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### The Next Big Thing

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*Striking deals with the biggest names in real estate, fashion and design, Philippine-based property scion ROBBIE ANTONIO has come into his own. By Lauren Tan*

He has collaborated with a sea of name-droppable luminaries including architectural legend IM Pei, design extraordinaire Philippe Starck, and the Trumps, Hiltons and Missonis. But these days, the name making waves is that of his own — Robbie Antonio.

Like business partners Donald Jr, Ivanka and Eric Trump, with whom he recently launched Trump Tower Manila, Antonio is a real estate scion who can actually boast of have stepped out of the shadows of an illustrious father by seizing opportunities and adding lustre to the family portfolio.

Son of Jose Antonio, the billionaire founder of Philippines-based Century Properties, the 35-year-old's first taste of the headlines was in the late 2000s when instead of returning home from the US after graduate school, he incorporated the firm Antonio Development and built The Centurion, a luxury condominium in New York's Plaza District.

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Antonio's coup was not only in acquiring the area's first ground-up development in 20 years, but also in securing the services of IM Pei, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect critically lauded for the Bank of China building in Hong Kong, Raffles City in Singapore and the Pyramid of the Louvre in Paris. Designed in collaboration with his son Sandi, The Centurion is the only condominium Pei has designed in a six-decade career.

Could the next-generation property magnate not have chosen a more difficult project to cut his teeth on, I ask when we meet on the sidelines of an art fair in Singapore. (Blouin Artinfo describes him as one of the Philippines' biggest art collectors, if not, certainly its youngest.) Barely skipping a beat, he says: "It would have been a little too easy at that time to go home to the Philippines and see what I could do there to contribute to [Century Properties]. I wanted to do something very entrepreneurial. It was obviously very challenging, but very rewarding."

In New York, he met Ivanka who introduced him to the rest of the clan including dad Donald. Professing the mantra "country first, company second, and project third", Antonio, who had by then returned to the family fold, set out to convince The Apprentice star of his hometown's growing economic might, resulting in a publicity feat of sizable proportions — Trump Tower Manila, the first Trump-branded property in Asia this decade. Developed by Century Properties, the residential development will become the Philippines' tallest building when completed in 2016.

"The Trumps are about the superlatives. They want to be the biggest, the tallest, it's always an -est. Keeping that philosophy in mind we had to convince them it was the right property at the right time," says Antonio. On the Donald, he adds: "With him you have to be very direct and very specific about what the goals and targets are in a short amount of time. The guy is brilliant."

As managing director of Century Properties, Antonio is in charge of innovating game-changing projects and branding initiatives. His Trump deal is only but one in a recent slew of big-name tie-ups. Versace Home is designing the interiors of the group's Milano Residences in Makati. MissoniHome is bringing its colourful aesthetic to the Residences at Acqua Livingstone. And John Hitchcox and Philippe Starck's design studio Yoo is charged with Acqua Iguaza, the pair's first residential tower in the Philippines.

Star architects and designers are a big draw to homebuyers, he says: "It's pride of ownership. When you own the first condominium by Versace in Asia or the first Missoni condominium in the world, it's limited edition." Such collaborations, he also acknowledges, allow the group to "achieve a premium". "I have a commercial point of view and an aesthetic point of view, and I like to marry that and keep a balance between those two," he explains.

Antonio, after all, comes across as the sort of art-and-design geek who can write a dissertation on Abstract Expressionism or the Mid-Century aesthetic off the top of his head. It's that fixation with creative expression that even has the entrepreneur picking out door hinges in person, or flying to China or Italy to look for just the right stones for his buildings. "I'm 100-percent focused on the details, too obsessed sometimes," he concedes.

### **Robbie Antonio on...**

#### Personal style

*"Because of what I do, people think I care a lot about brands. But sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. I don't wear logos and 90 percent of the time I don't even wear a belt or watch. I'm more particular about design and I tend to favour bespoke items because it's about personal style and taste."*

#### Some of the artists he collects

*"Marilyn Minter, Maurizio Cattelan, Kenny Scharf and Tracey Emin. They are all people who I have either met or respect for their tremendous amounts of knowledge in their art. Art is not just visual. It's how your sensibilities are affected or influenced."*

#### His new New York residence

*"It's going to be completely contemporary and super abstract. Because I gravitate to art and design, I have to make sure that it's visually impactful. It's a project I'm super obsessed with."*

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