Media Release | Annex A
PRESIDENT’S DESIGN AWARD 2015 RECIPIENTS

Designer of the Year

1 Dr Colin K. Okashimo
   Sculptor & Landscape Architect
   Colin K Okashimo and Associates

2 Franklin Po Sui Seng
   Principal
   Tierra Design (S) Pte Ltd

3 Siew Man Kok
   Chairman and Founding Director
   MKPL Architects Pte Ltd
Design of the Year

1 AIR+ Smart Mask and Micro-Ventilator
   Innosparks Pte Ltd (A subsidiary of ST Engineering)
   Jerome Lee and Team

   In collaboration with

   STUCK Design Pte Ltd
   Donn Koh and Team

2 Architect’s Office at Kim Yam Road
   Park + Associates Pte Ltd
   Lim Koon Park and Team

3 Deck – People, Place, Photography
   LAUD Architects Pte Ltd
   Ho Tzu Yin and Team

4 Dita, The Answer Earphones
   Project Perfection Pte Ltd (Dita Audio)
   Danny Tan and Team

5 Fugue 1, 3, 5, 7 - Archifest Pavilion 2014
   HCF and Associates
   Fong Hoo Cheong and Team

6 Library @ Orchard
   Singapore Polytechnic
   Gareth Lai and Team

   Design Collaborators:
   DIA Group Pte Ltd
   Nigel Smith and Team
   National Library Board
   Cheong May Fong and Team
   New Space Architects Pte Ltd
   Kevin Sim
7 National Gallery Singapore
Studio Milou Singapore Pte Ltd
Jean-François Milou and Team

CPG Consultants Pte Ltd
Lee Soo Khoong and Team

8 Pour
Hans Tan Studio
Hans Tan and Team

9 Prologue Collection
Outofstock Pte Ltd
Gustavo Maggio and Team

10 RUBBISH FAMzine Series
Kinetic Singapore
Pann Lim

In collaboration with

Holycrap.sg
Claire Lim
Renn Lim
Aira Lim
Pann Lim

11 Sunray Woodcraft Construction Headquarters
DP Architects Pte Ltd
Angelene Chan and Team

12 The Caterpillar’s Cove Child Development and Study Centre
Lekker Architects Pte Ltd
Ong Ker-Shing
Joshua Comaroff and Team

13 The Oliv
W Architects Pte Ltd
Mok Wei Wei and Team
There is a pragmatic side to the discipline of design that requires the final product to have function, efficiency, even aesthetics. But these features of design are not the primary concern of landscape architect/sculptor Dr Colin Katsumi Okashimo, a Canadian of Japanese descent. “Design needs to be thought provoking. It should have a deeper cause embedded into it since it cannot simply be about solving problems. It needs to question things at a higher level,” he says.

Over the years, Colin has designed some intriguing landscapes for hospitality and residential projects across Asia. In recent times, he is known as much for his site-specific sculptures as he is for his landscape architecture. Indeed, when the project permits, art and landscape architecture become one for him. He has achieved this unified state only through a rigorous process that has become the focus of his work over the last two decades. “I have figured out a way to amalgamate sculpture and design through a strong research narrative that speaks about the unique aspect of its location,” he explains.

One recent project that exemplifies this work process is Five Stones, a residential development in Kuala Lumpur. Like most projects of this type, the developer was concerned with maximising the investment potential of the site with high-rise, high-density tower blocks.

When Colin’s research-based firm Colin K Okashimo and Associates secured the project, he convinced the client that the development needed a communal space as its focus. The task was daunting because as any condominium dweller will attest, social interaction at the community level is rare once residents cross the threshold and enter the privacy of their homes.

However, Colin’s research into the meaning of community spirit in the Malaysian context elicited the notion of “play” as a unifying factor. In particular, he examined the children’s game of five stones. This game inspired sculptures with organic forms made of stone, and added a dimension of interactivity to the space by allowing residents to use them as outdoor furniture.

“The idea was to get people to slow down,” Colin says. And the residents of Five Stones
do just that, he is glad to report, at least around the sculptures. This reduction in speed aligns with Colin’s perception of his landscape interventions as “provoking calm”.

And if the space appears to have a meditative quality, it is probably because every project he designs begins with an on-site ritual of pre-dawn meditation. Explaining this unusual aspect of his design process, he says, “I want to feel the nuances of the site at an intuitive level, without preconceptions, to understand it as it really is, with the creative ideas drawn from the very site itself.”

Calmness in a space is a quality that Colin was not always able to achieve, at least at the beginning of his career. After rising to the top of the corporate world of landscape architecture as chairman and managing director of Belt Collins International, he decided, at the age of 38, to go back to school. “I was taking the business side of work too seriously,” he recalls. So he enrolled himself in the Chelsea School of Fine Arts and Design in London.

Initially, Colin went back to school with the purpose of finding a way to differentiate himself from other landscape architects. But he soon found the practice of art all-consuming, forced, as he was, to look deep within himself to create meaningful work. It was then that he had an epiphany. He realised that the landscape architecture he had been practising for the previous 14 years “may have met functional requirements, but it was not enriching people’s lives in terms of how they might relate to have a meaningful and memorable experience”.

After graduating with an MA in Fine Art in 1996, he decided to set up his own practice in Singapore. With a new *raison d’etre*, he had to find a different kind of client too. “What I wanted to do was not what a lot of clients wanted,” he recalls.

Fortunately, there were clients who understood his intentions. He began working, at first, on small projects before moving on to much larger projects including resort master planning in Mauritius and Seychelles. He was able to do this after convincing clients that his approach to landscape architecture was more than choosing materials and making allusions to the local context. “If there is no cultural reference, then it’s just another foreign project. That differentiation is what we strive to achieve,” he would tell his clients.

To contextualise each design, Colin would go so far as researching a site’s geological make-up. For the Ephelia Resort in Seychelles, for example, he took the site’s unique geological condition known as a tombolo – where swirling sea currents form a natural bridge between two islands – and used it to generate the resort’s “eddies of contemplation”, a dynamic landscape inspired by the sea’s movements over centuries. Increasingly, Colin’s method to art and design is to take a phenomenological approach
which he describes as “a way of seeing things as they really are”. He researched this notion for his PhD thesis titled “Art as Contemplative Place with Reference to the Sited Works of [Japanese-American artist] Isamu Noguchi” in 2007 at London’s University of Arts. In particular, he is interested in the notion of “phenomenological disclosure” as espoused by David Seamon of Kansas State University, Department of Architecture. The results of his endeavours over the years have also been published in his book “Provoking Calm: The Artworks of Colin K. Okashimo”.

A project is successful when there is clarity within the design and the viewer is provoked into a calm but contemplative state. In that way, he hopes each project transcends landscape architecture and the site becomes, through the personal experience of the user and the power of memory, a “place”. This is the “aha” moment, says Colin, where the design reveals itself and its many layers slowly over time.

Jury Citation

Dr Colin Katsumi Okashimo’s exceptional career spans over 33 years, during which time he has built a reputation for designing outdoor places of contemplation. He represents a new level in the maturity of design in Singapore and the region. As an antidote to the hectic pace of life in cities today, he introduces us to a process that can be best described as “Slow Design”, a movement like “Slow Food” and “Slow Cities” that shifts our value system from quantity to quality.

“Slow” does not mean a glacial pace of development. Instead, the key to Colin’s successful work lies in a refined attempt to introduce feeling and a deeper meaning to design. He strives to introduce every person who engages with the space, an experience of “provocative calm”. He describes the ideal client as one who deeply understands the meaning of the place they are activating. He is particularly inspired by the insight that is achieved through meditation and through the value of experiential research.

This inspiration allows Colin to develop an “absence of distractions”, to not over-intellectualise the programme, but to learn from it. The architect Louis Kahn would describe the idea as “becoming what it wants to be”. In the same way, Colin creates content with memory and meaning, space and experience to find a path that unifies the body with mind and spirit.
Designer of the Year

2 Franklin Po Sui Seng
Principal
Tierra Design (S) Pte Ltd

For the work they do, designers do not always get the credit they deserve. Franklin Po Sui Seng insists this should not distract them from creating good design. “Passion must be the driving force behind one’s work,” he says, “regardless of whether we get the recognition or not, there is a much bigger picture: that of ensuring that the design benefits a greater whole”.

As chairman of Tierra Design, a holistic and integrative landscape architecture practice, Franklin acknowledges that this concept is challenging to attain.

He started practising landscape architecture in Singapore at a time when the idea of landscaping meant little more than planting a few evergreens and laying the turf. Well aware of the higher status accorded to architects and engineers, he has, in the last 20 years, helped to raise the standard of the profession by incorporating aspects of architecture and urban planning into a hybrid better known as urban design.

Urban design – a discipline he picked up whilst studying architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles – is integral to Tierra’s practice of landscape architecture. The Loft in Nassim Hill is one of many projects that weaves landscape elements into the overall design concept of a development. Varying lengths of vertical green strips 600mm wide were used as design motifs on a 40m-long granite-clad wall. These landscape elements help transform hard walls into garden walls, and changed the way external spaces are expressed. It was, Franklin recalls, the first time this result had been achieved in Singapore.

Over the years, Tierra has become one of the champions of urban vertical greening, designing intricate structures that allowed green walls to stretch 300m at Changi International Airport’s Terminal 3 or to rise seven indoor storeys at 158 Cecil Street.

Even with smaller commissions for private landed residences, Franklin has always consciously endeavoured to push the boundaries of landscape design beyond mere accessory or decoration. For a house in Morley Road, the swimming pool departs from the standard configuration to define how the house is experienced. There, the demarcation between interior and exterior spaces is effortlessly blurred, and the external walls of the house are clad in granite thereby becoming part of the garden.
Franklin cites Frank Lloyd Wright, Geoffrey Bawa and Luis Barragán as examples of architects who practised a contextual and holistic integrative approach. They inspired and influenced Franklin’s approach to landscape architecture and its relationship to the environment.

Franklin says that any house must be relevant to its context. “It must relate to the outdoors,” he says. “To achieve this state, landscape architecture must be part of the architecture at the point of conception.”

