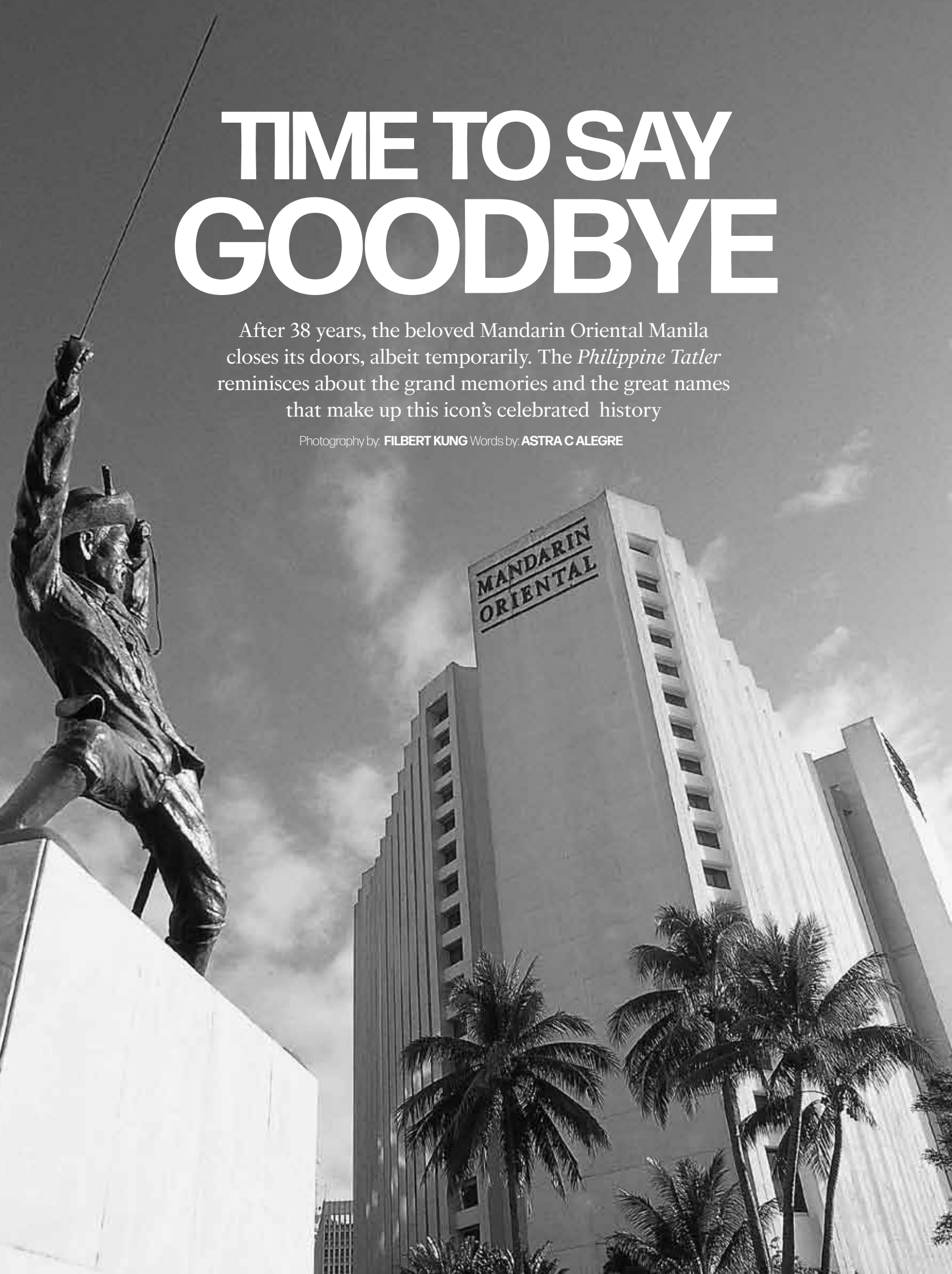


# TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

After 38 years, the beloved Mandarin Oriental Manila closes its doors, albeit temporarily. The *Philippine Tatler* reminisces about the grand memories and the great names that make up this icon's celebrated history

