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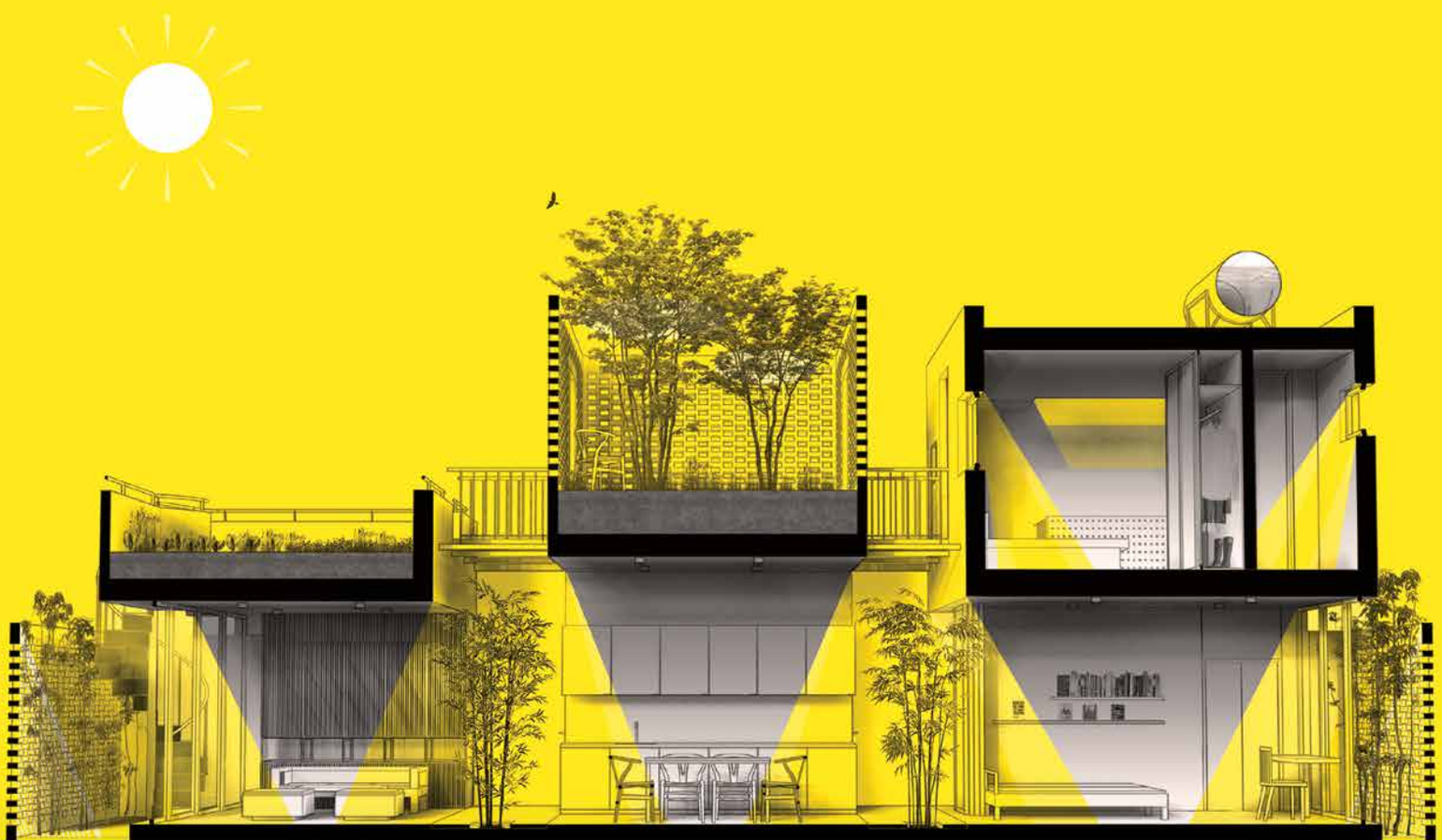
The Voice of Green Architecture in Asia-Pacific



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Spaces for Living

Inside: **Two Spaces, One Place;** exposing the myth of the urban-rural dichotomy in India | *Works of* **WOHA, Hong Kong Housing Authority** and **John Bulcock** | **Timothy Beatley;** thought-leader in biophilic cities | **Special Focus:** projects, commentary & interview on the Vietnamese housing sector

With projects from **Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan** and **Vietnam**

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Letter from the editor

Dear *FuturArc* Readers,

We live in a world of binaries. We are, it seems, forced into choices. We are either at work or at home; a space is either public or private; we are in the city or the countryside; this is either inside or outside. The Modern Movement, it's been said, has forced us into an either-or world. The amorphous, porous quality of our everyday lives is fit into boxes not always of our choosing. In this issue, we examine these binaries in the context of spaces for living; what we have come to regard as *home*.

