

# Real estate agents and negotiators celebrate bedazzled gala night

StarProperty Awards Realtor Edition 2023 brings recognition to unsung heroes



Chan (front, on stage, second from right), Yeow (front, on stage, right), Wang (back row, seventh from right) and Ng (back row, seventh from left) posing with the award winners at the gala dinner. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

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**T**HE StarProperty Award Realtor Edition returned glamorously for the sixth year on the night of Nov 21, 2023 to the delight of real estate practitioners who were crowned at this very stage for their outstanding achievements as well as serving as an inspiring hallmark for the industry.

Organised under the aegis of the Star Media Group (SMG), StarProperty Award 2023 Realtor Edition not only recognises realtors' achievements but provides a lens through which the public can be informed about the latest developments in the real estate sector and its highest current standards.

With an attendance of over 400 real estate agents and negotiators as well as guests, the night was also a gathering to celebrate friendship, network and unwind from the year's unrelenting grind. Under the dazzling stage lights, passionate music and sumptuous dinner, the agents, negotiators and other esteemed guests witnessed and celebrated the awarding of achievers amongst them in 27 categories and 33 sub-categories.

Divided into awards for individual agents and negotiators and agency establishments, this year's prestigious award went to a total of 47 agents and negotiators and 11 agencies. As with last year's edition, categories that recognise both agencies and individuals were

the All-Stars Award for overall excellence, Thriving Award for remarkable growth, Rising Star Award for remarkable newcomers under three years, Developer Preferred Award and its sister award Developer Preferred Award (Bumiputera Lots) for excellence in developer-related projects, and last but not least the Subsale Award that recognised outstanding achievement in secondary market transactions.

At a more refined level, the agencies were also recognised under the Best Technology Award and Best Digital Marketing Award. For the individual agents and negotiators, the creme-de-la-creme among them received awards under categories such as Deal of the Year, Most Exceptional Leader, as well as the unique Key Personality Award, which was also conferred to an outstanding probationary estate agent as a kudos for newcomers.

Aligning with StarProperty's dedication to elevating industry benchmarks, this year marked the introduction of three new awards, namely the Chief Executive Of The Year Award, the StarProperty Millionaire Masters Award and the Real Estate Negotiator Of The Year Award, which has three sub-categories for Residential, Commercial and Industrial properties.

The Awards would not be possible without a panel of professional and impartial judges who were tireless in upholding the industry's integrity. They were Sime Darby Property Bhd group managing director Datuk Azmir

Merican, Messrs Gan and Zul, Advocates and Solicitors group managing partner Datuk Simon Lim Seng Chai, Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) Youth president Lee Han Rick, RHB Bank homeowners consumer finance and group community banking head Christine Wong and Gamuda Land executive director Lam Sew Chee.

At the gala dinner held at M Resort and Hotel Kuala Lumpur, SMG group chief executive officer Alex Yeow said property agencies and negotiators were the society's unsung heroes who deserve recognition for playing an essential role in the industry.

"They act as vital bridges, connecting property developers, owners and buyers, facilitating transactions and ensuring the fulfilment of all parties' interests. They empower homeowners and investors, helping them make informed choices by understanding marketing dynamics as well as sharing relevant information, laws and regulations, including those that have an impact on the seller and buyer. In certain cases, they also help investors identify lucrative investment opportunities and provide valuable advice," Yeow said.

He said that the growth witnessed in the industry this year has also been matched by the scaling up of capabilities by the negotiators to deliver added value to their clients and remain relevant to market trends.

"For this 2023 edition, not only have the

number of entries for this year increased but also the quality of the submissions, a testament to the robustness of the industry. Towards this end, we would like to thank our esteemed panel of judges for your commitment, dedication and support in conducting the necessary assessments for these submissions," he added.

Also present were SMG independent non-executive director Chan Seng Fatt, chief business officer Lydia Wang and chief content officer Esther Ng, who participated in the presentation of the trophies to the winners. ❦

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— Alex Yeow



# Backstage with the SREA judges

High quality of entries posed a tough challenge for judging panel



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**A**S the crowd gathered at the StarProperty Awards 2023 Realtor Edition gala night, the spotlight fell on the faces behind the awards. Taking pride in their holistic and equitable process, the judges ensure the event's success while backing the development of a thriving real estate industry.

The five judges are all industry leaders representing diverse sectors of the real estate landscape. With their expertise and a rigorous selection process, the judges are well-equipped to assess the best of Malaysia's agencies and negotiators.

Each category has been crafted to reflect the real estate landscape of today. Entries have been separated between agencies and negotiators, with 13 main categories for agencies and 14 for negotiators.

Throughout its conception, the StarProperty Awards Realtor Edition has been constantly refined and improved. Owing to participant contribution and feedback, this year StarProperty placed emphasis on commitment to diversity and inclusion, ensuring that every perspective is heard and every achievement celebrated.

