

COSENTINO®

# Talks on Architecture & Beyond II

The Making of Architecture



# Contents



## Introduction

- 04 Letter from Cosentino President
- 06 Curatorial Statement

## Concept & Inception

- 10 Marc Webb & Naoko Takenouchi  
Takenouchi Webb
- 12 Mike Lim & Yong Siew Onn  
DP Architect
- 14 William Ti  
WTA Architecture and Design Studio

## Development & Documentation

- 18 Pan Yi Cheng  
TypeO Architecture
- 20 Alan Tay  
Formwerkz Architecture
- 22 Adela Askandar & Farah Azizan  
Studio Bikin

## Fabrication & Construction

- 26 Goy Zhenru  
Goy Architects
- 28 Victor Lee & Jacqueline Yeo  
Plystudio Architects
- 30 Chatpong Chenrudeemol  
CHAT Architects

## Life & After Life

- 34 Jonathan Quek & Koh Kai Li  
RT+Q Architects
- 36 Realrich Sjarief  
RAW Architecture
- 38 Adrian Lai  
META Architecture
- 40 Tiah Nan Chyuan  
FARM

## Cosentino & Sustainability

- 42 Silestone® with HybriQ+
- 44 Dekton® Carbon Neutral Certified



# Approaching Sustainability in Architecture

As the CEO and President of Cosentino Group, I would like to highlight the importance of sustainability in architecture. As one of the global leaders for architectural surfaces, I am proud to share important advances and actions that Cosentino has made during the last few years and in 2022 to pave the way toward a more sustainable future: what we produce, how we produce, and how we deliver to the market.

Incorporating the values of sustainability is in our core DNA. Our corporate purpose is “to inspire people through innovative and sustainable spaces”. In this context, it is even more important for us to affirm that aspiration in concrete and measurable actions.

In the last quarter of 2021, we have begun the installation of a photovoltaic solar plant consisting of 38,000 solar panels in our industrial park in Almeria, Spain, with a capacity of 20-megawatt peak (MWp) generating approximately 34,000 MWh per year. It would be one of the largest of its kind in Europe. This important step in increasing our self-generation of electricity from a renewable source solidifies our commitment to environmental impact and sustainability. Likewise, we are working on projects to treat wastewater from neighbouring towns for industrial uses. We are also actively increasing our capacity in waste treatment

through a green quarry that recycles waste from production processes to give them a second lease of life.

The evolution of Silestone with the new HybriQ+ technology and the achievement of carbon neutrality in Dekton are key milestones that give us a sense of optimism in achieving full sustainability in our business. All these are complemented by our commitment to the SDGs (sustainability development goals) and the 2030 agenda set by the UN.

As a last thought, I would like to add how we are continuously innovating, designing products that are more resource-efficient and affordable for different segments – we offer high-performance products that are ultra-thin which speed up installation in restoration projects such as facades, floors and other applications suitable for both housing and commercial projects.

I am confident that by playing an active role and in setting these examples, we would spur more partners to do the same – to create a more habitable world through architecture and circular economy.

**Francisco Martinez-Cosentino Justo**  
CEO & President, Cosentino Group



# Invoking Change

Yann Follain  
Curator, the TAB Series  
Managing Director / Head of Design (Singapore)  
WY-TO

Dekton Sommita from Omirika Collection.

The 2020 pandemic that slowed everything down allowed people to stop and smell the roses and wildflowers growing on the sidewalks. We refocused on personal growth and prioritised development.

It was the start of change.

Bit by bit, things started to pick up pace in 2021, the world took a better turn for our planet and our societies.

Craftsmen are unashamed to slow down because they recognise that beautiful craft takes time. The knowledge of “making” and the muscle memory of hand moulding, carving and crafting all add to the character and personal touch of the craftsmen, which is honed through his years of practice. The intangible value of a handcrafted object will inadvertently be compromised when it is mass-produced, as development and refinement get lost in the process when things move too fast. Likewise, we see the role that time plays as we gather expertise and knowledge, steadily working towards a well-crafted Architecture on a day-to-day basis. How can we marry the need for automation in our fast-paced society, whilst still ensuring a high level of ‘human touch’? The second TAB Series “Talks on Architecture & Beyond” featured and challenged the Making of Architecture, by dissecting the process into its constituent stages, as quarterly themes for 12 TAB sessions:

1. Concept & Inception
2. Development & Documentation
3. Fabrication & Construction
4. Life & After Life

In slowing down, we started to reveal some of the systemic issues that exist in the making of our built environment.

No one will deny that behind every successful project is a great team, but how can we fight against the tendency to treat people not as mere cogs in the machines of a long factory line, but as humans with souls and unique value that add to the process? Is it possible to have an inclusive society with equality in opportunities for all? How can we design and operate to facilitate this?

At the same time, we are gradually starting to see a shifting trend towards more sustainable practices. More and more companies are starting to call out seemingly “sustainable

practices” such as adding greenery to the tops of our glass-clad office towers, making sustainability the cherry on top of the cake of an already designed project. Now, we account for actual sustainable acts that consider the built future. Research has shown that the Construction sector contributes to 23% of air pollution, 50% of climatic change, 40% of drinking water pollution, and 50% of landfill wastes, accounting for 40% of worldwide energy usage. Firms are increasingly putting in the effort to make real changes and moving toward a circular economy model.

Looking outside of Singapore to the region of Southeast Asia, the differences in practices and cultures have provided new vantage points on how we may innovate to advocate for the sustainability agenda.

We do not claim to know all the answers to every question, but our minds always remain open for growth and progression in thought. We see in the development of society that discoveries and new methodologies evolve over time. What may be considered revolutionary today could eventually be seen as unmistakably evident, and that is the beauty of progress and change in societies.

We as Architects, Designers & Craftsmen need a fresh change in perspective, to prevent us from just going with the flow as we practice and hone our skills. We need to reboot and think of creative solutions, even if it means stepping out from the flurry of urban life just to consider the impact of the daily decisions that we make, as we move into the new beginnings in 2022.

Let’s return to the “why”, not just “what” is next.

We slowed down for this journey in the Making of Architecture. We shared generously through our project exchanges. We are now ready to invoke change.

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a Dekton surface with a complex, organic marbled pattern. The pattern consists of irregular, vein-like shapes in shades of beige, tan, and light brown, set against a lighter, off-white base. The veins vary in thickness and direction, creating a dynamic and textured visual field.

# Concept & Inception

Every design begins with an idea. It lays out a framework that is able to guide necessary interventions that contributes to improving present conditions and quality of being. We unearth a spatial language that is tailored to the space. In this conversation, a methodology is defined. It then translates by balancing form and function, while exploring the possibilities in creating a contextually and socially engaged environment.

Product: **Dekton Daze** from **Orinika Collection**.



# Process & Design

Marc Webb & Naoko Takenouchi  
 Founders, Takenouchi Webb  
 Singapore



Left: Marc Webb and Naoko Takenouchi  
 Top: The Mandala Club, Singapore

What happens when a heritage building or space loses its shine and is reinvigorated to generate new businesses? The results can be magical.

In land-scarce Singapore, heritage building conversion has become increasingly common. Naoko Takenouchi and Marc Webb share their design process and philosophy working on such projects.

The couple, who design everything together, is behind some of the most talked-about restaurants: Whitegrass, Empress, The White Rabbit, Tanjong Beach Club and the Straits Clan (which has been rebranded as The Mandala).

The key to their success is the way they create a space by building layers of detail, taking a down-to-earth, step-by-step mindset that begins with inspecting the site and then finding a balance between aesthetics, functionality and choice of materials.