The inside-outside dichotomy is best seen in small projects. The tropical house, after decades of experimentation, still fascinates the architect, and not only because it offers a chance at crafted ambiguity between landscape and architecture. The projects in this issue (VH house, page 58; Artists Retreat, page 40; Ray of Light and Window Houses, page 26) are each distinctive in what they say are the thresholds between indoor and outdoor spaces. What might have once been just a *veranda* is transformed, always clever and contextual. There is intimacy and human scale; a home is customised to one person, one family, and so, literally, is an extension of their psyche.

From the private to the most public, this binary comes to the fore in government housing. A commentary on housing in Hong Kong (page 50) highlights how, in a city where indoor space fetches a premium, attention is lavished on shared spaces within housing estates. The goal here is to create a shared identity and a sense of community. In the case of Hanoi, we see the shift from traditional to new typologies, resulting in a transformation in the way the city feels and looks (page 72).

Perhaps the most interesting example of binaries is in the Main Feature by Matias Echanove and Rahul Srivastava, co-founders of urbz, India, who speak of how people in (what is disparagingly called) slums, live out their lives in two spaces (page 12). The first is the urban home, tied to how they make a living. Here, a home might also be a workshop or factory. The way this home interacts with the street becomes critical to how its owners will make a living. Second, home is also the village they left behind but frequently visit, where they are likely to keep a house to which they bring their hard-earned wealth and knowledge from the city. This lays bare the myth of the urban-rural dichotomy, showing us how many people can have two simultaneous realities of home.

The housing sector in Asian cities struggles with a deficit of numbers, coupled with a deficit of imagination. This issue suggests that solutions are often right before our eyes, that they need not be expensive or complicated, that they need intelligence and a little compassion for the lives that people live.

Happy reading.

Dr Nirmal Kishnani
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southeast asia edition

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The Voice of Green Architecture in Asia-Pacific

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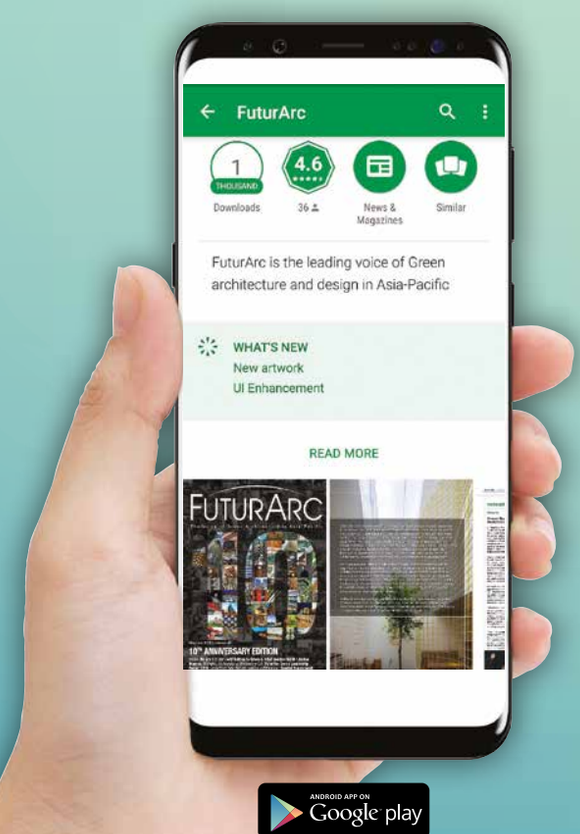

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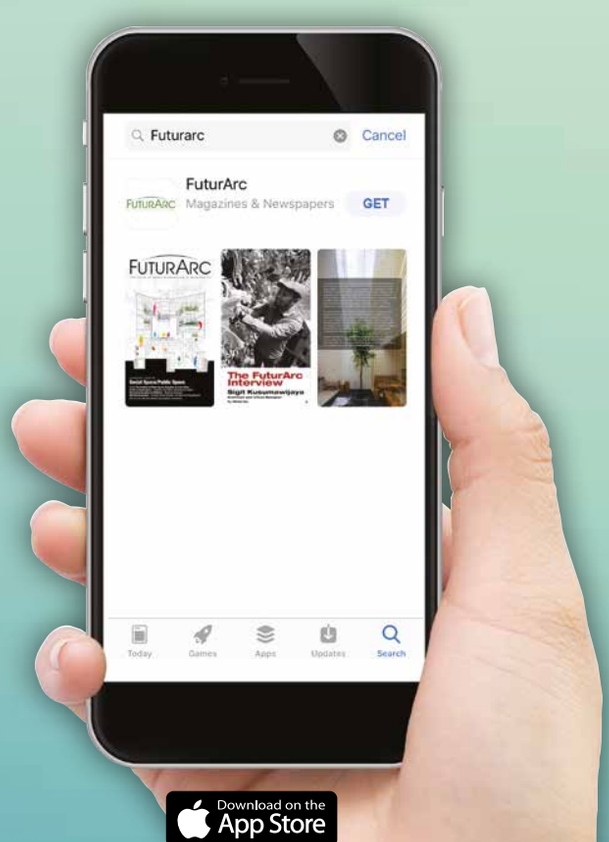