For Franklin, the landscape design for the Marina Barrage is a seminal example of Tierra’s portfolio of work. Initially conceived as a very large pumping station to manage the water levels within the new reservoir after construction of the Marina Barrage, URA rejected the initial utilitarian design and championed a complete review of the design concept with the consultant team. The outcome was a more innovative approach to the site with the functional components being “slipped” under a sloped green roof that formed an extension of the adjacent waterfront park.

The design was not only unique, it was an opportunity to create more parkland space. For example, covering the pump station building with green allowed for an increase in space proportionate to the footprint of the structure. The area displaced on the ground was literally lifted 15m, allowing it to be used as a viewing platform and recreational space that is accessible 24/7. Besides being the ideal venue to view Singapore’s skyline, it provides an unexpected form of recreation — kite flying, both by day and night — that, thanks to prevailing offshore winds, has become a favourite pastime.

Franklin freely admits he has never lost any of his idealism. In fact, studying and working in the United States between 1969 and 1993, he was exposed to many fields of academia including biology and botany as a pre-med student at the University of California, Irvine; then architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he also received a strong foundation in urban planning and design. In between, he attended many electives in fine art.

This early multi-disciplinary training has left its mark on his work, and still does. Not allowing himself to be restrained by complacency, he continues to explore and research biophilic design and carbon sequestration through aeroponics with the objective of taking his practice to the next level of professionalism. He is conscious about staying relevant to the needs of the end-user, reminding himself to always ask: “Have I made a difference in somebody’s life through the things I design?”
Jury Citation

Franklin Po Sui Seng’s work has been greatly influenced by the International Style. This is partly the result of having spent many years with the architecture masters who worked in California in the 1960s and 1970s. His multi-disciplinary path – beginning with studies in biology, botanical morphology before graduating to his studies in architecture – has informed his understanding of natural systems and holistic intersections. Inspired by the verticality of Singapore’s built landscape and by the progression of modern design, the mastery of his craft is infused with a bionomic sensitivity for humanity’s relationship with nature.

Throughout his career, Franklin’s landscape solutions have been informed by a profound rigour and acknowledgment of the architectural context. In particular, his special affinity with ecology, derived from his biology background and love for Ian McHarg’s work, has created a work style that is as astute as it is technically masterful. His portfolio of works is especially interesting for its interactive discourse on architecture, the urban setting and, in particular, an on-going search to give definition to the ideal of “Living in a Garden City”.

Designer of the Year

3 Siew Man Kok
Chairman and Founding Director
MKPL Architects Pte Ltd

Architect Siew Man Kok believes that design, good design in particular, must not only improve individual lives, it should also change the way a community or even entire societies live.

It was with this sense of social responsibility that Man Kok decided that he should participate in – and win – the Housing and Development Board (HDB) design competition for the Bidadari Estate.

“I wanted to find out the challenges in designing public housing and see whether we could contribute to improving the public housing environment,” says Man Kok, who is chairman of the 20-year-old firm, MKPL Architects.

Growing up in a kampong in Singapore, Man Kok, now 53, remembers happy times as a child playing in the yards with the neighbour’s ducks and catching insects. “It was a delight for me,” he recalls.

So, as an adult Singaporean, Man Kok understands what housing, in particular, public housing means to many people here. But whilst he acknowledges that the HDB is usually lauded for its policy of providing affordable housing, he adds that his experience with the Bidadari Estate shows that the HDB is always receptive to new approaches to public housing design.

A new park had already been previously planned for the estate, but Man Kok’s proposal was a paradigm shift – at least for the HDB and the other government agencies involved including the Land Transport Authority and the Public Utilities Board. Taking what he called the “artificiality” of the various “boundaries of authority” as a cue, he proposed locating the housing blocks within the park.

Challenging almost every extant public housing practice in the book, everything, including the building materials for the park and housing blocks were integrated. For instance, the road cutting through the estate was reconfigured to follow the natural terrain. This also allowed for the preservation of existing mature trees. A new community building was built over an arterial road so that it extended towards the lake and terminated just at the
water’s edge – this plan responded to Man Kok’s own question: “Why can’t anybody live in a park?”

From MKPL’s first projects, the architect has held the view that “psychologically, nature makes you feel good.” He always attempts to integrate architecture with nature, albeit in subtle ways. For a small development of semi-detached houses in Eastwood Drive, he tackled a long, narrow site by incorporating a courtyard house typology so that all the main living spaces look inwards to a courtyard filled with natural light.

It was, however, with a shophouse project at Cuff Road for the Singapore Gujarati Bhavan – where the building’s internal play of natural and artificial light is almost sublime – that MKPL’s reputation as an architecture firm of consequence was sealed.

The project brief was to design a clubhouse of sorts in a long building that had a narrow front and wide rear. While this is an auspicious configuration in Gujarati culture, Man Kok had to fulfil a challenging design programme which included a large hall and office spaces. His solution was to relegate the staircases to the narrow front of the building and create a sub-basement so that the hall could have a grand volume that belied the building’s low-key façade. By changing the floor and ceiling levels, Man Kok also created a new roof deck with strip skylights that wash the textured walls of the hall with natural light. In the evening, artificial light from the hall escapes through the roof to create a beacon effect. “It was an interesting duality,” Man Kok explains. “It was a ‘receiver’ of light in the day and a ‘giver’ of light at night.”

Man Kok has not always been quite so philosophical. After graduating from the National University of Singapore with a BArch (Hons), he worked for several years at a medium-sized architectural firm where he found himself running civic and institutional projects on his own. This was wonderful training for him but after six years, he realised he wasn’t “thinking about architecture with a capital ‘A’”. A classmate of his, Wong Mun Summ – the co-founder of WOHA who was working at Kerry Hill Architects at the time – showed him some drawings for a resort the firm was designing and Man Kok remembers being “blown away”. He quit his job soon after, telling himself that he “should be pursuing my own dreams about what good architecture is about”.

He has been on that journey ever since, though, of course, the pursuit of good architecture is far from over. Recently, for NParks, Man Kok turned what was initially a visitor centre into a thoughtful exploration of what living in the tropics can mean. Taking inspiration from the canopy of a rainforest, he created a porous roof so that rain perforates the roof just enough for visitors to experience a thunder storm, yet not enough to get soaked. In an unconventional, and some might say completely counter-intuitive
move, he also oriented the building to face the western sun. “We bravely embraced our climate,” he says.

Taken in context, the NParks project represents less a revolutionary act than another link in Man Kok’s commitment to achieve a new benchmark with each design. “I dread the day I cannot do something new.”

Jury Citation

Siew Man Kok is an accomplished architect who has worked on a wide spectrum of projects ranging from master planning, institutional and commercial projects, to public housing and private homes.

Throughout the different projects, he has demonstrated consistency in the exploration of a singular idea – embracing local climate and topicality. He is sensitive to the social, cultural and tropical context of his works, which he explores with passion, rigor and commitment. We see in the shophouse at 13 Cuff Road (Singapore Gujarati Bhavan), a new interpretation of the shophouse typology with finesse and maturity through the use of materiality and light. The HortPark Visitor Centre is a simple and clear representation of a pavilion through its refined detailing and elegant structure that pays homage to Singapore’s greenery.

Man Kok’s positive spirit brings people together. He contributes to the discourse of the important and relevant issues facing us today through his high quality architectural works. He is an active member of the architecture fraternity, and volunteers his expertise on numerous advisory and jury panels. The Jury recognises Man Kok’s commitment and architectural vision and his contribution to the architectural profession.
Design of the Year

1 AIR+ Smart Mask and Micro-Ventilator
Innosparks Pte Ltd (A subsidiary of ST Engineering)
Jerome Lee and Team

In collaboration with

STUCK Design Pte Ltd
Donn Koh and Team

The adage that necessity is the mother of invention holds true in the case of the AIR+ Smart Mask and Micro Ventilator.

Over the past decade, the increase in incidents of airborne diseases and air pollution, particularly in Southeast Asia, has resulted in a proliferation of face-masks. These masks are often ill-fitting, impractical and poorly designed, especially when used by young children. Improper fit results in leakage of polluted air into the masks. Even if the masks fit, trapped exhalations raise internal temperatures, moisture and carbon dioxide levels. Wearers are often forced to abandon the masks which leads to further exposure to air pollutants.

The team at Innosparks (a subsidiary of ST Engineering) researched the breathing patterns of individuals and the airflow dynamics that occur within masks when they are worn. The engineers measured the face sizes of Asian adults and children aged 7 years and older. The various shapes were modelled on computers and then run through mathematical simulations. Using state-of-the-art 3D printing technology, the team designed prototypes in varying shapes and sizes that could fit a wider range of face profiles. Once the most feasible mask designs were achieved, actual fit tests were conducted on adults and children. The result was a truly differentiated product that offers mask sizes in small, medium and large sizes to fit typical Asian face profiles.

When paired with the Micro Ventilator (the AIR+), the AIR+ Smart Mask eliminates the unpleasant build-up of heat, moisture and carbon dioxide after prolonged use that has hitherto bedeviled conventional masks. In every sense, this is a world’s first, and to bring the prototype to market, Innosparks engaged STUCK on the industrial design front to bring this innovative concept to life.

For Donn Koh, the lead industrial designer at STUCK, this meant not only brainstorming with Innosparks’ technical team to find solutions to functional challenges such as airflow
and heat dissipation, it also required the “simplification of the design to an optimum point where performance and functionality met and was hassle-free to use”.

The resulting ‘face-friendly’ shape and neutral look of the AIR+’s design minimises the social distance a mask creates. It also encourages the users’ willingness to protect themselves in polluted environments.

In keeping with STUCK’s creative philosophy, the user was always at the forefront throughout the design process. Donn says, “Good design occurs when there is no excess, but there is also no shortage. In this case, we were able to express our philosophy that technology and innovation should be logical, easy to understand and pleasurable to use. It should be designed for human beings. So, if the technology is not immediately obvious and the aesthetics appear subdued, that is precisely the point of the design approach of AIR+.”

Project lead Jerome Lee of Innosparks agrees, adding that “the AIR+ Smart Mask is innovation in action. We have arrived at an elegant solution to close the gap in today’s protective masks and make a difference in people’s lives.”

