

## Belt Collins – Firm History

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Belt Collins grew from the combination of a charismatic landscape architect/planner, Walter K. Collins, ASLA, and a consummate civil engineer, Robert M. Belt, P.E., when they got together in Honolulu in 1953. By developing local landscape architectural talent throughout the Pacific for 50-plus years, today the firm sits atop the landscape architectural profession in Asia and the Pacific.

Several facts demonstrate Belt Collins' preeminent position in landscape architecture in the Pacific Basin: (1) three senior principals, each of whom is a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects, have led the firm for over 30 years; (2) of the firm's 350 employees, nearly 75 are landscape architects (more than any other firm in the Asia-Pacific region); and (3) currently, Belt Collins is engaged in over 100 landscape architectural projects in more than 40 cities in China alone.

Today, Belt Collins is a 21st-century multidisciplinary landscape architectural firm with land planners, architects, environmental scientists, and engineers on its staff to support the landscape architects.

Belt Collins was the first collaborative firm in the Pacific and Asia regions that combined landscape architecture, urban and land planning, civil engineering, and other disciplines within one professional organization. An example of the advantage of such a collaboration is the groundbreaking master plan for the 1,000-acre destination resort called Ka'anapali on the island of Maui created in 1955. Where fields of sugar cane once grew, now there are seven hotels, two golf courses, a shopping center and several condominium projects all within the surroundings of award-winning landscape architecture.

This project became the collaborative and land development model for many other destination resorts in Hawaii, other Pacific Island nations, and Asia, primarily because thousands of clients found how well integrated projects work.

Belt Collins was the main contributor to the State of Hawaii Visitor Destination Study in 1960. It was a first. Tourism planning of this type has served as the prototype for many Pacific and Asian nations hungry for diversification and economic development.

Through the tourism master plans Belt Collins created for Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, India, Fiji, Samoa, Tahiti, Central Australia and the Great Barrier Reef, a whole new world and clientele for the landscape architectural profession—and for the firm—has opened up.

The firm took that early landscape architectural expertise, and together with its collaborative spirit, established a succession of overseas offices. At the beginning of this era, Belt Collins' philosophy was to find, mentor and promote local landscape architects, encouraging the brightest to pursue graduate studies, and hopefully, return to Belt Collins.

A great example of this philosophy is Pariya Sheanukul, a Thai woman landscape architect who first worked for the firm in its Singapore office. Recognizing her talent, the firm encouraged her to get her MLA from Harvard. She did, and returned to head Belt Collins' Bangkok office during the 1980s and 1990s.

The **Thailand** office was originally opened in 1964 in Bangkok. Today it is headed by Somwong Leevanijkul, ASLA, who also has a MLA from Harvard. In that wondrous country, as an example of what the firm does best, a Belt Collins team provided master plans and landscape consultation that transformed an abandoned tin mine into a multi-acre resort with five hotels called Laguna Phuket Resort.

In 1975, the Belt Collins opened its **Hong Kong** office initially to serve a project named Discovery Bay on Lantau Island in Victoria Bay. The firm provided planning, engineering and landscape architectural services for Discovery Bay, which became a major urban development on 1,500 acres of what was completely undeveloped land. Today, Belt Collins' Hong Kong office employs 225 people from ten countries and is led by Anthony Hui, ASLA, a talented Chinese landscape architect.

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The Belt Collins **Singapore** office was opened in 1982. Its work ranges from destination resorts in such diverse areas as Bali, Myanmar and India, to the restoration of some of the world's classic, historic hotels, including the legendary Raffles Hotel. One of the office's most successful projects, Heritage View Condominium in Singapore, has been compared to "living in a five-star enclave."

The firm operated three offices in **Australia**, the first of which opened in 1983. Among many award-winning projects are three venues built for the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Belt Collins also prepared the Great Barrier Reef Master Plan, one result of which is the landscape architecture for a spectacular destination resort on remote Hayman Island in the Great Barrier Reef.

The firm's **Malaysian** office was opened in 1985 and was led by Teng Teng Lim, a skilled Malaysian woman who graduated from Louisiana State University. Demonstrating the entrepreneurial spirit of the firm, Teng purchased this office from Belt Collins two years ago.

With the growth of tourism in **Guam**, Belt Collins opened up an office on this U.S. territory in 1993, which is now headed by a Guamanian, Elizabeth Gayle. The firm redesigned and landscaped San Vitores Boulevard, which is the most popular stretch for retail shopping in Guam and now draws visitors and residents alike to its booming shops and malls.

Belt Collins opened its **Philippines** office in 1990. Among its prestigious landscape projects was the transformation of an abandoned U.S. Navy ammunition storage yard on the shoreline at Subic Bay into luxury villas to accommodate the prestigious APEC meeting that President Clinton attended. The firm has worked on numerous master plans for residential and resort communities at Subic Bay, Clark Air Base (Mimosa) and Fort Bonfacio in urban Manila.

The **Seattle** office was opened in 1997. This office has made its mark in northwest destination resorts for landscape architectural projects such as Resort Semiahmoo in Blaine, Washington.

Perhaps one of the best examples of Belt Collins' ability to refine what it does best is the work the firm accomplished for the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore. It is here that Ray Cain, FASLA, applied to an urban hotel many of the landscape skills the firm had learned in its destination resort work. The landscape architecture for the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore was trend-setting because previously no other urban hotel in Asia had any landscape or garden environment to speak of. It wasn't easy. For example, Mr. Cain had to run newspaper ads offering to buy trees and plant material from the back yards of residents, since there were few small landscape nurseries in Singapore in 1967.

Belt Collins is very proud of the fact that clients engage the firm over and over. An example is the Shangri-La Hotel Group where the successful design for the Shangri-La Singapore's Garden Wing addition has led to landscape architectural work for 27 other Shangri-La Hotels, mainly throughout Asia.

Mauna Kea Resort, where the firm did the original landscape architecture and master planning work in 1962, remains an active client of the firm today. On that same Kohala coast, other clients noticed how perfectly that original resort works, and as a result, Belt Collins has provided landscape architecture, master planning, environmental consulting, civil engineering, and golf course design to four more of the world's greatest resorts—Mauna Lani Resort, Hualalai Resort, Waikoloa Beach Resort, and Hokulia Resort.

While Belt Collins' services and office span the Pacific, the firm never forgets its home front, which is Hawaii. Here, as worldwide, the firm continues to accomplish award-winning resort, recreational, residential, educational, and urban redevelopment projects.