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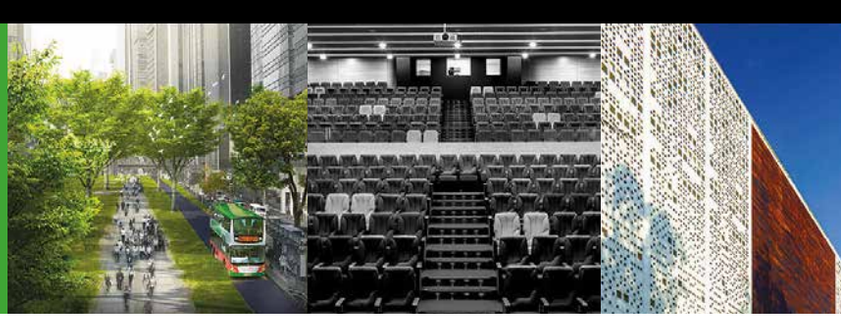

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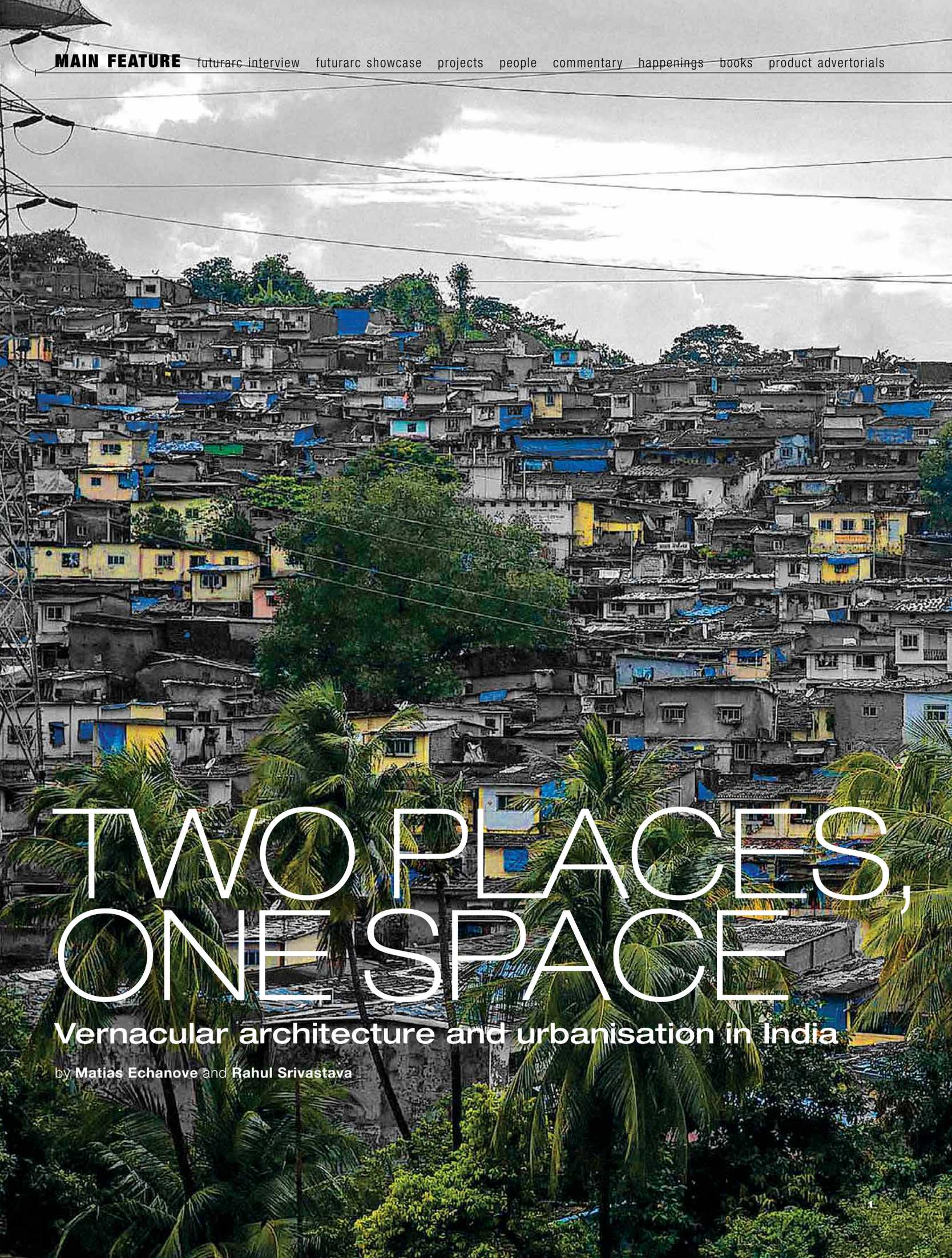