## Bio

Takenouchi Webb was founded by British architect **Marc Webb** and Japanese architect **Naoko Takenouchi** in 2006. The integrated design firm develops architecture and interior environments specialising in restaurant, retail, hotel, residential and bar projects.

The studio believes in a holistic approach to design, developing the architecture, interior and furniture specifically for each project. Its design approach combines a carefully considered materials, detailing and precision with practical problem solving unique to each project.



Top: The Mandala Club, Singapore

## Interview

**What is Takenouchi Webb's design philosophy?**

Marc: Whatever the project, typology or size, we always go back to a few main starting points which we then develop further. First is our response to the site and the brief, getting the practical elements right is critical for the success of any project. When it comes to aesthetics, we are very focused on materiality and how different materials interact and harmonise with each other together with the detailing of the design. In that sense we have a very practical approach. Our final designs may be quite different, but our approach is always similar, which makes a recognisable thread that runs through all our projects.

I was trained as an architect while Naoko studied interior architecture and then specialised in restaurant design which means we have a very architectural approach to interior design. In our eyes there is very little difference between designing the architecture and the interior and ideally there shouldn't be a distinction between the two.

**What is Takenouchi Webb's approach to reviving and preserving heritage buildings and spaces?**

We have been very fortunate to have worked on many heritage buildings in Singapore which are always very challenging and rewarding. Our approach has always been to strip back the building to its original form as much as possible and then

bring out the original qualities we uncover. Often such buildings also give us a lot of inspiration in developing the design for the space.

**How do you find a balance between aesthetics, functionality and choice of materials?**

The choice of materials always has to be primarily functional, but within that there is such a wide range of possibilities to develop. The aesthetic choice then becomes a matter of balancing the emotions we are trying to develop in the design, and of course, the budget!

**What is your dream project?**

We always like to work on both the architecture and the interior of projects, and have had a few opportunities to do so. We would love to be able to work on a small hotel and design the entire thing, from the building envelope to the cabinet handles.



# Beyond Aesthetics

Mike Lim, Principal Designer, DP Design  
 ER Yong Siew Onn, Director, DP Sustainable Design  
 Singapore



Left: Mike Lim. Right: Yong Siew Onn.

Lim and Yong lent insights on their firm's multidisciplinary design methodology and how collaboration between different disciplines creates meaningful spaces for users that go 'beyond aesthetics'.

As practitioners are forced to understand the role of architecture and design in this brave new world, Lim believes it is important that they reset the way they think, ask themselves what good design means, and be genuinely passionate in designing for users while maintaining respect for the space and environment.

Lim also discusses the importance of seamlessly integrating exterior and interior architecture, infusing character into interior spaces for improved user experience. He shares how together with the Sustainable Design team, DP adopts a synergetic approach to achieve a holistic design that is both aesthetically pleasing and environmentally-friendly.



## Bio

**Mike Lim** is responsible for the concept design and design development of a wide range of projects, including commercial complexes, large condominiums, shops, restaurants and offices in DP Design.

Besides prominent local projects like Resorts World Sentosa, Changi Airport Terminal 2, and Paragon Shopping Centre. Lim has undertaken numerous overseas projects including The Dubai Mall, Noon Square in South Korea and Abu Dhabi Tower in the United Arab Emirates.

**Yong Siew Onn** oversees DP Sustainable Design, which specialises in the energy efficiency of sustainable building and focuses on the integration of architectural and engineering systems for optimal building performance in various building typologies.

He has been practising Green Design since 2008 and a Certified Singapore Building Construction Authority Green Mark Professional since 2009.



Top: Our Tampines Hub, Singapore

## Interview

**Do you think biophilic design is here to stay? Why?**

**Lim:** Quite simply, yes. For a long time, we have known of our need to be surrounded by nature, if not, in nature itself. We knew that it made us feel better and improved our wellbeing as a whole, but largely played it down to the individual's experience. That said, biophilic design is not just about placing a few potted plants in a space and having green elements in the built environment.

Many studies show that biophilic design strategies reveal benefits to the well-being in built environment. It may in fact, become part of a larger solution to the climate emergency we are facing today by means of an enhanced environmental attitude and knowledge within the community. Whether you are an end-user, developer, designer or built environment consultant, you would be led towards a greener outlook and consciousness which then alters lifestyle and consumption patterns. So, by extension, biophilic urbanism would increasingly entail a holistic urban design concept that identifies how cities can be reconceived and reconstructed to fit in with nature.

**How do you consider a material to be more sustainable?**

**Lim:** Sustainability by definition, is focused on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to provide for their needs. With this in mind, it is important not to be swept away by the novelty of environmentally friendly spinoffs of commonly used materials as the solution for the climate crisis we face. Its initial reduction of carbon footprint must be compared alongside quality and durability of the material. Longevity trumps ricketiness.

The other green option is to opt for re-purposed, upcycled or sustainably-sourced materials. These not only help us to be aware and work towards waste reduction, they also help us remain conscious of practising responsible consumption.

**How do you adapt and implement the concept of a circular economy in practice across different design disciplines?**

**Yong:** Circular economy is very relevant to us. Now, with accelerating natural resource depletion, it is becoming increasingly necessary to work closely with architects and interior designers to embrace and implement a circular economy in a closed-loop regenerative approach of reduce, reuse and recycle which will create a ripple effect toward sustainability in the built environment sector.

For example, in adaptability, architects can design to extend the service life of a building as a whole, either by facilitating the continuation of the intended use or through possible future changes in use with a focus on replacement and refurbishment. Interior designers can play a great role for a greener planet too by having a reduce and reuse mindset, and by shifting towards the use of green products with potential reuse or recycled contents.

Essentially, to promote circular economy in different design disciplines, we need to do more and better with less. All of us need to put in concerted effort to design waste out of the resource ecosystem and maximise the value of these resources by keeping them in use for as long as possible.



# Social Architecture

**William Ti**

Principal Architect & Founder, WTA Architecture and Design Studio  
Philippines



Urbanisation is one of the major trends currently shaping Southeast Asia in numerous facets - societies, cultures, economies, businesses and environments. In the Philippines, Metro Manila itself has a population of over 20 million people and is one of the most congested urban centres in the world, second only to Mumbai.

With the city set to keep on growing in the coming years and with increasing land scarcity, how can the overall living quality be improved for the people living in the city?

Tapping into architecture as a solution to urban issues, William Ti, Principal at WTA Architecture and Design Studio, shares with us his motivation, ideas and solutions through his projects that aim to encourage social connection and build a more welcoming community.

Ti delves into his thought processes in building an environment that engages, inspires, and empowers. An architecture that builds communities.

## Bio

**William Ti** founded WTA Architecture and Design Studio in 2007 and has worked on numerous projects ranging from retail shops and housing projects to large scale malls, residential condominiums, hotels and master-planned developments.

He is also the founder and director of Anthology Festival, Shelter Magazine and The Book Stop Project, and writes the City of Tomorrow column for the Philippine Daily Inquirer. Ti is a strong advocate of social architecture that promotes an architecture that builds communities.



Watch the talk



Left: William Ti Jr.  
Opposite page: The Book Stop Project, Manila, Philippines

## Interview

**Why is it important for architects to place emphasis in designing towards social equity in the context of rapid urbanisation of cities worldwide?**

Architects are responsible for the totality of our built environment. We are the only professionals tasked with making our cities and communities more inclusive and mindful of the needs of its more vulnerable members. Most architects are keenly aware of the social issues that plague our cities and always bemoan the state of our built environment. We must be conscious that if we do not embrace everyone in our society, then they will also not embrace the ideas that we espouse for our cities. We cannot move forward towards visions of utopia without first making sure that everyone is invited. Trying to do so is as futile as carrying water in a sieve.