About the Designer

Driven by the desire to spark innovations and touch lives, Innosparks took on the engineering challenge of bringing to market the AIR+ Smart Mask which has, to date, reached many Singaporeans, especially the young and vulnerable elderly groups. The team was incubated within global engineering group, ST Engineering – a company hailed by Forbes as one of the world’s most innovative companies and one of Asia’s largest defence and engineering groups. With such antecedents, it’s no surprise that Innosparks has led the field in pioneering innovative engineering solutions that bring positive impact in everyday lives.

Overlaying this profound dedication to altruistic engineering is STUCK’s pursuit of aesthetic purity. In this regard, the President’s Design Award provides the ideal point of reference to which the industry and emerging creatives can aspire, especially when the result is one that so effectively harnesses the engineering and creative strengths as Innosparks and STUCK does with the AIR+ Smart Mask.

In the short space since its launch in March 2015, the AIR+ Smart Mask has been warmly embraced by Singaporeans. With community outreach and roadshows, families have experienced the superior fit and total comfort that the AIR+ Smart Mask brings, with the assurance of certified protection for their loved ones.
During the prolonged haze of September to October 2015, the AIR+ Smart Mask emerged as the preferred choice of protective masks among consumers. It also garnered rave reviews from top family bloggers and even earned a 5/5 rating from ST Digital Life.

“Reaching out to the community with the AIR+ Smart Mask is truly the culmination of one and a half years of product development. We are both an engineering company and a corporate citizen. We apply our expertise to meet the many needs faced by people in Singapore and the world. What we have developed is an example of how innovation, engineering and design can be put at the service of people for good,” says Jerome.

The success of the AIR+ Smart Mask is attributed the strength of the multidisciplinary team to synergise skill sets across different fields, the tenacity to leapfrog past conventional thinking, and the passion to develop a product that can truly impact lives.

**Jury Citation**

The AIR+ Smart Mask is truly an innovation brought to life through advanced engineering ingenuity and intuitive industrial design. The task was simple: to challenge the status quo by engineering a protective mask that delivers protection without compromising comfort. Users can choose from three mask sizes, as well as two types of detachable ventilators to suit individual requirements.

Lateral thinking, a spirit of invention and a rigorous design process informed every aspect of the design. The result is an utterly convincing product. The fact that it is a collaboration between Innosparks (a subsidiary of ST Engineering) and STUCK, a home-grown design practice, is all the more significant since the commercial possibility of this product has the potential to extend beyond Singapore.
When it came to designing its new office on Kim Yam Road for a staff of 60, it seemed only appropriate that Park + Associates should present itself the job. The self-vote of confidence has paid handsome dividends. The office design has secured many accolades, including the SIA Architectural Design Awards 2014, the International Design Award 2014, and the Architizer A + Awards 2015.

Part of the challenge for the project is that the 8,000 sq ft office space was originally the staff office and library of a 1960s school. This meant having to re-configure awkward spaces including a large, long corridor.

Luckily, the bones of the building were sturdy, beautifully proportioned and imbued with nostalgic architectural niceties, not least a sprawling column-free space crowned by barrel vaults.

Lim Koon Park, the lead architect on the project, says his team’s approach was predicated on a “reaction against the rigidity of the typical office”. This meant discarding conventional notions of an office, in favour of an experiential space that not only embodied Park + Associates’ approach to design, but also served to inspire the staff and visitors.

In that sense, Koon Park says the most challenging aspect of the design was figuring out “how to introduce distinct character and interest into a series of traditional office spaces without making them contrived or gimmicky”.

How does one create spaces that transcend visual interest and function? How should ‘space’ be transformed into a ‘place’ that holds meaning, and creates memory for the user? These questions persisted throughout the design process.

Perhaps the most dramatic expression of this approach is in the pantry. Traditionally a utilitarian space tucked away at the back of the house, Koon Park and his staff cleverly combined reception and pantry to create a mood-lit, glossy gallery that is part hipster café and part soigné bar.
There are other deft touches. The staff works in an expansive open-plan office where natural light streams in from high windows. The spines of the barrel arches are outlined in dramatic black slashes. A garden shed, sheathed with an exterior wall of hanging plants, reveals itself to be a small meeting room. A framed glass vitrine on the mezzanine level opens out over the rough-hewn corridor, itself transformed into a meeting space that leads out into a bijou green terrace.

That the Kim Yam office is good design goes without saying. Less obvious, but just as gratifying, is Koon Park’s insistence that a designer should be driven by the desire to make a positive difference to the perception of reality. “The motivation to pour one’s energy into design,” he says, “should be the gratification of the user.”

About the Designer

Lim Koon Park says that while we have good designs in all aspects of our lives in Singapore, there are still many more opportunities to push the envelope.

Since the NUS-and Bartlett-trained architect set up Park + Associates in 1999, he has cleaved closely to that mind-set, unveiling one after another, designs that are immaculate, considered, understated. Whether a hotel in Malaysia, a school in Singapore, or a mixed-use development in Cambodia, there are, inevitably, lush layers of textures and visual cues that surprise the visitor.

Much of Park + Associate’s success can be attributed to an abiding respect for the site, in understanding and harnessing not just its inherent strength and character as part of the final design, but also the palimpsest of the site’s genetic origins. In a city that is as aggressively progressive as Singapore, this last element adds an unexpected dimension to the projects.

“The rapid urbanisation of Singapore, which creates a modern but sanitised environment, exaggerates our need to remember the past,” Koon Park says, in explaining the rationale for the sensitivity with which he and his team transformed, but without losing the nostalgic charm, a mid-century school building into his firm’s modern office.

That said, whilst Koon Park is keen to create spaces that define a sense of place, he is also mindful that the design must also be rational.

Here lies the key to understanding Koon Park’s modus operandi. What makes him tick is this: Intrigued as he is by the romantic possibility of each site, every project, first and foremost, serves its uses.
Koon Park is also mindful that understanding the practicalities of good design should extend beyond the closed circle of architects and designers.

“I think that public education on design awareness is important,” he says. “A supportive and appreciative public audience is a big factor in encouraging the growth of local design talent.”

That is why the influence of the President’s Design Award is so important. “It furthers the push for design awareness. Having the endorsement of the highest office lends weight because it’s newsworthy and, hence, reaches a wider audience.”

**Jury Citation**

The vaulted ceiling, part of an existing structure in a former school built in the 1960s, is emphasised and punctuated with black steel forms. This makes for a remarkable office for architecture firm, Park + Associates. The design also establishes the firm’s signature design expression: specific, refined, elegant. The visitor is surprised by the unconventional sequence of spaces. One first enters into a chamber where the staff gathers or meets to share a meal – the intent emphasises the focus on community and the Singaporean love of food. In the studio beyond, the barrel-vaulted ceilings with up-lighting deliver a softly lit effect into the heart of the workspace to create a calm and serene setting.
When Gwen Lee and Jay Lau, co-founders of 2902 Gallery commissioned LAUD Architects to design a space for the 2014 Singapore International Photography Festival, they did not expect the result LAUD delivered.

For starters, the site for the Deck itself – a vacant block of state land in the vicinity of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and LASALLE College of the Arts – was physically unpromising, along with the limited budget and construction period. As the lease was for only two years, the structure also had to be temporary.

“The most difficult part of the design process,” says Ho Tzu Yin, “was the struggle to gain an insight that the Deck could or should be more than a photographic gallery. The solution was to stack 19 twenty-foot and forty-foot shipping containers into cascading terraces. The architects’ insistence on a low carbon footprint and minimal on-site construction (and deconstruction) time perfectly fits the Deck’s remit of a non-commercial, independent arts venue – specifically, a venue for staging photographic exhibitions, lectures and workshops.

“The shipping containers provide the advantages of lightweight volumes, structural integrity, mobility and modularity,” Tzu Yin explains. Both internal and external spaces remain exposed with no extraneous or decorative elements.

LAUD also realised the potential to design the Deck as a social and cultural events space; as well as the need to consider its place in the urban context, and how it can contribute to the surrounding streetscape. “We felt strongly that the Deck should not be an enclosed white box gallery,” says Tzu Yin, “but that it should present itself as a welcoming platform to support intimate, cultural and social events.”

For this reason, a blank party wall has been integrated into the Deck’s spatial boundary as an al fresco projection screen. The spaces between the containers become sheltered gathering spots and plaza for break-out discussions and performances.

For Tzu Yin, the Deck is a timely Singaporean case study on attuning the collective sensitivity towards cost effective construction in a city of high-density living and high building costs.
About the Designer

For Ho Tzu Yin, deputy managing director of LAUD Architects and lead designer on the Deck project, architecture is a lens through which one understands the wider world.

“Singapore, today, is truly at the crossroads of cultures, both east and west,” he says. “The mix of local cultures, living in a high density Asian city, the tropical climate, and having a Western architectural education allows us to create architecture that is truly unique to Singapore.”

This approach is especially evident in LAUD’s portfolio of churches, hotels, industrial buildings, condominiums, retail and office buildings that are located across the world from Hangzhou to Qatar. Light is always a consideration but its heat and glare are invariably filtered through strategically placed roofs, brises soleil, careful site orientation, and landscaping.

Good architecture, says Tzu Yin, must incorporate three aspects. First, it must appeal and communicate to the visitor through a conscious understanding and interpretation of its composite forms and volume. Secondly, it should fulfil its role as a social institution that supports the daily interactions of the occupants of the space. And lastly, it must offer a heightened sense of experience whereby a memorably designed space transcends the mundane quality of daily life.

When incorporated into a design, the effect of this philosophy is a sense of inclusion, of wanting to linger in a space or to explore. Since the Deck opened, it has energised the quiet stretch of Prinsep Street by attracting both visitors for events and curious neighbours.

A sense of community is important to Tzu Yin. It is a refrain that he is eager to project on to a larger stage, specifically Singapore’s design scene. “To push ourselves to the next level, we need more robust public discussion and critique on design, as well as a stronger sense of a design community that supports and gives feedback to one another.”

There is a push and pull to achieving this state, between a tendency to imitate other design traditions and a sense of place that grows with each graduating class of architects and designers. Nevertheless, Tzu Yin believes that these fundamentals are in place, with designers equally comfortable assimilating what they need from the global modernist, and at the same time, realising the importance of responding to the local sense.