Photography by: **FILBERT KUNG** Words by: **ASTRA C ALEGRE**



**LOOKING  
BACK**

Fatima in  
Francis Libiran

**OPPOSITE**

The facade of  
the Mandarin  
Oriental



## THE GLORIOUS PAST

(Clockwise from top left) The original façade of The Mandarin; the Marquee Coffee Shop; the lobby of Mandarin Oriental and the Captain's Bar; former GM Helmut Gaisberger, Master Joseph Chau, and Rosemarie Arenas

**W**HEN SHE finally said her good-bye, she did it with style, like a refined lady making a graceful exit. She did not rush through her leave-taking. She took her time, turning off the lights, so to speak, one room at a time.

“Rather than shutdown all at one time, we staggered the closure of the hotel,” Mandarin Oriental Manila’s director of communications, Charisse Chuidian, explained how they decided to close the iconic 38-year-old luxury hotel at the corner of Makati Avenue and Paseo de Roxas in Makati City. “Our general manager, Torsten van Dullemen, said we should be able to focus on one outlet at a time, to give time for our staff and our guests to say goodbye to each other.”

So they mounted what they called “the best of the best,” with each of their popular F&B outlets taking turns in featuring the all-time favourites in their respective menus. For many of their loyal patrons, it was a food trip down memory lane.

At Tin Hau, the hotel’s gourmet Chinese restaurant, executive Chinese chef Hann Furn Chen prepared the popular dim sum, crispy fried shrimp with cornflakes, lobsters with mushrooms, Peking duck, and signature two-way chicken, among other outstanding dishes for the last time. Tin Hau was the first to close its doors, on 15 July.

Chef Norbert Gandler, who served as Tivoli’s executive chef from 1995 to 2003, returned for a one-night stand for a 10-course menu. He was accompanied by the hotel’s former executive pastry chef Ernie Babaran and former sous chef Kenneth Cacho to recreate Tivoli’s best-loved dishes—among them, Millionaire’s Salad, the Tivoli Bouillabaisse, and roasted Nebraska prime Angus beef.







## THE M TEAM

**THE MANDARIN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** (Front row) Rudy Chai, Director of Property Management and Services; Alu Suarez, Director of Sales and Marketing; Charisse Chuidian, Director of Communications; Marla Secoquian, Director of Revenue; Barbara Reyes, Director of Human Resources; Freggie Felizardo, Financial Controller (Back row) Peter Pysk, Director of Food and Beverage; Torsten van Dullemen, General Manager; Rene Ottlik, Executive Chef

“They did it out of love,” said Chuidian. “It was like a homecoming.” Within 48 hours of the announcement, the event was fully booked. On another night, Tivoli had Margarita Forés as guest chef. “Again we were fully booked and there was a long waiting list,” Chuidian recalled. The esteemed contemporary European restaurant made its final farewell on 25 July.

The last cocktails and martinis were poured and enjoyed at the Martinis bar on 2 August. It was a truly sad day when the Mandarin Deli, very much loved for its tempting sweet and savoury goodies, officially closed on 18 August. Paseo Uno, with its popular buffet, held the fort until the very last day.

On 9 September 2014 Mandarin Oriental Manila took its final bow, to resounding applause and the promise of an encore when it reopens in 2020 in another location. Until then, there will be the memories to keep the flame alive.

The Mandarin Oriental Manila made its grand opening in September 1976, just in time for the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which was held in the country at that time. Designed by renowned Filipino architect and National Artist, Leandro Locsin, it was one of the first Mandarin Oriental hotels built outside Hong Kong, after the Mandarin Oriental in Bangkok.

The iconic building is shaped like a fan, the hotel’s highly recognised logo. “The 11-bladed fan represents the group’s 11 pillars by which we live by,” van Dullemen explained. It also symbolises the group’s image of luxury, elegance, and comfort.