**How should an architect ask the right questions in designing an inclusive and socially responsible architecture?**

Architects should ask architecture "by whom" as much as they ask "for whom." Architecture that embraces and includes as many diverse perspectives as possible tends to produce more surprising possibilities. Behind every project should be a research group that includes various stakeholders that can give their open opinions. This should go beyond their immediate wants and needs and inquire how they go about their days. This allows for them to process the gaps in their built environment that architecture can help fill.

We should embrace projects and measure them by the social impact that they can have. In our growing cities, we need to find broader and scalable solutions that can help the lives of more and more people. Technology is changing our lives so fast, that change cannot happen at a glacial pace. We must be conscious of the fact that the future is always charging along and we cannot let the development

of our built environment be constantly outpaced by societal developments.

**What advice do you have for young architects who are considering following in your footsteps towards social architecture?**

"Optimism is a duty. The future is open. It is not predetermined. No one can predict it, except by chance. We all contribute to determining it by what we do. We are all equally responsible for its success." - Karl Popper

Never take any barriers for granted. Always strive to break through and see beyond the immediate present. Every problem presents an opportunity to find a new solution. All it takes is passion and ambition for you to make change possible.

For example, in adaptability, architects can design to extend the service life of a building as a whole, either by facilitating the continuation of the intended use or through possible future changes in use with a focus on replacement and refurbishment. Interior designers can play a great role for greener planet too by having a reduce and reuse mindset, and by shifting towards the use of green products with potential reuse or recycled contents.

Essentially, to promote circular economy in different design disciplines, we need to do more and better with less. All of us need to put in concerted effort to design waste out of the resource ecosystem and maximising the value of these resources by keeping them in use for as long as possible.





# Development & Documentation

By understanding the fundamentals of process, we see the potential of each that intrigues more explorations. With modernisation and technological advancements, experimenting with different concepts that may reveal unexpected valuable findings that can be innovated and shared. Through acknowledging the co-existence of contributing elements such as existing conditions, materiality and intangible factors, we may harmonise a hybridised approach in the making of architecture.

# Parametric Phenomenology

Pan Yi Cheng

Principal Architect, Type 0 Architecture  
Co-founder & Director, Produce and Superstructure  
Singapore



Top: Tailored plywood pavilions at the Herman Miller shop in XTRA

Parametric Phenomenology attempts to unify the diametric themes of technology and emotion. By defining the basic elements of materials and nature, parametric systems can be formed to generate technological models that impact our emotional and spatial perception of space.

Pan takes us through this design concept he coined and his design process which involves material experimentation, and shares his motivations in creating context for spaces through objects.

To Pan, every project, in one way or another, is a representation of capital. The design should therefore be a representation not just of the inherent values of the project hitherto, but also the aspirational values of its owner and future users.

## Bio

**Pan Yi Cheng** is the principal architect of Type0 Architecture and co-founder and director of Produce and Superstructure. These three studios are set up not only to support architectural and material experimentation but also to address the urgent needs of the contemporary built environment. Collectively, the studios offer an all-rounded approach to the built environment, focusing on typological transformation, design research and digital fabrication, respectively.

Positioned at the forefront of the technological transformation of architecture and construction, they are currently the only Architectural practice in Singapore with an inhouse digital build-lab.

## Interview

**How do you convince stakeholders to accept your design process and thinking which so often challenge conventions?**

It is never easy to balance the client's risk appetite and budgetary constraints with our design ambitions. We were able to have relative success in this respect largely due to the integration of a prototyping workshop with our design studios. With an in-house facility to experiment and make models at a 1:1 scale meant that we could internalise and design out a lot of mistakes within our design processes making the final product not just more technically sound but also more economical in terms of fabrication and assembly. We also present a fragment of the proposal in 1:1 scale prototype to demonstrate the result of our processes from virtual to reality. Clients were able to experience the structural and spatial quality of the artefact and this first-hand experience helped to allay fears and instil confidence.

**What is the importance of adopting a responsible attitude to materials?**

Our built environment has generated nearly 40% of annual global greenhouse gases emissions of which more than a quarter is attributed to "embodied carbon" – which is the manufacturing of building materials and their related construction processes. To meet the global emission targets, it is crucial that we employ materials that are from sustainable sources and can be repurposed or recycled beyond their intended purpose.

From a design point of view, it is also important that we do not design with excesses but instead strive for an optimum fitness, using less material to do more. This requires us to recognise and parameterise the essential attributes of the material and reorganise the material to enhance its performance.

**As an expert designer who constantly innovates and pushes boundaries, what advice do you have for aspiring architects when they hit a creative wall?**

Start again and relook at the premise of the project as there may be important insights that were missed out. The designer's motivation to intervene in the project can be found from multiple sources and most of the time not in the client's brief. Such sources can be tangible like the site context, building type, functions, etc. but they can also be intangible



Top: Pan Yi Cheng

like situations surrounding the project, history, aspiration of the client or even emotional conflict the designer may have about the project. These are all useful points of view a designer can take when analysing the brief and if the narrative and design process is crafted causally, I believe it will result in a very grounded and relevant project.

**Do you see architects as craftsmen?**

I still subscribe to the etymology of the word Architect. From arkhi- "master" and tekton "builder" – Master Builder.

Of course, unlike in antiquity, the architect today is definitely not only a master craftsman or master carpenter who is specialised in a particular way of construction but he or she is required to integrate the skills, craft and knowledge of a myriad of specialists.

I interpret the "master builder" or Architect today as a person who is not only competent in operating within and overcoming the full "Means of Production" of Architecture, both ideological and technological, but also able to influence its growth and transformation.





# Typological Margins

Alan Tay

Managing Director and Principal, Formwerkz Architects  
Co-founder, Formwerkz Collective  
Singapore

Formwerkz believes in the transformative power of design in effecting improvement to lives. They are interested in Architectural Types, engaging with it as a means to challenge dominant paradigms and to further the architectural discourse. They often find themselves traversing along boundaries, sometimes in oxymoronic situations, or at times attempting to reach a hybridised solution. This approach to design has motivated and kept them interested in the craft of Architecture throughout the firm's 20 years in practice.

From the modern Al-Islah Mosque (Singapore) to the intricate Cloister House (Malaysia), Formwerkz Architects has constantly challenged dominant paradigms of typologies to create refreshing hybridised solutions to the use of spaces. Architects create form, shapes, spaces and ambiances that are usually functional. However, they can sometimes be uplifting and memorable.

As one of the founding partners of Formwerkz, Alan Tay is interested in projects that have the capacity to be a vehicle to engage with deeper issues. They may be about the city, the way we live, or even to the level of the playing field for the marginalised or forgotten.

Tay shares with us his motivations on reinventing the existing to give form to the future through his designs.

## Bio

**Alan Tay** is one of the founding partners of Formwerkz Architects. He is currently an adjunct assistant professor with the School of Architecture (NUS) and on the School Advisory Committee for Temasek Polytechnic School of Design. He served on the Board of Architects Professional Practice Exam Panel from 2011-2014. He was selected by AUDE as one of the promising architects in the "20 Under 45: The Next Generation" exhibition.

He believes in the transformative power of Architecture in effecting improvement to lives.



Terrace House project, Singapore



## Interview

**Your works are constantly reinventing existing norms of typologies, diversifying the use of a space and how the users interact with it. What motivates you to challenge dominant preconceptions?**

The adrenaline of the discovery can be addictive. And when your earlier hypothesis is proven right and what follows can be deeply satisfying, knowing that in some small ways we have contributed to the greater good. Our typological investigation and reinvention are just our method to be systematic and rational in our creative process.