“Perfection or Utopia is not a state or destination for design. Instead, design is a relentless pursuit of Utopia through the ages.” - Ho Tzu Yin
Jury Citation

This project uses de-commissioned shipping containers. These are not an unusual resource in the Jury’s view, but they have been developed with a skill rarely seen in temporary structures. The site is an “urban gap”, essentially a no-man’s-land. Deck is an architectural intervention with a lively vibe that actively links two neighbouring art schools. The interiors deliver dynamic spaces comprising galleries, a photography studio, and a resource library. The exterior is configured into multiple zones that further animate the overall structure. Overall, the project exudes a quality of space that few other temporary structures have achieved. Its very existence demonstrates innovation and resourcefulness in surmounting the problems of land scarcity and high leasing cost in Singapore. For its exceptional execution and clarity of vision, the Jury is unanimous in awarding Design of the Year to Deck.
Dita, The Answer Earphones, says Danny Tan, was conceived as a solution to the problem of personal spaces shrinking as a result of an increasingly crowded environment. “We wanted to expand the quality of an individual's personal space so that they could enjoy their music any time in any place. So, the brief we gave ourselves was simple: build the best device we can using the most advanced technics that is at once state of the art and simple to use.”

The team – which comprised Danny Tan, Desmond Tan and Darren Goh – took an engineering approach to the design. Getting the ergonomics right was a challenge, as was the machining of the components and material selection. The solution was found in breaking each problem down to its most minute detail. “This way,” says Danny, “we could get to the root of the problem.”

For instance, the designers insisted on using commonly available raw materials. “When used creatively, they can produce products that are best in class,” Danny explains. “It is also far easier to predict and control the manufacturing process. This, in turn, allows us to reduce unnecessary manufacturing costs.”

In the same vein, Dita, The Answer Earphones is engineered with standard multi-axis CNC machining and chemical etching to produce a consistent and durable finish.

The result is a high-fidelity earphone that is voiced with reference grade speakers to closely reproduce the tonality and dynamic impact of top-tier stereo systems. The design is packed with intuitive features, not least a tactile nub that enables left and right plugs to be easily identified in dimly lit settings like aircraft cabins, while the flight adaptor is custom-designed to work with most commercial passenger aircrafts and highlights the technical emphasis of the company.

Even the cables have been considered – not only are they weather-tested for heavy use in a tropical climate, they are oversized so as to be less prone to tangling.

What’s more, the main earphone body is flat and compact to keep the centre of gravity close to the ear. This design feature prevents the piece from losing its seal against the
ear canal that would result in marginal low frequency perception. The earpieces also stay securely in place so that the user is not constantly adjusting and fiddling with them.

These are design considerations – and there are many more – that result from patient dissection of engineering problems which, in turn, are solved by original analysis. The cause is also aided by a practicality that’s based on thorough research and canvassing of all available options.

“We wanted our products to be as easy to use as possible while also balancing certain specialist technical merits,” says Danny.

From the sounds of it, he and his team have certainly achieved that objective.

About the Designer

“Our design philosophy,” says Danny Tan, co-founder and managing director at Project Perfection, “is that a design has got to work the way it’s supposed to. Every time. All the time.”

It’s a philosophy that has stood Danny and his friend and Project Perfection co-founder Desmond Tan in good stead. Dita, The Answer Earphones – their most accomplished product to date – is a pair of sleek, smartly designed earphones that have won universal approval from audiophiles around the world.

It certainly helps that the creative and commercial synergies of the founders, both self-confessed audio and music geeks, are so striking – Danny trained as a mechanical engineer at the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University, while Desmond cut his teeth in grandfather’s high-end audio retail and distribution business.

Project Perfection was founded in 2012 with the objective of elevating the personal audio experience to “the n-th level”. This translates into a quest for no-nonsense designs that are “visually pleasing, emotionally captivating and musically satisfying”.

This explains why finding solutions is at the core of Project Perfection’s DNA. “I wasn’t schooled as a designer,” explains Danny who is also the company’s project lead. As a result, the creative and minimalistic approach he and his team take is informed by practical needs and a precise focus. “The best advice I have ever received came from design engineers. The human mind is almost limitless and there is always more than one way to solve a problem.”
It’s an approach that has helped the company expand into Shanghai to capitalise on the Mandarin-speaking market in the region, while its products are distributed across Southeast Asia, the Asia-Pacific Rim and Europe. The Singapore headquarters is housed in a fully equipped, modern factory where prototypes are built and tested in-house, alongside experiments into the visual and sonic appeal of products.

The company is bold in its determination to build “quality products that not only sound good, but are also designed to appeal as time-tested ‘legacy’ products and to continue to push the boundaries in the practical implementation of advanced technologies”.

In that respect, Danny is aware of the impact and recognition that come with securing the President’s Design Award. “The Award is a great platform for Singaporean designers to aspire to. It’s a local award that is at once internationally recognised and has street credibility. As a Singaporean, this is something I am honoured to be a part of.”

**Jury Citation**

The designer, Project Perfection, is commendably undaunted by the crowded market for earphones. Its design team has created a product that is not just meticulously designed and uncompromising in its detailing, it is also a worthy addition to this home-grown brand’s growing reputation.

The team’s passionate attention to detail is accompanied by a profound understanding of how technical and design details can enhance the user’s experience. This is evidenced by the choice of T6061 aluminium as the chassis for the speakers, the etching of the logo onto the housing, the angled nozzle for the earpiece, the thickness of the cables that lead from the housing, the step detail at the end of the plug, the nub detail on the left earphone, the sliding chin stop, and the output jack position in the aircraft adaptor.

All touch-points of the user experience have been considered, not least the oversized box that lays out the components in a beautifully graphic way, and the accompanying tote bag. Last but not least, judging by the effusive praise in consumer reviews and blogs, the all-important sound quality of the Dita, The Answer Earphones achieves the same level of excellence as the design.
Everyday objects have long inspired artists and architects. The idea for Jan Utzon’s design for the sails of his iconic Sydney Opera House, for instance, came from the sectional peel of an orange. But by any yardstick, HCF and Associates’ winning entry for Archifest 2014, the Singapore Institute of Architects’ annual architectural festival, was extraordinary.

“I wanted to make a monument of the everyday in the context of the intensely luxuriant,” says Fong Hoo Cheong. Certainly, it is a sentiment that resonated on every level.

For the steady flow of crowds that streamed through the twisting right-angled ribs of the Fugue 1, 3, 5, 7, it was easy to forget that the entire pavilion was constructed from plastic stools, the kind commonly found in coffee shops.

The logistics and budget for the construction of the Fugue were daunting. Working within an incredibly tight 10-day period, a team of architects, engineers and lighting consultants hand-assembled 3,885 stools into a translucent white pavilion stitched together with a red annex. A shimmering roof made of silver foil provided shade from the sun, while little fans, unobtrusively inserted into the “walls”, offered circulated air.

For the observer wandering within the pavilion, Marina Bay and the glistening skyscrapers of Raffles Place were visible through a porous, tessellated white and red prism. In the evenings, slender lighting rods lit the Fugue, causing it to glow like a lantern from the outside, and a futuristic cathedral from within.

But there was yet another dimension: sound. Pieces of “found sounds” were commissioned to play within the Fugue’s chambers, a subtle nod to the pavilion’s musical name.

By using plastic stools, Hoo Cheong turned a budget constraint into an artistic expression. Here, he was influenced by Marcel Duchamp’s predilection for objects that neither attracted nor repelled. “I wanted to make a disjunction between the object and the architectural space. The everyday plastic stool tells us one message, and the architecture tells us another. The observer is surprised by this disjunction.”
For Hoo Cheong, the pavilion was a whimsical piece that was up for only a fortnight before it was disassembled. “It was like a mayfly,” he says. “So real when ‘alive’, yet gone in a flash. I saw many wedding couples use the pavilion as a backdrop for their photos. In a small way, the building participated as a timeliness moment in someone’s life. I was very pleased with that as it completed the architecture of the design – two dualities, the everyday with the special occasion, the transient and the forever.”

About the Designer

Born, bred and educated in Singapore, Fong Hoo Cheong, founder partner of the boutique architectural firm HCF and Associates, is very much a man of his place.

“I’ve lived all my life here in Singapore,” he says simply. “I practise here and I run a practice that is, for all intents and purposes, grounded and sited entirely in Singapore. This makes me a physical expression of the habits of the nation and its culture in the sense that we are precise and mannered. We value studiousness and, by circumstance, we are definitely aware of our past even as we look towards the future. We are, at times, fearless.”

This detailed insight is a handy semaphore for HCF and Associates’ work. Indeed, Hoo Cheong readily admits that Fugue 1, 3, 5, 7 reflects a design philosophy that is “precise, multi-layered with multiple readings, studied, anchored in history yet contemporary, and different”.

All of which helps explain the breadth of HCF and Associates’ portfolio which ranges from boutique retail concepts to private residences, and architectural concepts to small-to medium-scaled complexes and masterplans.

Clearly, for Hoo Cheong and his team, scale is simply a matter of mind. Fugue 1, 3, 5, 7 manages to be both intimate and expansive at the same time, depending on the observer’s point of view. In the world according to HCF and Associates, what is important is being completely present in the moment and the site, so that the design can emerge organically.

“The best piece of design advice I ever received,” says Hoo Cheong, “is to let the site tell you what is needed and then to respond without hesitation.”

And if that response requires killing a few sacred cows, then so be it. “I don’t believe in any ‘golden rules’ about design. In fact, rules are malleable and can be broken.”
It’s an approach that Hoo Cheong is keen to pass on to the next generation. Since 2000, he has taught at his alma mater, the National University of Singapore as a studio master, and is currently adjunct associate professor lecturing on architecture and architectural pedagogy. On pushing Singapore’s design scene to the next level, he says, that requires a deeper understanding of the humanities from a young age. “We can’t have just lip service humanities education.”

Against this background of struggle to place architecture in its proper context, Hoo Cheong continues to fight the good fight, always alert for ways in which to become a better architect, to create better, more meaningful designs. From that perspective, he says the President’s Design Award is “a good way to celebrate design and designers in all their myriad forms. It is a kind of relief as well as a form of recognition. Another avenue of hope”.

