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Skyline

Insights into planning
spaces around us

Ageing and social capital

A seminal project aims to shape ageing
friendly neighbourhoods

Seoul transforms with
citizens as leaders

Envisioning the
liveable city

Jurong Town Hall:
restoring an icon

 URBAN
REDEVELOPMENT
AUTHORITY

Skyline



Cover | This image reflects the low-rise and intimate scale of Tiong Bahru, one of Singapore's first housing estate that is helpful for older persons as it makes the place more walkable and supports greater social interactions, according to architect Ong Ker-Shing. More on page 32.

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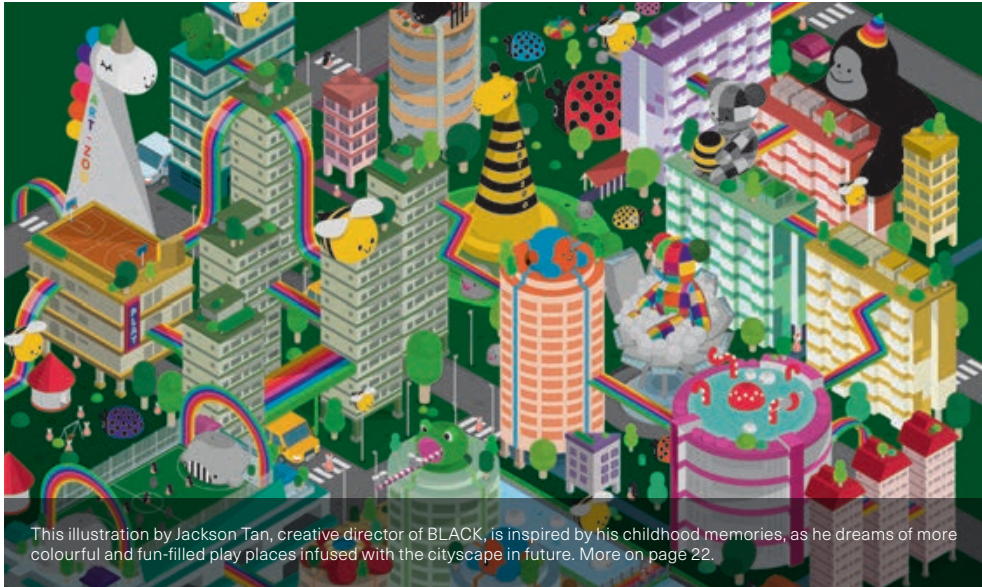
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This illustration by Jackson Tan, creative director of BLACK, is inspired by his childhood memories, as he dreams of more colourful and fun-filled play places infused with the cityscape in future. More on page 22.

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What makes a city more liveable?

In this issue, we speak to designers, artists, experts and champions to explore the many facets of a liveable city.

When there is openness

DBS and Continental Automotive are breaking out of boxy cubicles for open work spaces, creating more interconnected communities that learn, collaborate and grow together.

When there is nature

Ramboll Studio Dreiseitl Singapore's studio director, Leonard Ng sees the need for a deeper understanding of how nature works, to leverage on it for more sensitive designs.

When there is beauty

Principal director of Forum Architects Tan Kok Hiang and renowned artist Sun Yu-li remind us about beauty in the city, that it has a "huge role to play in society", whether it is in restoring old buildings like the Jurong Town Hall or creating and enjoying art in public spaces.

When each of us can design our own

Executive director of DesignSingapore Council Mark Wee dreams of play environments that can be framed in a more "open-ended manner, where the public feels inspired to design their own experiences."

When there is sharing

Co-founders of LOOK Architects Look Boon Gee and Ng Sor Hiang are hoping to create a more sharing culture by shifting people's mind sets from not in my backyard to good in my backyard through the thoughtful design of residential spaces.

When there is love

Philip Singh, a local champion, shows us what it means to bring people together. He started Coffee Corner in 2016 together with others by organising a simple weekly gathering of neighbours and friends and this has built strong bonds that are key to creating thriving neighbourhoods for everyone, both young and old.

“I always emphasise that there is nothing trivial in relation with citizens’ lives. And if we have an accumulation of several things together, then revolutionary change can be made.”

Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon on the importance of focusing on citizens and the smaller things to make a larger impact in the city’s urban transformation. Seoul was awarded the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize in March 2018.

26,000

DBS is redefining the work environment with its innovation hub DAS (DBS Asia X), creating more open, adaptable spaces for collaboration, empowering its 26,000 employees to become a 26,000-person start-up.

200

The number of people Coffee Corner at Toa Payoh View attracts every week since 2016. Its gatherings organised by one of its founders Philip Singh has fostered a strong community spirit, key to creating ageing-friendly neighbourhoods.

“There is more than ever a need to share, and for residential developments to shift people’s mind sets from not in my backyard to good in my backyard.”

Co-founders of LOOK Architects Look Boon Gee and Ng Sor Hiang on encouraging more sharing in future living spaces as envisioned in their public housing project, St George’s Tower.

07

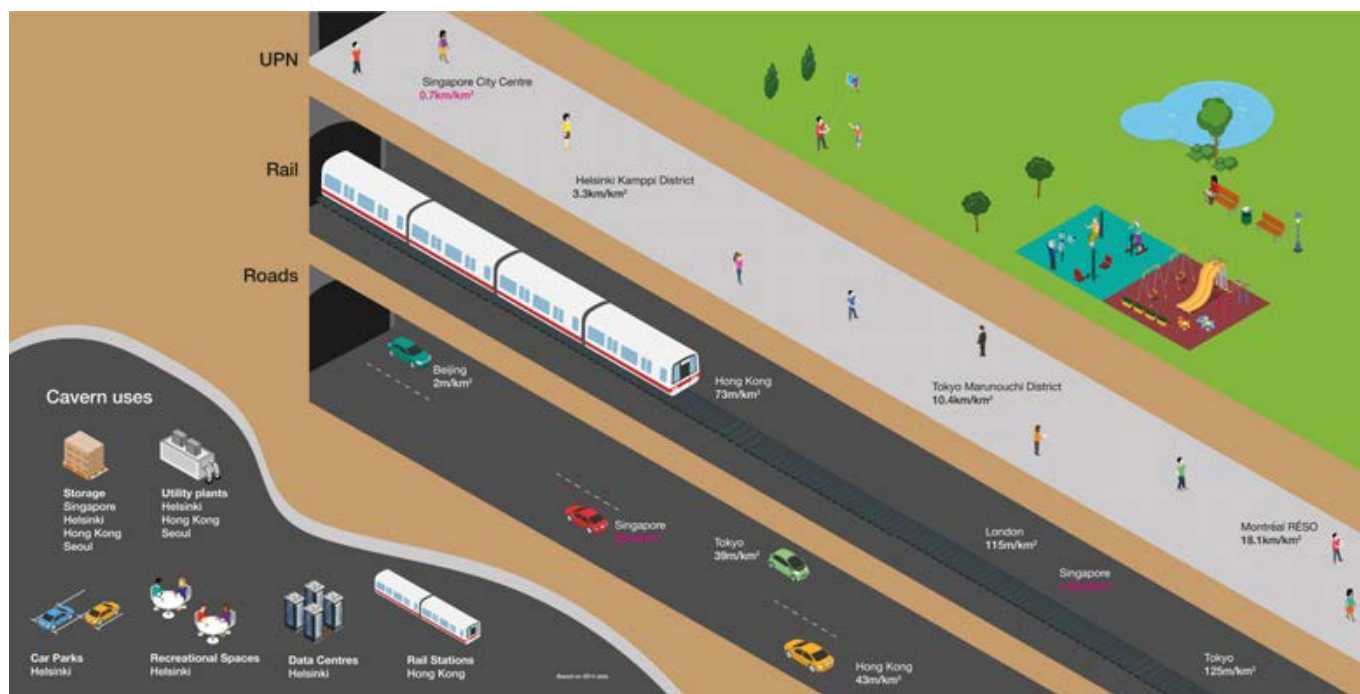
Jurong Town Hall is among the 7 national monuments built after World War II. Its restoration by Forum Architects continues to capture its spirit as an icon of modern architecture and a symbol of Singapore’s successful industrialisation efforts.

“There is good design all around us, but more of our environment can be framed in an open-ended manner, where the public feels inspired to design their own experiences using various mediums.”

Executive director of DesignSingapore Council, Mark Wee, dreams of different types of play spaces for the city in future.

More reasons to go underground

URA planners are tapping on 3D technology and smart data for more comprehensive planning of underground spaces in Singapore.