TWO PLACES, ONE SPACE

Vernacular architecture and urbanisation in India

by **Matias Echanove** and **Rahul Srivastava**

Photo by Ishan Tankha for urbz


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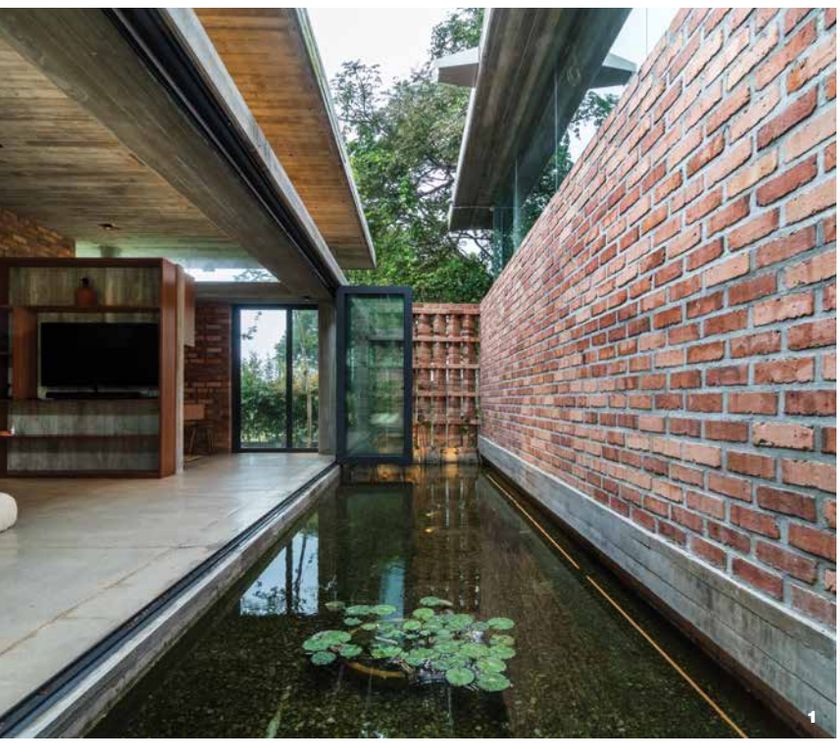
Timothy Beatley

Teresa Heinz Professor of Sustainable Communities, Department of Urban and Environmental Planning, School of Architecture at the University of Virginia (UVA)

By **Candice Lim**



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TROPICAL MODERNISM: A COMPARISON OF TWO APPROACHES

by **Assoc Prof Dr Zalina Shari**

INTRODUCTION

`Suryamzhu' Ray of Light (RoL) House is a single-storey, 520-square-metre house, built on an approximately 1,000-square-metre site in a suburban setting of Bukit Gasing, Petaling Jaya. Window House, on the other hand, is a three-storey, 900-square-metre house, built on a hillside plot of around 800 square metres, located on the fringes of a reserved forest in Kuala Lumpur.

Both of these private properties are categorised as modern tropical houses but they adopt different approaches. There are three tropical modernism approaches relevant to RoL House and Window House: organic in context with nature; minimalist in structure, form and massing; and neo-brutalist in materials and appearance. These approaches are strongly influenced by the three masters of modern architecture: Frank Lloyd Wright in 1900s, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in the 1940s, and Le Corbusier in the 1950s, respectively.

The emphasis in both houses is on passive design, achieved with form, massing and spatial layout; as well as a particular aesthetic derived from their palette of materials. It is not the intention of this comparative article to suggest the superiority of one house over the other as both houses have distinctive characteristics that meet the clients' needs or preferences.

ORGANIC TROPICAL MODERNISM APPROACHES

ROL HOUSE

The blending of RoL house with the site and the nature around it is unmistakably inspired by Wright's principles of organic architecture with the following four characteristics.

1 The living room pavilion of Ray of Light House is separated from the courtyard by a full-width reflecting pond. Rainwater spouts are provided to channel water run-off from the roof to the pond **2** The façade or outer shell of Window House is 'punched' with windows where greenery of varying heights planted between the shell and the house can 'peek' out

First, the house is horizontal in elemental composition and building proportion. The flat, spreading roofs with generous eaves, on the whole, contribute to the emphasis on the horizontality of the earth and a blend of nature, architecture and site. The house's plan consists of a group of three single-storey pavilions wrapped around a rectangular green open courtyard in a U-shaped configuration. These pavilions are accessed off the open-sided circulation walkway. The green courtyard is the focus of the house, and the design encourages air movement, passive cooling, and harmony between nature and the built environment. The house is entered from a car park at the southern corner. To the left is the south pavilion, containing the maid, kitchen and dining spaces with two bedrooms at the end. Beyond the dining room is a Y-junction—left to the guest bathroom and right to the two smaller bedrooms. Turning to the right while still on the main circulation corridor, one passes along the west pavilion of main bedroom suite, before crossing a little bridge to reach the northern living-room pavilion, which is the climax of the journey. In essence, visitors must traverse the entire house, shifting axes, before arriving at the living room pavilion or the large entertainment deck at the rear of the site. Forming the full width of the site, the living room pavilion is separated from the courtyard by a full-width reflecting pond and built to cantilever out over the lower-level pool area. The floor area of the house seems to be just the right size for a small family. This house has a persuasive tranquillity and calmness that embrace the family and visitors from the moment of entering.

