

Entrepreneurs pursuing their passion are leading a trend in innovative hotels and restaurants, writes **Christopher DeWolf**

When Philip Leung was a boy in the 1950s, his father used to take him to the Mid-Levels homes of his business associates for Lunar New Year celebrations. He was amazed by the grandiose terrace houses and mansions.

"It was my once-a-year treat," he says. "I thought: 'How could people have such beautiful places?' That's when I started to love architecture and art and design."

That passion followed him through a long career in the corporate world, including Seagram, the once-powerful Canadian liquor distiller known for its adventurous architecture; most famously, it commissioned Mies van der Rohe to build its New York office in the '50s.

Leung's taste veered more towards the ornate. He cherished each visit to Seagram's Montreal headquarters, a "gorgeous Gothic castle" built in 1928, and he looked forward to his stays in grand hotels such as the Mayfair in London, or the chateau-style railway hotels in Canada.

"I said to my friends, 'I don't stay in hotels; I study hotels,'" says Leung. "That was the beginning."

Earlier this year, Leung and mainland hotelier Liu Shaojun opened the Emperor Qianmen Hotel in Beijing, a luxury boutique operation designed by Adam Sokol and Dan Euser, who created the 9/11 memorial fountains in New York. Water flows from the rooftop pool into water features throughout the hotel, including an alley soaked by constant rain. The theme extends to the rooms - each is named with a Chinese character that contains the water radical.

From the outset, it

