

AXA basing centres in S'pore, HK, Shanghai

By RUPALI KAREKAR

FRENCH insurance group AXA is setting up innovation and investment centres in Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

The centres will aim to accelerate investment in Asia and connect with its talent pool of entrepreneurs and new business models, the group said yesterday.

All three centres will be up and running by the end of the year.

The Singapore-based centre, called Data Innovation Lab, will be a business-centric data analytics facility to foster research and development for AXA products and services. The lab, which will be modelled on one in France, will tap new ways of processing the large volumes of data that have impacted the way insurers do business in recent years.

"The goal is to offer customers products and services they need... while protecting their privacy," said Mr Philippe Marie-Jeanne, the lab's director here.

Hong Kong will host the AXA Strategic Ventures Centre, which will invest in innovations in the insurance, asset management, financial technology and healthcare service industries. It will be modelled on centres in New York, Paris, London and other cities.

The AXA Lab Asia centre, similar to one in Silicon Valley in the United States, will be based in Shanghai.

The three centres are in addition to AXA Group's presence in Europe and North America.

"Asia represents a major strategic focus for the AXA Group," said AXA chairman and chief executive Henri de Castries.

"We are confident that these new structures will prove decisive in identifying untapped opportunities to accelerate our digital transformation and ultimately better protect our clients."

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SCDA Architects design director Chan Soo Khian, who has four projects under way in New York this year alone, says he is still "actively looking for more work". ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Singapore architect takes bite of the Big Apple



Mr Chan's projects in New York include Soori Highline, a 31-unit condo being developed by Siras Oriel Development. The \$175-million project unveiled last year made headlines with its "resort living in the city" theme. PHOTO: CHAN SOO KHIAN

SCDA Architects founder making a name for himself in New York

By JOYCE LIM

SINGAPOREAN architect Chan Soo Khian is fast making the Big Apple his main hunting ground, with four projects under his belt in New York this year alone.

As well as two condominiums in the west side – one that probably sets a record for the most number of indoor pools – he is designing a luxury condo in 59th Street and a hotel in Tribeca in Lower Manhattan.

Even with four projects under way at the same time, Mr Chan, 53, says he is still "actively looking for more work".

It is likely that some of that work will be in New York, given his long love affair with the city.

Mr Chan recently told The Straits Times from his office in a shophouse off Keong Saik Road in Chinatown that he had "spent some time" in New York after obtaining his Master of Architecture degree at Yale University in 1987.

Even though he is a registered architect in the United States and Singapore, he "never really practised" in New York, although it remained an ambition.

His career took hold here, eventually leading him to found SCDA Architects, where he is the design director. He has also done work in cities such as Shanghai and Dubai.

New York remained a lure, however. He visited the city in 2009 "looking for opportunities",

but the economic crisis put paid to that.

Then in 2012, when he returned to New York, he visited what is now called the High Line, an elevated park developed from disused railroads.

He was immediately charmed by the area and its potential.

"I could see the signs of it coming... The High Line is an elevated park in a high-density area like New York. It's a connector that is dedicated to pedestrians and surrounded by very interesting neighbourhoods like West Chelsea, which is kind of the art capital of the world."

"The whole area of West Chelsea is very well located. You can go to downtown and midtown very quickly (because) you are in the 20s (streets)."

His enthusiasm helped him finally get his foothold in the American market – the 31-unit condo Soori Highline.

The building is being developed by Siras Oriel Development, a joint venture between Oriel Development founded by Mr Chan and New York-based luxury real estate developer Siras Development.

It has received many good reviews, said Mr Chan.

When the US\$130 million (S\$175 million) project was unveiled in New York last year, it made headlines with its "resort living in the city" theme. More than half of the units would come

with a private pool.

Mr Chan said about one-third of the apartments, priced between US\$3.7 million and US\$22 million, have been sold through his office in Singapore. Two of the units were bought by Singaporeans.

Construction started last May and a sales launch is planned in the United States next year, once construction has progressed.

It is very much Mr Chan's baby: He designed the building, the interiors, the furniture that comes with the units, and even the sales brochures.

"It has to be one that stands out because New York is a very important city," said Mr Chan, who does most of his design work in Singapore.

The "good reviews" about Soori Highline led him to his second project – 515 Highline – an 11-storey condo development with an art wall facing the High Line. Construction for the project, being developed by Bauhouse Group of New York, also began last year.

"A lot of what I do in New York is also what I have done in Singapore," said Mr Chan.

New commissions followed, including a commission for him to design a hotel in Tribeca.

And in New York last month, he was named the architect for 118 East 59th Street, a 38-storey luxury condo in midtown Manhattan.

His design for the 29-unit development will have each unit occupying at least an entire floor, with marble finishes for kitchens and baths.

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