



LISTENING TO HISTORY

Nansha Marina is part of a much bigger development for the region, and Eric Fok talks about the role that history has played.

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ABOVE:
An overview of
Nansha Bay

RIGHT:
Eric Fok, the
grandson of Henry
Fok who created the
vision for the Nansha
Bay development

In China, they are not afraid of Big Ideas that take a while to come to fruition. Think of the Great Wall. Think of the Three Gorges Dam. Think of all those 5-Year Plans. So really it shouldn't be any surprise that the Fok Ying Tung Group is immersed in a development that possibly won't be complete for another 30 years. "We don't think in dates," says Eric Fok, Director of the FYT Nansha Bay development, "We think in phases, and when one is complete, we move on to the next one." And now we're talking about today's stop along the time line - the completion of the new Nansha Marina.

Eric Fok may be new to boating, but in recent years he has become involved in the leisure marine industry as project director and now Commodore of the newly-developed Nansha Marina in Guangdong, China. He smiles when asked if he ever gets seasick. "I was not brought up on boats," he says, "but my grandfather, Henry Fok, started life building boats and trading along the Pearl River Delta. He went on to become one of the great entrepreneur tycoons of Hong Kong and southern China, a major industrialist, and a prominent Chinese patriot."

Grandfather Fok also created the Fok Ying Tung Group, whose partnership with the Guangzhou Nansha Development and Construction Co is now set to redefine the Panyu (Nansha) region as a modernised coastal city.

"My grandfather was a visionary," says Eric. "He built the White Swan Hotel, the first five-star hotel in Guangdong, and the first international-standard golf course, at the Zhongshan Hot Springs Hotel." Ever the forward thinker, Henry Fok realised that Nansha could be a key player in the development of southern China, with its strategic placement and close proximity to the major manufacturing cities of Dongguan, Zhongshan, Zhuhai and Shenzhen. He believed that once the area was connected to Hong Kong and Macau, Nansha could play a very special role in the region.

In 1987 he began building the core infrastructure - bridges, roads, docks and quays - to connect Nansha to its neighbours. Further investments included an 18-hole golf course, a five-star hotel and the renovation and beautification of the Matzu Temple. The foundation also set up a technology development park, a secondary school and sports training facilities. Now following in his grandfather's footsteps, Eric Fok has taken the helm of the Nansha





TOP LEFT:
Eric Fok with Mr and Mrs Jacques Rogge attending the 'soft opening' of the Nansha Marina

BOTTOM LEFT:
Timothy and Eric Fok and VIP guests review the scale model of the Nansha Bay development

ABOVE RIGHT, TOP:
The Fok Ying Tung Group supported the renovation of the Matzu Temple

Marina project, and this - along with the proposed property development which is the next phase of development - is intended to transform the Nansha/Panyu region into a regional lifestyle destination to meet the needs of a very modern and increasing wealthy Chinese community.

It's all about the old property mantra, "Location, location, location." Nansha lies at the geographical heart of the Pearl River Delta, less than an hour's travel time from Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Zhongshan, Zhuhai and Macau. With the advent of the high-speed rail link to Guangzhou (which actually terminates in Panyu, with a stop at Nansha), Hong Kong will soon be within what Fok considers to be the 'magic one-hour circle'. "People, families, businessmen - everyone wants to get out of the city for some R&R," says Fok. "If the destination is too close, they don't feel as if they have 'got away' at all. If it's too far, well... it's too far!" And there are five international airports inside that same one-hour circle. How much more connected, or central, can you be?

At present a ferry from Hong Kong takes a shade over an hour, but the service is a very important item in its own right. "The ferry running into Nansha really is critical, as it confers 'open water' status. The initial grant was not easy to obtain, but it will be a great deal easier to get that status extended to include the marina than it would be to start with a new application." The thought is intriguing - is there any other marina in China that enjoys 'open water' status, where a foreign-registered vessel can arrive from overseas and complete

port clearance, or CIQ (Customs, Immigration, Quarantine).

Fok wants Nansha Marina and the surrounding Nansha Bay area to be 'somewhere' in its own right. "We want to recreate the sort of relaxed lifestyle that you find along the Mediterranean coast - outdoor cafés around the marina, low-rise residential property, pedestrian-friendly waterfront. The south of France comes to the south of China, that sort of thing."

"This is a ground-breaking project in more ways than one. We have built an international standard marina in China, with all the hardware and support facilities that that entails. But when it came to design we decided not to go with the horizon pools and the modern look, but go back instead to history and culture, of which there is plenty in China!" Hence the 'fort' design, which harks back to 1842 and the first Opium War - the decisive sea battle that led to the Treaty of Nanking and the British annexation of Hong Kong was fought on just this stretch of water, the 'Humen Gate'. The shore batteries still exist, just across the river at Weiyuan, and there's a commemorative museum there as well.

It's an interesting historical circle: building a marina on the Pearl River with a view to 'connecting up' the region both literally and figuratively, and building it right at the place where the modern history of the region really started. "There's a long way to go," admits Fok, "but this really feels right. And it feels as if we are doing it in the right place." Next phase, please! 🐼