**Where do you find your inspiration?**

Travel, people and books. With Covid, the internet and my garden.

**How can architects stay relevant in the future?**

To constantly remind ourselves not to let go of the Futurist part of us while our architectural practice may be heavily grounded on the present and the wisdom of the past.

**You mentioned your projects give form to the future. Can you elaborate?**

Correction. We aspire and seek to give form to the future through our works.

The "Future" here embodies a "Better World" shaped by the answers or solutions to the problems of the "Present". It may be carbon issues, aging, inequality, pandemic, post-anthropocentric future, etc. The issues can be both universal or local.



Watch the talk



# Spatial Narratives

Adela Askandar & Farah Azizan

Founders, Studio Bikin  
Malaysia



Top: Farah Azizan and Adela Askandar  
Opposite page: Jelutong House, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Founded by Farah Azizan and Adela Askandar in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2012, Studio Bikin originated from a colloquial word that means “do” or “make”. A statement of intent, it also reflects their context-driven projects favouring local materials and craftsmanship that age well in the local climate.

The duo then began Kedai Bikin in 2013, curating furniture pieces and complimentary home & living products designed by local Malaysian designers.

The design duo touches on the topic of Spatial Narratives - a sharing of the process where narratives of the brief and the client are absorbed, processed and subsequently developed into the physical interventions both in idea and construction.

Studio Bikin offers exceptionally thoughtful and holistic solutions in transforming existing spaces whilst keeping the soul of the original architecture.

## Bio

**Adela Askandar** received her BA and Masters in architecture from University of Cambridge, UK. She has worked for Lisa Shell design and TP Bennett Architects in London, and Unit One design consultancy in Kuala Lumpur.

Her interests include collaborative approaches to promote a more circular economic approach within the building industry.

**Farah Azizan** obtained her BA in Architecture at Nottingham University, UK, and pursued her diploma in Architecture at the Architecture Association, London. She has worked for Tonkin Liu Architects in London and Seksan Design in Kuala Lumpur where she practised landscape and architectural design.



What are your thoughts about how climate change might affect the future of materials used in construction?

Of course it may affect the future of materials, but the first step is awareness. Second is using old-fashioned common sense. Third is to try to keep things simple; the world is constantly moving to a greater level of sophistication and complexity - just like the second law of thermodynamics. There is no stopping or reversing it but sometimes we need to pause and find material solutions that may be simple and right before our eyes or within our locality; similar to editing an overly fussy or complex design. That makes it exciting (for us anyway).

How can the design and construction sectors adopt the circular economy and take a restorative approach? What are some challenges you face taking this approach?

Demolishing a well-built (particularly if it is well-designed) building, to put it simply, is wasteful. It also creates construction waste that is hard to deal with. However, it is an easier process for those with short-term considerations; taking a restorative approach requires more thinking, perhaps a little more time but often with better long-term results in terms of design and carbon footprint as well. The biggest challenge is convincing clients to first, invest in a good team of consultants that can help them deliver this and to look beyond the lure of a shiny new 'iconic' product where it does not HAVE to be that. The other challenge for us in this region is to find a good contractor or builder to work with, particularly for larger-scale projects.

What is your advice to architects and designers looking to start their own practices?

Think twice!

Well, it has been a tiring two years working remotely on and off, and we are just getting back on our feet and on site again so all we can say is it's not easy. However, doing your own thing and being in control of the process at the same time can be challenging but rewarding at the same time. If you have a clear intention, a strong conviction and a bit of faith, we say go for it!

## Interview

What is Studio Bikin's design philosophy?

All existing buildings and spaces have had their own lives and history, just as how new buildings we design begin their 'lives' under the new owners when we hand over our projects. So, we try to absorb some of the knowledge of these spaces when we begin the project, whilst taking into consideration the new purpose for which their transformation is required. We ask ourselves, what do we need to do in order that this structure can fulfil the new brief, solve an existing problem or activate certain thoughts, whilst acknowledging, perhaps, some of its past? Once we ask these questions, the thinking and design process becomes clearer - and thereafter arriving at possible solutions, whether it involves remodelling the layout, material choice or construction method becomes more fluid and interconnected.



The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a Dekton surface with a marbled pattern. The pattern consists of irregular, flowing veins of light blue, dark blue, and brownish-gold against a light beige or off-white base. The veins vary in thickness and direction, creating a complex, organic texture.

# Fabrication & Construction

Every actor involved, no matter the size of the project, plays a part in formalising the vital aspect of space-making. Engagement with local craftsmen and builders expands the design process to consider more than just their expertise. They provide invaluable points of view on local resources that add a unique contextual feature to their craftsmanship. This gives the cross-disciplinary interaction room to shape the built economy and nurture unique architectural identities and experiences.

Product: **Dekton Trance** from **Onirika Collection**.



# In Search of the Intangibles

Goy Zhenru

Founder, Goy Architects  
Singapore



Top left: Goy Zhenru

Top and ppposite page: Sukabumi Farmstay, Indonesia

Working collectively from Singapore, Bali and Chiang Mai, Goy Architects is nimble in method but deep in consideration - always attuned to opportunities to cross-pollinate ideas, materials and crafts from around Southeast Asia.

Architecture is usually associated with its physical material components, but often its powers lie in its ability to evoke the intangible qualities of our humanity. Goy explores and discusses these qualities and their relevance in our times through a couple of the firm's projects - Sukabumi Farmstay in Indonesia and Heng House in Singapore.

The design practice believes that memories protect the history and culture of a place, creating a sense of belonging for the community, shaping identity and heritage for future generations.

To understand the role of the built environment in users' lives one has to understand the nature of human behaviour which Goy demonstrates through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

## Bio

**Goy Zhenru** is the founder of Goy Architects, a firm spanning three Southeast Asia countries - Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand. Alongside her colleagues, she seeks to push the boundaries of vernacular and regional crafts whilst embracing technology and modern working methods, aiming to create meaningful spaces and embrace the rich diverse culture of the region.



Watch the talk



## Interview

How have your projects the users and dwellers to achieve their psychological and self-actualisation needs?

A memorable and enriching built environment co-relates to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. For a space to be truly memorable, it no longer deals independently with the subject of physical comfort and functional needs, but has to be layered with psychological stimulation. It inspires people who are using the space through taking into account their beliefs, values, and personal aspirations. When the environment aligns to their personal beliefs, this gives them a sense of attaining their inherent desires. When these personal desires are attained, the emotions stimulated either connect to their past or act as a stepping stone of creating a new key memory to anchor themselves and their future in. These memories therefore build on the psychological and self-actualisation of the human, giving them hope and a stronger foundation to move forward as individuals.

In Sukabumi Farmstay, the sense of belonging is achieved through the harmony of architecture and the environment. The spaces allow one to feel more in tune with their surroundings, by being more involved with the process of basic sustenance. The experience allows people to reflect on their lifestyle and be more aware of the resources they consume, and therefore increases sensitivity to the impact their lives make to nature as a whole. Their psychological sense of self is heightened, and their place in the relation to the world is solidified in their mind.

You have a passion for amalgamating ideas, materials and crafts from around Southeast Asia. Do you foresee more clients adopting more of these rich heritage textures and materiality into their projects, especially in urban cities like Singapore?

I feel that as a society grows and matures, it develops and dwells deeper into concepts of belonging and identity. I see a growing appreciation of local and regional crafts and design, simply due to the fact that people are starting to understand the region's uniqueness and contribution to the world. This instils more pride and encourages users to want to explore this rich history of Southeast Asia. They begin to invest more into preservation of the culture and root themselves into the region as we progress as a young nation. In addition, as our main medium of interaction in work and life is becoming more digital, I also see that this tactile deprivation sparks a desire of clients to go 'offline' and be more in tune with their immediate surroundings through their sense of touch, smell, and taste.