Second, the presence of extending terraces: some open, some roofed over to make the connection between inside and outside more seamless, obvious and pleasurable. Undoubtedly, the prominent aspect of RoL House is the use of landscaping (including water elements) as the integral design element. According

Photo by Mahesh Mendis 1

Photo courtesy of Palinda Kannangara Architects 2

Photo courtesy of Palinda Kannangara Architects 3

Photo by Sebastian Posingis 4

ARTISTS RETREAT

The clients—contemporary Sri Lankan artist JC Ratnayake and his wife, Tanuja, a printmaker—wanted a multifunctional space that would serve as a residence, work space, art storage and gallery. The budget was low; hence the brief called for a contextual design with cost-effective measures that would reflect their simple lifestyle and aesthetic sensibility.

Situated on a 3,700-square-foot site, paddy fields and a busy expressway between Colombo and Galle are on the periphery of the retreat-like abode. The design is reminiscent of the striking ruins of the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, where Ratnayake grew up in. A split-level layout accommodates the sloped terrain, avoiding the cut-and-fill process. Despite the hot summer months in Sri Lanka, the need for air-conditioning is negated as the entire dwelling is passively ventilated—a *jaali* (a screen of perforated brickwork that provides air voids in the façade) gives definition to the house while allowing for a cooler microclimate and filtered sunlight. During the day, each area of the house can be used without any artificial lighting; multiple indoor open-to-sky courtyards enable daylight and natural airflow, as well as for rainwater to be naturally dispersed and absorbed into the ground. Furthermore, the house is buffered from traffic noise from the highway by abundant internal gardens filled with tropical plants and paddy fringe species (such as Alocasia) that serve as private oases.

The architecture offers a fluidity that is distinctive and refreshing—roofed, but open to the natural environment, tropical gardens surround the miniature courtyards abound on the ground floor. The absence of doors and windows at the ground level helped save costs. Instead, indoor courtyards divide the spaces into their respective functions that double up as work and gallery areas: living space, dining-cum-studio, kitchen and garage. The high-volume studio with an elevated ceiling and ample storage spaces (area under the staircase, for example) is a requirement from the clients to accommodate large-scale paintings and sculptures. This open-concept design eliminates boundaries and gives the entire area an uninterrupted aesthetic, with a view to the distant expansive paddy scape.

This home also offers a space for the art community, a gallery where the clients' artist friends contributed art pieces. Wide steps reminiscent of Sri Lankan monastic gardens connect the living pavilion to the studio—made of affordable rubble and surrounded by Syzygium trees and wild creepers, they serve a dual purpose as seats for dialogue and as a socialising area. While the ground floor is an open, continuous space, the upper floor is a private sanctuary comprising three bedrooms and a rooftop pond with water lilies and freshwater fish—a meditative zone for the clients. This 1-foot-deep biological pond, replete with aquatic fauna and flora, encourages biodiversity and keeps the spaces beneath cool.

5

1 A rooftop pond with water lilies and freshwater fish keeps the spaces beneath cool **2** A screen of perforated brickwork provides air voids in the façade, allowing for a cooler microclimate and filtered sunlight **3** Wide steps serve a dual purpose as seats for dialogue **4** An old baker's table is transformed into a spacious worktop that also functions as a dining table **5** Site plan

