



## CONSTRUCTIVE ADVICE

Building a new home on Samui can be easy, if you do it the right way, as **Christian Pejtersen**, Managing Director of **SIL Architects**, explains.



Thousands of foreigners now live on Samui. And a number of them have had their own houses built to their particular specifications. Which can be rather daunting when you aren't familiar with the language or the system here. However, help is at hand in the form of SIL, a company that specializes in architecture and building project-management. I spent some time with Danish architect and Managing Director of SIL, Christian Pejtersen, to find out more about what they do.

**JP: Can you give us some background to the company please Christian?**

**CP:** I've been working on Samui for four years now and spent the first couple of years with another firm working alongside my two colleagues at SIL, Khun Wasan Dokmaitad (engineer) and Khun Amorn Senbutr (architect). In 2009, we decided to form our own company and, collectively, we have more than 100 successfully completed projects in our résumés. We deal with different scales and extents of involvement; from refurbishment of existing buildings all the way through to the design and detailing of entire developments. We can solve coursework as an external third-party advisor or take on entire project-management assignments.

**JP: How would you define what an architect actually does?**

**CP:** Architecture is about creating order and relationships between space, light, functionality and the senses. We take advantage of Samui's unique environment and focus on understanding our clients' needs and desires. We carefully explain and guide them through the entire design process and deliver bespoke solutions whilst strictly adhering to the given budget. It's the responsibility of the architect to create diverse, exciting, and innovative environments within the brief. Our design philosophy is that each project is unique and relative to its intent and the context. We are looking for clarity and simplicity in every project and find it through the projects' own particular characteristics.

**JP: When someone comes to you with a proposal, what's the process?**

**CP:** SIL's design strategy is to begin with the various features and possibilities between the site, budget and project's intent. We evolve a scheme that incorporates all the priorities and negotiate the conflicting requirements of these forces and use it throughout the entire design phase at all levels and scales to create an architectural language unique for the project. Aside from the conceptual design, the documentation schedule will normally include all the necessary paperwork for building permits, construction drawings and building specifications, an illustrated materials' list and site inspections. We use BIM (Building Information Management) software for our drawings and building documentation; these programmes offer several benefits compared to the traditional CAD (Computer Aided Design) software. All principal drawings are done as models in a digital 3D environment, which in the early design phase allows us to analyze the levelling and interaction between the site, context and project. The model is used to produce both technical construction drawings and easily-understandable coloured presentation drawings. A BOQ (Bill of Quantities) can be progressively calculated by the programme as the project is being drawn up and can be used for cost control throughout the entire design phase.

**JP: What are some of the issues that you have to consider?**

**CP:** It makes a big difference if the house is being built on the beach or on a hillside. Whilst the beachfront may be flat there are factors like the sea (in a storm) to consider. And on a hillside, you need to be sure you aren't on top of, say, an old tin-mine. Tearing out trees may make the ground unstable and you have to consider what is above you further up the hill. There could be large boulders that might move because of construction work and that wouldn't be very nice at all. And you have to factor in potentially huge amounts of rainfall during the monsoon season and know how that will flow. Depending on where you are there may not be an existing road and it's likely that there're no electric cables nearby, and that can add around one million baht per kilometre to install. And there's probably not going to be a direct water supply so you may have to dig a well and install a pump or buy water in by the truck-load. On the other hand, you don't need central heating here on Samui though you will want air-conditioning units in most of the rooms.

**JP: What about the construction phase?**

**CP:** Construction work is not an exact science and unpredictable issues may occur. Local contractors can often come up with very practical solutions, as they know which materials are available and what their staff are capable of. The Thai legal system is as good as any in building disputes (provided you have the right documentation) and there is a strict set of building regulations to be followed. Finding the right contractor is the key issue. Ask to see both finished as well as unfinished projects, as they will reveal important details and techniques used. A good contractor can be recognized by their building sites as they are always kept tidy; partly for the ease of work and partly to

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minimize material wastage. A legally-binding contract between you and the contractor will prevent any avoidable extra costs, provided that the building documentation, drawings and written specifications are adequate and precise, with detailed descriptions of materials, their use and interaction with other building components.

**JP: How do you effectively project-manage a new development?**

**CP:** Each material and building component is stored with a description, a price, usage, assembling instructions and safety codes. We also draw with a database or rather we model with a database. All building components are assembled in a virtual model as a reflection of the real-world project. The database then progressively calculates the materials used in the model. We then combine the virtual model with the material database, and subtract the information needed; for example, as a materials' list or construction price estimation. We basically only have to update our pricelists and adjust the price according to specific project parameters, such as extra costs for transport, or special site conditions. This system is not only beneficial for us by making our job less labour-intensive, less prone to mistakes and very competitive. A virtual model can be presented in several ways, such as an easily-understandable 3D picture where every detail can be analyzed.

**JP: Finally, Christian, what's some simple advice that you can give to someone thinking about building a new home here?**

**CP:** Whether it concerns material choices or design issues, you should usually go for the solution that requires the least amount of maintenance work in the long term.

*Johnny Paterson*



# The Cliff

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