The judges are:

- Sime Darby Property Bhd group managing director Datuk Azmir Merican
- RHB Bank homeowners consumer finance and group community banking head Christine Wong
- Gamuda Land executive director Lam Sew Chee
- Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) Youth president Lee Han Rick
- Messrs Gan and Zul Advocates and Solicitors group managing partner Datuk Simon SC Lim

Here's what they say about this year's awards:

"Reflecting on this experience, I am filled with optimism for Malaysia's real estate future," said Lim. The fusion

of seasoned professionals enriched by international exposure, with the enthusiasm of the younger generation, promises a bright and progressive trajectory for the industry."

The competition gathered top estate agencies from across the nation, highlighting their expertise, market acumen, and adaptability to an ever-changing industry.

"This year's competition was particularly notable for the introduction of the Chief Executive of the Year award. This category attracted distinguished executives with vast international experience, making it an extraordinary addition," Lim noted.

He said the global exposure and diverse experiences of these candidates added a layer of complexity to the judging process. Their expertise, garnered from various international markets, has profoundly influenced their vision and leadership, greatly benefiting our real estate industry.

Lee said: "As a returning judge, I was pleased to see more active participation in the awards by a larger variety of agents from different backgrounds and focus." The entries encompassed a wide range of disciplines.

He noted that it was encouraging to see the innovation and effort put into new strategies to reach a wider audience and to establish trust among their clients, pushing the industry to provide a higher quality of service.

Wong said: "It is wonderful to meet candidates embracing leadership qualities to build and grow team members collectively to deliver reliable service to customers in the property market. The award provides a positive avenue to recognise the virtues and qualities of leaders and role models."

Azmir agreed: "I was impressed by how much work all the participants put into their submissions. There's no denying that this award is a good way for real estate agencies, agents, negotiators and developers to leapfrog their businesses." Companies that are shortlisted,

and successful at awards such as this might benefit from the status and legitimacy these events provide.

Lim added: "Judging the competition involved a detailed assessment of each agency's performance across criteria like innovation, customer satisfaction, and ethical conduct. The exceptional quality of the submissions presented a formidable but rewarding challenge."

## Communication and customer service

However, Lee noted that he would like to see improved communication skills, industry knowledge and professionalism among the next generation of agents.

Lam expanded on Lee's point by noting that he would encourage a stronger focus on professionalism by shifting from just pitching to delivering excellent after-sales service. He said this would involve educating clients throughout the process, maintaining proactive communication, and providing personalised assistance even after the deal is done.

"Agents should stay updated on industry trends and ethical standards, and seek feedback to continually improve their services. This client-centred approach goes beyond transactions and builds lasting trust," Lam pointed out.

"My judging perspective is shaped by my commitment to ensure that I value-add wherever I can, especially when it comes to analysing customer profiles and market trends in this ever-changing landscape.

"It's vital to lead by example through responsive communication, having deep knowledge of local and global property markets, and unwavering integrity – all traits that are important for property agents," Lam added.

Azmir noted that among the entries are companies whose innovation, achievements and hard work deserve to be recognised. He hopes to see agents being able to better demonstrate core values and skills including integrity

(Wong, Azmir, Lee, Lim and Lam during the judging session.)

and interpersonal skills during their presentations.

"Winning an industry-level award, especially of this scale, validates a real estate agent's commitment to service excellence and good sales performance," Azmir said.

"The best agents understand the value of being unique in the field, and how this will inspire their peers to pursue greatness," he added.

## What's next?

Lee said: "I foresee a lot of disruption in the real estate industry in the future due to increasing construction costs, shortage of labour and over-regulation by the authorities."

While property prices will continue to rise, Lee pointed out that this could be an opportunity to push the industry to the next level. Stakeholders will look to implementing new technologies in construction, project coordination and property management.

Lam reckons the real estate industry is moving towards a future marked by a strong commitment to sustainable development.

"The industry is increasingly embracing the concept by adopting green technologies like Industrialised Building Systems (IBS), environment-friendly materials, and buildings rated by the Green Building Index (GBI). This forward trajectory involves a shift towards smart city concepts where technology is leveraged to enhance efficiency, connectivity and resource management," he said.

"We're also leveraging virtual reality, drone technology, and 3D visualisation to elevate marketing strategies and provide immersive property-viewing experiences," Lam said.

Azmir noted that in order to maximise impact, green adoption has to be encouraged across the ecosystem, with incentives for property developers, end financiers, suppliers and utility providers.

Besides emphasising sustainability, the industry is also steering towards digital transformation involving integrating AI into property transactions and search processes, and enhancing customer experiences both pre- and post-sales.

Even so, when it comes to creating a future-forward real estate landscape, the industry must simplify and streamline the selling and buying process for customers, Azmir said.

"The introduction of the electronic Sale and Purchase Agreement function (eSPA) is crucial to this, so the government and private sectors need to support this initiative," he added.

Initiatives would include a reduction in fees borne by buyers including legal fees associated with loans and SPA and stamping fees, among others. In addition, he noted that buyers should have more protection from errant property developers, including against abandoned project end-financing bailouts and developers who oversell Bumiputra lots.

"Today's customers are more selective. Hence, enabling customisable designs to suit their unique preferences and popularising smart homes will be a boon," Azmir said. 📌