Many cities around the world have been exploring the use of underground spaces including Singapore. This helps free up more space above ground for other uses like housing, parks and community spaces that contribute to quality living environments.

In Singapore, the priority remains to place uses such as rail lines, utilities, warehousing and storage facilities underground. There are no plans for underground homes. The latest infrastructure to be located underground is Singapore's first 230kV underground substation at the former Pasir Panjang Power District, as announced by National Development Minister, Lawrence Wong on 30 May 2018.

Building on current efforts, URA is working with various agencies and partners to further tap on 3D technology and smart data for more holistic and comprehensive planning of underground

spaces in Singapore. The aims are to be able to accurately identify and understand the more intricate underground conditions prior to development works, to establish potential obstacles and constraints that can be addressed and to develop detailed visual information and accurate data for more advance planning. By 2019, URA will release a 3D underground master plan for selected pilot areas.

Singapore's key underground efforts and ideas were presented in Urban Lab's exhibition, "Underground: Singapore's Next Frontier", in collaboration with agencies and the industry from 30 May to 29 June 2018. Urban Lab is a URA platform that presents the latest R&D and urban solutions for a future-ready city.

For more information, go to <https://ura.sg/underground>.

Citizens are the Mayor

Seoul, the winner of the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize 2018, shows how citizens as leaders of their own city can transform everyday spaces and major streets.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland**

A megacity with a population of over 10 million and counting, it's a wonder that Seoul is so liveable. The South Korean capital faces the same problems of larger cities worldwide: rapid population growth, ageing districts and an ageing citizenry, and all of the economic, environmental, health and social issues that seem to go hand-in-hand with urbanisation. However, what sets Seoul apart is its approach. In Seoul, urban development is as much about building social cohesion as it is about building infrastructure, and many credit the success of this approach to the city's Mayor, Park Won-soon.

Elected in 2011 under the slogan "Citizens are the Mayor," Mayor Park has been described as "on a mission to revolutionise the policy-making process." His passion is participatory democracy, which he has promoted tirelessly since the mid-1990s through his roles as a lawyer, civic activist and founder of community-based non-profit organisations. Now, as the head of the city's government, Mayor Park has ushered in a new era of government transparency and citizen involvement.

We catch up with Mayor Park on his dedication to place citizens at the centrestage of the city's urban transformation and why this works.



Above | From the top, the Sewoon Shopping Centre is a result of 7 commercial mega-blocks transformed into a vibrant Makercity, many streets have been activated with pianos and other activities, the Mapo Oil Tank Cultural Park, an eco-friendly cultural centre was crafted from the remains of a fuel storage facility and a part of Cheonggyecheon, a key green haven in the city (far right). Photo credits: Seoul Metropolitan Government and URA.



You have a very unique leadership style. What is the most important aspect of leadership for a megacity such as Seoul?

Mobilising the citizens is the most important part of leadership. I was formerly an activist in the civil society, but when I moved into city government, I realised that the sense of leadership is not so different. Empowering the citizens is important to make all policies successful. So I was always emphasising how to mobilise and engage the citizens in our process of decision-making on all policies. That is the number one essential part of leadership.

Another important role of leadership is to focus on the future. I'm always saying that the direction is more important than the speed. We Koreans are very much accustomed to speed. We accomplished rapid economic growth since the 1960s, but now focusing on the right direction is important not only for leaders, but also for society in general.

I think that understanding global trends and how they will affect future generations is important, so that is why I focus on sustainability, climate change, public transportation, public housing, quality of life, air quality and so on. These are the assets of the future.

I think to accomplish anything it is also important to make one team. Teamwork and team spirit is not confined to the staff of the government, it can also expand to the citizenry. Sharing our vision with citizens is important for discussions and openness, supported by public education to solve our challenges.





Above | Mayor Park at a citizen engagement session in Seoul (top image) and Cheonggyecheon, a key project that saw the demolition of highways to create public spaces. The space has become a green haven in the middle of the city.
Photo credit: Seoul Metropolitan Government



How is your approach different from city governments in the past?

Before, we experienced an authoritarian approach for a long time, with a top-down style fixed into every corner of policy decisions and the policy making process. This new bottom-up style is really a fundamental change.

I made the decision to change the old negative system into a positive one in terms of disclosure of documents, information and data, to allow citizens to make decisions for themselves. I believe we should disclose everything to citizens and provide a universal platform for them to make their own proposals or to discuss or decide. So from this process we developed a system of citizen participation.

How would you describe your approach to urban development?

The lives of the citizens are complex. Rather than focusing on big projects only, we can approach many smaller projects instead. I always emphasise that there is nothing trivial in relation with citizens' lives. And if we have an accumulation of several things together, then revolutionary change can be made. Of course, we have many large projects that focus on rejuvenation, developing new buildings and implementing transport-related initiatives, but in addition to hardware projects, the softer aspects are also important. I really tried to change not only the apparent physical things but also the process and mentality of the many softer, process related things.

What can other megacities learn from Seoul?

In the past, we didn't spend money to design good residential buildings, but we are now focusing more on good design. We designated one city architect to oversee every project and enlisted more than 100 young architects to examine building designs at the preliminary stages, opening up architectural

projects to competitions around the world. We can now see a clear change in the aesthetic quality of our urban architecture.

Of the many initiatives you have carried out, what is one improvement you are most proud of?

The growth of the citizens. In the past, citizens were regarded as the target or customers for city government, but now they are becoming the mayors of the city. Their ideas and their activities are becoming real in the city, implemented through the participatory system with the government. Since my inauguration, I advanced many local community projects, sharing city projects, social enterprises, social economy projects and many new innovative projects and policies. Now 6 years into my term, all the different sectors of policy are becoming 1 brand, transforming Seoul into a new future society and city.

Park's interview responses have been edited and condensed.

Park has been the Mayor of Seoul since October 2011. He's also the President of ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability since 2015 and a board member of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy. Before taking office as Mayor of Seoul, Park worked as a human rights lawyer and was at the very centre of the democracy and human rights movement in Korea. He is a strong proponent of going beyond national borders and strengthening city-to-city cooperation when striving to tackle the many different challenges that the world as a whole faces together.



Citizen participation: the soul of Seoul

For decades, South Korea has enjoyed stellar economic prosperity, resulting in an urban development fixation on quantitative expansion. In the 1970s, the city demolished a lot of its urban heritage to accommodate freeways, parking lots and high rises, while in the 1980s, the city deregulated building-to-land ratios, floor ratios and usage restrictions in the lead up to the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. But with the new millennium came a shift in the urban development focus, with greater emphasis on sustainable development and the preservation of Seoul's built heritage, and more recently the transformation has been led by city residents themselves. Here are some highlights:

The 2030 Seoul Plan

A collaboration between citizens' groups, city council members, experts, city government officials and other stakeholders, this 2013 draft paved the course for the city's future, categorised by key issues, and containing spatial structure and land use plans, regional plans and action plans. The process saw the formation of the Seoul Plan Citizens' Group, 100 citizens who were tasked with identifying the vision and key tasks for the city. The plan was also reviewed at public hearings and regional presentation sessions.

Open government 2.0

The M-Voting smartphone app invites citizens to vote almost daily on municipal issues, which in turn provide the city with data to improve services.

The Open Information Communication Plaza website shares city documents with the public, while the Seoul Open Data Plaza maintains an open data platform where virtually all quantitative datasets, except for confidential or personal data, is shared freely to educate the public of municipal affairs and invite people to develop their own apps to help address issues.

Seoul innovation bureau

The first of its kind in Asia, this multi-departmental innovation unit employs a staff of 58 supported by a budget of [5 mil GBP], its purpose is to seek insight and ideas from the public, many of which are adopted into policy. A massive civic-engagement undertaking with two goals: to draw citizens into the decision-making process, including budget decisions, and to transform government organisational culture. Among other initiatives, the bureau operates an online portal and hosts interactive workshops between residents and government to seek feedback on important issues.

Urban regeneration

In 2017, there were 131 active urban development projects underway in Seoul, driven by a citizen-led process that focuses on urban regeneration, or development without demolition, as opposed to redevelopment. Some of the finest examples to come out of this approach are the Sewoon Shopping Centre, the transformation of 7 1970s commercial mega-blocks into a vibrant Makercity, and the Mapo Oil Tank Cultural Park, an eco-friendly cultural centre crafted from the remains of a circa 1978 emergency fuel storage facility.

Sharing city Seoul

Since 2012, a new culture is emerging based on the sharing of resources and services. It started with the city government itself sharing facilities such as unused parking lots, empty rooms and idle public spaces with citizens in a bid to help residents, startups and established companies build and capitalise on shared resources. This has spurred a sharing sensibility among citizens, who are encouraged to develop apps to further share services and resources that will help the city and its communities.