Photos by Patrick Bingham-Hall

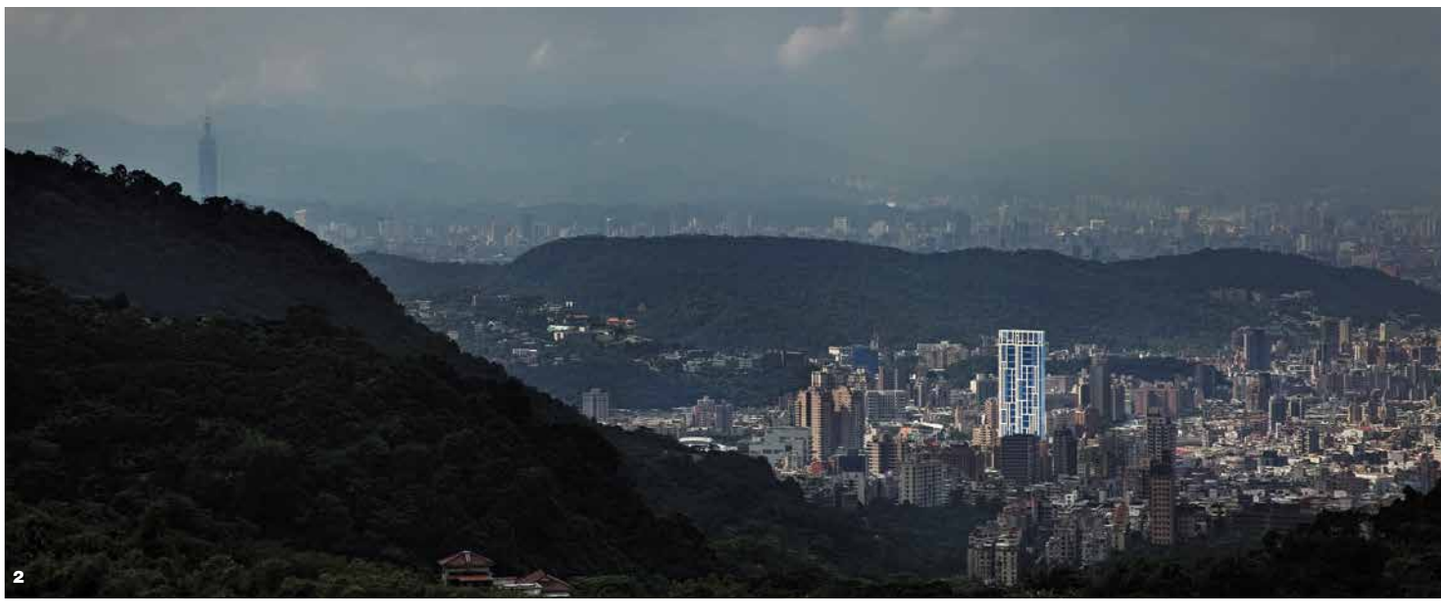
HUAKU SKY GARDEN

The beauty of Huaku Sky Garden lies in the twin towers' architecture that seems at once delicate (due to their slim forms) and strong in the symmetrical structural frame (referencing traditional Chinese latticed screens) done in multiple scales, the repetition articulating the structural delight.

The project's location at the base of the foothills of Yangming mountain range means that the building design could leverage the scenery as its backdrop. The towers' symmetrical, interlinked forms with thick columns came about due to earthquake and typhoon-proof requirements. This structural expression has led to the Chinese-inspired screen manifested in different scales, from the oversized structural frame to the delicate metal filigree.

Aesthetically, the façade, featuring the rectangular asymmetry of traditional Chinese joinery and screen designs, stands out from the other heavy, solid blocks

1 The façade design is enhanced by the 3D depth of the recessed gardens on the balconies of each apartment **2** The tower is located at the base of the foothills of Yangmingshan National Park



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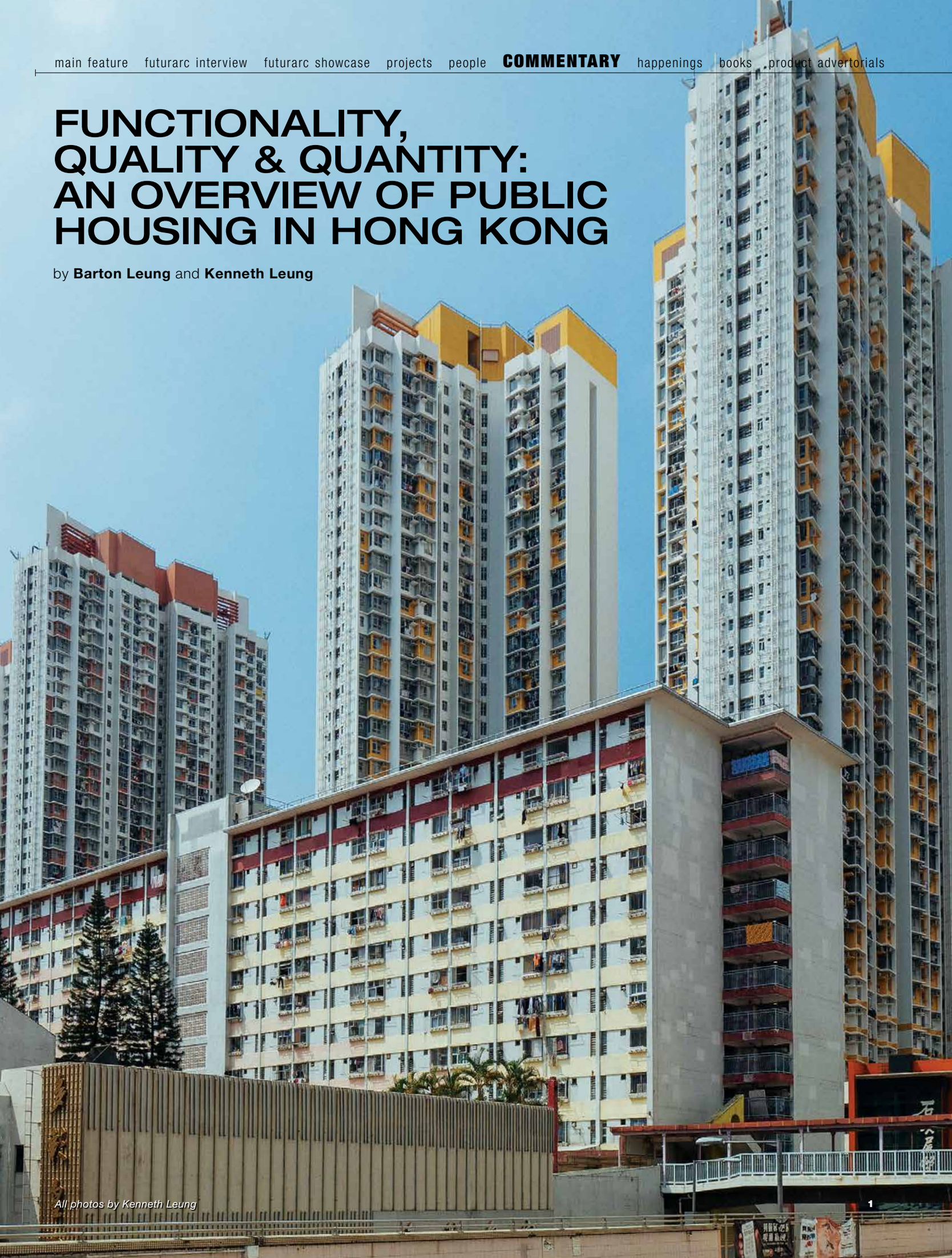
FUNCTIONALITY, QUALITY & QUANTITY: AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN HONG KONG