**Jury Citation**

The common plastic stool, a quintessential seat of choice for coffee shops in Singapore, forms the core of the outstanding pavilion that was created for Archifest 2014. The use of this everyday object to form a festival space was an apt response to the festival theme of “Crowd”, a state in which no one is stronger than anyone else. The pavilion not only met the festival objectives of providing a venue in which to engage the crowds, it also emphasised the idea of reusing and repurposing. When the pavilion was eventually dismantled, the humble stool was liberated to its original use. The sounds of Singapore – of people talking, religious bells, traffic, construction – were woven into the installation to reflect the diversity of Singapore, as a secondary layer of experience.
Built on the theme “Design is for Everyone”, the library@orchard was conceived as a public library with a focus on design and applied arts. The intention was to create a new experience that blended the tactile quality of printed publications with the opportunities presented by new media.

Occupying two floors at Orchard Gateway on Orchard Road, the library@orchard responds to users’ needs by providing a spectrum of connections and experiences.

Upon entering the library at level 3 of Orchard Gateway, users are greeted by a digital wall that showcases a selection of design-themed videos, including feature films, animation shorts, and live-feeds from workshops in the library. The video wall also features a listing of library events and programmes.

The foyer is fitted with localiser sound domes that engage interested visitors without disturbing the other library users, whilst a contoured acoustic ceiling, ambient lighting, and natural bamboo flooring provide a soft and warm welcome.

The foyer leads into the centrepiece of the lower level, the “magazine wall”. The latter proposes a tidy yet accessible solution to organising periodicals, and forms a lively backdrop to the maker space “Make”, programme space “Imagine”, and the double volume amphitheatre “Share”. These are spaces deliberately carved out for people to come together, make things and share their common interests.

The journey continues up the stairs to the “Loft”, where users immerse themselves into a private world of books through a series of single hideaway seats, “Cocoons” and content-sharing platforms “Book Trees”.

Design Collaborators:
DIA Group Pte Ltd
Nigel Smith and Team
National Library Board
Cheong May Fong and Team
New Space Architects Pte Ltd
Kevin Sim
The overall design emerged from a study of library users and the community. Through the process of design thinking, a multitude of insights were distilled into the themes of Learn & Discover, Engage and Escape. All elements of the library were designed to achieve these outcomes. For example, the “Cocoons” were built for users to escape and the “Book Trees” to discover and engage with other users. Even the bookshelves were contoured to enhance the experience of escape and discovery.

Project leader Gareth Lai, a senior lecturer at the School of Architecture & the Built Environment, Singapore Polytechnic (SP), explains that “through the initial design process, we found that users really want to learn and discover through multiple platforms, from print to digital and visual resources. They also want to engage by actively creating and sharing user content, connecting with like-minded people, and moving beyond being passive borrowers of content. The library is also a place to escape by getting lost in time and other realities, both past and present”.

The designers’ aim was not to create a “wow” product. They wanted the design to address user needs. The gestures are therefore subtle rather than grandiose; the focus is on a seamless experience that delights rather than awes; and the tone, inclusive rather than exclusive.

Says Gareth, “We wanted to create useable spaces that people would be comfortable in, and that they would find pleasure and value in using.”

About the Designer

Designing by committee may seem counter-intuitive, but it can achieve great results – especially when that committee has a vested interest in the outcome. The National Library Board (NLB) and SP jointly designed library@orchard, the first public library project in Singapore that sought public feedback and suggestions for its design. The NLB, which wanted to learn how a library could evolve to be relevant in an age of social media and new technology, worked closely with SP’s Design-Thinking Team to develop unique spaces and features for the library. The latter was led by Gareth. “We have created a space where users not only acquire knowledge, but they are also actively engaged in sharing knowledge, creating content and forming communities with specific interests,” he says.

For library@orchard, the NLB-SP team combined design-thinking principles with the practical needs of library management to develop and conceptualise ideas. “We leveraged design thinking to engage as many users and other stakeholders as we could in the design process,” says Gareth. “In many ways, the new library is about developing
a deep empathy for the community, understanding contextual dimensions, and providing the designer’s unique response in terms of form.”

In the practice of design thinking, a holistic understanding of the users is harnessed to deliver a design of distinct experiences that uniquely meet their needs. This philosophy, overlaid with a strong commitment to engaging stakeholders, guided the team through the design process.

Some 30 students and lecturers from the SP Design-Thinking Team were involved in a process that included a prototype exhibition to fine-tune the design. Branding consultant DIA Brands, architectural consultant New Space Architects, lighting consultant LPA and contractor KJS Construction also made significant contributions to the project.

“The experience of designing library@orchard was a liberating one,” says Gareth, adding that harnessing the creative energies of a dynamic team of students and staff while distilling insights and contributions from the clients and stakeholders to create a coherent vision, resulted in a fresh perspective on how design and designers can evolve.

“Design is as much about creating solutions for real people as as it is about space, form and details,” Gareth concludes. “Involving people in the process is not a walk in the park, but it is worth the effort because in that crucible of myriad perspectives, constraints of resources, and the designer’s need for creative expression, something deep and meaningful is born.”

**Jury Citation**

library@orchard is a testament to the process and approach of the entire design team to define a library experience that is more relevant and accessible to the public. Designed around a community with a common interest, the library is a repository of design content including books, periodicals and other media. The space introduces us to a “lifestyle” touch-point as a respite from the Orchard Road activity. It offers refuge from the commercial pursuits to one of contemplation and exploration. The library features include new forms of engagement with materials, self-navigation and check-out counters, giving the user control over the library experience he or she desires.
The architectural symbiosis of the former City Hall and Supreme Court buildings into the new National Gallery Singapore required its architects, Studio Milou Singapore Pte Ltd and CPG Consultants Pte Ltd, to walk a very fine line between the radical transformation of the monuments’ identities and the exacting conservation of the buildings’ heritage.

The brief was simple: to return the monuments to the people of Singapore in the form of a welcoming, world-class art gallery that displays the world’s largest collection of Singaporean and South-east Asian art.

How the architects met that brief, however, was not so simple.

The National Gallery’s grandest statement is, paradoxically, its most subtle – a filigreed metallic veil that drapes over each building at the roof level to create a gentle but unbreakable union. From some angles, and depending on the skies, the veil resembles finely woven rattan or silken ikat. “This simple and sweeping gesture meant that interventions into each building are minimal so as to respect their architectural authenticity and character,” says Jean-François Milou.

Controlling the way natural light plays on the architecture and is filtered into the exhibition spaces was also a challenge, as was creating a basement concourse that links the building from below so that the facades are untouched. Less obvious but no less critical interventions required the insertion of a sophisticated infrastructure, including climate control, acoustics, storage facilities, computer and security systems. Together, Studio Milou and CPG worked with exacting measures to integrate them into the walls, roofs and floors so that they stayed out of sight. “We wanted visitors to focus on the architecture and the artwork with minimal technical distractions,” Jean-François says.

The architects add that given the historical importance of the original buildings and, indeed, the extant memories of them among the older generation, it was important that the design returned the buildings to Singaporeans in a way that was immediately recognisable, without losing the appreciation of their transformation. Jean-François notes,
“I wanted the design to be legible to visitors and, at the same time, to create a state-of-the-art international gallery that was entirely at ease with the historic buildings from which it had emerged.”

The achievements of Studio Milou and CPG cannot be overstated. From the limited palette of materials to the muted, but warm, colour scheme, the calm flows and the cohesion of the modern gallery spaces are overlaid with a sense of the past. And within this unified ensemble, neither detail nor concern for visitor comfort has been spared. Together, the architects have created a place that is at once spectacular and yet welcoming for people of all ages.

Jean-François says the design is also a deliberate reaction against the increasingly fragmented nature of contemporary life which he finds unfortunate because “it often leads to an atomisation of our feelings, our relations, our decisions. I feel architects have a role to play in providing unified and calm spaces where people can think and feel a sense of self”.

About the Designer

“My preferred notion of architecture,” says Jean-François Milou, managing director of Studio Milou Singapore Pte Ltd and the lead architect on the National Gallery Singapore project, “is one of landscape as a place where people can wander and think, dream and learn something about themselves in relation to where they are at that moment in time. The National Gallery reflects this approach."

Indeed, over the years, Studio Milou has carved out an enviable reputation for its sensitive approach to the design and adaptive reuse of museums and theatres including the Cherbourg Maritime Museum in Normandy, and the Carreau du Temple in Paris. In that regard, Jean-François found in CPG Consultants Pte Ltd and its Executive Vice President Lee Soo Khoong, the ideal collaborator; indeed, he has nothing but praise for CPG’s multi-disciplinary design capabilities and extensive experience in conservation and adaptive re-use projects. Under Soo Khoong’s direction, CPG brought to the collaboration an equally enviable track record, including many Singaporean landmarks and award-winning projects including the Asian Civilisations Museum, the Arts House at the Old Parliament, and the National Museum of Singapore.

In relation to Studio Milou’s general approach to architecture, Jean-François notes that the studio’s “projects in France and Singapore have always combined an elegant architectural gesture of great simplicity with a deep respect for conservation and the context of a site. I am not personally interested in architecture that competes with the surrounding buildings. Instead, I am always looking for an elegant solution to the problems
The architect also offers insights into the influence of life in Singapore on his design work. “In design, one of the gravest errors one can make is to listen to others. In life, it’s not listening. I’ve found the balance between these two positions elusive, but working in Singapore and adapting to the extraordinary attentiveness of the Singaporean people to all that is done and said around them has taught me a lot about how to balance my manner of listening.”

Jean-François is particularly aware of the honour and responsibility that came with the appointment to lead the project. In moving to live in Singapore for the entire duration of the project, he felt welcomed and entirely supported by his Singaporean team and partners. Among them, the close day-to-day collaboration and guidance from CPG and the client were, of course, key. These gestures of welcome, he says, “had a real effect in terms of reinforcing our confidence and dedication to the project and to Singapore as our host and adoptive home.”

This inclusion – itself an apt metaphor for his unifying design for the National Gallery Singapore – is reflected in his appreciation for the President’s Design Award which he says can only serve to motivate designers and act as an engine for engaging more public interest in architecture.

“It is important that, at the highest level of governance, real respect of this kind is given to the discipline. Though architecture is not the easiest career path, it plays such a central role in how we all live day by day, and the degree of comfort, safety and well-being we enjoy.”

**Jury Citation**

The transformation of the former Supreme Court and City Hall into the National Gallery Singapore displays great sensitivity and respect to its historical architectural fabric while meeting the exacting requirements of a major art institution.