About the Prize

The Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize (LKYWCP) honours outstanding achievements and contributions to the creations of liveable, vibrant and sustainable urban communities around the world. The biennial international award is organised by URA and the Centre for Liveable Cities. Seoul was awarded the LKYWCP in March 2018. The Prize, comprising of an award certificate, a gold medallion, and a cash prize of S\$300,000 sponsored by Keppel Corporation, will be given at the Lee Kuan Yew Prize Award Ceremony on 9 July 2018 during the World Cities Summit. 4 other cities received Special Mentions for best practices in city management: Hamburg, Kazan, Surabaya, and Tokyo. For more information about the Prize, go to www.leekuaneyeworldcityprize.com.sg





Live, work, play

As planners rethink and redesign city spaces to adapt to changing needs, 8 designers and experts reflect on how live, work, play spaces are evolving and what they want to see in future.





Where we live

Where people choose to live in future may depend on how the design of living spaces work with the different needs of the community and the natural environment.

Writer **Dawn Lim**



Leonard Ng

Leonard's design interest lies at the intersection of man and his environment with the aim of finding a long term sustainable balance between them. His approach involves extensive collaboration with diverse professions to develop holistic landscape-based solutions that engage and educate users while respecting the environment. Amongst his many projects, he has led the redesign of the popular Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park that was awarded the President's Design Award 'Design of the Year' in 2012.

Look Boon Gee and Ng Sor Hiang

Through clever and intimate site-specific strategies, Boon Gee and Sor Hiang have been exploring ways to make living more enjoyable for the people. A personal desire for beautiful open spaces quietly permeates LOOK Architects' sensitive design approach, which seeks to understand the needs of people while minimising the impact on nature. Boon Gee is also a recipient of the President's Design Award 'Designer of the Year' in 2009.

The more urbanised a city, the more contested its spaces. Balancing different needs increasingly becomes a juggling act. How then can we continue to turn spaces into places where people want to live in?

URA planners are envisioning future neighbourhoods to have fewer cars, well connected, inclusive spaces and closer integration with nature for new precincts such as Kampong Bugis, Holland Plain and Bayshore.

Co-founders of LOOK Architects, Look Boon Gee and Ng Sor Hiang, and Ramboll Studio Dreiseitl Singapore's studio director, Leonard Ng, discuss a more nuanced approach to adaptable and inclusive living spaces, and how we can tap into the relationships between individuals, communities and the natural environment.

How has Singapore progressed in shaping its living environment?

Leonard: Singapore has always emphasised landscaping and quality environments as part of liveability, even though it might not have been defined in these terms before. This principle has largely remained, but I think it has deepened. We are looking at landscape more programmatically now with significant steps taken towards diverse and thoughtful forms of landscaping. We are thinking: What can landscape do for people? What can landscape do for nature?



Above | The Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park by Ramboll Studio Dreiseitl (image above) has won many hearts with its multi-layered design that balances functional, ecological and communal needs while LOOK Architect's Trans-Urban Connector Project in Fuzhou (image on the right), China, seeks to draw closer the relationship between people, city and the mountains. Photo credit: Ramboll Studio Dreiseitl and LOOK Architects

There is more than ever a need to share, and for residential developments to shift people's mindsets from 'not in my backyard' to 'good in my backyard'.



How do you ensure different needs are met in a residential project?

Boon Gee, Sor Hiang: We think that there is more than ever a need to share, and for residential developments to shift people's mindsets from 'not in my backyard' to 'good in my backyard'. We have a public housing project, St. George's Tower, where the drop off and precinct pavilion is integrated into an active ageing hub. Instead of tucking the elderlies in a corner, we want them to partake in the goings-on. But a facility like this may generate mixed responses from residents, so we set a really nice pavilion within a nice ageing facility. We want to show that it is alright to share.

How else does St. George's Tower encourage sharing?

Boon Gee, Sor Hiang: We tried to boost opportunities for interaction between residents and non-residents through these unique pockets of sky terraces within the residential blocks. The idea is to encourage an upward flow of movement so that activities are not confined to the ground. The blocks have such a spectacular view of the city, why not share it? The precinct pavilion and landscaping on the ground floor also faces the park connector, encouraging non-residents to take a detour into the development or continue their Kallang-Whampoa Heritage Trail.

Will we have fenceless condominiums in Singapore some day?

Boon Gee, Sor Hiang: Maybe we still have some way to go. But in the meantime, there are always friendlier strategies to distinguish a private development without saying: "I am here and you are there". The idea of the street is very important. You want to maintain privacy and still respect the streetscape. We designed a condominium, Bliss@Kovan, where the perimeter wall is set behind the drop-off porch. This makes the entire frontage with its paved driveway look like it belongs to the street, even though it belongs to the condominium. We also employed very porous fencing all around so that the condominium's landscaping can be visually enjoyed from the outside.



How can we better integrate our social and ecological infrastructure?

Leonard: Instead of building in the image of man, we can think about working with nature, harnessing its ideas for more enriching and efficient designs. But this means we will need to return to the first principles of natural systems and learn what makes nature work. The least we can do is respond to topography, identify high-value trees to retain, and try not to change the land too much (lest it goes against our storm flow).

What does adaptability encompass in landscape design?

Leonard: We call it a “future-forward design”. It involves planning and design with a view to the future where an entire urban fabric will change. For example, in our CleanTech Park project for JTC, not all the (currently forested) plots will be developed concurrently. So we developed the green-blue infrastructure in the centre first and prepared a green corridor. When all the plots are occupied in the future, animals can migrate into this corridor and start using it.

How do you go about finding the most inclusive perspective?

Leonard: We always design in layers. A park design is many things – biophilic design, stormwater management, landscape design. You think about the water, the plants, the animals and the people. We try to plan for different age groups, but we accept that we can’t possibly know what everybody wants. Hence, we create interesting areas that are not programmed, and people can colonise them with

their imagination. This is increasingly a new approach.

What is an attractive living environment to you?

Leonard: If we can coexist with nature, if all the parks are high quality and accessible, if people learn to use these valuable spaces sensitively, I think that will be wonderful. Right now, we still don’t understand what all these spaces really mean. We see them as amenities for our use. But they are more than amenities – they are our heritage and nature’s heritage. If we never understand what makes a space special, it will lead to big impediments for future advancements.

Boon Gee, Sor Hiang: We long for open, green spaces and vast stretches of untouched, unbuilt spaces. For us, nature is also a great treasure trove of ideas and inspiration. The forest walk we designed in Alexandra was inspired by the ‘mile-a-minute’ plant. We will prefer to preserve whatever little natural heritage we have, but if green spaces must be touched, any intervention must be very sensitive.

Other ideas you have been exploring lately?

Boon Gee, Sor Hiang: We have been intrigued by this idea of slow walking as a basic human activity that could make city living more enjoyable. This is what we explored for our Trans-Urban Connector project in Fuzhou, China. The intention is to draw closer the relationship between people, city and the ever present mountains in Fuzhou. So we proposed an eco-smart walkway system that cuts through an inaccessible mountainous area, creating new vantage points and a thoroughfare for people to get from city to mountain, from one place to another.

Future neighbourhoods

Plans for Kampong Bugis, Holland Plain and Bayshore, were announced in October 2017. A total of 19,000 housing units are in the pipeline for the 3 precincts in the next decade. They will be designed around the vision of a car-lite, inclusive and green future. For more information on these precincts, go to ura.sg/futurehoods.

