

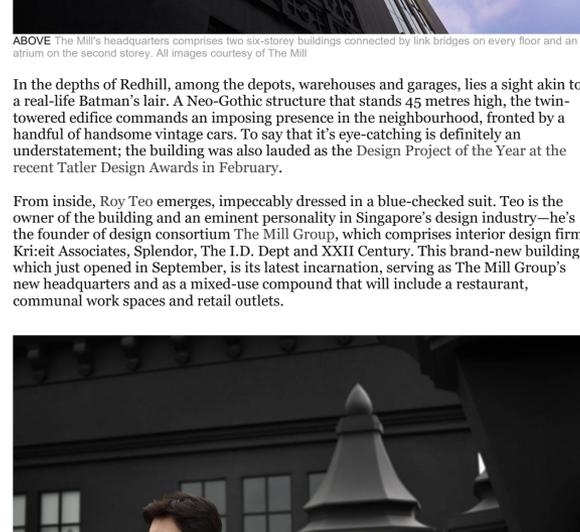
# This Neo-Gothic Building Is The Mill's Creative Fortress

Words by POLLY SWEET  
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COVER The headquarters of design consortium The Mill

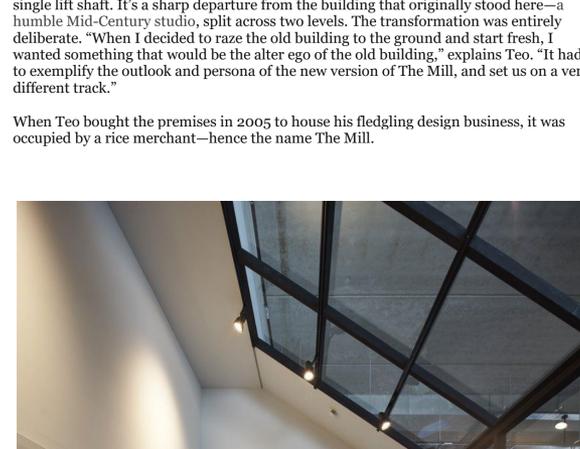
From his striking new Neo-Gothic headquarters, Roy Teo, founder of The Mill Group, has his sights set on shaking up Singapore's design industry.



ABOVE The Mill's headquarters comprises two six-storey buildings connected by link bridges on every floor and an atrium on the second storey. All images courtesy of The Mill

In the depths of Redhill, among the depots, warehouses and garages, lies a sight akin to a real-life Batman's lair. A Neo-Gothic structure that stands 45 metres high, the twin-towered edifice commands an imposing presence in the neighbourhood, fronted by a handful of handsome vintage cars. To say that it's eye-catching is definitely an understatement; the building was also lauded as the Design Project of the Year at the recent Tatler Design Awards in February.

From inside, Roy Teo emerges, impeccably dressed in a blue-checked suit. Teo is the owner of the building and an eminent personality in Singapore's design industry—he's the founder of design consortium The Mill Group, which comprises interior design firms Kri:eit Associates, Splendor, The I.D. Dept and XXII Century. This brand-new building, which just opened in September, is its latest incarnation, serving as The Mill Group's new headquarters and as a mixed-use compound that will include a restaurant, communal work spaces and retail outlets.