The design’s key elements – an elegant new roofing structure and monumental basement concourse, unite the monuments from above and below, leaving the existing structures intact to the greatest extent possible while accommodating the new function of the art gallery. The tree-like structures supporting the new filigree metallic roof are a wonderful architectural gesture that is both spectacular and deeply respectful of the historical fabric. This newly created rooftop and the sky bridges in the atrium offer visitors to the gallery new vantage points to experience the architecture of the monuments. Underlying the visual simplicity of the design is the creation of a new identity.
The Jury commends the design for striking a balance between preservation and innovation that offers visitors new perspectives of both buildings and the surrounding cityscape.
Design of the Year

8 Pour
Hans Tan Studio
Hans Tan and team

Like every one of the works emerging from Hans Tan Studio, Pour defies categorisation. Commissioned as a new piece for The Alchemists exhibition at the 2015 Triennale di Milano, it is a circular side-table – but which table has ever been inspired, as Pour is, by the rainbow-layers of the lapis sagu cake?

The table comprises overlapping glossy circles of vivid yellow, turquoise, pink, sky blue and light green. At first glance, it resembles an Ishihara Plate Test. On closer inspection, it appears as if the colours are flowing up the table’s stem. At this stage, one is intrigued by the manufacturing process, and tries to unravel the technicalities without being distracted by the sunshine mood evoked by the colours.

It’s no surprise to learn that Pour is the result of five intensive months of investigating fabrication techniques and processes, and complicated experimentation with plastic resin-casting methods. Hans describes the table as simply “moulding without a mould”, made by casting the table surface upside down without any walls to hold in the liquid resin.

Aesthetics aside, what makes Pour an even more satisfying result from a technical standpoint is that Hans chose to work with a material he was completely unfamiliar with. “I didn’t know if the idea was even feasible.” Neither did the industry experts he consulted.

For Hans, the challenge mirrored an artisanal approach to production. He was forced to develop new craftsmanship techniques. Even more remarkable is that he and his team of two assistants were able to independently develop fillers that alter the viscosity of liquid resin and increase surface tension without losing its ‘pourability’.

With this new process in hand, Hans and his team set to work. Each colour was individually poured in progression with precise control over the curing periods for each pour. It was important that each colour did not mix with its ‘neighbour’ so as to create the multi-coloured effect within a single smooth surface.

The combination of the new fast curing system, steady hands and a lot of patience also meant that a surface tension was created that “puddles up” despite gravity on an open

Pour, says Hans, “pushed the material possibilities of epoxy resin. Although, in terms of utility, it functions as a side-table, conceptually, it communicates new ideas about materiality and production. I hope it opens up new perspectives toward material, object and craft”.

**About the Designer**

The landing page for Hans Tan’s website gives a hint of the designer’s subversive wit. It’s almost too easy to skim over the three innocuous looking lines: “Designs… plural noun… a secretive plot or scheme, often with hostile or selfish intents: He had designs on the chair.”

This playful thrust is a thread in the designer’s work. Everyday objects – many rooted in Southeast Asian design – are reimagined with restless imagination and cheerful glee.

“My work is often occupied with the authenticity of the contemporary design artefact being a deliberate gesticulation of material culture,” says Hans, who is also an assistant professor at National University of Singapore’s Division of Industrial Design.

And so, a tray is made of white nylon springs made from 3D imaging. The patterns on a traditional Peranakan teapot are perforated into individual dots that resemble a magnified Roy Lichtenstein print. A sequence of Singapore’s national lion symbol transforms an ordinary white plastic shopping bag into an eye-catching accessory. Each work provides a fresh perspective and brings a smile to one’s face.

This is not to imply that Hans’s work is without discipline. For all the apparent frivolity of the final product, he takes the task of design seriously, investing his work with impressive fundamentals. Every design is never produced for its own sake. Every finished product can actually be used. As Hans points out: “I see design as a medium, and I make use of its utility as a pretext to explore ideas.”

When asked what, or who, has influenced his design philosophy, his reply is as instructive for neophyte designers as it is remarkably nuanced: “The perceptiveness of Gaston Bachelard’s work on phenomenology; the lightness in Italo Calvino’s conceptual yet narrative approach to writing; and Georges Perec’s sheer wit in describing everyday life.”

In Han’s case, everyday life means the local Singaporean culture. “That’s always been a major influence on my work. I cannot imagine responding to the condition of being Singaporean without being in Singapore.”
This perspective has been hard-earned. His greatest mistakes have occurred when the value or potential of a design, or the complexity of the process is not recognised from the outset. This is a theme that runs through in his work and in his lectures. “The underlying principle of many of the pedagogical methods and strategies I develop are rooted in the idea that creating is ‘deforming the existing’, rather than ‘creating anew’.”

Given this sense of connection between time and place, it’s no surprise that Hans sets the value of the President’s Design Award so firmly within a local context. He is especially appreciative that “it has created a benchmark for design in Singapore, and places a seal of worth on design at a national level”.

Jury Citation

Hans Tan has turned the process of furniture-making on its head. The Pour table is literally that – a tabletop made of an agglomeration of poured resin puddles on a simple pedestal base. The meticulous and painstaking experiments of putting additives to resin, controlling the duration between pours to attain the required viscosity, and mixing dyes to achieve a visually pleasing palette of distinct puddles – all point to a process that is part chemistry, part “cake-making”. The process of casting without a mould creates a free-form table-top, albeit within controlled parameters. The result is surprising and beautiful: a lava flow of colours that have been frozen, defying gravity as the poured surface is then turned upside down to lay bare the production process. This adept deployment of an industrial material with an artisanal approach challenges our notions of production and craft. It is rare that a piece of furniture can open up conversations beyond the parameters of the project itself. With Pour, Hans does exactly that.
Outofstock designed Prologue, a 12-piece teakwood furniture collection, with a very specific market in mind: Japan. When the designers accepted the commission from the client Scanteak – which was trying to expand their retail presence in Japan – they were well aware that cultural and social norms played an important role in informing and influencing consumers. Both Outofstock and Scanteak were especially aware of the importance of research to uncover user insights before design ideation.

The key research took place in densely populated Tokyo, Osaka and Kobe with a myriad of houses, condominiums and public housing flats. Predominantly, space was scarce but the designers were keen to tap into the collective knowledge of adaptive living in the context of shrinking floorplans to reframe their design brief.

The designers asked: “How do we design furniture that transcends decreasing spatial boundaries? What are the attitudes of the Japanese consumers towards furniture? And how to influence their motivations to buy, use and maintain a chair or table?”

Through their research, Outofstock began to understand the cultural values and living rituals that drive the choices of Japanese consumers. Insightful observations were collected: A lady shared her childhood nostalgia through a wooden chair that her mother kept for her, aptly placed next to the wooden tricycle her son now uses. An elderly couple remembered a Danish dining table they had been using for 20 years; and portholes in the walls that allowed their cat to move freely between rooms.

Outofstock also trailed a Scanteak delivery truck for two days to get a glimpse into the homes behind closed doors. Outofstock spoke with the Scanteak’s Japanese showroom staff. Over time, everyone on the front end of retail observes the hidden needs and motivations behind a customer’s request. Bringing this intuitive knowledge to the drawing board was part of the design process.

The result of the research was the Prologue collection: teak furniture with a lightweight visual language and versatility in function. Teak, a luxury wood, is pared down and softened with upholstery and textiles in blue hues of blue. Wide armrests hold a cup of tea; coffee tables are raised just that bit higher to function as a work surface; benches pivot to orientate flexibly for dual spaces.
The Outofstock team continues to learn from feedback it receives to make further tweaks and edits. In so doing, they are reminded of Ushio-san – their translator and experienced employee of Scanteak – who shared his distillation of what furniture means to the Japanese. “The agriculture legacy of their forefathers has given them the perspective of a landowner. For them, the home is like a piece of land; his furniture, the crops that he takes good care of as they age with him. Furniture should accompany a person on his journey through life. A table of 20 years speaks of countless stories of family activities, whilst a chair shines with the lustre of age and use.”

About the Designer

With offices in Singapore, Barcelona and Buenos Aires, and projects across the world, the design collective, Outofstock couldn’t be more global. Yet, when it comes to design, its founders Sebastián Alberdi, Wendy Chua, Gustavo Maggio and Gabriel Tan understand that a single solution does not fit all. Indeed, for the designers, accommodating the needs of people of different cultures and diversity of circumstances in which they live will always supersede any preconceived notions of what design is, or should be.

This inclusive and respectful approach to design – and the belief that “it is not design that reflects one’s philosophy, but rather the way of living that imbues design with life’s philosophies” – has seen Outofstock’s rapid rise since it was established in 2006 to become an international design collective of considerable repute with clients such as Ligne Roset, Bolia, Environment, Industry+ and Scanteak.

Outofstock’s commission to design the centennial exhibition of Sori Yanagi in Singapore left visitors with an indelible mark. Yanagi, after all, championed “anonymous design” and devoted his life to designing utilitarian products and furniture for quotidian living. “That a designer can achieve such success and be humble and self-deprecating – despite the deep influence of his work on other designers – is nothing short of rare lucidity,” the designers say.

Interestingly, all four partners of Outofstock are adjunct faculty or visiting lecturers of design schools in Singapore, Spain, Mexico and the United States. And it is through teaching that they have concluded that “design is not a talent, but a sensibility”. These sensibilities, they add, cannot be pushed or incentivised because this would lead to quick, but short-term, success. Instead, Outofstock believes that a design sensibility must be nurtured. “Nurturing sensibilities is a generational process through education. Children are born with curiosity and a sense of wonder. With a little guidance, their creativity will naturally blossom. As an adult, one needs to ‘unlearn’ in order to learn and so it is more difficult – but not impossible – to transform otherwise closed mindsets.” Outofstock walks the talk. Its design sensibility is clearly rooted in a reverence for austerity
that necessitates a minimalist aesthetic that is present in most of their designs, stripped to the barest elements needed to hold up a table or chair. All that remains is the essence of eating at the table or sitting in the chair.