Beyond boxy cubicles

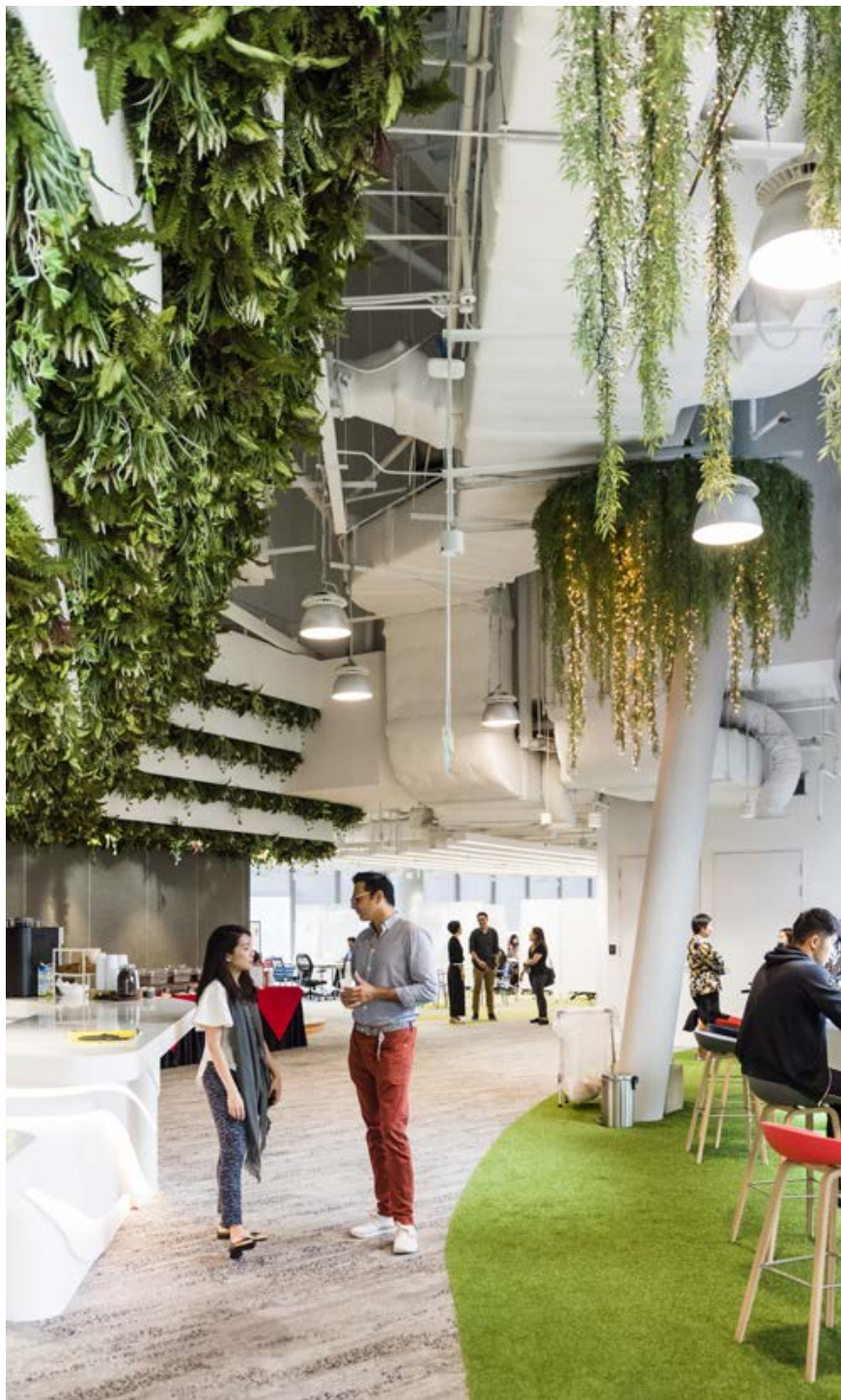
Banking and automotive companies DBS and Continental Automotive are breaking out of boxy work cubicles for more open and adaptable spaces. This is changing work spaces in significant ways.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland** | Photographer **Chee Boon Pin**

There is a curious office space in the Sandcrawler Building, deep in the heart of Fusionopolis, a research and development complex in Singapore's one-north business park. Workers here wear jeans and trainers and sit wherever they please, alone or in groups, near the well-stocked open pantry or the playful chill-out area, gazing out at sweeping views or hanging out on the lush open-air terrace. A casual observer might think this is the office of Lucasfilms, or maybe Google or Facebook, but surprisingly it is a bank. DBS, to be exact.

This office exemplifies a growing trend for companies to bust up their boxy cubicles in favour of spaces that are open, flexible and adaptable for mixed-use; holistic environments designed to gear up their workers, and their businesses, as they blaze a trail into uncertain futures within fast-changing industries.

With the advent of new technologies, traditional industries are being disrupted, some beyond recognition. Commercial banking is not immune. As app developers build competitive web-based options for global payments, remittance, lending and other financial transactions, traditional banks are at risk of becoming merely data platforms from which these third-party companies operate. But for banks clever enough to harness emerging technologies, the opportunities are endless.



According to Steyn Verhoeven, a consultant at Zanders Treasury & Finance Solutions, banks need to become more like Google or Apple, lest Google or Apple become the next bank. In a 2016 think piece, he wondered, "With the world's largest taxi company owning no vehicles, and the world's most popular media owner creating no content, perhaps in the future, the world's largest bank will not even hold deposits?"

"Banks are no longer competing with other banks," says Annie Ye, head of DBS Asia X, or DAX, the innovation hub that occupies this unique space at Fusionopolis. "Technology companies like Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu plus fintech start-ups are all coming into our space and providing fast, cheap and scalable service. So we have to look at our playground in a very different way," she says.

DAX is just one of DBS's responses to the sea change, a place where the bank can engage the fintech community and breed a culture of innovation. Residents, or DAXters, consist of about 70 per cent DBS employees from across different

teams in the bank, while the rest are a mash-up of fintech startups, social enterprises and student interns. Opened in late 2016, DAX ran up to 14 internal innovation projects in 2017, driven by various business units within the bank. DAXter teams conceive of products, services or processes with the goal of developing a successful proof-of-concept.

Fertile ground for ideas

In the centre of the 16,000 square feet of mostly open space, small clusters of tables are surrounded by moveable whiteboards, welcoming collaboration among DAXsters from myriad functions, sectors and disciplines. The vast majority of them don't even come from a banking background.

"The culture of a tech company, the way of working is very different to a bank," says Annie, "so we need a space like DAX to enable that. The space is about being agile and bringing multidisciplinary functions together, so we have a lot of open space and moveable furniture that facilitates this kind of conversation."





The future is not just a person working at his desk by himself. It's a project team, a group effort that we need to build. Because the system that we are building is becoming more complex, integrated and connected. It's not just one product that we are building, but a system.



Here, no one has a permanent desk. Everyone works from any point they choose. Plants hang upside down, giant Lego bricks cordon off breakout spaces and natural light streams in from nearly every angle through panoramic windows. In addition to the pantry, play area and terrace, an auditorium for 200 can be opened up entirely to the rest of the space.

For DAX, planning programmes is as important as planning space. In 2017, DAX hosted around 220 events, from sleepover hackathons to TEDTalk thought-leadership-style presentations, programmes to inspire both DBS employees and the broader innovation community to view their work beyond traditional boundaries. Many events reach out to innovators within start-ups, fintech and social enterprise communities, their Sandcrawler Building and one-north neighbours, like Disney and GovTech.

"What's most important is the community

we create. We can curate this space so that people come here to learn, collaborate, grow their network and receive support," says Annie. But for all the fun, DAX means serious business, positioned to change the mindsets and empower 26,000 DBS employees to become a 26,000-person start-up, which is why Annie says they chose a Fusionopolis address.

"You need a space away from the traditional financial district so that people feel they can do things differently. This is a safe place to experiment and fail fast. They are safe to try new things here. They don't have to think about returns on investment, because that's not how people start the problem solving process," says Annie.

But she doesn't see this as the end of the financial district in a traditional sense. "I don't see it disappearing," says Annie. "But we can think about the future of the district, possibly for education, access to more people in need, and social enterprises. There is an opportunity to give it a new meaning and function given how technology is evolving."



Affecting everyone, everywhere

Across town, another company in a completely different industry has also redesigned its workspace in anticipation of a future driven by new technology. Later in 2018, Continental Automotive Singapore will be rolling out a new R&D facility that is completely unlike the company's 2 existing blocks at Boon Keng Road.

"We are moving towards more electric and software driven, integrated products, things like automated vehicles and artificial intelligence," says Lo Kien Foh, managing director of German automotive solutions provider, Continental Automotive Singapore. As a result, he says, engineers focus less on mechanical parts than they used to and more on software development.

Continental Automotive Singapore is the R&D hub under Continental Corporation, one of the world's top automotive suppliers and the Singapore location is home to one of Continental's largest R&D centres in Asia. "We've made the new building future-ready, more flexible so that we're able to adapt easily. It is definitely more open," says Kien Foh.

In the new facility, the open plan design encourages workers to mix with each other to talk about their projects. Each floor has a central meeting space with a large screen monitor and glass walls that can be moved to form a number of sizes and configurations for discussions. It is in these spaces that the company holds *kanban*, a Japanese practice of brief daily updates of ongoing projects. In other areas, smaller alcoves with monitors have been created for smaller stand-up meetings. Each floor also has a number of sound-proofed rooms for teleconferencing and small booths to facilitate private conversations between 2 or 3 people.