What are the challenges you foresee in converting our society's reliance on air-conditioning and adopting other natural ventilation methods?

A challenge would be that the community should view climate as a unique opportunity presented to us to explore and grow with. Comfort does not need to be done through control of the environment through air conditioning; it could be done with intentional respect for it. As we seek to improve our design and technological prowess, a next step would be integrating and working with our environment to grow and live in tune with it.

The environment impacts our habits, lifestyles, and culture. Instead of working against it, a mindset shift needs to occur for us to see the possibilities given to us due to the tropical climate.



# Building Economy

Victor Lee, Co-founder & Director, Plystudio Architects

Jacqueline Yeo, Co-founder, Plystudio Architects  
Singapore



Top: Rainbow Centre, Singapore. Opposite page: Victor Lee and Jacqueline Yeo.

Building Economy presents a way of liberating modal constraints in design, practice and construction by working small and thinking big. It celebrates the notion of the non-spectacular in architecture.

As something which resonates strongly with their work, Plystudio Architects presents a selection of their works as a framework to discuss how working closely with their clients, users and the community can give rise to an honest expression in architecture. Through their fascination with the climatic, contextual and cultural interactions of any given environment, underpinned by a preoccupation with planning and organisation strategies, Plystudio Architects are interested in imbuing new intelligence and meaning into 'everyday' architecture.



## Bio

**Victor Lee** is a registered architect in Singapore and the UK, where he trained at the Architectural Association in London. He is interested in research-driven practice and has taught at the Department of Architecture (NUS) as a member of its adjunct faculty. He is deeply rooted in the belief that architecture is fundamentally driven by an honest expression of form and structure manifested through building economy.

**Jacqueline Yeo** is a registered architect in the UK. She is interested in the architecture and craft of building with a specific focus on materiality and technology within the context of creating an economy of building. She has also been actively involved in education serving as visiting critic and as a studio tutor at the Department of Architecture (NUS).



## Interview

Can you explain the concept of 'building economy' and how you create economy in the way you design?

Building economy is not so much of a concept but rather a way of thinking to ground our projects. We like to see it as an outcome that we aim to create from our work. It is based on a design approach that we have developed by first understanding how we can create economy in the way we design, rather than look at how to achieve efficiency only in the end product. In a way, this is much tied to the topics we are interested in, such as simple geometry, organisational logic, repetitions and modulations in form and structural rationalisation in a fundamental and streamlined manner. As a small and lean practice, this is especially important as these processes allow us to work within our limited resources on smaller parts of a design to achieve larger economies of scale. The word economy for us is also an expression of an ecosystem where these aspects of our design interest come together to create value in the project and for our clients.

How much does the location of a project affect your approach and design strategies?

We do take that into account, especially for our overseas projects as a way of responding to the project location's context, social norms and culture. We usually start by trying to find similarities and ways to engage the project by looking at it through a lens that we already know. Then we find ways to adapt and integrate our design as we export our local knowledge and apply it in a more universally meaningful way. For example, in our project for affordable housing in Kenya, we suggested the Singaporean model of having a multi-storey carpark

found in our public housing projects as a way to efficiently organise parking for the development, in turn freeing up open spaces and which can be more meaningfully used for communal spaces and amenities for the residents. The multi-storey carpark was planned to be centrally located, which became instrumental in organising the site, creating a network of pedestrian pathways and green spaces to serve the housing blocks.

In terms of building, to understand the availability of materials and the way things are built locally is important to us too. For example, in our Batam Film Studios project, as labour cost are cheaper than material costs, we designed the entire facade in concrete panels, manually cast within a corrugated formwork to create a rippled surface resembling the ubiquitous zinc roofing of the local houses, as a nod to the local, everyday architecture we saw every time we visited the site. We also worked with the local builders and craftsmen and enjoyed the process of witnessing the trials and mock-ups that were created. We sourced locally available materials such as Indonesian lava stone for flooring and natural finished plywood for the internal walls to minimise time and cost of transportation.

What role do materials play in reinforcing and influencing the way you build? What's your take on building sustainably?

We tend to work mostly with simple and a limited palette of materials and try to apply it quite homogeneously and consistently across most of our projects. You could say we prefer a sense of aesthetics that is quieter to allow the designed forms and spaces to shape a user's experience. In terms of building sustainability, yes - we are overall concerned about the impact building has on climate change. We try to do our little part for sustainability by first being mindful of the way we design from the beginning. We believe that this is the fundamental move to create sustainability in the building process, such as designing passively, working with organisational logic, modulated forms and repetition, rather than through the prescriptive application of 'green' materials and specifications.



# Bangkok Bastards

**Chatpong Chuenrudeemol**  
Director, CHAT Architects  
Thailand



Hotel Labaris Khao Yai, Thailand



Samsen Street Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Bangkok Bastards are architectural concoctions created by everyday people to solve everyday problems. These 'live' street vernacular typologies potentially hold the key to discovering an authentic hybrid language of architecture for Thailand and her ASEAN neighbours.

The concept of Bangkok Bastards was thought up by CHAT Architects and its research division CHAT lab. They are structures scattered throughout Bangkok created by the city's forgotten citizens - squatters, street vendors and migrant workers. From temporary construction worker houses to semi-legal shantytowns to underground sex-motels, these typologies are often built with cheap, local, scavenged materials in simple yet ingenious ways.

Most of these 'bastards' are dismissed by many as low-brow and unrefined, unworthy of any serious investigation or research. However, these honest responses to the city's real-life conditions have become Chat's muse, where he has designed wonderful projects as a result. In fact, they meld perfectly with his unique architectural language

that is a synthesis of the local culture and Western-based principles.

## Bio

**Chatpong 'Chat' Chuenrudeemol** obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Architecture in Berkeley and his Masters of Architecture at Harvard Graduate School of Design. He returned to his birthplace Bangkok after completing studies to form CHAT Architects, a practice combining research and design, resulting in multi-scalar projects that aim to stimulate the community through strategies that reinterpret authentic local conditions. He created CHAT Lab in 2015, a research think tank aimed at discovering new Thai vernacular "street" typologies affectionately called "Bangkok Bastards".



Watch the talk



The more I research, the more I realise how little I know. The research that I have come across is insufficient. We are missing this research on "LIVE" architectural, urban, landscape subjects in Bangkok. We need to go out into the living city to survey, document, and critically understand these active subjects.

A big part of your unique design language was shaped by your experience and observation when you moved to Thailand – a synthesis of local culture appreciation and western-based principles. Tell us more about what you are working on with respect to elevating knowledge about Southeast Asian (SEA) architecture.

## Interview

**How would you describe your design language?**

I am trying to develop a design language that is rooted in my home, in my local context.

Because I live and work in an urban tropical environment which is Bangkok, it is inevitable that the language of tropical architecture - angled roofs, deep overhangs, porous building envelopes, light or flexible frames over solid load-bearing walls are common traits not because of stylistic reasons, but climate-based reasoning and strategic in nature.

However, Bangkok is a modern metropolitan city that is an important global node, not only in ASEAN but in the global network. Thus, its urbanism carries with it global (Western) building typologies and most definitely Western-biased architectural language. Naturally, this combination necessarily results in a hybrid architectural language that is a crossbreed between... local and global, and between Southeast Asian tropicality and Western Modernism or pastiche historicism that is developer-driven.

My aim in every project is to introduce an architecture which creates, stimulates, and energises public life and community.

