

FROM LEFT
Jeffrey Tang,
Keith Tang and
Ong Wei Ping



Breathe EASY

JEFFREY AND KEITH TANG AND
ONG WEI PING CHAT WITH STEVE
WILLIAMS ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMITMENT, JUICY RATS, WHY
NOT TO TOUCH THE DOOR HANDLE
IN SOME HOTELS AND THEIR LATEST
VENTURE, IEQ GLOBAL



SAGE ONCE SAID, “IT’S NOT EASY BEING GREEN.” How right he was. Jeffrey Tang seeks clarification of the pundit’s comment: “What does that mean? Being green, having green buildings? We all have to do our part – we have a responsibility for the well-being of the planet, but further to that, it’s also important to understand that it’s also the people who inhabit the planet. So when you go green, you have to consider the people as well.”

¶ Backtrack about 15 years. Jeffrey and his older brother Keith were following up a business opportunity to establish hotels in New Zealand. The business, Heritage Hotels, has now developed into an award-winning chain of 10 properties throughout both islands in the Land of the Long White Cloud.



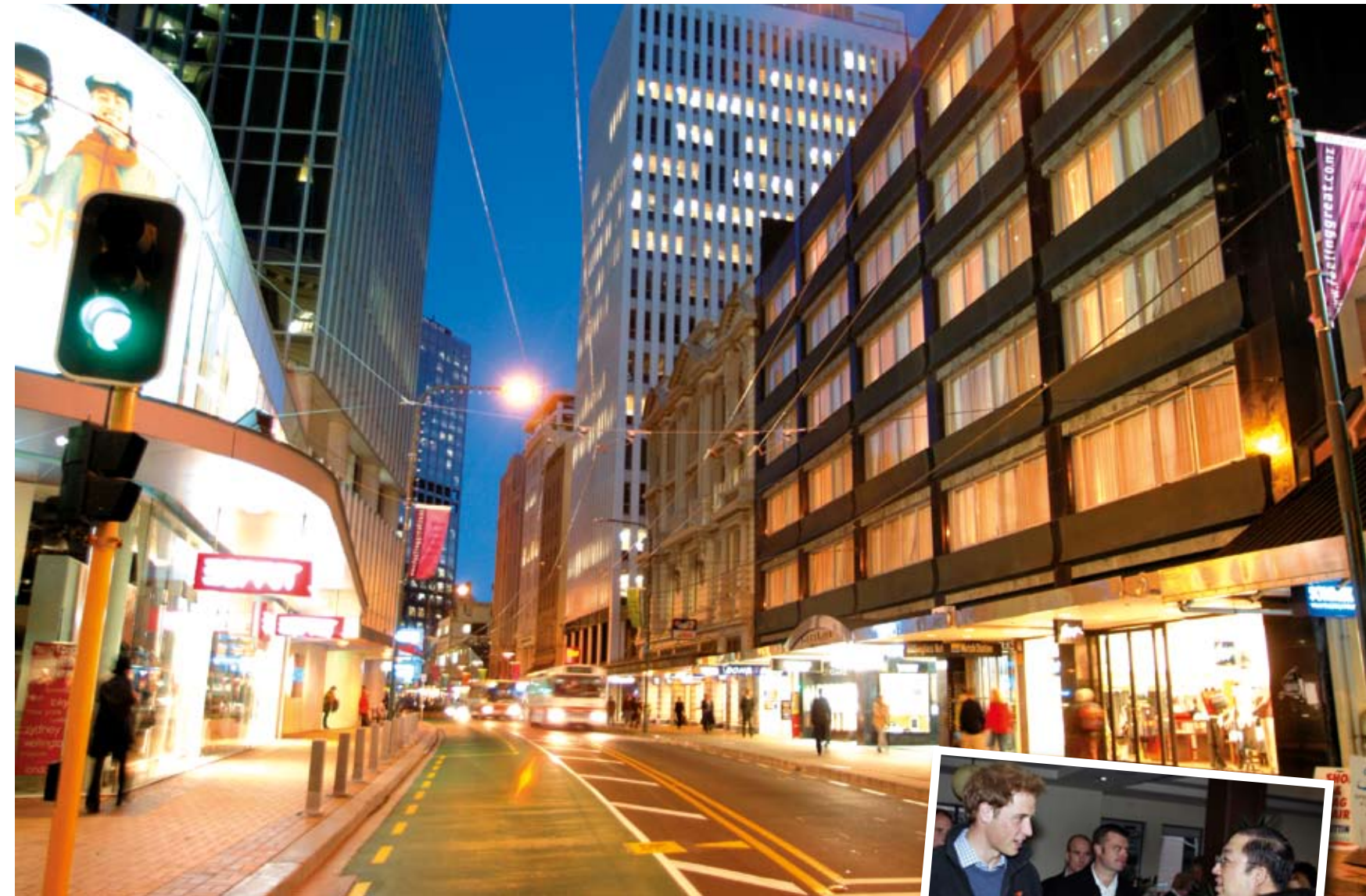
One of the things that impressed them during their time in New Zealand was how the Kiwis enjoyed the great outdoors – and that got the brothers thinking. Jeffrey says, “People talk about “Pure New Zealand.” We started to wonder if that was true, so we tested the air quality.” The results were interesting, although not surprising. The highest reading they took was in Auckland, but according to their measurements, even in Auckland the air was around three to four times cleaner than in Singapore, 10 times cleaner than Shanghai and 12 times cleaner than New York! “If you go around the world, New Zealand does offer very clean air. So Pure New Zealand is not just talk, it’s real.”

