

Ready, set, play

Playpoint Singapore's playgrounds may look like child's play, but actually they are an innovative fusion of art, landscape design and the latest thinking on childhood development.

IMAGES YEW KWANG

A swing set and a slide used to be all it took to keep kids amused in a playground. Not anymore. When Playpoint Singapore designs one of its sought-after playgrounds they can come complete with augmented reality options and downloadable apps of Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales. Jason Sim, Managing Director, Playpoint Singapore, explains: "The children can play on the playground's products physically but they can also play on it virtually. With the augmented reality the characters appear out of the playground and you can actually take a photo with your child standing right beside the character.

"There's also a storytelling app where they can touch the character on the iPad and it will actually respond to their touch. It can be in 16 different languages like Korean, Chinese, or even Dutch so it caters for all different kinds of nationalities." It's all part of the company's vision to push the boundaries of >>



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Position Managing Director
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Employees 40



playground and landscape design, creating playscapes that combine art and landscape design seamlessly.

It wasn't exactly the vision Jason was holding in his mind's eye when he graduated with a Bachelor of Marketing from Australia's Curtin University of Technology. He was aspiring to a future in an advertising agency — and did go on to work for a firm in that field after graduating — but quickly found it wasn't his cup of tea. It was while he was studying his university degree part time, however, that he found his true calling. He went to work for a trading company selling playground equipment

and that experience sparked an idea for a business. In 2001 he and two friends, Wayne Chua and Charles Tay joined forces to start Playpoint Singapore, six months after Kompan offered an exclusive agency to Jason. Fast-forward more than 15 years and it's now the leading turnkey playground and outdoor space specialist in South East Asia, with offices in Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The company has now completed more than 5,000 projects for condominiums, shopping malls, schools, attractions and parks, including dreaming up Asia's first vertical playground. Over the years it

has worked with developers, consultants and international design firms such as Zaha Hadid, Toyo Ito Office for Metropolitan Architects, Daniel Libeskind Architect and Grant Associates.

Jason says the process starts with understanding the customer's objectives and requirements and whether there's any story behind their project that can be integrated into the playground design. "Of course we have a full range of products that we can put inside it, it's just what is the best product that assists in the development of the story? So we need to understand all of this before we can come back with any possible design."

Asked to name some of the company's highlights Jason nominates some of its bigger projects in Singapore including its Gardens by the Bay project, which features treehouses, climbing ropes, slides and water play areas for children; and Happy Park at Waterway Point suburban shopping mall, which became the first attraction in Singapore to integrate lights in a wet and dry playground. "Those project values are more than S\$2 million for each job," he says.

Achieving its aspirations for children's playgrounds has meant gathering a cluster of innovative and imaginative partners, who are equally committed to its vision. "We work with companies that are more into the architectural field like [Italian street furniture company] Metalco because their products are a combination of form and function."

"For several years we are proudly working with Playpoint Singapore as our exclusive distributor in many Far East Countries, including Singapore and Malaysia. We love working with Playpoint because it's a company made by real enterprising and creative people" – Enzo Lorenzi, International Business Development Manager, Metalco

"I'm motivated by opening up new markets for Playpoint and trying to move forward and develop new ideas and new concepts which stimulate the company." – Jason Sim

Another key partner is the Danish playground supplier Kompan, which was responsible for developing the world's first children's playground with its own app. The design of its products are based on extensive research into child development. "Most of the products shape the children's development so I think the most important aspect is to get them out of their homes, get them off their iPhones and iPads and actually be active and socialise with other kids at the playground to learn more about cooperation and interaction with the physical combination." While the products are designed to have aesthetic appeal, there's no skimping on the safety and sustainability elements.

Playpoint Singapore has green label certification for its products, for instance, with some made from recycled components. "Most of the products are designed for outside use and require minimum maintenance; some of our products also have a lifetime warranty that includes manufacturing defects. "We do maintenance probably once or twice a year depending on how much the playground is used."

As the company has grown it's also set in place various CSR initiatives over the past four years. In Cambodia it worked with independent disaster relief agency Mercy Relief to donate a playground to a primary school in Takeo. As part of its

CSR program, Playpoint Gives Back, it has also worked with Unilever, actively donating sets of Kompan playground equipment to children's charities for underprivileged children in Vietnam. Looking ahead, the company plans to continue expanding in the region. Jason is eyeing China as well as looking at how it can extend its product portfolio into previously untapped areas including entertainment centres. It's a side of his role that he loves. "I'm motivated by opening up new markets for Playpoint and trying to move forward and develop new ideas and new concepts which stimulate the company rather than being stagnant and waiting for things to happen." Naturally, he also loves seeing children enjoying one of the company's creations. "That's another thing I love about my job — creating really nice playgrounds and seeing kids having fun using them." ■

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