



enchanted isle

Singapore's Ecoid Architects creates a modern fantasy playground for the W Maldives

For Starwood, W is like the rebellious offspring that made good. Rather than traditional creature comforts with equally traditional design, W is a lifestyle-oriented brand of hotels that is all about contemporary aesthetics. For the brand's first resort, Starwood chose Fesdhu island in the north part of the Maldives but wanted to make it dramatically different from the other existing properties throughout the islands. Singapore-based Ecoid was awarded the project through an invited request for proposal and worked on all of the public areas and guestrooms with the exception of the restaurants—these were the responsibility of Ed Poole, one of Singapore's most prolific F&B designers. The end result is a retreat that is both theatrical and soothing, with spaces capturing the sense of being on a secluded tropical island with every whim catered to.

Of the 1,193 islands and 20 atolls in the Indian Ocean that makes up the Maldives, only 199 are inhabited; 87 are currently operating as resorts. "The challenge was to design a resort that was unconventional from what other Maldivian resorts were offering," notes Carol Chng, associate director with Ecoid. "The unique feature of Fesdhu island is the beautiful lagoon and fantastic coral reef—a truly breathtaking destination for snorkeling." Ecoid worked with Starwood's Neil Palmer, Dennis Heft and Kevin Lien to bring shape and substance to the brief of "redefining resort luxurious living as ultra tropical chic," according to Chng.

All of the spaces were given witty names. The main building is dubbed the Living Room in keeping with the W moniker for its lobbies; the all-day dining restaurant is Kitchen; the seafood restaurant is Fish; the swim-up poolside bar is Wet; and the underground bar is

Left: Daybeds beckon at Sip, W Retreat & Spa Maldives' outdoor lounge designed specifically for enjoying sunsets over the Indian Ocean.



15 Below. A total of 75 guestrooms vary in size and amenities. The 188 square metre Beach Oasis has an upper-level living area while the whopping 492 square metre Ocean Haven has two ensuite bedrooms, study, kitchen, outdoor entertainment area and private swimming pool. All rooms offer outdoor showers, a private plunge pool, sun loungers, direct lagoon access and barbeques. Ecoid played with balance and contrast with its use of materials and finishes.

"As a tropical resort, it was necessary to use natural materials such as coconut thatch, timber and a ceramic pool tile to bring forth the resort concept," explains Chng. "The twist came in the way we applied colour and texture in the villa interior. The mood is light and chic at the same time." Red in a variety of tones is used as an accent colour and is evident in the signature circular wool rugs and cushions in the villas. Walnut veneer, oxidised brass and bronze mirrors play up the sleek factor, while slate and rectified tiles were used for contrast.

Since W emphasises the guest experience, privacy and seamless integration of indoor and outdoor spaces

Left: White sheers within the all-day dining restaurant Kitchen give diners a sense of privacy.
Below, left to right: The lobby combines clean lines with rustic foliage for a contemporary tropical feel; W's signature seafood restaurant Fish is decked out with thatched roofs and offers full sea views in an open air dining pavilion; the views from within the Beach Oasis guest suite make ideal eye candy.
Right: The Beach Oasis guest suite offers a private plunge pool and circular sun lounger.





were top priorities in the guestroom design. The second storey of the Beach Oasis commands views of the sea and lagoon, while the Ocean Oasis, a 146 square metre villa perched over water, features a large outdoor deck under a circular wooden trellis with banquette seating.

Meanwhile, the restaurants all offer complementary yet varied experiences. Kitchen consists of outdoor daybed dining under pergolas constructed with Indian-inspired columns. Wet, the poolside bar, offers an 'event' shower pavilion with rain curtains mimicking jungle rains, set off by motion sensors. 15 Below is the only underground bar in the Maldives, allowing revellers to continue way into the night without disturbing other guests. The Away Spa has a roof structure inspired by the white sails of the local Dhoni, rising in a softly flowing form above the waters and enhancing the spa concept.

Since its opening last September, the W Maldives has garnered rave reviews. Chng believes that an ideal blend of all the right ingredients is the key to its success. "Overall, the W Maldives is tranquil and exciting, natural yet sleek all at the same time," she concludes. **h1**

Left, top to bottom: Wet, an outdoor lounge featuring a partial swim-up bar; sun worshippers can kick back on lounge chairs dotted around Wet; the Away Spa's rooflines were inspired by the white sails of the local Dhoni. *Opposite page:* A view down the sculptural staircase into Wet lounge area.



W Retreat & Spa
Fesdhu, North Ari Atoll, Maldives

Owner
Universal Enterprise; Starwood Hotels and Resorts

Architect and Interior Designer
Ecoid Design Consultancy, Singapore

Project Team
Calvin Sim, Carol Chng, Tang Yong Kuan, Patricia Ho

**Interior Designer (Kitchen, Wet, Fire),
Architect and Interior Designer (Fish Bar,
15 Under)**
Poole Associates, Singapore

Landscape Architect
Belt Collins

General Contractor
Universal Enterprise

Spa Consultant
Salamander

Lighting Consultant
Vision Lighting Design

**Designers did not provide sourcing for products and furnishings shown.*