That triggered something in their minds. “Keith said to me ‘surely there must be a way we can do better in Singapore,’ because we spend more time here. We feel less sickly when we are in New Zealand.”

Keith adds, “It’s the feeling of being happy and we all have the right to breathe better.” Breathing – pretty basic stuff, but an issue that’s also close to their hearts – or lungs in Jeffrey’s case – he’s an asthmatic.

So the Tang brothers worked at becoming environmentally responsible corporate citizens. Jeffrey says, “When we were running the hotels,

“We all have to do our part – we have a RESPONSIBILITY for the WELL-BEING of the PLANET”



Keith asked ‘there must be a way to monitor how we are doing against the environment.’”

Heritage Hotels have been recognised by Green Globe, the worldwide benchmarking and certification programme, which facilitates sustainable travel and tourism.

Jeffrey believes it helps the company minimise its costs, “But at the same time the flow on effect is quite good, from us to our employees. And then you realise that Kiwis are passionate about New Zealand and they say, ‘I’m so happy that our company is involved in this. Let me do my part.’ Not everyone is like that, but people are very positive.” Their corporate partners support the initiatives. “They look for people who are of like-mindedness. In a way we reckon ourselves to be like Toyota’s hybrid car the Prius. Ten years ago nobody gave it any credit, but today they’re doing very well out of it.”

It’s this passion, commitment and “top-down”

management that comes through constantly. So from New Zealand to Singapore and the new venture IEQ Global. Unfortunately, you can’t bottle that pure New Zealand air and ship it to this part of the world. But talking to these three, don’t be surprised if they’re working on it. The Tang brothers gained real insights from their hotels. As Jeffrey says, “What we learnt from New Zealand is fabulous. A lot of things jolted in our mind, where do we go from here? I’m an asthmatic, [IEQ global executive director] Wei Ping’s a germaphobe.”

Speaking of germs, the conversation briefly turned to hotel cleanliness or lack thereof. Apparently the most polluted, germ infested part of a hotel room is the TV remote. It’s quite hard to clean effectively. Don’t even talk about some hotel door handles. Wei Ping says, “Door handles in some five- and six-star hotels contain

CLEANER LIVING

ABOVE Jeffrey Tang, managing director of the Heritage Hotels Group receiving HRH Prince William at the Heritage Auckland
TOP CityLife Wellington, the first hotel opened by the group in New Zealand
OPPOSITE PAGE Country air



FRESH AIR
ABOVE Air quality is good in New Zealand; Auckland
BELOW Auckland's air is cleaner than New York and Shanghai



human fecal matter, food, salmonella, E.coli and even semen samples.” That’s disgusting. “So you start to think, these guys should be cleaning the door handles. We do,” adds Wei Ping.

Wei Ping explains the philosophy of IEQ Global: “We’ve all known each other for more than two decades. It’s our belief that if you take care of the earth, it will take care of you. In all that we do to create a safe, healthy environment indoors for everyone in Singapore, we do it as far as possible using environmentally friendly means.” Jeffrey delves a bit deeper, he sees themselves as “stewards” of their family resources. “Our faith teaches us to be good stewards, from young we’ve been taught that. Not everything is ours, we’ve got to keep it for the next generation.”

Okay, so what does IEQ do? What does the name mean? IEQ stands for “Indoor Environment Quality” and yes, the indoor environment is just as, if not more important than the outdoor environment – especially the air conditioning.

Jeffrey explains, “The air conditioning is actually the respiratory system of the building. What isn’t really talked about is how you take care of the people. Part of IEQ Global is to create awareness. While we can continue to support the green movement, while we can do our part to

