



Awards with a heart

Virtually anybody in the real estate industry knows his name. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that in his 22-odd years of writing on property, he's guided quite a few buyers to their homes with his insightful narratives and colourful opinions drawn from putting himself in their shoes.

Shh, don't tell S.C. Cheah, but I used to read his columns that appeared in another English daily even before I became an editor. During those days as a junior executive with a property firm, it was part of my job to cut out his articles, mount them onto paper, file them in Ring Folders and circulate them to everybody in the office, from the stenographers – yes, it was that long ago – to the head honcho. SC's articles helped us know who was doing what, where, when, with a kind of observation and understanding that has evolved to become his trademark.

So what sets SC apart?

First and probably the most important, he's passionate about property development and has

no qualms about travelling far and wide to see the various endeavours and ideas developers are hatching. This has introduced him to companies of all shapes and sizes and allowed him to meet captains of the industry so he can get straight from the horses' mouths the concept and basis of their brainchildren.

With this tremendous exposure, SC has been able to form considered opinions and it is this that developers as well as buyers at large highly regard. It is also what qualifies him to nominate his choice of best developers and developments in this inaugural S.C. Cheah Choice Awards.

His winners are featured in the subsequent following pages along with something many awards don't have: The reasons for his choices.

Unlike other Awards, this is not an industry back-patting exercise or an award that can be bought with money. The winners were chosen because like SC, they are similarly passionate about property and have thus won a piece of his heart.

As I said earlier, such an accomplishment cannot be done with money or formulated evaluations based on a standard set of questions. Rather, it earned over years of regular monitoring, interviews, informal chats with the captains and impromptu unannounced site visits.

The latter is one of SC's hobbies and what has become one of the hallmarks of his writing style.

As he told me, "After I just got married, I would take my new wife to construction sites and we would trudge in mud and on nails ... I love to enter houses under construction, peeping in here and there, taking loads of photos."

His interest in property began in the 1980s while watching the 60-storey Komtar building in Penang being built.

"I was then with *New Straits Times*, and remember climbing up the stairs illegally to the top of Komtar," he says.

"At that time, the walls and windows were not in place ... it was very dangerous but I was probably one of the few people

who took photos from the top floor of the tower when it was being built.

"Suddenly, all the scaffoldings attached to the ceiling fell – I don't know whether it was accidental or not – and I escaped by a hair's breadth!

"But that's me – I'm not an armchair writer; I prefer to write on things after seeing them with my own two eyes." Ergo, his weekly column in this pullout, "PropertyEyes".

Over the years, SC has amassed a veritable treasure trove of property research materials but hasn't found the time to make commercial use of them. Quite happily, he'll tell anybody willing to listen that he is "probably one of the few who has tracked the entire development of USJ Subang Jaya in Selangor" and has "a few thousand photos and brochures of all the township's phases from Day One".

"It shows my love – or eccentricity if you like – for the property industry."

Whatever it is, it comes to life today. And it comes from his heart.



Andrew Wong

Andrew Wong
Property Editor

I still feel an 'oomph' ...



S.C. Cheah

S.C. Cheah
Consulting Editor

Awards and recognition. Many people crave for it, some avoid it, others scorn the commercialised and sometimes hypocritical attempts to place a "crown" on something that may be controversial.

Indeed, awards have been used as tools that can enhance prestige and branding, add value and bring in business ... particularly if they are seen as credible, relevant, professional, truthful and sincere.

Like beauty pageants, many awards are given after several rounds of shortlisting with the choice of winner often not being agreed upon by all the judges. I should know. During my younger days, I was often called upon to be a judge in beauty contests.

I have a keen eye for beauty and it is no different if the subject of my attention is built with bricks-and-mortar. There is also beauty in buildings and, after 22 years of writing about the housing industry, I still feel an "oomph" whenever I see anything attractive or unique.

I must confess that when my editor Andrew Wong asked me to select developers that I think deserve recognition for their excellence, I was initially hesitant, not because I doubt my choices – I don't think I can be worse than

say a judge without any knowledge of the industry – but because the award could be misconstrued.

It may sound clichéd to say that this S.C. Cheah Choice Awards tries to recognise excellence for deserving developers both major and minor. It is not a competition, there are no winners or losers, just my choice, rightly or wrongly.

I could have missed out somebody but perhaps you are still hidden somewhere and need to project yourself more. Of course, too much publicity without anything to boast is just as bad. Sometimes, it is better to have a few worthwhile awards than a showcase full of useless trophies.

In this year's inaugural event, I created an award for the Best Philanthropic Private Developer. This effectively leaves out the big philanthropists from public-listed firms such as Sunway Group's Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah and SP Setia's Tan Sri Liew Kee Sin, whose mega-buck donations to charity are widely known and respected.

Like the work of the late Mother Teresa, charity is not measured merely by the amount but by the weight of goodness coming from the heart.

In considering candidates from the private sector for this award, my mind latched onto Titijaya Sdn

Bhd's Datuk S.P. Lim as he too has unselfishly shared his wealth with those in need. However, it is not so much the choice of person that is important, but that the person serves as a beacon shining a path for others to follow. He or she must have an inspiring story to tell and a legacy to share.

SP Setia Bhd, can be described as an all-rounder, excelling in many areas. However, developing townships and building communities are its forte.

Recognising it as my choice of the Best Township Developer is therefore merely picking a diamond from SP Setia's stack of jewels.

Mulpha International Bhd's Leisure Farm too has a special place in my heart as I have spent many nights there and had the privilege of savouring every aspect of this fine resort. There is no doubt in my mind this is the Best Resort in Malaysia!

YTL Land's Centrio in Kuala Lumpur's Pantai Hillpark is also amazing. There are many Single Operator Home Office projects in the market today, but this one takes the cake.

The Lum Chang Group, which has been actively promoting both its Twin Palms developments in the

Klang Valley suburbs of Kemensah and Sungai Long, deserves two awards: One for Best Bungalow Design and the other for Best Gated & Guarded Community. Why? Go and see them for yourself.

As for Bukit Kiara Properties Sdn Bhd, it seems like only yesterday when the father-and-son team of Datuk Alan Tong Kok Mau and N.K. Tong struck it out on their own after exiting from Sunrise Bhd.

In the ensuing 10 years, they have not only built up a strong brand and an enviable track record, they have constantly set new benchmarks in quality and innovation. Their Verve @ Suites in KL's Mont' Kiara is undisputedly the "most innovative" product I have seen and as such, their company is my choice of the "Best Innovative Lifestyle Developer".

"The Best Rising Developer" Award is my attempt to cast a spotlight on a company that should be watched as it is quickly rising up the ranks to become a major player. This year, it goes to the combination of Yuk Tung Development and HR Group, with their Peak @ Cheras shooting them to the top of their class.

Read the articles I have written on all these winners to understand the reasons for my choices and see if you agree.