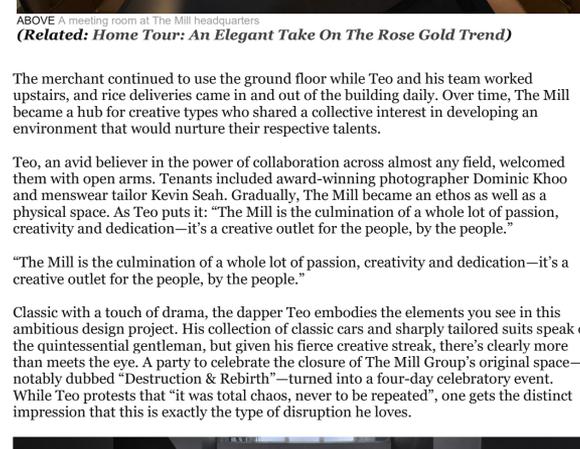


ABOVE Roy Teo, founder of The Mill at the eponymous headquarters

"I wanted it to resemble a fortress," explains Teo of the namesake building's unique design, which was masterminded by him and American architect James Adams; in Singapore, the architect's most famous project is Parkview Square, the grand Art Deco-inspired office and hotel complex that stands tall at North Bridge Road. "In our work as designers, we are so often surrounded by chaos, ideas and noise—so I wanted to create somewhere that was the opposite, somewhere that feels calming and safe," continues Teo.

Fortress-like it most certainly is, with the imposing façade only penetrable through a single lift shaft. It's a sharp departure from the building that originally stood here—a humble Mid-Century studio, split across two levels. The transformation was entirely deliberate. "When I decided to raze the old building to the ground and start fresh, I wanted something that would be the alter ego of the old building," explains Teo. "It had to exemplify the outlook and persona of the new version of The Mill, and set us on a very different track."

When Teo bought the premises in 2005 to house his fledgling design business, it was occupied by a rice merchant—hence the name The Mill.



ABOVE A meeting room at The Mill headquarters

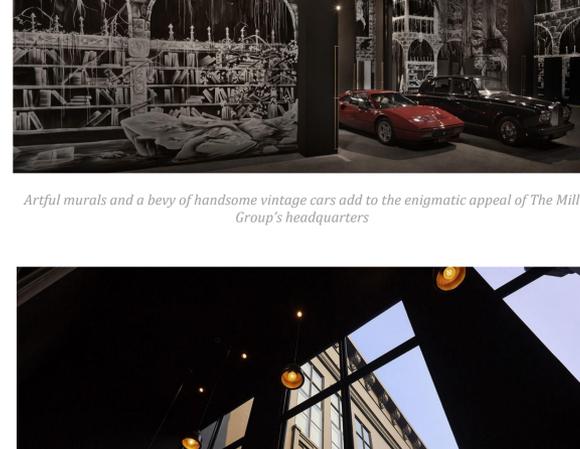
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The merchant continued to use the ground floor while Teo and his team worked upstairs, and rice deliveries came in and out of the building daily. Over time, The Mill became a hub for creative types who shared a collective interest in developing an environment that would nurture their respective talents.

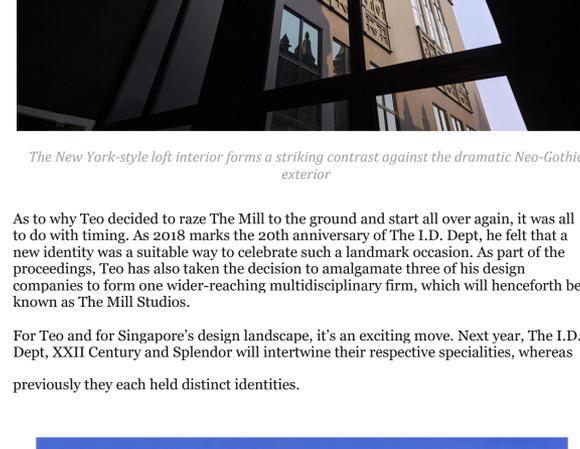
Teo, an avid believer in the power of collaboration across almost any field, welcomed them with open arms. Tenants included award-winning photographer Dominic Khoo and menswear tailor Kevin Seah. Gradually, The Mill became an ethos as well as a physical space. As Teo puts it: "The Mill is the culmination of a whole lot of passion, creativity and dedication—it's a creative outlet for the people, by the people."

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Classic with a touch of drama, the dapper Teo embodies the elements you see in this ambitious design project. His collection of classic cars and sharply tailored suits speak of the quintessential gentleman, but given his fierce creative streak, there's clearly more than meets the eye. A party to celebrate the closure of The Mill Group's original space—notably dubbed "Destruction and Rebirth"—turned into a four-day celebratory event. While Teo protests that "it was total chaos, never to be repeated," one gets the distinct impression that this is exactly the type of disruption he loves.



