



## BEHIND the DESIGN KNAI BANG CHATT

Elegant lines, modernist shapes and natural materials are characteristic of Kep's Knai Bang Chatt resort. Steeped in history, the site includes beautiful examples of 1960s architecture, including the vibrant powder blue home of the town's former governor and the deep red of the ex-head of customs' abode.

The houses — designed by a protégé of famous Cambodian architect Vann

Molyvann — have been lovingly restored to their original glory, with clean lines and open walkways contrasting with the surrounding medley of tall palms and emerald grasses, and a calm sea beyond.

Their condition was a different story when the structures were spotted by Belgian Jef Moons and friends during a visit to the sleepy seaside town around

10 years ago. Just 48 hours after seeing Kep for the first time, they bought the three properties that now lie at the centre of Knai Bang Chatt.

"They were the same as all the old houses. They were not renovated, completely destroyed, and then they had built extra walls," says Moons, who is now the resort's sole owner. "So what we did architecturally was to look very deep at the initial structure,



and we stripped the house and then we rebuilt it from nothing — like it should have been originally."

French architect Françoise Lavielle was brought in to help restore the buildings — now decorated in soft blue, red and grey — and over the years the location turned from a personal retreat into a tranquil resort.

Materials used both inside and out are in keeping with

the scenery. Driftwood is transformed into seats with weathered long tables directly facing the waves, natural hues that echo the sand and sea decorate walls, while pebble pathways, stone walls and bamboo screens define space.

Artefacts are also spotted around the site, adding a personal touch to the 18 rooms. In 2012, Knai Bang Chatt expanded, with a

new ochre building mixing seamlessly with the original houses and a cabana-style restaurant providing clear views of islands beyond.

Perfection isn't the aim, says Moons, as he stops beside a misshapen pot beneath a spiral staircase in the governor's house. "It's the wabi-sabi — the beauty of being imperfect — that is very important in the whole concept," he explains, referring to a Japanese

aesthetic idea.

"[The pot] fell down when they probably burnt it in the oven, and it's imperfect," he says. "But isn't it more beautiful than when the pot was perfect? Because otherwise it was just another perfect pot — here you find something unique."

Words by Ellie Dyer, photos by Chatti Phal. For more information, visit [www.knaibangchatt.com](http://www.knaibangchatt.com).