**Jury Citation**

Outofstock was commissioned by Singaporean manufacturer Scanteak to create a furniture range for the Japanese market. Before committing anything to paper, the principal designers decided to embark on an intensive research trip to Japan to study the country’s typologies, living spaces and cultural habits. Their home visits and interviews resulted in a human-centric furniture collection that is full of subtle, sensitive and insightful details. The flippable back-rest of the Duo Swivel Bench allows users to sit facing either the dining table or the living room simply by changing the direction of the back-rest. Equally ingenious is the angled shelf under the coffee table that provides storage withoutimpeding leg-room when the user is using the coffee-table as an impromptu work surface.
In the two short years since Holycrap launched the first issue of RUBBISH, the magazine has achieved a cult status as much for the quirkiness of the content, as for the extraordinary production values.

Each issue has a print run of just 300, but limited supply is not the reason for the popularity of the FAMzine (yes, the creativity extends even to the product category). The idea itself is an unusual one that appeals across age groups.

“We wanted to put all our unique family memories into print and use the whole creative process as a way to educate our kids about art, design, life and family bonding,” says Pann. “Our brief to ourselves was to document and bring across the idea that expression is a form of art and that it can manifest in many ways.”

Of course, the most obvious manifestation is the magazine’s name. “We called it RUBBISH because it is a common word we use frequently at home. It is a multi-purpose word as we can use it to tease, to scold or praise for example. It’s perfect for us as it is whimsical and nonsensical, very much like our family.”

Each bi-annual issue has the same 15 by 20cm format, but the packaging varies wildly. The first issue was sent out in, literally, a rubbish bag; the second in a vintage school folder; the third in a tarnished, battered biscuit tin.

The labour involved is daunting. Each issue takes between five and seven months to compete, from brainstorming, writing and layout to design, production and printing. Everything is handmade in the sense that photos are individually inserted by hand, containers individually sourced, and folders individually hand-weathered.
Each issue has its own challenges because, as Pann points out, “we make it a point to make every issue different, but, at the same time, without losing the essence and DNA of the FAMzine. We treasure the concept and ideas that go into every issue. This makes it difficult at times because what is beautiful might not be strong in idea and vice versa. So the art of curating what goes in becomes critical.”

But more than that, RUBBISH is a unique distillation of experience seen through the lens of what Pann calls our ‘rojak’ multi-cultural DNA. In other words, the magazine is very much a product of its place. “Living in Singapore has influenced us greatly in our stories for the ‘zine,” Pann says. “We are proud Singaporeans living in Singapore and we want to bring up our kids loving Singapore the way we do.”

**About the Designer and Collaborator**

If there is any lasting observation to be made about the Lim family, it is this: the family that designs together, stays together.

Pann Lim, his wife Claire, and their children Renn, 12, and Aira, 9, are the creative minds powering the family art collective, Holycrap – itself set up to share the family’s stories, document their explorations and experiences in a way that goes beyond the quotidian family scrap-book.

Holycrap’s headlining product, RUBBISH FAMzine, ticks all the boxes and more – a chaotic, lively, visually engaging bi-annual magazine filled with an equal mix of wit, nostalgia and high production values that has touched a chord with readers.

“We want the FAMzine to document and explore subjects, experiments, travels or other strange exploits that interest us as a family,” says Pann. “It should not come across as too contrived or clichéd.”

There is no danger of that happening. The creative values are too obvious. It certainly doesn’t hurt that the collective – a labour-intensive, family project run out of the Lims’ home – is led by Pann whose day job is creative director of Kinetic Singapore and who was also a laureate of the President’s Design Award 2013 for Designer of the Year.

What’s more, the family collective is exactly that. Everyone is involved. “Renn and Aira are full-time pupils,” says Claire, “so, the time schedule is always worked around their time-table. And Pann’s working hours are also very long, so we can only talk about our projects when we go out during the weekends, or when we are sending the kids to school. Even small pockets of free time in between our schedules are not left unused. We make use of any available time to make the project happen.”
“We are very fortunate that the four of us are in this together,” Pann adds. The whole family brainstorms, shares ideas and thoughts. Twice a year, our home becomes a factory line. It’s messy, but we wouldn’t have it any other way.”

There are also no grand overarching design philosophies, just what Pann calls “the simple truth of being honest to the idea, design, craft and story. That becomes our benchmark when looking at the hundreds of mock-ups we do for every issue”.

In some ways, this approach is homespun but it also perfectly embodies a group dynamic whose creativity is fresh and unfettered by pre-conceived dogma. “Every single day, we learn about design through conversations, books, movies, social media, friends, strangers,” says Claire. “But if there’s one thing we’ve learnt, it’s to stay hungry always to do good work, be positive. And always remember that love and family comes first.”

**Jury Citation**

RUBBISH FAMzine, a mash-up of “family” and “magazine”, is both a creative project and a passionate pursuit for the Lim family: a father and a mother – both designers – and their young son and daughter. It is original in concept, daring in design and detailed in execution. Three issues have been produced so far, each takes a different form: a travelogue of a family holiday in Tokyo; a file folder containing reproductions of vintage photos and love letters; and a traditional biscuit tin that’s used as a time capsule of sorts to hold a family’s memorabilia. The final expressions are as remarkable as they are surprising. RUBBISH FAMzine is, however, much more than a design project. It is an endeavour of two parents and their children to showcase a contemporary Singaporean family that is living life meaningfully, purposefully and creatively. It demonstrates and encourages familial bonding and values, tradition and heritage. Because the Lim family wears its heart on its sleeve in sharing with the reader (or viewer) its family life experiences, the narrative is first-hand and textured. Expressing the content through design enriches the stories. For its exceptional, inspiring and holistic design concept, the Jury is unanimous in awarding Design of the Year to the RUBBISH FAMzine series.
“One cannot deny the tropical climate in which we live,” says Angelene Chan by way of explaining the rationale for the design of the Sunray Woodcraft Construction headquarters. “This acute awareness of the forces of nature instils both a respect for, as well as fosters an innovative attitude towards, the mediation of the natural environment when shaping the built environment.”

The eight-storey headquarters for Sunray, one of Singapore’s largest interior builders for interior fit-out works, is among the first industrial buildings to be completed as part of the new International Furniture Hub in Sungei Kadut.

By actively listening to Sunray’s requirements and following up with research and creative thinking, Angelene says DP gained a “critical understanding of the issues. We were also able to distil with clarity the complexities of the brief and the programmatic requirements, and develop a cohesive design solution”.

The building’s stacked box design creates interconnected volumes that correspond to their interior functions. The factory production and warehouse spaces are clad in sunny yellow horizontal aluminium louvres (the use of yellow is a nod to the company’s corporate colour and name) that provide shade from sun and rain while letting in natural light and ventilation. Deep recesses are inserted between the boxed volumes to create intuitive points of entry and exit while allowing more light to penetrate.

Offices are clad in vertical aluminium louvres that provide both shade and views, while the concrete façade of the showroom creates, essentially, an enclosed box to retain controlled lighting conditions. Tucked away at the rear, away from workshop activities that generate noise and dust, the workers’ dormitory features vertical louvres with checkerboard apertures that let in natural ventilation and maintain privacy.

The most difficult part of the project, says Angelene, was to maximise efficiency and quality control. Because there are three separate groups of users – namely, showroom and office visitors, staff and workers – it was important to ensure a seamless flow of spaces, easily navigable volumes and efficiently planned areas for the movement of human traffic, materials and finished products.
For that reason, the building experience for each group was carefully considered. Contiguous floor space, for instance, between production zones and dormitory allow fast and easy access for workers.

Sunray’s new headquarters are, in the end, a perfect synthesis of DP’s preference for marrying design with the client’s demands. The building’s skin responds to the subjective needs of the interior spaces. “It’s a striking design statement,” Angelene concludes, “that embodies the efficiency and pride Sunray has in its craft. It raises the bar for similar developments in the surrounding Sungei Kadut area.”

About the Designer

When DP Architects was founded in 1967, Singapore was barely two years old and if the island-state can be said to have a recognisable urban silhouette today, it’s because so many of its buildings were completed by the firm. Suntec City, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Resorts World Sentosa and Singapore Sports Hub all bear DP’s imprimatur.

Its 1,200 staff is spread out in 15 offices around the world working on a broad portfolio of designs services that range from architecture and urban planning to infrastructure design, landscape design and project management.

If there is a common denominator to be found in DP’s work over the decades, it is an ever-evolving regard for sensible solutions that are grounded by the client’s needs and the natural setting of the project.

The design for Sunray Woodcraft Construction’s headquarters, for example, is anchored in the bifurcated notion of tropical architecture and industrial space. As Angelene Chan, DP’s deputy CEO and lead architect on the project, puts it, the building morphs from the ideal of “the typical, open-sided, corrugated metal roofed warehouse commonly seen in the region into a design that is highly efficient and aesthetically appealing”.

Obviously, any transition of this nature must take place in a disciplined way.

In that regard, if there is a lesson to be gleaned from DP’s work, it is the importance of listening closely, researching extensively, and being innovative. Angelene warns against formulating premature solutions before conducting comprehensive research. “Before doing anything,” she says, “one must listen closely to the client to understand their needs. Always take cues from the users, the context, the climate. It is only through the probing of the problem with the right questions that the best solutions will emerge.”
Angeline also makes the point that DP’s enduring success comes from an appreciation of Singapore as a society founded on an ethos of rationality that embraces technology and a forward-looking mind-set.

Part of that rationality involves a recognition of just how connected the world has become not just as a result of communications technology but the dissolution of physical barriers and distances by cheap travel. As a result, many of the issues faced by Singapore are now also shared by the rest of the world. From this perspective, bringing the Singaporean design scene to the next level requires what Angelene describes as a “critical understanding of how these universal issues need to lead to globally applicable prototypes”.

“The President’s Design Award neatly dovetails this understanding by fostering, an awareness of emerging ideas and trends through a range of design disciplines. It is a way to celebrate thoughtful design that advances critical thinking in a way that will benefit the community.” says Angelene.

**Jury Citation**

Sunray Woodcraft Construction Headquarters is a ray of light in the midst of a drab industrial area.

One can find production spaces, a workers’ dormitory, a warehouse, offices and showrooms in this bright and cheerful 8-storey building. The spaces are designed to facilitate a seamless workflow for different user groups. The different functions of the spaces are reflected in the volumes and variations of their surface treatment. They depart from the usual industrial factory typology in Singapore – factory production and warehouse spaces are clad in yellow horizontal aluminium louvres; office spaces are clad in vertical aluminium louvres; the showroom is in concrete and the workers’ dormitory in vertical louvres with checkerboard openings for maximum natural ventilation while maintaining privacy.

