

Media Coverage

Publication: *The Straits Times*

Date: 9 April 2022

Author: Chantal Sajan

Where giants gather

SINGAPORE – Step into Wilmar International’s headquarters in one-north business park and you will find yourself surrounded by greenery, birds and butterflies across various biomes.

Singapore-based agribusiness group Wilmar commissioned Eric Parry Architects in 2017, after it won an invited international design competition for the project.

The London-based practice, which established a local office in 2013, collaborated with home-grown firm RSP Architects Engineers and Planners, as well as other consultants and contractors, to realise the vision for the seven-storey tiered building, which was inspired by rice terraces in Asia.

The headquarters houses more than 850 employees, with amenities such as an extensive research laboratory, auditorium, a staff cafeteria, cafe, gym and a rooftop jogging track.

Wilmar is just one of many multinational corporations (MNCs) setting up their headquarters in Singapore, which is fast becoming a hub for companies looking to expand their presence in Asia, home to a rising middle class with growing spending power.

According to a 2021 report by global management consulting firm McKinsey, Asia is expected to account for half of global consumption growth by 2030, offering businesses a US\$10 trillion (S\$13.6 trillion) opportunity.

Separate studies conducted in 2018 by British-American insurance company AON and audit, tax and advisory services firm KPMG show that Singapore is home to the largest number of headquarter jobs from global Fortune 500 companies, compared with other key hubs in Asia.

A 2019 report by global professional services network EY said the city-state is home to about 4,200 regional headquarters, the largest number of regional headquarters in the Asia-Pacific region.

Google, one of the world’s biggest technology companies, opened a sales as well as research and development office in Raffles Quay in 2007. It relocated to bigger premises at Mapletree Business City II in Pasir Panjang in 2016.

British technology company Dyson recently opened its global HQ at St James Power Station at 3 Sentosa Gateway, pledging a \$1.5 billion investment in Singapore over the next four years as part of a \$4.9 billion global investment drive.

It aims to hire more than 250 engineers and scientists in fields such as robotics, machine learning, artificial intelligence, sensing and vision systems.

Situated in the heart of Asia, Singapore offers attractive features such as ease of doing business, political stability, ready access to talent and world-class infrastructure for companies to expand in the region.

Ms Celia Sia, senior vice-president for hub services and connectivity at the Economic Development Board, says: “In the midst of global uncertainties, Singapore presents a trusted environment that upholds the rule of law and supports companies by being business-friendly.

“Companies can also rely on the skilled and reliable workforce in Singapore, and are therefore able to plan for the longer term as they continue to engage Singapore in new and expanded investments.”

Other global players such as Zurich-based Swiss banking giant UBS and American-Singaporean multinational technology company Razer have also recently unveiled offices in Singapore that up the ante in workspace design.

The world's largest wealth manager moved into 9 Penang Road last year, which also marked UBS' 50th anniversary in Singapore. The new development is on the site of the former Park Mall furniture retail centre, which was demolished in 2016.

The sleek regional office is the bank's largest in South-east Asia, spanning 400,000 sq ft of office space and accommodating about 3,000 employees. It is on lease from the owner of the development, which is a joint venture helmed by SingHaiyi Group.

The eight-storey building houses the UBS University, a campus facility which will lead training and development programmes for the bank's staff across the region. There are communal spaces such as a cafe and a wellness centre.

Mr August Hatecke, UBS' country head of Singapore, says the bank's focus is on creating agile working across the entire building.

"This is why the Singapore office is equipped with numerous focus pods and collaboration spaces with network connectivity," he says.

"Staff wellness is a priority and all our workstations are height-adjustable, and employees get to enjoy our wellness centre comprising a clinic, gym, cafe and nursing rooms."

In October 2021, Razer opened its \$100 million headquarters in one-north, incorporating cutting-edge technology to power its daily operations, with sustainability features that helped the company snag the coveted Green Mark GoldPlus certification by the Building and Construction Authority.

The exterior of the seven-storey Razer South-east Asia HQ is designed with the company's signature neon green-and-black scheme.

The design language of the building "aims to invoke feelings of efficiency, innovation, energy and inspiration", says Razer's chief of staff Patricia Liu.

The hip HQ houses more than 600 employees and includes a RazerCafe where visitors can order a hot cuppa, freshly brewed by a single robotic arm that is hardwired for barista duties.

"One of the highlights in the interior is the large LED media display wall which greets visitors and spans almost the entire width of the lobby," says Ms Liu.

"It is equipped with spatial surround-sound capabilities, allowing us to utilise the lobby as a space for all forms of events.

"Another key highlight that can be found on the Razer office levels from two to four is the iconic spiral staircase with LED green lights that serves as the centrepiece of the office," she adds.

Meanwhile, veteran British architect and Royal Academician Eric Parry, 70, says the new Wilmar headquarters builds on Singapore's City in Nature vision and delivers a clear strategy for future tropical office architecture - one which is not only conducive for work, but also provides a habitat for butterflies and birds to nestle in its leafy nooks and crannies.

"The design provides 360-degree views of the interiors as well as the surrounding park landscape," says Mr Parry.

