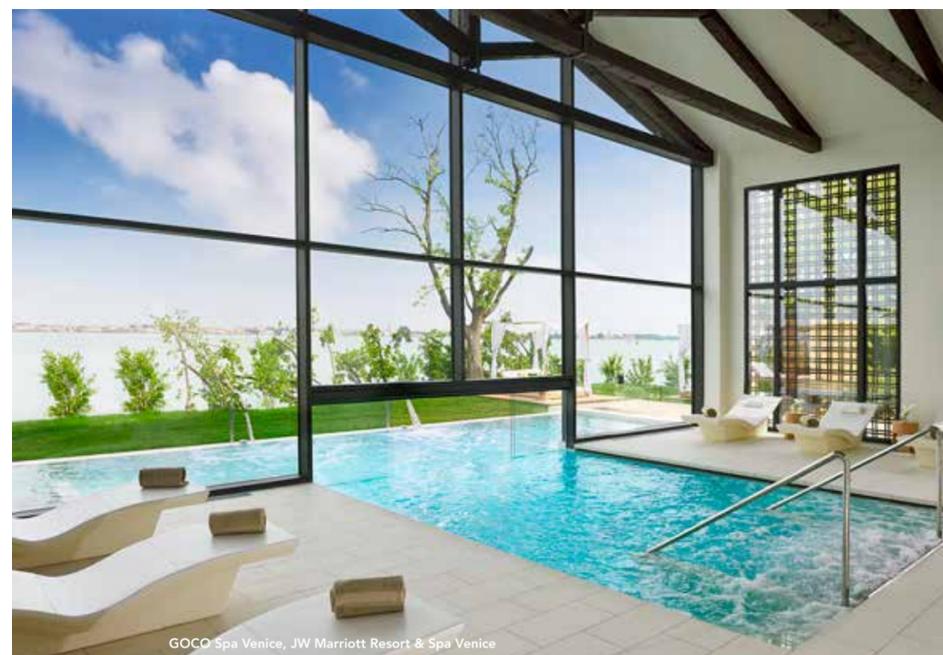
NiuTuo Wellness Resort



GOCO Spa Venice, JW Marriott Resort & Spa Venice



GOCO Spa Venice, JW Marriott Resort & Spa Venice



GOCO Spa Venice, JW Marriott Resort & Spa Venice

The wellness of tomorrow. With more than 600 hotel properties slated to develop in India over the next few years, Schweder shares a few words, of caution and of encouragement, to the evolving spa industry in the country.

“I don’t think all of these will be built in the time frame presently envisaged. This is mainly due to issues with the 100+ licenses and the associated processes to create hospitality ventures in India.

Spa guests in India want greater authenticity. Therefore, developers need to carefully carry out research, create interesting and novel concepts and make sure they meet the needs of the market. It is too much same-same and far too much cost cutting than creativity. As Mr. Oberoi famously said, “You don’t make money by cutting costs but by creating unique experiences for which people pay premiums.” Oberoi Hotels are to this date still the benchmark others are measured by.”

www.gocohospitality.com

KNOWING SCHWEDER BETTER

First hotel experience

The Carlton Hotel in Cannes during the annual film festival with my parents.

Spa idols

For spa community planning and design: Josephine Leung, GOCO

Other designers: Tony Chi, tonychi, New York; Martin Palleros, Tierra Design, Bangkok; Tim Kobe, Eight Inc., Singapore, creator of the original design concept for the Apple Stores.

Favourite international spa

Landmark, Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong. To this date, it is the highest grossing spa by square metre in Hong Kong. It was the project on which I met my wife.

Top 3 spas designed by you

The Landmark, Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong (Opened 2004)
GOCO Retreat Ubud, Indonesia (Opens 2020)
GOCO Spa Venice, Italy (Opened 2015)

Next 3 wellness projects

A wellness resort in the Maldives
A cutting-edge fitness and lifestyle resort in Thailand
An organic, food-producing, sustainable wellness resort in Southern California

A word of advice

Work with experts in design and fit out. Be unique, think out of the box and create a difference. Do not short-change things that make people truly happy, healthy and content.

Adage to live by

“Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.”
– Rumi