The Jury commends Sunray Woodcraft Construction Headquarters for the refreshing and cheery interpretation of an industrial factory building. This is a welcome departure from the norm and provides a benchmark for future developments of this kind.
“This project,” says Joshua Comaroff, “grew directly out of our own experience of being parents in Singapore to Singaporean kids who attend local schools.”

In that context, Caterpillar’s Cove represents an intense attempt to take a generic office unit space and scale it down to a child’s intimate perspective, to construct an almost fantastical interior that entirely surpasses the physical shell.

The starting point for the clients, the school’s director and principal, was the belief that children have a right to an environment that will arouse imagination and creativity. The brief called for a contemporary design, neutral material palette, and open spaces while being able to manage the daily minutiae of operating a pre-school. This balance between carefully planned function and aesthetics owes much to the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy.

From the first walk-through of the finished space, the physical imprint of the classic schoolhouse – an entirely unexpected conceit – completely neutralises the blank column-field of the office unit in the Devan Nair Institute in Jurong. Teachers’ offices and infant care rooms are inserted into the schoolhouse, itself set in a schoolyard formed by four open-planned learning zones. The office columns have been recast as stylised trees while a drifting curvilinear trellis, concealing electrical services and ducts, evokes a sheltering bank of cloud.

Bespoke furniture fills the interior spaces. Banked steps encourage children to lie down, tumble and sprawl – a direct result of the designers’ personal dislike for sitting. “There are studies that are beginning to show that the amount of sitting by young children has very negative cognitive and physiological results,” Ong Ker-Shing explains.

Elsewhere, Lekker has created a series of follies that suggests storybook themes in a highly abstract design language of form and colour. A garden shed serves as an observation booth for trainee teachers. A periscope allows children to peer into the “outside world”. In the sheltered alfresco zone, a winding river of sand, conical hills and a tiny playhouse continue the illusion of the bucolic farmyard.

Joshua and Ker-Shing say the design for Caterpillar’s Cove represents some of their own
ideas about childhood and education. In particular, the willingness of the clients to engage in a dialogue has been gratifying and which has wider implications. Joshua says: “It seems to us that the recipients of the President’s Design Award are often those whose design pushes forward an area of Singaporean life into new territory. In a sense, they are national projects. The effect of this is to shift designers’ goals, to think about projects with national consequence. To make change, not just beautiful examples.”

About the Designer

Though it’s only been 9 years since Joshua Comaroff and Ong Ker-Shing set up Lekker Design, and a year since Lekker Architects in 2014, the husband and wife team has won considerable professional and press plaudits for their reflective, meditative work, whether institutional facilities, master planning services or arts environments, retail installations, private residences and gardens.

“Our design philosophy is centred on the emotive and interpretive aspects of space,” says Ker-Shing who met her husband while they were both at Harvard. “We think about how architecture can assist users to learn and grow. We want to create spaces that allow the user to create. We want to make environments that provoke people to live better and, as a result, to imagine the world that they want to create and live in.”

Joshua recasts this philosophy into a pithy dictum: “Don’t give clients what they want. Give them what they deserve.”

This holistic approach demands that the design must transcend the ego of the architect. In many ways, it helps explain when Lekker was such a perfect fit for The Caterpillar’s Cove Child Development and Study Centre, where, Ker-Shing points out, the true ‘client’ is actually the school-children. “This project was intended to address certain problems that we see in existing schools and to attempt to push local designers to consider more intensely designed environments for children,” she says.

This concern for the wider society, and the architectural and design communities, runs deep, especially in the duo’s lectures, exhibitions and extensive publications.

“While we are interested in forms,” Ker-Shing adds, “we are more interested in the social and imaginative life of buildings. Architects do not build a society in any revolutionary sense, but we do think that buildings, landscapes and interiors have the potential to make a huge difference to the daily lives of the people that inhabit them, by engaging them on a profound and personal level.”

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, this is where Joshua and Ker-Shing’s concern for
the wider design community comes into play.

“Singapore needs to make a very conscious effort to continuously foster its younger generation of designers,” Ker-Shing insists. “Yes, we have very strong corporate practices, but it is the SMEs of design, the start-ups, that tend to be the engines of idea-generation. We are always happy to see former employees starting their own practices. For us, it just means a richer community of peers to engage with. At the same time, these fledgling firms are highly vulnerable. We need to support them so that they can survive.”

**Jury Citation**

This compelling space, in which the environment is the ‘third teacher’* demonstrates a thorough understanding of early childhood development. Its learning landscape – intended to serve multiple school groups with diverse activities being taught in parallel – is created within a dense and restricted architectural environment. The project represents a great example of the value and potential of well-designed educational spaces. Terraced seating clusters shift the learning and storytelling activities into a less formal posture – specifically, one that is aligned with the time devoted to the process as well as the attention span of young learners. The space supports the dynamic nature of the ‘work’ the students engage in, and allows it to be owned by the students. Parents can observe and follow a strict ritual of arrival and departure of the students. This project truly represents a new generation of childcare centres that incorporate a human touch, and gives hope for future generations.

*With parents being the ‘first teachers’ and school educators, the second, the term ‘third teacher’ expresses the deep impact and value a learning space can have on learning and education.
Even in a densely packed city like Singapore, says Mok Wei Wei, there can be quality in high-density living.

Set along Balmoral Road, the 12-storey The Oliv condominium is an apt expression of that belief. In the steady hands of the veteran architect, it is also a canny exploration of the sky terrace paradigm as a tool for enhancing the saleability of the apartments while, at the same time, creating a visually arresting building.

“The idea of creating ‘bungalows in the sky’,” says Wei Wei, “is manifested in this design.”

As the architect explains, one of the most important features to emerge from the promotion of vertical greenery and communal spaces in high-rise residences by Singapore’s urban planners has been the introduction of sky terraces as communal spaces. These spaces are exempt from the Gross Floor Area calculation, but only if they are accessible to all residents.

The Oliv, says Wei Wei, is an architectural expression of this guideline, but pushed to its limits. “The design innovates within planning constraints. This is very much what we believe in – to turn constraints into opportunities.”

The result is an intriguing play of rhythm in which the sky terrace, freed from its traditional rectilinear form, rises and dips across the building façade. Each unit – there are only two on each floor – luxuriates in a covered and landscaped outdoor space that adds both the illusion of an extended garden and shelter from rain and sun. The irregularity of the profile is accented by the use of natural balau wood for the top-deck, while the underside is cast in concrete.

Certainly, incorporating sky terraces and double-volume living spaces into residential design is not new. Yet, as Wei Wei points out, the challenge of The Oliv’s design lay “in expressing this typology in a unique architectural language that is also functional and liveable. The end result is a rather bold statement of a high-rise, green façade”.

In many ways, The Oliv is merely the latest iteration of Wei Wei’s approach to architecture.
which he freely admits to have been influenced by pioneers such as William Lim, Alfred Wong, Lim Chong Keat and Tay Kheng Soon. “Our design is always contextualised to the local context, and shaped by the social, economic and cultural demands of the time.”

Which is why Wei Wei has no rules for good design. In his view, good design comes encumbered with its own push-pull between client, planning authorities, setting, budget and a multitude of other constraints. The challenge then becomes one of reconciliation – a resolution made with admirable finesse in The Oliv.

About the Designer

On paper, W Architects is a relative newcomer to Singapore’s architecture fraternity. The reality, its antecedent goes back to 1982 when William Lim, one of Singapore’s most respected and influential architects, opened his eponymous practice William Lim Associates. When Lim retired in 2003, his long-time colleague Mok Wei Wei continued the practice under the newly formed W Architects.

The depth of W’s practice is entirely belied by its size. With just around 25 staff, the firm’s catalogue of designs – including the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum and the National Museum of Singapore – is impressive, ranging from architecture and urban design to interior architecture and exhibition design.

In and of itself, this broad remit betrays Wei Wei’s restlessness and dissatisfaction with the status quo. He is rarely still, always on the move through classrooms, offices and galleries, scrutinising the work of young designers, always on the lookout for new perspectives and innovative design.

Indeed, the sweep of his extra-curricular activities, past and present, is exhausting – a board member of the Urban Redevelopment Authority and Arts House Ltd, visiting critic at the National University of Singapore’s Department of Architecture School of Design and Environment, committee member of the Singapore Heritage Society and Preservation of Sites and Monuments, member of the Architectural Design Panel for the Housing Development Board, Grand Jury member at the World Architecture Festival.

It’s impossible to be involved at this level without a genuine interest in the architecture profession, its practitioners, its work, and its future. It also explains why so much of W Architect’s work feels imbued with a quality of rigorous discipline that’s based on solid fundamentals and ever questioning curiosity. One suspects that internal staff meetings are peppered with “Why?” and “Why not?”

“I am very much exposed to both eastern and western influences,” Wei Wei says. “My work is often positioned at the confluence of the two. In today’s context of globalisation,
it’s not so much about the east-west dichotomy anymore, but about how we negotiate the global within the local context. To me, that negotiation is exciting.”

Part of that negotiation also requires making room for the next generation of architects. Here, Wei Wei makes the point that the President’s Design Award “is an important platform that recognises good design”.

And still, there is so much more work to be done. If Wei Wei has one prescription to make, it is for more good design education. Here, he cautions the next generation to be patient.

“Give up instant gratification in order to reach a larger goal,” he counsels. “In the field of architecture, many types of talents are needed – it is not just for the design-oriented. You can have a rewarding professional practice and make meaningful contributions in many different ways.”

Jury Citation

The Oliv stands out for its interpretation of the existing sky terrace regulations that transform into new opportunities for multi-level living in Singapore.

The building successfully achieves a unique sense of the integration of landscape and high-rise living by maximising the provision of sky terraces. The clarity of composition creates a sequence of unique spatial experiences with a hierarchy of different volumes that clearly defines the character of each space. The project exemplifies a refined environment for tropical living in the city.

The Jury commends the architect for seeing guidelines as the impetus for innovation and the pursuit of a high level of craftsmanship, detail and construction.