**You have developed such an amazing methodology in research, making it a pivotal part of your design process. Why do you think research is a valuable tool as an architect?**

One of the most important goals for me as an architect is to be able to create an architecture that is AUTHENTIC and LOCALLY RESPONSIVE to my context, which is Bangkok.

In order to do so, I need to know everything about Bangkok. At this point in time, I don't think I know enough. Therefore, I research in order to become smarter and more informed about the place in which I am designing. I feel like this is true for all architects in Southeast Asia (and all developing countries in the world), but many will not admit it.

My favourite places to lecture are in Southeast Asia. Every time I tell stories about Bangkok Bastards to the local audience, whether in Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Hanoi, Singapore, I see nods in the audience. Local students and practitioners always approach me afterwards with enthusiasm sharing their own version of these particular Bastards too, in their respective hometowns.

And they all share a similar DNA to the Bastards in Bangkok. It made me realise that national boundaries are not appropriate in categorising local vernacular types in SEA. Common bastards re-occur and are transformed in their own particular way, but in the end, they show how people throughout Southeast Asia are similar, and interconnected. Perhaps of our tropical climate, explosive growth as developing nations, our connections to water, our common religions...who knows? But these Bastards connect us not only architecturally, but culturally.

This is why I expanded the research from Bangkok Bastards to SEA Bastards. I believe a large-scale ASEAN research of local bastards (Manila Bastards, Kuala Lumpur Bastards, Vientiane Bastards, Singapore Bastards, etc.) will create an awareness of the intrinsic value for Southeast Asian architecture. It will make us look at how we are all interconnected culturally and architecturally.





# Life After Life

In shaping our built environment, we unconsciously shape ourselves. It is a representation of values, character and heritage for which, end-users are empowered to contribute through their daily exchange. The resultant cumulation grants us access to comprehend how spaces may truly be optimised. At the same time, change is the only constant and in refreshing existing structures and compounds, we challenge ourselves to remain relevant in the progression of time. Combining different usages of space reforms preconceived notions that present opportunities to celebrate past, present and future communities.

# Shaping Spaces

Jonathan Quek & Koh Kai Li

RT+Q Architects  
Singapore



Stacked Up House, Singapore



House with Two Faces, Singapore

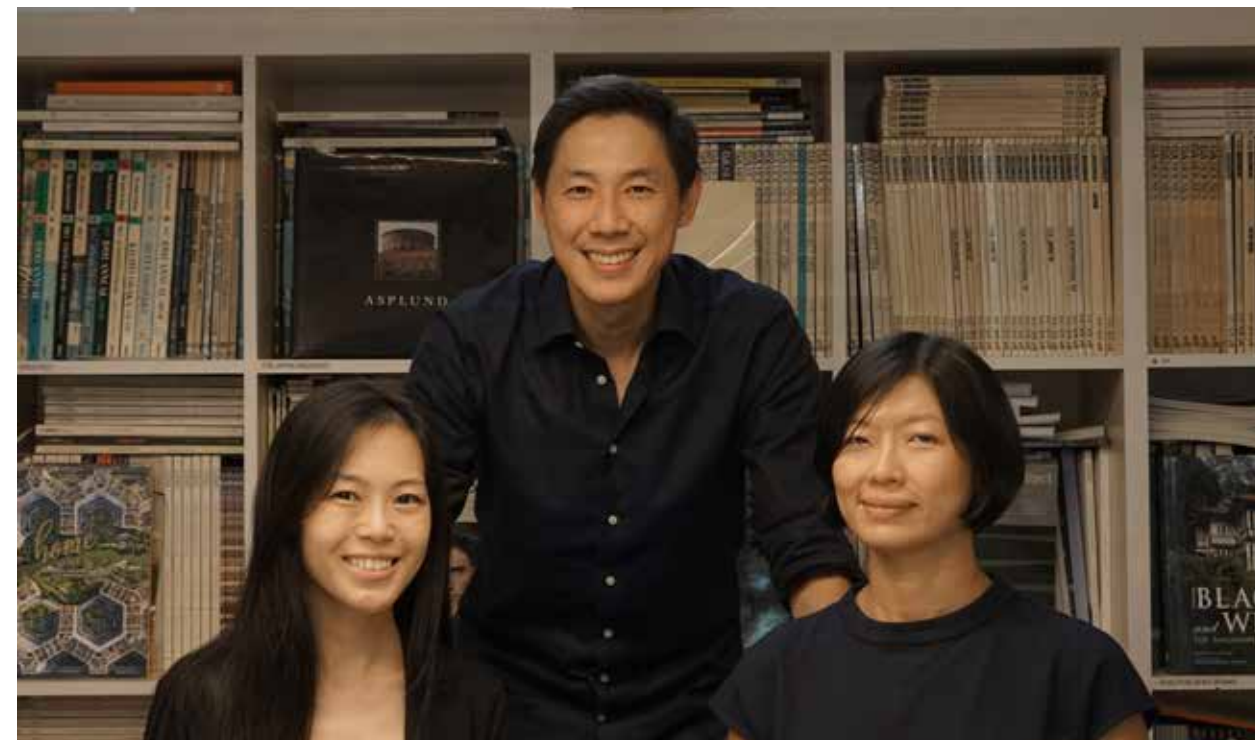
Guided by Vitruvian principles, RT+Q Architects' works are embedded in the timeless philosophies of good proportions, composition and scale. In recent years, this has expanded beyond the traditional field of architecture, in projects of different scales and permanence, such as stage design, bus stops, and even tombstones. Shaping Spaces discusses this exploration of architecture as an interdisciplinary craft through three distinct approaches to create lasting spaces and memories: Architectural makeover, Liberated plan and section, and Variations on a Theme.



## Bio

**Jonathan Quek** is a Director at RT+Q Architects. After having earned his education at Carnegie Mellon University and Columbia University, he returned to Singapore to join the firm in 2006. He has led numerous local and international award-winning projects including The Fennel Apartments which was shortlisted for the World Architecture Festival in 2018. He was selected in the Third instalment of the "20 under 45" Awards in 2017.

**Koh Kai Li** is an Associate at RT+Q Architects. She was the project architect for the House with Bridges which won the SIA Architectural Design Awards in 2015. She has lectured on the works of RT+Q locally and abroad and represented the firm as a judge at the 2017 Inside Festival in Berlin. Apart from architecture, she has a deep interest in music and finds inspiration in the simple things in life.



Top: Koh Kai Li, Jonathan Quek and Sock Mui

## Interview

**Describe RT+Q's design philosophy.**

We strive to create beautiful spaces that inspire and elevate the human experience. This is based on our design core values of scale, proportion and hierarchy. We approach design based on these ethos, whilst having a counter-intuitive design approach to keep the work fresh and unexpected.

**What is your greatest source of inspiration?**

We have always looked to the Modern masters such as Le Corbusier, Mies Van der Rohe and Louis Kahn for the richness of their repertoire, the endurance of their ideas and the poetry of their spaces.

Besides creating and organising a travelling exhibition of 121 built and unbuilt models of Le Corbusier's work, we are also teaching a Le Corbusier focused studio at SUTD this semester and bringing the students to his seminal works in France over the summer.

**What are the biggest challenges Singapore is facing? How should architects tackle them?**

As we are all well aware, the cost of construction has risen significantly since the pandemic and Ukraine war. We should focus on the more important, timeless aspects of design such as scale and proportion and less on accessorial or opulent aspects. Good design is not necessarily correlated to high cost.

**If you could give one piece of advice to young architects, what would it be?**

As a profession, enjoy the grind and take each challenge in the positive spirit as an opportunity to improve and learn.