by **Barton Leung** and **Kenneth Leung**



All photos by Kenneth Leung

As home prices continue to escalate in the world's most expensive property market, fear of the ability to provide a basic shelter over one's head continues to grow, and the provision of sufficient affordable housing has been one of the major challenges faced by the government of Hong Kong today. While the soaring demand for affordable public housing continues to outstrip supply, almost 50 per cent of the population are already housed within rental or subsidised-sale public housing. Hong Kong lags behind Singapore's ability to accommodate over 80 per cent of the population within public housing. Nonetheless, the sheer number of residents accommodated within Hong Kong's public housing (around 3.3 million according to the Hong Kong 2016 Population By-census) remains to be noteworthy, and the significance of this public good for the lives of many in the city should be highlighted.

Over the years, the provision and design of public housing have responded to the circumstances faced by the city: addressing the needs within the built environment, reflecting the ever-changing social dynamics, and serving as a means to the economic conditions and reality that burden a large part of the population. In fact, public housing must be included in the dialogue when conceptualising the identity of the city and the way of life of Hong Kongers.

FABRICATING FOR THE MASSES

Since the transformation from a fishing village into a trading port in the early days of the city, Hong Kong had faced a continuous influx of immigrants. Between 1945 and 1948, the population had grown from 600,000 to 1.8 million. This had led to a major uptick in the demand for housing, and households were crammed into tenement buildings. As more and more people sought refuge in the city from the Japanese invasion of China and the Chinese Civil War, the major housing demand was exacerbated. By 1953, the population had ballooned to 2.3 million. Residents of the crowded tenement buildings faced high rents, while those who could not afford to rent had to find shelter in unhygienic makeshift squatter huts constructed on rooftops or hillsides. There were over 300,000 squatter huts by 1953, and they were major fire hazards. They were constructed from wood and thin metal sheets, typically located in close proximity to one another, while residents used primitive stoves and fuel for cooking and lighting.

In 1953, a large fire in the Shek Kip Mei squatter huts broke out and devastated the area, leaving more than 50,000 people homeless overnight. As a response to the tragedy, the government immediately planned and constructed resettlement buildings for the victims. Designed with a functional approach to accommodate a massive number of residents within the shortest period of time, the resettlement blocks had no amenities. The flats did not have electricity and residents had to cook along the common corridors outside the flats. Toilets and showers were also provided in communal washing facilities.

Shortly after, the Hong Kong Housing Authority was set up to provide a better living environment for middle- and low-income citizens that dwelled in overcrowded conditions. The government also subsidised the Hong Kong Housing Society, a voluntary organisation, to develop rental estates. Public housing was conceived purely as a strategic and functional response to fulfil the need of low-cost resettlement and low-income housing. It also set a standard for health and safety.

Although Hong Kong's public housing model has churned out cookie-cutter designs that may be uninspiring at a glance, the design has continuously evolved over the past 50 years to cater to the changing needs of the citizens. Evolving from the basic resettlement blocks, new types of public housing such as the Slab Block were introduced in the 1960s. Toilets were provided within each of the flats and lift access was offered to every third floor of the block. The design of the later Slab Blocks included water taps, private balconies and kitchens in order to enhance the standard of health and safety. Due to the continual increase in Hong Kong's population, and the compact nature of the units, communal and public space proved to be more important in the development of public housing estates.

By the 1970s, the concept of community planning became central to the development of public housing. As the standard of living in Hong Kong improved, public housing had to include more than just provisions for basic living requirements. The taller Twin Tower Block model was introduced and had a central void to improve air ventilation. Lift access was supplied to every floor and air-conditioner vents were also provided in each flat. The public housing estates also had to cater to the shopping and everyday needs of the residents, and a greater focus was placed on public and communal spaces. Commercial facilities, car parks, recreational amenities, outdoor landscape areas and public transportation were developed as part of these estates, and they soon transformed into self-contained communities that would set the foundation for the planning and design of future public housing estates.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, the design of public housing estates became more complex. From Trident and Linear Blocks to the Ziggurat and Harmony Blocks, public housing blocks strived for higher building heights and featured multiroom flats where tenants could set up their own partitions. Various sizes of flats to cater for different households were later introduced, and windows were designed in every room of the flat to further enhance the penetration of daylight and air.