Flourishing foliage turns the communal atrium on the second floor into a tranquil alcove



Artful murals and a bevy of handsome vintage cars add to the enigmatic appeal of The Mill Group's headquarters



The New York-style loft interior forms a striking contrast against the dramatic Neo-Gothic exterior

As to why Teo decided to raze The Mill to the ground and start all over again, it was all to do with timing. As 2018 marks the 20th anniversary of The I.D. Dept, he felt that a new identity was a suitable way to celebrate such a landmark occasion. As part of the proceedings, Teo has also taken the decision to amalgamate three of his design companies to form one wider-reaching multidisciplinary firm, which will henceforth be known as The Mill Studios.

For Teo and for Singapore's design landscape, it's an exciting move. Next year, The I.D. Dept, XXII Century and Splendor will intertwine their respective specialities, whereas previously they each held distinct identities.



ABOVE Roy Teo worked closely with Singapore-based practice Swan & Maclaren to realise the Neo-Gothic design concept envisioned by him and architect James Adams

The I.D. Dept predominantly worked with commercial clients, creating hundreds of apartments and show flats for prestigious property developers over the years; XXII Century, meanwhile, specialised in experimental, innovative interior concepts for commercial and residential projects; and Splendor was the go-to for elegant, romantic interiors with a distinctly feminine grace.

From here on out, these three firms will become a part of a bespoke design house. Kri:eit Associates will remain a separate entity, with a focus on a truly gispe approach to interior design—much like tailoring a made-to-measure suit, the design firm will continue to craft handsome, personalised interiors for celebrities, tastemakers and discerning homeowners.

**(Related: Designer Living (Part 2))**

In the meantime, The Mill 2.0 continues to take shape, with some of its original residents set to be joined by a new generation of mavericks. Plans are afoot for a communal canteen led by a chef from a Michelin-starred establishment, whose identity Teo is reluctant to reveal just yet. As well as serving The Mill's residents, the restaurant will be open to the public—with the aim to make the compound a culinary destination. "We want The Mill to resemble something like you might find in New York's Meatpacking District," he says. "Somewhere that's fuss-free, but still exceptional."

While The Mill's evolution gathers steam, Teo will continue in his role as a champion for local design. When he's not busy revolutionising the local design industry, he returns to the UK to visit his family, who spend most of their time in either London or the Cotswolds. It is, Teo says, a way of ensuring that he's constantly exposed to different ways of living, which he finds endlessly inspiring. His clients certainly benefit from his constant travels, as he brings a fresh, worldly outlook to the table.

Some of the past projects by The Mill below:



Located at one of Singapore's most sought-after addresses at The Nassim, this apartment in The Nassim was developed by Kri:eit Associates in partnership with crystal purveyor Lalique. Inspired by the glamorous Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements, all details in this apartment are fully bespoke and feature crystal in abundance.



Meet the ultimate bachelor's pad: this abode at Cairnhill Nine combines the essence of a gentleman's club with the intimacy of a private residence. The decor was inspired by fine tailoring, with materials from mohair to wool bestowing the property with an air of elegance. It also features a martini bar for the discerning tastemaker who likes his beverage shaken, not stirred.



The ideal urban pied-à-terre, this abode at Marina Bay Residences boasts a debonair style that subtly brings the charm of old-world Singapore into the 21st century. Catering to the vivacious host, the abode places an emphasis on entertaining through large-scale communal spaces and exquisite finishings to create the ultimate city pad.



Completed in just two weeks, this four-bedroom villa features a French country-style decor scheme, inspired by the home's bucolic setting in Nice, France. The starting point was the antique door, which shaped the selection of European artworks, paired with vintage furniture sourced from local fairs and shops.

This story was adapted from Singapore Tatler Homes December 2017-January 2018.

<https://www.tatlerasia.com/homes/architecture-design/this-neo-gothic-building-is-the-mill-s-creative-fortress>