

# Oldest hotel marks birthday with fashion and flamenco

Vietnam's oldest hotel, the Continental in downtown HCMC, will celebrate its 125th birthday today with a fashion show and flamenco music performance.

The program will start at the Continental Palace Restaurant at 6:30 p.m. when more than 200 invitees who are the hotel's regular clients from Vietnam and overseas will join the party to share the birthday cake and drink a toast to the hotel's success.

The Continental will receive a certificate from Vietbooks Co. to confirm it is the country's oldest hotel.

As the evening's highlight, 12 Vietnamese and three foreign models will present two of Mai Lam's collections.

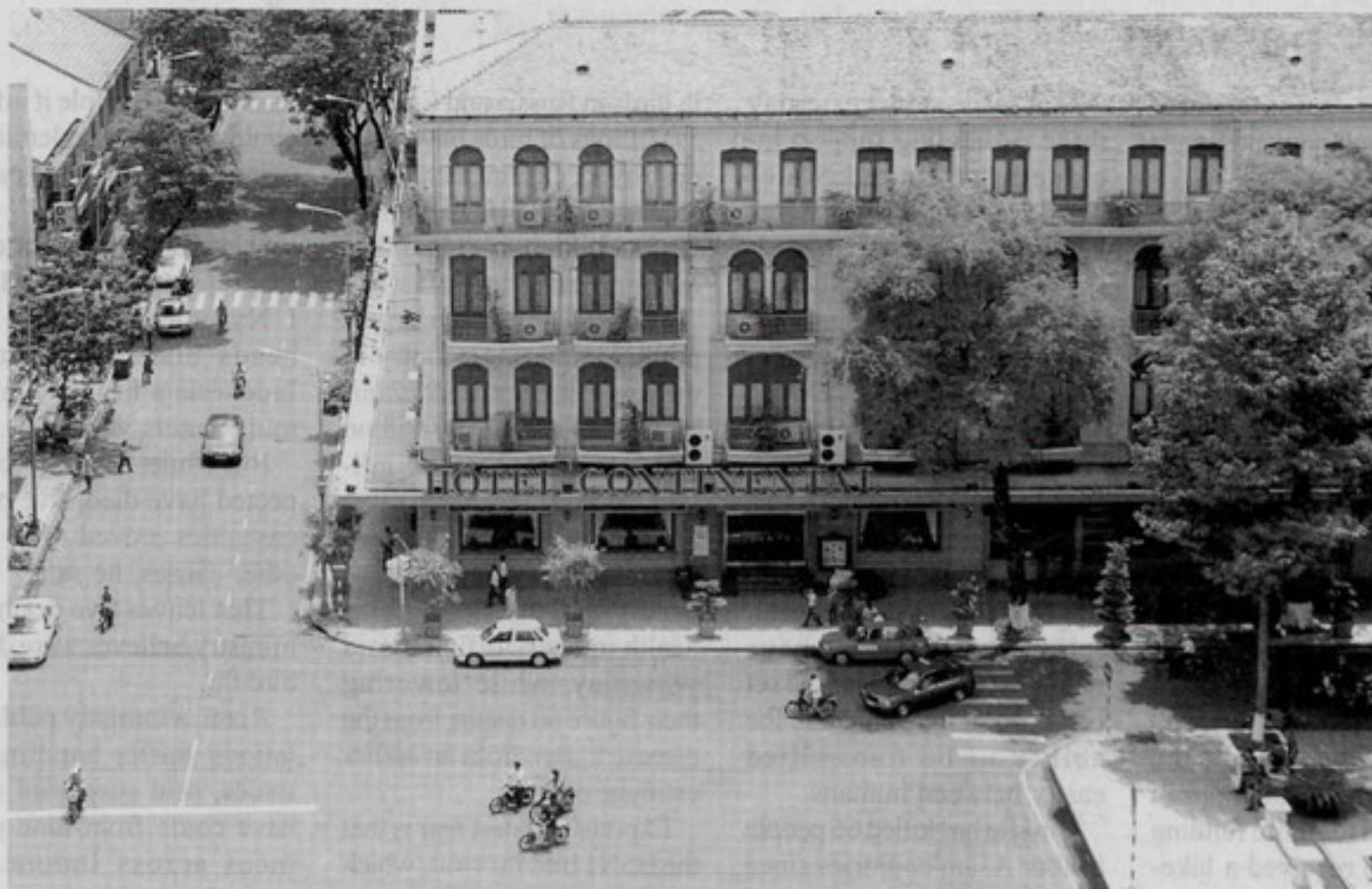
The *Mai* (apricot) collection consists of the designer's most distinguished creations of *ao dai* (traditional Vietnamese dress) and *ao tu than* (four-flapped costume). Those are adorned with hand-embroidered and painted images, and glass and plastic beads.

Lam says she created her other collection, CUYO, to honor cowboys in South America, especially Argentina. CUYO is a collection of jeans and leather and silver accessories, targeting young people.

The Continental's amateur designers will also introduce 10 costumes made from different materials, such as paper and nylon bags, to raise public awareness of the importance of protecting the environment.

In addition, a flamenco band will take the stage, together with other music and dance performances.

The Continental was designed



The Continental Hotel still retains the original French façade as it did 125 years ago

(Photo: Mong Binh)

by French architects and built in 1880. Situated in a prime location next to the City Theatre, the hotel was the rendezvous place of many local and foreign traders, journalists and politicians to exchange information and discuss politics, business deals and the war during the French and American wars in Vietnam.

The hotel's guests include quite a few famous people, such as French revolutionist writer Andre Malraux, who founded the *L'Indochine Enchainee* newspaper to fight against French colonialism; Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, who was there in 1929; French presidents Jacques Chirac and Giscard d'Estaing; and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

Among guests calling the Continental home are British author Graham Greene, who wrote "The Quiet American" about the waning days of French occupation in Indochina and the beginning of the American intervention in Vietnam.

Director Phillip Noyce made the story into a film in 2001, starring veteran actors Michael Caine and Brendan Fraser, and Vietnamese actress Do Thi Hai Yen.

Of course apart from celebrities, the hotel has received many foreign visitors, mostly from France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan and Australia.

Many people who stayed at the hotel 50 years ago have returned to recall the past and see the development of the hotel, as well as the city.

Since 1975, the Continental has been under the umbrella of Saigontourist and turned into a three-star hotel with 86 rooms and two restaurants.

The hotel, which is considered to be one of the city's architectural marvels, has been upgraded several times without changing the original overall appearance. The latest renovations took place in 1989.

Near the hotel are many old sights, such as the City Hall, the Post Office and the Notre Dame Cathedral.

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