



Longtime friends Adam Simkins (above, left) and Grant Healy co-founded Louis T Collection, a hospitality and building solutions company inspired by the life and times of one of South-east Asia's most intriguing foreign characters, Louis T. Leonowens. Here they talk about their experiences in the hotel industry and why they went from the security of a corporate gig to running their own company.

GRANT

If you are going to try and do something different, you need the right partners.

We started the Louis T collection because we wanted to connect unique hotels with a wider audience. But what makes them different is that, as well as delivering the quality any guest would expect, we aim to offer the unexpected. We do this by connecting these hotels to their location – culturally, and in the experiences for the traveller. We don't think a hotel door should act as an air lock between a vibrant culture and a 'vanilla' generic stay.

We are ensuring the hotels we manage and promote are of both character and quality. And as a neat twist of fate these are also the things I see in Adam.

We met in Fukuoka, Japan back in 1997 and I remember that Adam rode a Honda CBR motorbike at the time. He was young. We both were. He came across as dynamic, and we were like-minded. Even then, we had entrepreneurial spirits, and we both approached our professional lives with that mentality.

I went on to have a fulfilling 20-year career with Hyatt, and I'm grateful to Hyatt for the care,

learning and opportunities I had while at the company. My past laid a solid foundation for our new endeavour.

Adam and I have complementary skill sets. Adam is operationally savvy and is also very experienced in Food and Beverage. Adam has strong attention to detail and has the ability to bring people together, along with a creative flair and passion for branding. He has always been committed to being true to the promise. I'm stronger on the financial and business development side of the equation.

Our differences help us have productive debates. If there's status quo in a company, it's not healthy. We've created an environment where our staff can say what they think and challenge ideas to help us arrive at the best outcome.

I'm in my mid-40s now, and I have chosen to move forward to start-up a business with Adam rather than continue in a corporate environment. I'm thriving on it and enjoy the dynamic nature a start-up brings. Whilst I am an optimist, I am not expecting a red carpet ride. I've had my share of punches already but I am determined to keep getting back up for more.

Since we embarked on our

“When two men in business always agree, one of them is unnecessary.”
– William Wrigley Jr.

partnership, we've made several major achievements, including the purchase and take-over of the Mantra Samui Resort in Thailand in early 2015 and making a strategic decision to invest in technology.

Service is always service. It was the most distinguishing attribute 100 years ago, and it will continue to be a century from now, although technology is really pushing the boundaries of the hospitality industry. We are embracing these changes to create our business platform.

ADAM

At the time we met we were assigned to work in a hotel, which was part of the Canal City Fukuoka development. I was actually surprised to see Grant there, as there weren't a huge number of expats in the management team. We were allies from day one.

After we left that hotel we kept in contact, not always through the nature of our jobs but more because of the friendship we

developed. I also worked for Hyatt for two decades and was lucky enough to manage properties in several countries throughout Asia, including in Korea and China.

I credit my father for sharpening my work ethic and Hyatt for giving me the tools to do what I do. Later I joined my brother and father and became responsible for building the Interior Solutions division of Getz Brothers. The idea that Grant and I might do something together at some point had always been at the back of our minds. We both had the drive to become entrepreneurs. It was just a question of when. In mid-2014 we shook hands and decided it was time.

Our friendship has helped us but having that initial professional relationship, and knowing the way that we work together, has been important. I've always admired Grant's honesty and integrity, along with his ability to see the bigger picture. Now I admire that he had the courage to give this a go.

We also had a sense of each other's fortes already and we draw on those strengths. Back in 1997 we were willing to roll up our sleeves and do what had to be done for the job and in all this time that trait hasn't changed in either of us. We share a similar vision and values. We expect everyone to be reliable team players and that everyone comes to work to make things better.

We're also willing to disagree on things. That's how we make the best decisions. We both have the same desire though and that's to bring to market something that's real and authentic, both in the hotels we manage and in the way we run the business.

Our team members are important to us. In that fact, Grant and I agree wholeheartedly, we value the skills and expertise that each and every one brings to the company. They are all highly motivated, tech savvy and are driven to push the boundaries in their respective fields.

Grant and I are the heart of our brand – and I think this comes through in the business we are running. We see ourselves as a kind of Robin Hood & Friar Tuck working as enablers.

We want to partner with owners to level the playing field for the independent hotels. That in itself is Yin & Yang in harmony. ■