While "the ceramic exteriors are designed to provide shading to cool the interiors", he adds that the building facade also conveys a sense of stacking of the floors, almost like crockery.

"These biophilic 'trays' are home to flora and fauna, and combine to create biophilic elements that contribute to the well-being of the occupants of the building."

Wilmar International a showcase for innovative design

Wilmar International HQ

28 Biopolis Road, one-north

Home-grown architectural practice and lead consultants RSP Architects Engineers and Planners collaborated with Eric Parry Architects on the design and construction process of the new Wilmar International Headquarters.

Together, they brought to life a building that resembles rice terraces.

RSP, together with mechanical and electrical engineers Squire Mech, joined the project in September 2017. Eric Parry Architects, the practice headed by Royal Academician Eric Parry, won an invited international design competition to design Wilmar International Headquarters earlier that year.

RSP served as an adviser for local design strategies and technical compliance codes, and liaised with building authorities such as JTC Corporation, which manages one-north, to coordinate Wilmar's integration into the wider context of the one-north masterplan.

Unveiled in December 2001, the plan sets out to redefine industrial parks and does away with disconnected buildings in favour of self-contained "science park" precincts where one can work, live, play and learn.

One of the key challenges of the project was the engineering of the Tree Columns within the double-storey open plaza. Each column comprises a four-way branch which lifts the office floors over the plaza.

Due to its complexity, RSP worked closely with Eric Parry Architects and the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) to ensure safety and compliance with construction requirements.

RSP's deputy managing director Ng Meng Hui says another standout innovation was the matte pebble-like cladding and ceramic fins which cool the building by providing shade at key areas where sunlight hits the structure.

The pebble cladding is made of light anodised aluminium that does not cause a reflective glare, which normally happens when light hits a flat exterior surface.

The project bagged the BCA Green Mark GoldPlus ranking for energy efficiency and received a Merit Award for Office Buildings at the 2021 Singapore Institute of Architects Awards.

UBS banks on futuristic S'pore office

UBS Singapore office

9 Penang Road

UBS' regional office is a sprawling space spread over eight storeys and 400,000 sq ft, which is designed to be the Swiss bank's "workplace of the future".

From the glass-and-steel exterior to the plush interiors, featuring expansive column-free rooms with high ceilings, the design reflects the bank's global workplace ethos of being agile and flexible.

The office's look is a collaboration between designers from home-grown practice Wolf Studio and UBS employees, resulting in spaces that are perfect for clients who prefer privacy when crunching numbers, as well as providing staff with access to communal spaces, nature and creative downtime.

Staff get an in-house wellness centre comprising a clinic, gym, cafe, nursing rooms and a meditation room.

The office brings together more than 3,000 colleagues in wealth management, investment banking and asset management.

It is also the Zurich-based bank's largest office space in a single building in the Asia-Pacific region.

Sustainability ranks high in the Singapore flagship.

Lighting and air-conditioning are 100 per cent fuelled by a long-term energy deal between UBS and Sembcorp Industries. Sembcorp will provide UBS with locally sourced renewable power through the sale of solar energy from 15,000 rooftop solar panels via an exterior source.

To encourage clean, energy-efficient modes of transport, there are electric vehicle-charging stations, priority parking for staff who carpool, and parking spaces for green vehicles and bicycles.

Razer S'pore gets green light for innovation

Razer South-east Asia HQ

1 one-north Crescent

Razer Inc's regional headquarters in one-north business park will make you turn green with envy.

Or more appropriately, Pantone colour 802C, which is the gaming company's signature shade of green, according to the colour coding by global design institute Pantone.

In fact, the HQ's biggest pantry is called 802C, which ups the cool factor of the corporate colour of the American-Singaporean multinational technology company, which designs, develops and markets gaming hardware, consumer electronics and financial services.

Razer was founded in 2005 by Singaporean Tan Min-Liang and American Robert Krakoff. It is headquartered in both Singapore and Irvine, California, in the United States.

Its Singapore HQ leases out three of its four floors to like-minded companies and brands in the gaming and technology industries, such as miHoYo and co-working office space provider JustCo.

The building's lobby is a public space, home to the company's RazerStore and a RazerCafe where a one-armed robot serves freshly brewed coffee and other beverages to staff and visitors.

According to Razer's chief of staff Patricia Liu, the HQ's exterior is inspired by Razer's signature colour, with the company's iconic triple-headed snake logo in green and displayed against a black background.

The building was designed and constructed by **Boustead Projects**, a subsidiary of **Boustead Singapore**, a global infrastructure-related engineering and technology group.

Currently, more than 600 Razer employees are based in Singapore. With the launch of the HQ, the company is expecting to expand to a 1,000-strong workforce here.

Ms Liu says the HQ not only features cutting-edge technology to power its daily operations, but has also been awarded the Building and Construction Authority's Green Mark GoldPlus certification for sustainable construction features such as energy-efficient sensors, a glass facade that brightens the interior while managing heat from the sun, and a car-lite approach which promotes cycling instead of driving to work.

There is also a rooftop "sky garden" with native plants which doubles as a mini-ecosystem. A rooftop "sky garden" at Razer.