

The man that makes Kata rock

A meal with the CEO of Infinite Luxury and Kata Rocks, Richard Pope



A MEAL WITH...

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Sitting poolside at the stunning Kata Rocks resort and villa development with Richard Pope overlooking Kata Beach and Boo Island, it's hard not to feel rather overawed.

This is, after all, a quintessential vision of tropical perfection with beautiful, white, luxurious villas standing tall upon a stunning rocky headland overlooking the Andaman Sea.

Every facet of Kata Rocks breathes elegance and sophistication, so much so that a veritable procession of Vogue super-models with their retinue of photographers, stylists and paparazzi make the pilgrimage here to shoot the latest glossy spreads. Looking across the infinity pool I noticed that there was indeed a brace of such bikini-clad beauties being subjected to exactly this form of adoration.

Richard Pope is the visionary who made this new Camelot happen and was involved in the most hands-on way with every facet of its conception, design, construction, marketing and

management.

Kata Rocks has won more international property awards than any other single development worldwide, including Best Apartment in the World and Best Property Marketing, so you might expect the man behind all this to be rather intimidating. The reality is that you couldn't meet a more charming and approachable guy than Richard.

I sat down with him on a dazzling weekday morning just before the Kata Rocks fourth anniversary pool party as well as the Superyacht Rendezvous (KRSR) which is hosted and organised by the resort each year and brings the world's glitterati to Phuket to play on their floating palaces.

Richard was born into an entrepreneurial family and his father set him a fine example by turning hard work and creativity into a successful chain of UK pharmacies.

After obtaining his bachelor's in engineering and business, Richard applied his entrepreneurial flair to the burgeoning loft development property sector in London's uber-trendy Notting Hill.

By the age of 40 he was already able to retire to sail his yacht and drive his Aston Martin. But Richard's kind of creative energy needs an outlet, and in 2006 while holidaying in Phuket he



Richard, Baz and a postcard view.

saw the rocky headland between Kata and Kata Noi beaches which was to be the site of his next Camelot: Kata Rocks.

Developing a high-end luxury resort anywhere in the Andaman region is not for the faint-hearted as a litany of failures, scandals and bankruptcies attest.

So, what was Richard's secret to building Kata Rocks into the world-class super-luxury destination we were sitting in today?

"Firstly, I believe we found the right location," says Richard.

"We are sitting within a five-hour flight of half the world's population in the fastest developing sector of the globe. Thailand offers a fantastic value proposition, wrapped in a fascinating culture with friendly and welcoming people."

But developing Kata Rocks wasn't all plain sailing.

Richard continued, "We overcame major challenges during the development, eventually deciding to take all the integral components of the development in-house. We undertook a very hands-on approach to everything: design, build, architecture, plumbing wiring, marketing and branding. Everything!"

"That was a major undertaking, but we were able to assemble a superb team to expedite all this, and I'd say that the second key success factor was

this terrific team of loyal Thais and foreigners working together."

Knowing Richard, as I have come to through working with him on the branding and marketing of Kata Rocks, I would say that a third element of his success is his unbounded energy and optimism. With this in mind I asked him his opinion about Phuket's future.

"Many people are critical about obvious things like traffic and pollution making Phuket worse than it was, say, 20 years ago. But I think Phuket is different, rather than worse. For example, 20 years ago you couldn't see the latest film in a multiplex cinema or visit world-class shopping malls and restaurants, let alone visit superyachts at KRSR.

"So, I hope traffic and pollution are temporary penalties which have accompanied the rapid evolution of Phuket into a world-class tourism hub and which will be resolved in due course."

Richard's umbrella brand for Kata Rocks and its planned expansion and future developments is named 'Infinite Luxury', which I think gives a perfect summation of Richard's optimism and positivity about Phuket.

His target audience are most certainly discriminating global sophisticates seeking the ultimate *luxury*, and the possibilities for Phuket to deliver exactly that are, in his view, simply *infinite!*



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