

# INDIGO

01.

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# MODERN VS TRADITIONAL

**PAUL RAFF M.R.A.I.C., O.A.A., B.ARCH., B.E.S.** GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO'S PROFESSIONAL ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM IN 1992 WITH TOP HONOURS IN DESIGN. HE HAS WORKED INTERNATIONALLY ON ACCLAIMED PROJECTS AS THE REDEVELOPMENT OF BARCELONA'S WATERFRONT, THE CANADIAN MUSIC CENTRE AND ON A HOME FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT OF CHINA.

HE IS THE PRINCIPAL OF **PAUL RAFF STUDIO** BASED IN TORONTO. RAFF COLLABORATES WITH LEADING ACADEMICS, ARTISTS, ENTREPRENEURS, BUSINESSES AND INSTITUTIONS WHO WISH TO GENERATE VALUE THROUGH ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT. HIS WORK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN WALLPAPER, ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AND DOMUS.



As an architect with significant international experience, what do you think about working on Phuket?

When thinking about working in a place like Phuket, I think first about the landscape—the beauty of the ocean, the beauty of the hills and the vegetation like the rubber plantations, coconut and banyan trees. There's also a wonderful culture to think about too, of course, but the paramount reason to be here is that it is simply a tropical paradise.

I consider my role as an architect to be not just to deliver a certain style, but rather to frame the experience of the natural landscape for the client who's going to inhabit whatever building I've designed. Shaping buildings to give the best views is critical to my process. Any room with a great view is a great room.

It's a wonderful challenge to try to develop architectural forms which sit well in this landscape, which compliment the environment and look like they belong.

Do you think it's better to design buildings on Phuket that are traditional rather than modern?

No. But actually that's not such a simple question. What is traditional in Phuket? The well-known "traditional" Thai roof form, for example, may be centuries-old, but it was first built on Phuket just twenty or thirty years ago. So is that really traditional? After all, there were "modern" buildings here first. And what is "Modern" when Modernism as an architectural style is already over a hundred years old. We should also remember that there are other traditional architectural forms like the Sino-Portuguese colonial buildings in Phuket City which make for a wonderful streetscape. And there's the typical "shop house" type which is less inspired, but very prevalent in much of this part of the world.

Back to your question-- one of the problems with modern architecture is its tendency to be generic. It tends to look the same whether it's in the







North Atlantic or the South Pacific. I certainly don't advocate that-- I believe that the uniqueness of a place is something you want to feel in the architecture.

So you would say there is not a true local style on Phuket?

No, there is not one style you can determine as being truly authentic. Which brings the question: what is the indigenous architecture of Phuket? I believe the first people who inhabited this large and lovely island were nomadic Muslim fishermen. They lived on their boats. Perhaps we should call their boats the indigenous architecture of Phuket. Not only is there some truth to it, but I happen to think the local wooden fishing boats you see on some of the beaches are absolutely beautiful. They are long, slender forms with a strong and graceful curvature. I love them! I'm not suggesting we make buildings that look like them, but they are the type of thing that I absorb visually as I muse on the character and affect of the place where I'm currently designing.

Then how do you choose the style for a building?

I don't choose a style, rather I develop the style of each project I work on by considering the unique situation of the place, the people who are going to live in it, the topography, the sun angles and views, the local scale, and so on, all the while asking myself what is the poetic potential of the site. Eventually, I synthesize all of these issues and influences as a single and coherent architectural form. If you look at the most successful architectural design around the world, you will find that the success is not a result of mimicking tradition or abandoning tradition, but of using modern technology and modern clarity and embracing traditional concepts rather than looks. For example, the Thai sala -- an outdoor room with a roof-- is really a traditional design concept for lifestyle, and not necessarily particular to an architectural style.

You've worked on projects in China, the United States, and Europe. What's interesting for you about working on Phuket?

I'm a great lover of exploring landscapes and cultures, and this place is just paradise! What's special about working here? It just doesn't feel like work.

Phuket has good infrastructure but there is still enormous room for growth. So there is more opportunity to capitalize on my team's expertise in urban development and master planning than there is in a place like Barcelona or Tokyo.



What are some of your  
current projects?  
What does the future hold  
for your work, Paul?

Right now I'm enjoying a wonderful range of projects, including several buildings in Toronto, such as a hotel and a restaurant remodelling, and a significant cultural institution, The Canadian Music Centre. I'm also doing some selective residential work, including a couple of individual houses. I have to say that there is nothing quite as satisfying as designing someone's dream home.

As for the future, I've just been selected to be the design architect of an exciting new project in Phuket, located just down the coast from the Amanpuri with stunning ocean views and large open living spaces. Our Toronto based group will continue to do international work from individuals or organizations who understand and appreciate how our design work generates value.