"The future is not just a person working at his desk by himself," says Kien Foh. "It's a project team, a group effort that we need to build. Why? Because the system that we are building is becoming more complex, integrated and connected. It's not just one product that we are building, but a system. Moving into the future, things won't be as simple anymore."



Technology shifts have even altered individual workstations, which can be raised or lowered hydraulically to suit increasingly small and lightweight automotive parts and the equipment used to make and test them.

Aesthetics is also a surprising factor in the new facility, with a focus on bright colours, natural light and even a spacious leisure space with a billiards table to create a more vibrant and stimulating work environment. Employee programmes also promote work life balance. Things like fruit snacks, sport recreation clubs and a community garden promote healthy lifestyles and welcome breaks from the daily grind.

It goes without saying that such measures are also intended to attract top talent. "How can we make ourselves the employer of choice?" says Kien Foh. "By creating a work environment where people feel at home and feel like they can accomplish what they want to do."

Future districts

At a district level, planners are also creating more open and adaptable spaces that encourage collaborations and the fostering of thriving communities in future precincts like the Jurong Lake District and Punggol Digital District. In Jurong Lake District, a regular grid system for land parcels offers flexibility in providing larger or smaller land parcels to meet different needs. A 'white' zoning in the business area enables landlords and tenants to mix various uses and adapt spaces for future needs. The district is also envisioned to support more sustainable mobility set amidst green and blue spaces.

At Punggol Digital District, the new 50-ha development in Punggol North announced in January 2018 will become Singapore's first Enterprise District driven by technology and innovation. It will also be the first district in Singapore to adopt an integrated master plan approach that combines amenities for the community with a business park and a university – the Singapore Institute of Technology. This opens up interactions between students, researchers and industrialists for a more dynamic business environment.



How we play

3 creative leaders reflect on their play memories growing up and the types of play spaces they wish for in the city.

Writer **Dawn Lim**

MARK WEE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DESIGNSINGAPORE COUNCIL

The idea of play is a richly layered one. It refers to spaces where there is a sense of ownership and contribution to urban life. As an artist and architect, I loved my office in Arab Street. There were always a variety of food options, cool spaces and businesses in the neighbourhood. In my new role at DesignSingapore, play is something I have been contemplating in our aspiration to shape a loveable city by design. Just as we are shaped by our environments, we can also shape the places in which we live, work and play. The concept of play for me is to have places where I can go to, be filled with wonder, feel the generosity of the creative human spirit and contribute through different actions.

Playing as a child

Growing up in Serangoon Gardens, I spent my days hanging out, skateboarding or playing basketball with my friends. But the most memorable times were our secret group adventures. We would explore on our bicycles, catch fish in canals, sneak out in the middle of the night, and got back home before our parents woke up. I believe these times are responsible for shaping me and my creative leanings.

Playing as a grown-up

What I enjoy doing now is going to East Coast Park and cycling around the Joo Chiat area. The openness

of the park gives me a space to stare out into the sea, allowing me to think and reflect. The eclectic nature of Joo Chiat and the scale of the shophouses also yield unexpected discoveries now and then.

Playing in the city

I met a travelling street artist from London at East Coast Park some weeks ago. I asked him for his first impression of Singapore. He said that although it was a beautiful city, everything seemed in place, like they couldn't be touched or contributed to. No doubt, there is good design all around us, but more of our environment can be framed in an open-ended manner, where the public feels inspired to touch and play, to design their own experiences using various mediums.

Playing in the future

We all can curate the type of creative energy that we wish for a place. I would like to see places that can be easily adapted or reconfigured for different community needs. These places need not be completely designed, and only made complete by the public's contributions.

An artist, architect, experience designer and educator, Mark Wee is currently the executive director of the DesignSingapore Council. He was also recently named one of Singapore's "20 under 45" architects by URA. In his professional life, Mark believes in shaping places that deepen identity and community, as well as the potential of design and innovation for business and cultural transformation.



Above | This illustration by Mark Wee was inspired by Clara Chow's book, "Dream Storeys", published in 2016, presenting a series of fictional stories about Singapore. Places were reimagined as extraordinary spaces. For example, multi-storey carparks became landscaped gardens, buildings were built around majestic trees and Bukit Timah hill became a colourful, cheerful mosaic of a climb.

JACKSON TAN
CREATIVE DIRECTOR
BLACK

In the city, play is commonly or universally seen as entertainment. Mobile gaming on the train, playing pool at the bar or a game of frisbees at the park – they are all activities that entertain and engage the individuals in our everyday lives.

Playing as a child

When I was a kid, my maternal grandparents lived in a Housing Development Board flat in Dakota. I have fond memories of playing with my cousins in this family home. Our extended family members have a tradition of meeting over the weekends for home-cooked dinners in this very house. After eating, all the children get to go out and play. In a familiar scene, the adults sit around and chat while the kids have a field day on swings, the see-saws and other playground rides. Our play and activities were simple, but the joy came from being together with the cousins and knowing that we did not have to go to school the next day.

Playing as a grown-up

Play these days comprises post-work and post-dinner futsal with a bunch of friends on weekday nights. Long walks on weekends with my wife

are also valued time. When we are up to it, we sometimes invite friends over for a homely night of board games.

Playing in the city

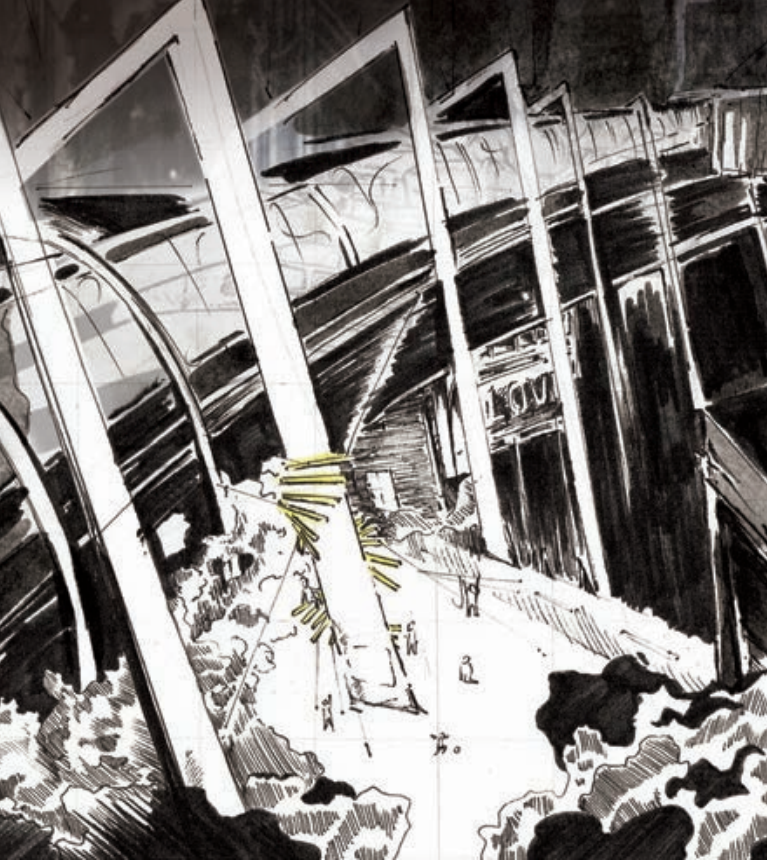
As a small city and island-state, play spaces can be built around our lives (home) and work (office), so that opportunities for play is always situated nearby. They should be made inspiring and accessible. If we repurpose some of the old or underutilised places around the city into play spaces – however big or small – they can easily become play destinations.

Playing in the future

Most people might cite the future as one that will be based indoors, shaped by virtual reality or digital-technology-enabled. However, I hope for future playscapes that are even more experiential, physical, outdoor-oriented and integrated with nature. These play spaces can be designed for kids as well as adults – where grown-ups are encouraged to play and our inner child-like wonders are ignited so that we can all return to the simple joys of playing.

Jackson Tan is an artist, designer and curator. He is the creative director of BLACK, a multidisciplinary creative agency and founding partner of PHUNK, a contemporary art & design collective. Jackson was awarded 'Designer of the Year' in 2007 by the President's Design Award.





CLARA YEE CREATIVE DIRECTOR IN THE WILD

In the context of spatial relationships, play breaks stereotypes and calls upon our imaginations to envision futures ahead of us. It is an inherent quality we were born with. Taking on various instances and qualities over our growing years, play evolves with us and so do the spaces surrounding us. A child might feel powerful and free in a playground, confidently hanging off monkey bars; an adult may discover more fun with setting foot on foreign land and bringing ideas into reality. In some ways, we are living the playful dreams of ancestors, and it is now our turn to play, shape and transform.

