

# Local knowledge opens doors to the city's hottest places

**Tim Metcalfe**

Not all serviced apartment operators are created equal. Fast-growing Kush, with properties fringing Central, Mid-Levels, Des Voeux Road West and the Sheung Wan end of Hollywood Road, has an advantage in that founders Alex Bent and Dinesh Nihalchand both grew up in Hong Kong.

As former students at Hong Lok Yuen International School and Island School respectively, they know their way around, especially at night. Their enterprise might be described as genuinely Hong Kong born-and-bred.

"When Dinesh and I first started Kush we asked ourselves what we would want in a serviced apartment and where we would want to live," Mr Bent said.

"Being brought up in Hong Kong and of the same demographic as our residents, we are able to provide what is proving to be a cutting edge experience in the serviced apartment market in Hong Kong."

What they came up with was less of a serviced apartment operation and more of a "Hong Kong lifestyle brand". The concept offers "a way to get quickly exposed to the best spas, restaurants and night clubs that Hong Kong has to offer".

Along with designer interiors and hi-tech amenities, residents are equipped with a lifestyle card called Kush Envy, which "provides more ways to stay and play in Hong Kong", with access to the city's "hottest clubs, restaurants, fitness and recreation outlets. We only team up with the best places, places we would go to. We partner with like-minded business owners wherever we see fit".

An example is privileges at the TakeOut Comedy Club in Elgin Street. As former banker Mr Nihalchand said: "It's an important part of our brand to further the entire Kush lifestyle, which includes partnering with entrepreneurs to offer more to our tenants and the community as a whole."

There is also the Kush Go card, a branded Octopus card giving residents access to Hong Kong's transportation system.

Kush ([www.kushliving.com](http://www.kushliving.com)) was founded in 2005 when the partners met at a dinner party. They shared a common interest in property investment and went into business together, focusing on Mid-Levels, SoHo and Kennedy Town. Initially, they spruced up apartments to sell for a profit. "But we found that the serviced apartment landscape was very fragmented, boring and generic," Mr Nihalchand said. "There was nothing superior or different about them, so we decided to do something about it."

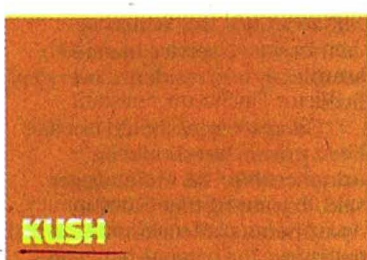
Securing funding from Hong Kong's Gidwani family, they founded Kush and launched the brand with Kush 111 at 111 High Street, Mid-Levels West; Kush 222 at 222 Hollywood Road, a stone's throw from SoHo; and Kush 255 at 255 Des Voeux Road, Sheung Wan.

With a young team of designers and handpicked operations staff with five-star hotel training they created a brand that "stands out from the pack".

Mr Bent said: "Each building has it's own personality, but with one thing in common. We wanted to retain the essence of being in Hong Kong – not something you could transport to New York."

Kush 111 is "suburban serenity" with smooth John Coltrane tunes in the lobby and open glass pots filled with floating lotus flowers, reminiscent of a spa.

The High Street address has a distinct suburban feel, with green hills and old colonial buildings on



one side, and stunning harbour views on the other.

Just eight minutes by taxi from Central, there are 22 fully serviced, 750 sq ft apartments of one and two bedrooms with large sunlit windows, spacious walk-in showers and a wealth of hi-tech equipment from Bose DVD entertainment system, Bang & Olufsen phones, iPod docks and 42-inch plasma TVs to Smeg kitchen appliances, and washers and dryers on a balcony laundry area. The third floor unit hosts a sprawling terrace perfect for outdoor dinner parties, while the 29th floor unit provides access to a private rooftop.

"This is meant to feel more of a retreat," Mr Bent said. "Apartments are designed with comfort, relaxation and tranquility in mind, with one per floor for ultimate privacy."



**A stylish bathroom at the flagship Kush 222 serviced apartment**

Duck down duvets, lush spa towels, organic toiletries from South India, supple throws from Peru, and individual wool carpets from New Zealand are a standard part of the furniture.

With the same standard amenities, Kush 255 is an "edgy and modern tribute to the local spirit of Hong Kong", with a neon sign and traditional Chinese characters in gold marking each floor and a colourful collage of old Mong Kok buildings in the stairwell. "This place feels like a private club in the middle of the city," Mr Nihalchand said.

Each of the six luxurious, 550 sq ft units is opened up with a "kitchen island" concept with a marble bar. The washing machine, tap, bar and all in-room amenities are hidden behind panels on the walls to maximise the space. Mood lighting allows colour switching to suit any mood. Remarkably, the rooftop incorporates a golf putting green.

Kush 222 is the flagship next door to hip SoHo, with The Cat Street Gallery on the ground floor. It fuses "edgy modernist elements while embracing local Chinese influence, the perfect package for executives embracing all that Hong Kong has to offer", Mr Bent said.

At first glance, it is an assault on the senses, with a black lobby and stunning rococo-style chandelier. The lift is gold mirror stainless steel, with a TV screen on the ceiling playing hypnotic motion graphics of slow moving vines, water ripples, birds and clouds, layered with low soothing music.

The 48 one-bedroom apartments of 650 sq ft offer either stark black or sultry brown interiors. Workaholics can settle down on a desk that spans the width of the master bedroom, and large glass windows afford an open view of Hong Kong.

What's next for Kush? "Regional expansion through institutional funding is an obvious growth strategy," Mr Nihalchand said.