As a designer, "don't think like an architect" and take a counterintuitive approach to arrive at the solution, allowing the unexpected to emerge, and challenge the norm.



# Hybrid Indonesian Architecture

Realrich Sjarief  
Principal Architect, RAW Architecture  
Indonesia



RAW Architecture is a ground-breaking design studio comprising of architects, thinkers and craftsmen. It serves at the core of the ecosystem of sustainable design and practice in Indonesia. Founded in 2011, RAW builds on the long history of craftsmanship in the Sjarief family of builders across three generations and over 60 years of practice since Indonesia's independence.

Led by Realrich Sjarief, RAW is active in designing residential buildings with interest in locality and craftsmanship resulting in an architecture that is simple, humble, yet transcendent. The intent of the studio is to preserve local craftsmanship and techniques while innovating in a current context.

He elaborates on the study and transformation of vernacular and traditional roots in the creation of a Hybrid Indonesian Architecture. Architects have territory, cultures, political and economic systems, built from vernacular tectonics, method (Design-Thinking), and craftsmanship (Design Making). The hybridisation of these systems can inform the development of a new approach to architecture, one that is deeply rooted in the rich understanding

of local crafts and contexts. This paves the way for a process of 'Decolonisation'; marking a "cultural, psychological, and economic freedom" practised by humanity to achieve Indigenous Sovereignty – the right and ability of architects to practise self-determination through collaborations with society.

## Bio

**Realrich Sjarief** was born and raised in Surabaya, Indonesia. He obtained his Bachelor of Architecture from Bandung Institute of Technology and Master of Urban Design and Development from the University of New South Wales. He has worked for Norman Foster in London before moving to Jakarta to set up his practice.



Watch the talk



Left: Realrich Sjarief  
Opposite page: Guha, a multipurpose extension of RAW  
Architecture studio, Jakarta, Indonesia

## Interview

### What is your design philosophy?

I believe that architecture is for all of the people, rich and poor. They have different techniques to execute and different tectonics as outcome. My design philosophy is to adapt material uniqueness on each facet of projects that is the beginning of bricolage.

Bricolage is a method that is a design approach to unify craft grammar, method grammar, and tectonic Grammar to create harmonious entities as a design method. This concept of reality explores how architecture should optimise local resources, integrate building technology, and adapt the implementation method, which builds the structure of local genius. It is not limited to the debate of how we should preserve the form of traditional or modern architecture. Still, it discusses the evolution of future architecture with the spirit of contemporary architecture by introducing a model of craftsmanship – a total adaptation of craftspeople, architects, builders, and clients into one holistic ecosystem.

### You blend old-world local craftsmanship with new-world technology in your designs. Why is it important to preserve craftsmanship skills in architecture?

It is easier in Indonesia due to its richness in craftsmanship. One important key is to evaluate and blend local craftsmanship with new technology which I call bricolage. In the first 10 years of my practice, I collected these pieces and referenced them as tectonic Grammar. Tectonic is defined as building or construction in architecture. According to Kenneth Frampton, Tectonic is defined as the poetry of structure. My father, Mangunwijaya, extended this meaning by collaborating with craftsmen and understanding the logic of grammars, so did my grandfather. They are great builders who are able to penetrate the boundary

of method and implementation, so why don't I start from what's around me?

### Your work involves a lot of experimentation with locally-sourced materials, especially bamboo. Why choose bamboo? What kind of projects are suitable for bamboo and how long do they last?

I don't limit our materiality to any certain type of material. I can work with bamboo, steel, concrete, plastic and so on, choosing only the appropriate material based on each specific project. Our project is analysed by certain constraints and to bring the beauty of available materials on each project.

I like bamboo for its strength, flexibility and its natural fibers. But the image of bamboo as poor man's timber has been around since the beginning of 1900s in Indonesia due to a plague caused by rodents infesting its tubular hole. With technology, that problem is solved. I believe bamboo lasts as long as we want, but we need to take care of its outer skin and inner core, protecting it from sunlight and water.

I have seen some of my father's work using natural fibre lasting for more than 30 years now. He applied a protection layer on the surface of the material. In the inside, we need to have selections of appropriate sources by timing the cut during the dry season and applying preservatives before using it for construction. We also tried a third technique which I call a hybrid technique - combining bamboo gradually in each stage of construction using a combination of brick, steel, and various materials depending on the specific form. It is a bricolage of materials, I believe that's when the richness of tectonics is met by understanding the deep technique of architecture design.



# Adaptive Re-Use

Tiah Nan Chyuan  
Director, FARM  
Singapore



FARM is a multidisciplinary design firm that riffs between architecture, branding and industrial design, shaped by a culture of curiosity and imagination. Over the years, the practice has grown from a society organising community events like ROJAK to a design practice that is working across different territories, domains and typologies. By creating meaningful dialogues across industries and gathering vertical expertise in design processes, FARM is continuously looking for new ways of thinking and working to project new possibilities, and how spaces can be drivers of change.

Tiah is at the vanguard of a generation of designers devoted to the preservation and sympathetic rejuvenation of living spaces in land-scarce Singapore. He shares one of his memorable projects, the Great Madras hotel located in the charming and vibrant pocket of Singapore, Little India.

Architecture, interior and story telling are woven together to create something more than the sum of its parts for this stylish boutique hotel. FARM transformed the art deco building into more than just a pleasant stay, but as a place that adds vibrancy to the neighbourhood and offers a memorable persona where stories and anecdotes could collect over time.

## Bio

**Tiah Nan Chyuan** is a Director at FARM, a cross-disciplinary design practice that won the President's Design Award Design of the Year in 2010 and was featured in Wallpaper's Architects' Directory 2018.

Tiah was also recognised as one of Singapore's emerging architects in URA's third edition of "20 Under 45" exhibition. He is currently the Honorary Secretary at the Singapore Institute of Architects.



Opposite page: The Great Madras hotel, Little India, Singapore  
Right: Tiah Nan Chyuan

## Interview

**What are your thoughts on the future of conserving Singapore's built heritage? Why is it important to fight for conservation?**

I am of the position that we need to think beyond conservation. We often see the fight for conservation as a single goalpost. I feel we need to be equally passionate about the next step. HOW do we ensure the conserved building is properly restored / developed / enhanced and integrated into the future of our city, HOW do we change the mindset of the public towards our built heritage? There are a wide range of design, construction, programming and management expertise that need to be layered on to ensure a good outcome for any conservation projects. Architects cannot do this alone. It is important we include owners, investors, operators, contractors, tenants, stakeholders and the general public etc in this process. Once the ecosystem is established and the cultural awareness is heightened, we will then have a sustainable future of our built heritage regardless of the conservation status of buildings. In an ideal world, we will not be looking to the government to tell us which building is worth conserving. There will be a general awareness on what is important to us. I think architects have an important role to play for us to get there.

**How has FARM's cross disciplinary design practice opened up new possibilities in finding creative design solutions for heritage projects that the firm has worked on such as The Great Madras hotel?**

Coming from the customer point of view, we often cannot tell what each design discipline is responsible for. We understand a hotel stay as a holistic experience. From the point of booking the hotel on the website, to the arrival, to the stay, the shower and the bed. A brand promised has been made at the point of booking and hopefully delivered beyond the expectations of the customer during the stay. Working across different disciplines, we can tweak, adjust, compensate or add the different touchpoints and hopefully deliver a unique experience to each guest.

**If you could share one piece of advice to young designers about adaptive re-use, what would it be?**

Enter the project with an open mind and work with what is there. Find opportunities to construct a narrative around the existing that is compelling, contradictory and layered.