Playing as a child

Immersed in my immediate environment of lalang fields, drains and the Bidadari cemetery, I take trips down my imagination, miming props, making

up stories and playing them out. I interacted with my environment, swinging from Banyan trees and playing with huge fallen palm leaves.

Playing as a grown-up

Now, I am drawn to connections beyond my immediate environment; to explore possibilities beyond my circumstances. I enjoy travelling and connecting with people, and experiencing fascinating cultures from Tao Pueblos to the Berbers and the Nias Islanders. I also turn towards playing through my work.

Playing in the city

Play in a fast-paced modern city like Singapore would mean to explore within our means and to push the boundaries of the free market. It is free from constraints such as the cost of living, power imbalances and historical baggage – yet, it works with the culture, geography and materials available. Here, play is spontaneous, unpredictable and can take the shape of organised chaos. It is a vessel for serendipitous encounters and all kinds of opinions and weirdness to free people's minds from the expected.

Playing in the future

In Georg Simmel's "The Metropolis and The Mental Life", cities of the near future will be in constant motion, with a high fluidity of information, commodities and population. The material of the city will transform dramatically into more complex, flexible organisations and soft (digital and ecological) infrastructures.

As cities move towards digital infrastructure, children will move from playing with sandpits to playing with roadside LED sculptures. With analogue mobile apps, they will code and hack themselves into cities to create their own narratives of play. My idea of play spaces in the future is anti-design. It grows out of the inherent resourcefulness of children and their non-conformity to rules.

Intrigued by the world of visuals, Clara began illustrating since young. She has since grown to experimenting and collaborating in diverse fields ranging from fashion prints to weaving spatial interventions and stage design using multiple disciplines as mediums for storytelling. She is a Forbes Asia inaugural 30 under 30 honouree and co-founder of nomadic creative house – in the wild.



Ageing and social capital

Academics, designers and policy makers are coming together in a seminal project to develop planning and design guidelines for ageing friendly neighbourhoods in Singapore.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland** | Photographer **Chee Boon Pin**

When referring to an age-friendly neighbourhood, we should use the word “ageing friendly” instead, suggests Dr Belinda Yuen, the research director and programme lead of the Lee Li Ming Programme in Ageing Urbanism at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University Technology and Design (SUTD). “Ageing is a process whereas age denotes a label. Ageing is not the end of life, instead, there is a lot to celebrate as one moves on to later years.”

She is leading a seminal 18-month research project that started from July 2017, seeking to understand the connection between the neighbourhood’s built environment and older persons’ social, physical and mental health. For this project, SUTD is also joined by the Geriatric Education & Research Institute, which will provide research on the public health and medical needs of ageing Singaporeans.

Envisioning an ideal ageing friendly neighbourhood, Belinda says it should be welcoming (inclusive for all), walkable, wonderful (with attractive spaces) and warm (referring to human interactions). “Our task is clear,” says Belinda, “to provide the opportunities that encourage older people to get out of the house and to support them in their capacity to use the spaces around them, otherwise they may become housebound. The physical infrastructure and facilities are very important in providing the stage for activities to play out and opportunities for interaction that can help address loneliness and social isolation.”

Something as simple as a bench can become critical. Belinda suggests that benches placed in public spaces in Singapore should be made of materials that are relevant to the local climate, that are comfortable and have arm rests for older people to use to lift themselves up. Placement is also important, along common paths and at short intervals. Even the angles at which they are placed make a difference, as benches facing each other are more conducive for social interaction.

Based on the project scope, Belinda and her team will focus on 3 neighbourhoods with different population profiles, topography, and land use mix, to provide local quantitative and qualitative insights. They have also undertaken benchmark comparisons with other ageing-friendly initiatives in 10 cities around the world.

Dream project

Once the research is completed, it will be used to produce broad planning and design guidelines that can be applied to existing and future neighbourhoods. There may also be opportunities to do post-implementation evaluation of subsequent improvements made within the 3 selected neighbourhoods. For this reason, Belinda calls it a “dream project.”

“Singapore is the first to approach the issue of ageing-friendly neighbourhoods from research through intervention prototyping to evaluation,” says Belinda. The project brings together academics, policy makers and architects. Funded by the National Research Foundation and Ministry of





Above | The seminal study by URA on ageing friendly neighbourhood is looking more closely at shaping and designing engaging spaces for older persons, including places like Coffee Corner at Toa Payoh View, a social gathering space initiated by local champion Philip Phajan Singh (image at the top) and Toa Payoh West market and its surrounding spaces that have become a focal point for many in the neighbourhood.

An explicit goal of ageing friendly design is to make sure that people's life space mobility doesn't get constricted, the amount that someone is willing and feels enabled to travel beyond their immediate home environment.

National Development (under L2NIC) and led by URA, some other partners include the Ministry of Health, Building & Construction Authority, Agency for Integrated Care and Housing & Development Board.

Her team is producing up to 10 deliverables, including an environmental audit toolkit which can be used by planners, architects, local councils or even residents themselves to assess the ageing-friendliness of their neighbourhood spaces. A draft has already been presented to some Town Councils for feedback.

Design solutions

The project also includes 3 architectural firms, CPG Corporation, Tierra Design and Lekker Architects. Each firm has been assigned to focus on 1 of the 3 neighbourhoods identified as part of the project, and come up with context specific design solutions.

"An explicit goal of ageing friendly design is to make sure that people's life space mobility doesn't get constricted, the amount that someone is willing and feels enabled to travel beyond their immediate home environment," says co-founder of Lekker Architects Ong Ker-Shing. This means walkability, benches and places that inspire social interaction are high on her list of priorities. Wayfinding is another.

"These days, everything shouts for your attention," she says. "There's no quiet fabric that forms the background, similar to what you see in older cities. With redevelopment, it's hard to have a neighborhood that is both legible in the scale of the buildings and the neighborhood itself, while

retaining recognisable landmarks. That's confusing as you get older, when maybe you forget things or find a lot of information hard to sift out. So one thing we've wondered is whether there can be a simplification of the visual information at a neighborhood level."

Tierra Design's co-founder Franklin Po adds: "The dilemma is to understand the neighborhood and the flows of where people are walking and then to figure out where all the spots are that need to be fixed." If it were up to him, Franklin says he would do away with every step and level change within the main walkways of the neighbourhood and move all roads and parking to peripheral areas, creating a seamless corridor of green and open spaces that is safe and inclusive for everyone. For exercise, there should be pathways outside of these main pathways to give people more choices.

Social capital

Similar to Belinda and Ker-Shing, Franklin places importance on how people use their neighbourhood spaces to form social connections, observing how residents gravitate to some spaces more than others, and the various ways that spaces are used for ad hoc activities. "Remember, people used to live in kampongs at the ground level," says Franklin, "so when you put them in apartment blocks, you've changed the social fabric. We want to bring people out from their apartments, back down to the ground level. It's a big issue if people don't want to mingle or don't even know who their neighbours are."





He adds: "We are exploring the difference between designing spaces for people and designing spaces for people to create by themselves," says Franklin. "We feel that if we give ownership to people, not just the elderly but people of all ages, then they will actually use these spaces more often."

It's about building social capital. "What we're trying to do in communities is to build social cohesion and providing amenities that will actually promote people coming together with different interests and to find the kind of interest that they like."

Above | Older persons within the Toa Payoh View neighbourhood have re-purposed common public spaces into their own gathering spots like this one (images on the left and right). These are located close to the Toa Payoh West market (image at the top).



See you at Coffee Corner

An example of what it means to build social capital lies with a quiet local champion. He has inspired both Belinda and Franklin in what he is doing at Toa Payoh View, building up an enviable community spirit, an important aspect in contributing to thriving ageing friendly neighbourhoods.

Every Saturday morning, Philip Phajan Singh, project chairman at the Toa Payoh View Residents' Committee (RC) has been creating quite a stir amongst residents who stream out of their homes and into the courtyard outside the RC office to enjoy coffee and breakfast together. There are also other things to do – join an exercise class, attend an informative talk or even go for a medical check-up.

Philip is one of the founders of the weekly Coffee Corner space. Organising a simple gathering each week has begun to build indelible bonds among neighbours and inspired heart-warming stories. It was at this place that 2 people who had lived in the same block for 40 years met each other for the first time and became friends. It was also here that a 96-year-old woman who lived in seclusion, wheelchair-and house-bound, found friends to talk to. And every week, a group of 8 elderly gentlemen can be seen setting up a table for their regular session of an informal men's club.

Above | Philip Phajan Singh (featured in the images on the left and right) at Coffee Corner at Toa Payoh View, which he started in 2016, an informal space that has attracted 200 people every week.