Cenen Dizon, father of jewellers Janina Dizon-Hoschka and Candy Dizon, who built the foundation said that it is one of the most solid buildings in the metro. He remembered that Bechtel, the project managers, insisted

# ON 9 SEPTEMBER, MANDARIN ORIENTAL MANILA TOOK ITS FINAL BOW

on laying a foundation strong enough to withstand a major earthquake.

Architect and interior designer, Chito Antonio, helped create the name for the hotel’s French restaurant, L’Hirondelle. He remembered his conversation with interior designer Don Ashton, who was scouting for a name for the restaurant. Antonio mentioned the word “*hirondelle*,” the French name for the Philippines’ *maya* bird. Instantly, Ashton liked the sound of it, and thus was born the name of the restaurant. Years later, L’Hirondelle gave way to Tin Hau, which took its place on the mezzanine floor.

Socialite and business woman, Marivic Vazquez, lived in the hotel for three months in the late 1980s at the height of the power crisis in Metro Manila. The Mandarin was among the first hotels to have a generator that provided 100 per cent power during brownouts. She remembered how she would start her day with what was widely known then as the power breakfast at the Tivoli. She held her meetings in the Captain’s Bar during the day. And when she partied until late night, she would enter the hotel lobby and be safely escorted to her room.

Like Vazquez, many businessmen practically made the Captain’s Bar their virtual office, conducting all their meetings and appointments there. Elena Tan Coyiuto said she would sign most of her business contracts only at Mandarin Oriental, which was lucky for her. She consummated many deals in the Captain’s Bar, the Tivoli, and Tin Hau.

# “MANDARIN HAS SO MUCH MEANING FOR SO MANY PEOPLE”

The Captain's Bar was also the place to see and listen to top-rated entertainers up close and personal, such as Kuh Ledesma, Martin Nievera, Sharon Cuneta, and Gary Valenciano, who held intimate concerts there, Chuidian recalled. It was also the venue of the launch of *Philippine Tatler's* maiden issue.

Journalist, writer, and TV anchor, Teddy Boy Locsin was a great fan of Mandarin Deli, where an empty table was often difficult to find. He is partial to the ambience and the products the deli offered, specifically its English fruitcake that's prepared annually over the Christmas holiday, the homemade strawberry peppercorn jam, and the Quiche Lorraine, which he would make a habit of taking out to enjoy at home.

“When we were kids, family members would take turns choosing where to eat out,” Rica Lopez de Jesus recalled. De Jesus comes from a family of entrepreneurs, which includes her grandparents, Ambassador Bienvenido Tantoco and Glecy Tantoco of Rustan's, her dad Jun Lopez and brother Noey Lopez of Starbucks, and her mum, Menchu Tantoco-Lopez of Golden Spoon.

“I would always choose The Tivoli at Mandarin Oriental,” de Jesus said. “I loved going there for the lamb chops, which have remained my favourite to this day. Many of our special occasions would also be held at The Tivoli. We will always remember and cherish those happy memories.”

“When we announced our closing, there was a spontaneous outpouring of sentiments,” Chuidian said. “Mandarin has so much meaning for so many people, both professional and personal experiences. They held their birthday parties here, their debuts, wedding and wedding reception, as well as anniversaries.”





**FEELING  
BLUE**

Fatima in  
the Blondel  
Room (one of  
the function  
rooms in the  
Mandarin  
Oriental)  
wearing a Rajo  
Laurel gown  
and jewellery







#### WORLD-CLASS SERVICE

(Clockwise from far left) Warm welcome at the spa; keeping everything spic and span; the efficient and hardworking kitchen team; VIP guest former British prime minister Tony Blair and wife Cherie with former Mandarin Oriental GM Oliver Kreuzer

## “IN EVERY CITY WHERE THE MANDARIN OPENS, YOU CAN BE SURE IT’S ALWAYS A STAR”

Among all their shared memories, the Chinese New Year celebrations at the Mandarin most likely occupies a special place in everyone’s heart. The hotel, which faces east, is believed to be in a lucky position. Who can forget the annual midnight revelry to welcome the lunar new year, which enjoyed full support from the city mayor’s office. Chuidian recalled how they brought in cubs from the Malabon Zoo to usher in the Year of the Tiger, and dancing carabaos from Bulacan to usher in the Year of the Ox. Of course, the celebrations would not have been complete without the presence and auspicious forecasts by celebrated geomancer, the late Paul Lau, who was succeeded by feng shui expert Joseph Chau from Hong Kong who continued the tradition. Master Chau returned for a last get-together with guests at Tin Hau before it closed, to bless and re-energise their lucky charms.