In recent years, due to the increasing land shortage, and provision of irregular and limited sites for public housing, the Housing Authority has adopted a site-specific design approach to meet the residents' expectations on the built environment while overcoming site constraints, utilising the limited land resources more efficiently, and achieving better cost effectiveness. In 2008, modular flat designs were introduced through the help of BIM. A range of standardised modular flats was created to provide greater flexibility for partitioning the flats.

Barton Leung has been a town planner at Arup for the last six years and is a member of the Hong Kong Institute of Planners. He was awarded a HBA in Urban Studies from University of Toronto and a MSc in Urban Planning from the University of Hong Kong. Being involved with major government planning and engineering studies along with other development control and feasibility studies in the HKSAR, Barton is experienced with delivering urban planning solutions that are tailor-made to each project to design people-oriented communities and sustainable living environments.

Kenneth Leung is an architectural designer working in Hong Kong. He holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Toronto, Bachelor of Environmental Design Studies from Dalhousie University, and Master of Architecture from the University of Hong Kong. He is experienced in both architectural and interior design, and has spent the last three years working on a variety of high-end commercial projects in Hong Kong. Kenneth is also an avid photographer and enjoys capturing the unique urban scenes in Hong Kong.

1 Two different generations of public housing

VH HOUSE

The plot of the house is relatively narrow, 16 metres (length) by 4.1 metres (width), a typical size for local houses. Hanoi's tube house floor plan is designed to maximise the number of rooms by using 100 per cent of the built-up area. Here, buildings are constructed next to each other, wall to wall, with only one open façade. This leads to poor quality dwellings that are completely lacking in natural light, air ventilation and spatial value.

1 Exterior view of VH house, where an abundance of greenery is implemented throughout the architecture

CCASA HOSTEL

2

A five-minute walk from the beach, Ccasa Hostel is the first hostel in Nha Trang, Vietnam that was built from shipping containers. What immediately draws the eye are the colourful repurposed steel containers that lend a charming vibe to the establishment. In Spanish, *casa* means home, and Ccasa (pronounced as C-casa) is short for Container Casa—a container house. In addition, locally produced flat winnowing baskets and recycled wooden windows had been put together as a screen, referencing Vietnamese architecture.

With a site area of just 195 square metres, the architects focused on offering guests multifunctional spaces for socialising. The aim was to allow backpackers to feel at home, providing communal areas such as the living room as well as an outdoor kitchen and dining area, and an entertainment area on the terrace roof. The resting areas were reduced to the minimum to give room for shared spaces, hence increasing the connection between travellers.

1 Ccasa Hostel (short for Container Casa) provides communal areas such as an outdoor kitchen and dining area for socialising **2** Three dimensional drawing of Ccasa Hostel

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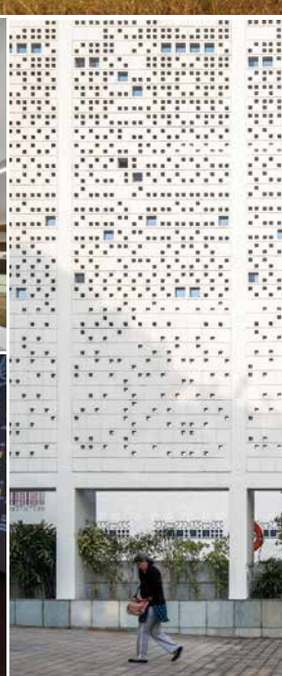
Next Issue:
FuturArc Nov-Dec 2018

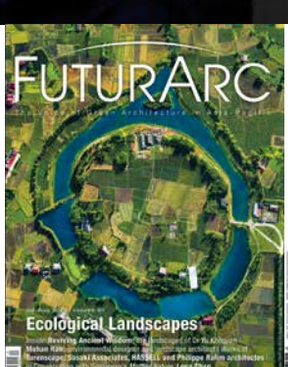
Year-End

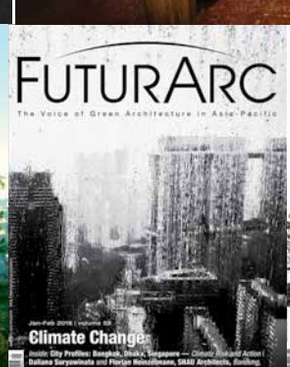
We wrap up the year with architecture that presents strong Green initiatives and social agendas. These developments seek to improve the environment and community with efficient and creative designs that preserve our ecosystems, as well as using local or renewable resources that enhance the environmentally friendly strategies that are set in place.

If you have projects to nominate, please send an email with a brief profile and photos to c.lim@futurarc.com by end September 2018.

We will notify you if your project is shortlisted for publication. Please note that the selection of projects is subject to editorial discretion.







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