A weekly affair

Philip remembers the first Coffee Corner in September 2016. The idea had been to create a monthly event, but after seeing the 80 people who showed up for the first one, Philip was motivated to make it a weekly affair, which he believes is key to its growth and popularity. Now, Coffee Corner welcomes up to 200 attendees of all ages, from all backgrounds - and even some who come from other neighbourhoods - to join the fun each week.

A true grassroots effort, Coffee Corner has a wealth of volunteers, from a 10 year-old primary school student to elderly couples who volunteer together, from Singaporeans to expats and new citizens alike. Programmes are provided by a host of agencies, including the Silver Generation Office, Health Promotion Board, Central Singapore Council, Singapore Police Force and the National Environment agency.



A health post is run by National Health Care Groups. All of the bread, rolls and pastries are provided gratis by Bread Line, a bakery located just across the street. Volunteers show up every Friday night to transport donations to the RC office for the following morning.

On the impact of Coffee Corner, Philip says: "People look forward to coming. They get a lot out of it, benefitting their health and knowledge. It's more than coffee and tea, that's for sure. It's the conversation and sharing. People start caring about each other, and that's really the whole idea."



Is Tiong Bahru good for ageing?

We walk around the neighbourhood with architect Ong Ker-Shing to find out.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland** and **Serene Tng** | Photographer **Chee Boon Pin**

Tiong Bahru, one of Singapore's first housing estate, is where co-founder of Lekker Architects Ong Ker-Shing's office is located. We stroll through the neighbourhood to understand how its physical environment might be helpful or harmful for older persons.

1 The scale

"What I think this neighborhood does really well is its scale. You have no choice but to be social in a place like this and it has to do with its low rise character. You're so up close and personal with other people's places...and that's good for keeping you engaged," says Ker-Shing. In addition, the different scales of the places within short distances make the place more attractive with a range of different environments to access. Ker-Shing also finds moving around Tiong Bahru relatively easy and is highly walkable. "Prolonged walking throughout the day is supposed to be very important to healthy ageing."

2 The staircase

"This can be intimidating... in the floors above me, there used to be older couples living there. However, even when they are struggling with their shopping bags, they refuse help," says Ker-Shing.

3 The small hump

"There are many things that don't occur to us but my mother is pointing this out to me now... it can be as small as this tiny little hump, you can kind of stub your toe and go tumbling over. In fact, one of my ex-colleagues who is in her late twenties was just walking around here and she accidentally went like this and she broke her foot. Perhaps smaller private sector or student-led guerilla projects can explore coming up with design solutions for problems like this, to enable ageing-in-place."







The story of Tanjong Pagar

Tucked in the heart of the business district, this charming enclave has become a vibrant neighbourhood of old and new. How will the story of its past and future continue to be shaped and told?

Writer **Serene Tng** | Photographer **Chee Boon Pin**

Tanjong Pagar is a historic district in the heart of the Central Business District. Located between the docks and the town area, it was an enclave for thousands of Chinese and Indian dock workers for many years. In the mid-1980s, Tanjong Pagar was one of the first few areas in Singapore to be gazetted as a conservation area as part of the larger Chinatown district.

Today, it is thriving neighbourhood that continues to evolve. With its contrast of old and new, the place offers new opportunities to further strengthen its identity and vitality. Place-making, a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach to improve districts will play an increasingly important role in enhancing areas like Tanjong Pagar and its distinctive character.

We catch up with two active stakeholders of the neighbourhood, Cheng Hsing Yao, group managing director of GuocoLand Singapore, that developed Tanjong Pagar Centre, a new focal point for the district and Justin K Chen, deputy ceo of Arcc Holdings, an investment company that owns many shophouses in the area. They share their memories and hopes for the district and the role of place-making in shaping its future.

What are your memories of the neighbourhood?

Hsing Yao: There were many dilapidated shophouses in the district until the 1980's conservation programme that started with a pilot restoration project along Neil Road. I remember it

as a quaint area with a mix of shophouses, Housing Development Board flats, offices, shops and hotels. However, it never really had a clear centre or identity.

How has Tanjong Pagar evolved?

Justin: Tanjong Pagar is coming into its own as a new hub apart from other districts in the city centre such as Raffles Place and Marina Bay. It has a very distinct blend of old and new which sets it apart. The new developments including Tanjong Pagar Centre have helped to give prominence to the area especially in attracting businesses looking for office space.

Hsing Yao: More new offices, malls and hotels have been added in Tanjong Pagar as compared to 10 years ago. The demographics has now become more diverse. The lived-in population is growing. There are more business travellers and tourists here too with more social and sporting activities available. It is definitely a lot more 'live-work-play'.

What role can place-making play for the area?

Hsing Yao: The stakeholders in Tanjong Pagar are very diverse, some of whom are very new to the area while others have been here for a very long time. Place management can bring the stakeholders together to foster a greater understanding of the district, and to also work together to make it better.





Justin: When things change as quickly as they do in Singapore, it's challenging for locations to retain a sense of identity just based on a revolving cast of tenants. There has to be a more deliberate focus on building up the heritage of the place. This is one of the advantages of Tanjong Pagar but that also results in a range of different perceptions of the area depending on who you ask. Place-making can help build on this and create compelling, unifying narratives about the place that excites people.

What do you hope to see for the area in the coming years?

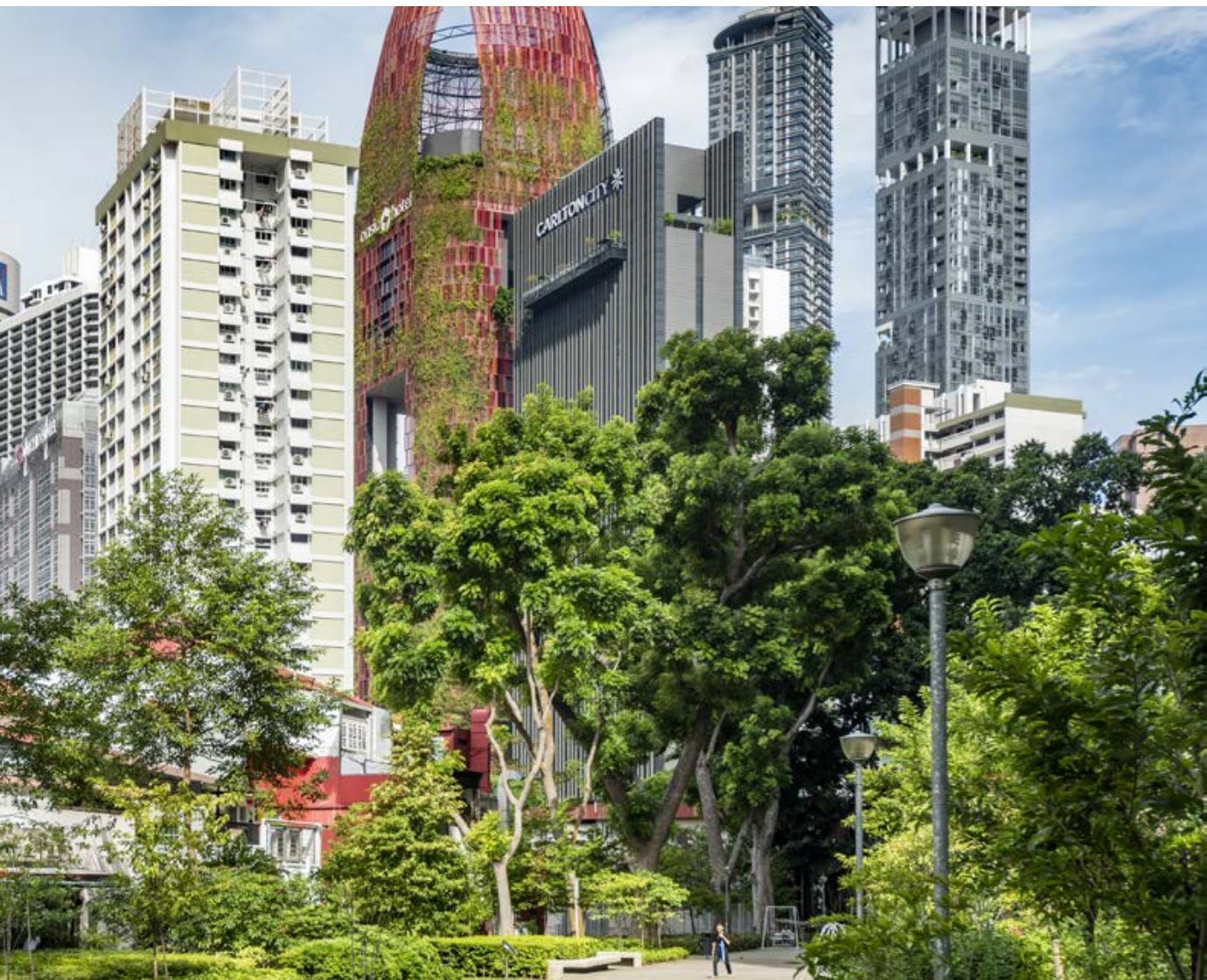
Hsing Yao: I hope to see an improved public realm. We can connect the beautiful linear park at Duxton Plain that leads from Eu Tong Sen to the new urban parks above and around the Tanjong Pagar MRT station. With an enhanced network of public spaces, we can introduce more informal activities in these spaces and explore closures of some of the streets on weekends. It will be wonderful if we can anchor the activities with a unique yearly festival.