Chuidian, who has been with the hotel for 22 years, has her own share of personal memories. She remembered when then GM Michael Gibb convinced her to consider the offer of the hotel, after her long tenure at Century Park Sheraton Manila. “I was blown away when he arranged for me to fly to Hong Kong to be interviewed by the group PR director, and capped it with an offer I could not refuse. Thanks to Michael, my magnificent journey with Mandarin Oriental would not have been my destiny.”

Among her many memorable experiences at the hotel, Chuidian will never forget her close encounter with Andrea Bocelli who was brought to Manila by Baby Arenas for a concert. “He was very down to earth, no airs, no prima donna,” she recalled.



# “AN ELEGANT INSTITUTION THAT WAS THERE, THAT WAS PART OF OUR LIVES”

Through the years, the hotel naturally has had many international celebrities and high-profile guests as well as tai pans, tycoons, and CEOs. “We respected their privacy,” Chuidian remarked. “We found out that they were also regular people.”

The Mandarin takes pride in an enviable reputation for its high level of service, Chuidian noted. “We have a super-efficient staff who are passionate about their work and who care for each other.” Of the 400 staff, 30 have been with the hotel for at least 30 years. “Some met their husband, bought their home, and sent their kids to school while working at the hotel,” Chuidian related. “There is a sense of belonging. The hotel has become so much part of their lives.” And like a mute metaphor, even the wall clock at the top of the stairs on the second floor has been hanging there since the hotel opened and was still working until the end.

“I had the privilege of living in the hotel with my family,” said van Dullemen, who led the Mandarin Oriental Manila on its last year. “What made it such a great experience is that every day, I looked forward to coming to work. And every day I finished work, I left being happy again. I’m extremely blessed to have a core team of managers around me that are exceptionally knowledgeable, great people who have been supportive and who helped me settle in very quickly.”

He added, “I always believe that design style, music, ambience, and lighting style change, but ultimately what never changes is the experience people give you. Someone who visited a certain restaurant two months

ago, for example, may not remember the shape of the plate, the colour of the seat they sat on, the material of the flooring, but if you ask about the experience—the way the waiter made them feel, what kind of welcome they had, and how they felt after leaving the restaurant—they actually remember remarkable details, because those are the lasting memories. In an era with so much focus on the latest trends, the hottest thing in town, it is for me so fulfilling to come to a hotel where things are so special because of the people, for the amount of time they’ve been there, for the relationship they’ve had with their guests, with each other. It’s a unique experience and one I really value.”

Van Dullemen, who has been in the hospitality industry for over 30 years, shared. “Since we announced the closure of the hotel, I have spoken to a lot of guests. Because of the memories, they wanted to experience the hotel one more time. I have never worked in any other hotel that had so many close personal relationships with people. It’s remarkable. It’s one of the most iconic hotels in this region. It’s something that’s really special. It’s the warmth of the Filipino people.”

The Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group signed a long-term management contract with Ayala Land for a new 275-room hotel that will occupy the top floors of a high-rise mixed-use development to be built in the Ayala Triangle, just across where the Mandarin stands now, still at the corner of Makati Avenue and Paseo de Roxas.

“In every city where the Mandarin opens, you can be sure it’s always a star,” Chuidian remarked. “When Mandarin Oriental Manila reopens in 2020, it will be the newest star in the group in Asia. Those familiar with the Mandarin type of service will know what to expect. It’s something everyone can look forward to.” In the meantime, Chuidian would like the Mandarin to be remembered “with esteem and fondness, an elegant institution that was there, that was part of our lives.” ●

**LAST LOOK**

Fatima in the Adam room (one of the function rooms in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel) wearing an Albert Andrada gown