# Adaptive Re-Use

**Adrian Lai**

Founder, META Architecture  
Singapore

The team at META Architecture are professed hyper contextualists, seeking to unearth the deep structures of extant context and layered histories as diagrams to project forward from. Instead of uniqueness and novelty, the design firm spends a lot of time on the inclusive frameworks of originality and authenticity, which revolve around and project from a search for origins, consistency and resonance. These frameworks incorporate future uses and their clients' aspirations and needs, with an essential premise and existing concerns in meaningful ways.

As a practice, they are interested in spatial structure and its experience, in cultural production as much as the culture of its production, and in significance beyond signification.

The rejuvenated Khong Guan Building is an example where the project has found its own life beyond the built boundaries. A stark contrast to the cohering heritage-listed Khong Guan Biscuit Factory, it expands popular imagination and critical discussions – it pops up in conversations related to local Singaporean efforts at continual historical development, in Insta-stories and the many popular social media channels.

## Bio

**Adrian Lai** is a registered Architect in the UK and Singapore. His education and practical training has taken him to London, Hong Kong and Guangzhou in China and back to Singapore in 2008. He runs Meta Architecture and holds the appointment of Adjunct Assistant Professor at the NUS. He hopes to be able to continue to contribute as a representative of small practices seeking design excellence and professional standards in Singapore and abroad.



Top: Khong Guan Building, Singapore



## Interview

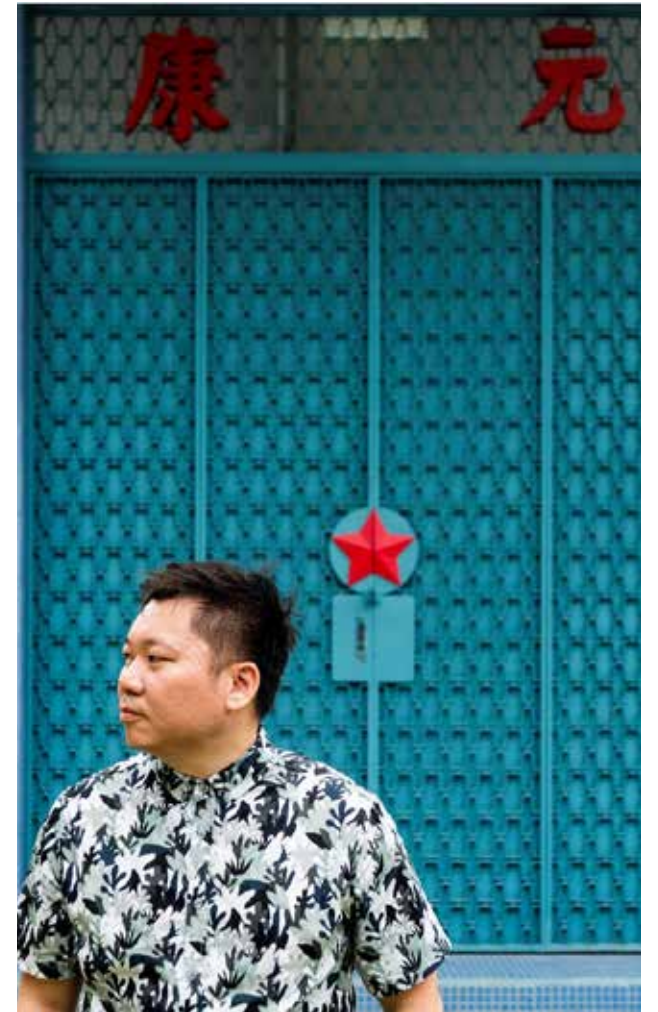
**What are your thoughts on the future of conserving Singapore's built heritage? Why is it important to fight for conservation?**

A society is bound together by the tapestry of stories that we keep telling each other. Our Built Heritage are the backdrops to the events that shaped us and are thus, places of historical significance. They are also the material artefacts that directly link the present with the past, giving the ephemeral words physical anchors in experience - a conduit to emotions and emotional connections. While not all events are historic, it is the diversity of stories - from official accounts to myths that become folklore, that binds people of all stripes together. Conservation of our built heritage and the unearthing of their stories is nourishment for the cultivation of a society.

Sustainability of any sort depends on continuities. Especially for a young country, the cultural and historical continuities that we must strive for should stand alongside the drive for resources and energy sustainability.

**Please elaborate on the "Adaptive Enhancement" framework that META adopts while working on heritage projects such as the Khong Guan building.**

Meta Architecture refers to Adaptive Enhancement projects in response to the oft tabled choice between conservation and development. That would be the case if buildings were either destroyed to make way for the new, or for the existing to be kept and new uses fitted in - both being seen as mutually exclusive but also a compromised solution in either case. Instead, we look at existing buildings and structures as repositories of stories and also as embodied carbon that should not be mismanaged by its removal by default. These structures are the opposite of the blank canvas and could form the actual building fabric to build upon. By doing so, we turn the stance of adaptive re-use - with its seeming assumption of some form of compromised use to a design approach that looks to enhance existing opportunities or qualities. And when we do that and look for the inherent good in all aspects of the existing original - the embedded carbon, the prevailing structural strength, the spatial character, the building features, we are able to imagine possibilities that enhance land value, enable possible future uses and are integrated with the retained original building, to not just extend but to give the city's urban fabric a truly worthy new life.



Top: Adrian Lai

**If you could share one piece of advice to young designers about adaptive re-use, what would it be?**

Appreciation is a useful and healthy attitude to take as a mode of inquiry and as a critical stance. To be curious, to understand the underlying ambitions and the choices made in the materialisation of the idea in order to evaluate its successfulness in achieving its intended effects and exploiting any unintended consequences in that context, is harder to do than to just criticise each work by looking for its shortcomings. But in doing the former, not only do we take away a lot of the negativity associated with being critical, we also gain as architects learning from the fruits of our fellow architects' journeys. It is also the seed of our approach of 'Enhancement' - to always make what you find in front of you better.



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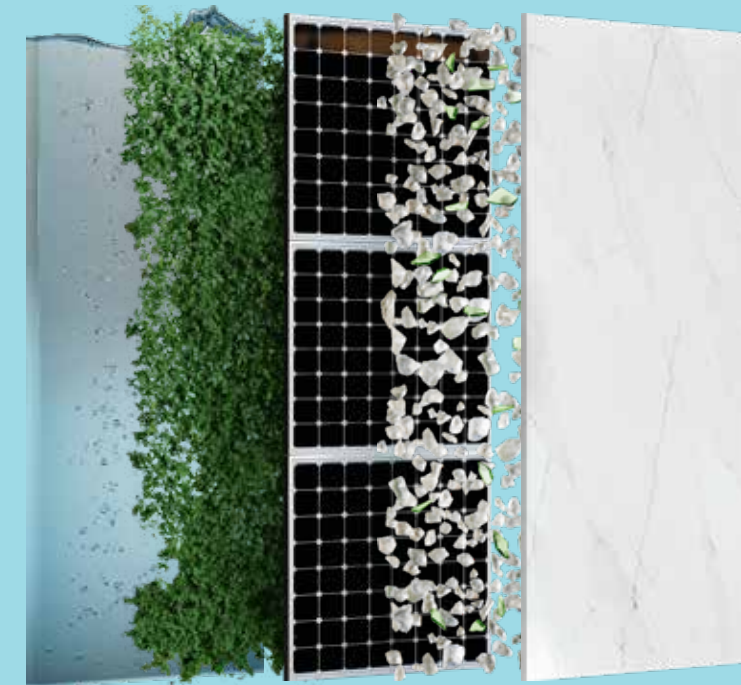
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