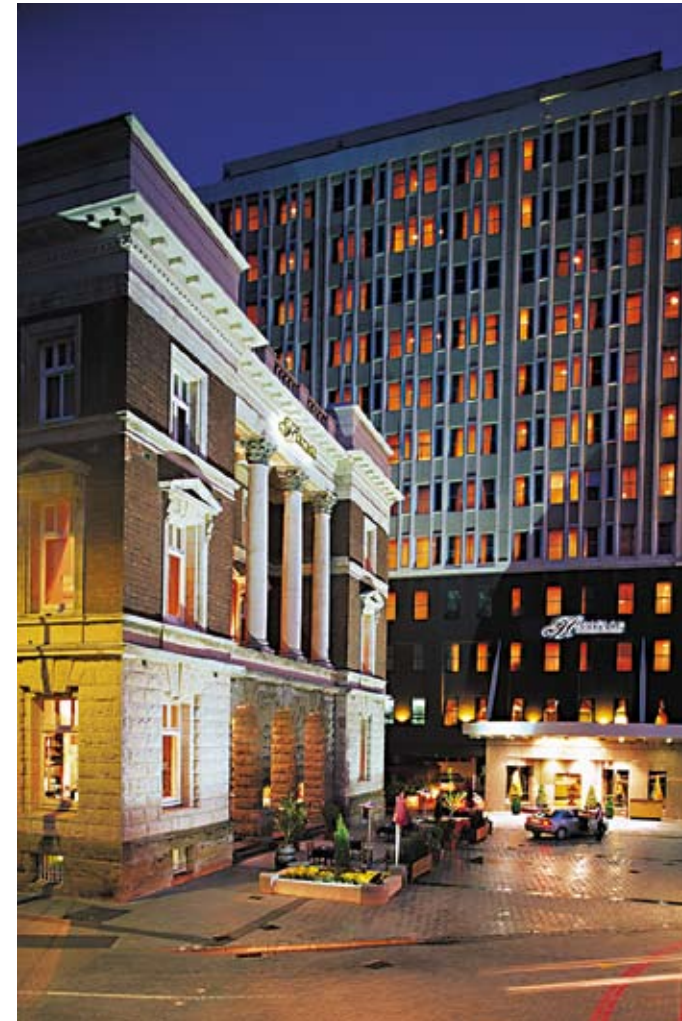
refine energy efficiency, don’t forget we can also create an environment that is well suited and in line with all these initiatives to create a healthy environment for all of us. It’s the flow on effect of a person not being at the best of health.” Less sick days equals healthier business bottom line.

Some of the things they have discovered in and around air-conditioning systems are the stuff of horror films. Insects, large and small, alive, dead, skeletal dust blowing around, decomposing rodents, rats – including one “huge, juicy one” in the air-conditioning system of a large financial institution. So the customers are breathing dead rat. Forget the haze. Wei Ping says, they once found a fully operational bird’s nest with feathers. “The customer said, ‘We eat bird’s nest all the time.’” But as Wei Ping explains, “You might want to eat it, you don’t want to inhale it!”

As illustrated by the likes of bird’s nest building owner, it’s educating these people that they have a problem, it’s just not healthy to have the decomposing cargo of Noah’s Ark in your air-conditioning system.

As its corporate brochure says, IEQ Global provides solutions to address indoor environmental quality requirements ... from air quality, making surfaces more hygienic, right through to energy

“NOT EVERYTHING *is ours*, we’ve got to **KEEP IT** for the **NEXT GENERATION**”



efficient lighting, and they do this in a calculated and scientific manner.

One example given was that you have mould growing in your wardrobe that’s spread to your walls and you believe it’s coming from the air-conditioning system. IEQ will find out where it’s coming from, what it actually is, how to kill it and how to stop it growing again. As part of the investigations, there’s an air sampling, air particle sampling, air content sampling, physical inspection of air ducts, all the surfaces, then they’ll decide what (environmentally friendly) products to use. It’s all very CSI Singapore (Crime Scene Investigation, commonly referred to as the television series *CSI*).

This is opposed to the possible advice of one of those fly-by-night outfits, “Just get your maid to wipe it down, open the windows and put the air purifier on.”

Those so-called air purifiers – the lovely plastic spheres with the murky water swishing around, pumping out some interesting fragrance that Uncle Cabby swears by. In

comparison, IEQ’s ultra high-tech versions are a much better proposition.

In a relatively short time, IEQ Global has racked up an impressive client base – five- and six-star hotels (that do clean their remotes and door handles), multinational corporations and homes – right across the board. They’re also working in partnership with government agencies and constantly pushing the envelope with new technology.

The three men are passionate about what they do, and excited about some of the new solutions they are working on. They also realise it will take time to change the mindset of a lot of people. As Keith says, “We are in the business of persuasion in a good sense. We go one step further – Return On Investment. People don’t move unless they can see the benefits. Our solutions can be quantified and at the end of the day, what we save will help the company bottom line.”

With stewards like these at the helm, our indoor and outdoor environment is in good hands. ■

MAKING HISTORY
CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT
 Heritage Christchurch;
 Heritage Auckland; IEQ Global aims to improve air quality in Singapore



TIMELINE

- 1995** Heritage Hotels brand is established by Keith and Jeffrey Tang
The first hotel opens in New Zealand (CityLife Wellington)
- 1996** Four and a Half Star hotels Heritage Queenstown and Heritage Christchurch open
- 1997** Historic Christchurch landmark Old Government Building acquired and restored as part of Heritage Christchurch all-suite wing
- 1998** Historic Auckland landmark Farmers Department Store acquired and restored and opened as Heritage Auckland
- 2002** Heritage Auckland achieves Green Globe benchmarking
- 2005** Research and development for IEQ Global starts
Heritage Queenstown receives New Zealand Tourism Award for Hotel of the Year
- 2006** Heritage Queenstown receives a consecutive New Zealand Tourism Award for Hotel of the Year
- 2007** IEQ Global is established by Keith and Jeffrey Tang and Ong Wei Ping
Heritage Queenstown and Heritage Christchurch achieve Green Globe benchmarking
- 2008** Eight Hotels of the Heritage Group receive Green Globe Accreditation