I hope to also see a more conscious management of the trade mix to introduce more diversity and character in the area. And we can tell better stories of both the heritage of the place and the new things happening here. This way, we can shape the 'old and new' identity.

Justin: For me, the most exciting changes in Tanjong Pagar has to be the slow return of residential homes to the city centre. There is a vibrancy that comes with a mixed-use precinct, with a diverse range of interactions and activities throughout the span of a day, rather than just during meal times.

I personally would love to see Tanjong Pagar become a place people love to live in, to be able to wander your neighbourhood and build a more tangible community. You will not find people who are more passionate about a neighbourhood than those who actually live there.





Above | Tanjong Pagar – a contrast of old and new, from the busy Tanjong Pagar Plaza of the 1970s (image at top left) to the active Urban Park at the Tanjong Pagar Centre, a new focal point for the district (image at top right) and the quiet Duxton Plain Park which was previously used for the Singapore-Kranji Railway Line.





Why is there a need for districts like Tanjong Pagar be guided by a more formal place management model?

Hsing Yao: The city of Singapore is now quite mature, and there is a tendency for a successful model to be repeated thereby creating possibly a cookie cutter experience. We want the city to have more distinctive districts that provide a more varied experience.

It is hard to achieve that through a top-down process. In other cities, many of the spontaneous ground-up initiatives came about because the district had degenerated to such a dire state that stakeholders had to step up to help themselves. In Singapore, I cannot think of anywhere that is as poorly managed to the same extent.

There is also an over-reliance on the government to provide all the solutions and answers. The place management model is a way to nudge more ground-up initiatives by showing people the potential of what their districts could become.

Most of us are new to the processes of place management like forming an association, how to define practical and equitable policies, costing and execution of public events, etc. A formal model administered by an independent party provides a framework for us to engage, establish communication and build trust.

What are some of your favourite places in the area?

Hsing Yao: The Urban Park at Tanjong Pagar Centre for the ambience and public activities. Maxwell Market for the food. Duxton Hill because I used to intern there and always remember the beautiful paved street.

Justin: One of the joys of the shophouse district is the discovery of interesting pockets when you take the time to wander the streets. My favourite spots are the hidden green belts such as the cobbled street of Duxton Hill, the wide expanse of Duxton Plain and the tree lined path of Ann Siang Park.

I personally would love to see Tanjong Pagar become a place people love to live in, to be able to wander your neighbourhood and build a more tangible community. You will not find people who are more passionate about a neighbourhood than those who actually live there.

Any lesser known places?

Hsing Yao: The Tanjong Pagar Plaza. It is an integrated mixed development of the 1970s. Shops surround open air courtyards, and the apartments neatly rise above. Among the shops are many old trades, but also new concept cafes and eateries.

About the pilot business improvement district

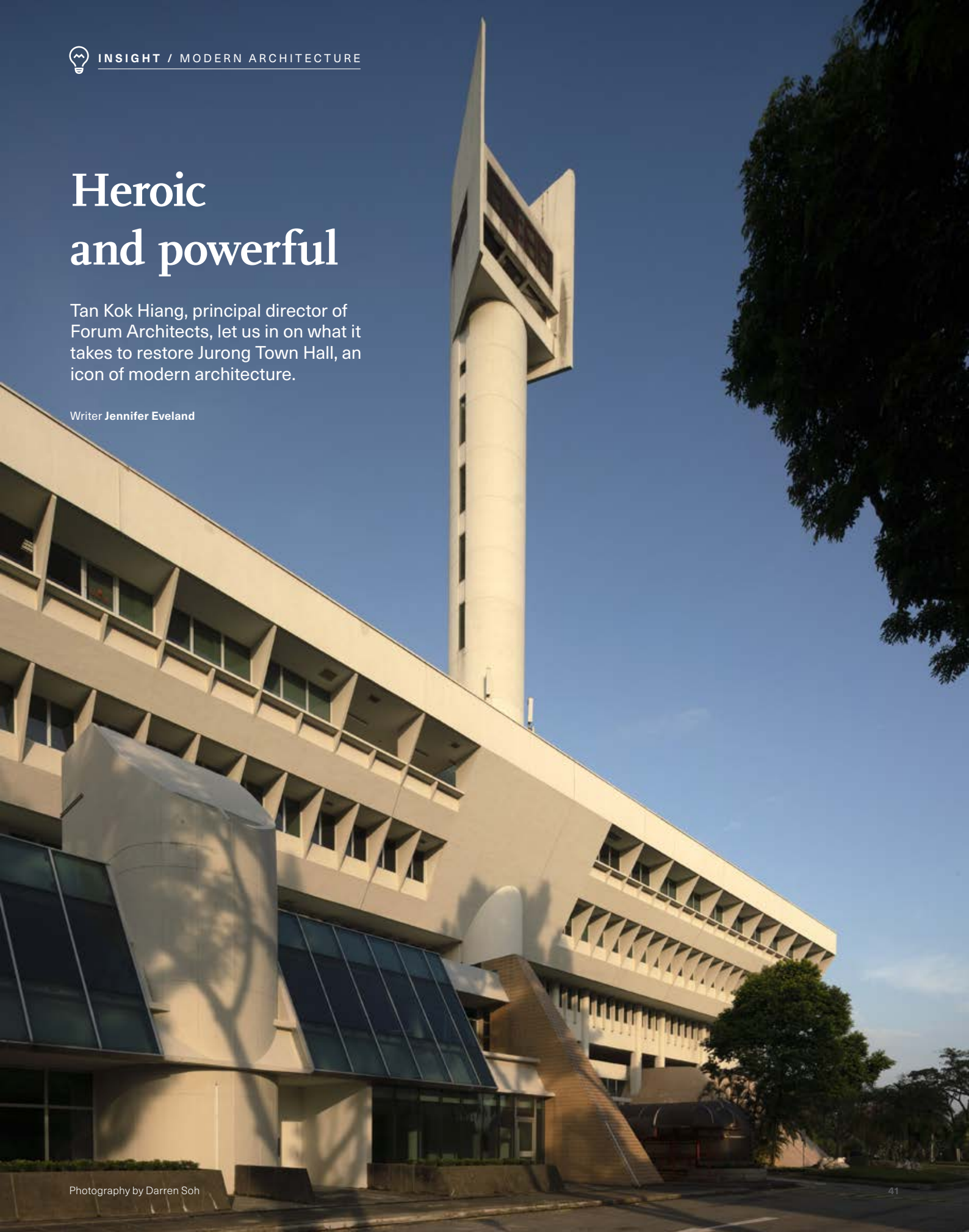
URA and other agencies have been working closely with stakeholders to implement crucial place-making efforts in Singapore. In the last decade, more private sector stakeholders have taken on active roles with several districts managed by stakeholders for areas like Singapore River, Little India and Kampong Gelam. In September 2017, URA formally launched the pilot Business Improvement District (BID) programme to test the BID framework in Singapore. BID is a legislated place management model commonly used in other cities to create positive impact to a place that benefits its users. Property/business owners vote to implement a business plan for a particular district and everyone is compelled to contribute towards funding the business plan if there is majority support for it. Under this pilot, seed funding is available to support stakeholders in their place management efforts. For queries on the pilot BID, write to bid_feedback@ura.gov.sg



Heroic and powerful

Tan Kok Hiang, principal director of Forum Architects, let us in on what it takes to restore Jurong Town Hall, an icon of modern architecture.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland**



"Jurong Town Hall was very heroic and powerful. It had something to say," says Kok Hiang. In 2017, his firm, Forum Architects, completed a detailed restoration of the iconic Jurong Town Hall, which has become a significant landmark and symbol of Singapore's successful industrialisation efforts.

Completed in 1974, Jurong Town Hall served as the headquarters of Jurong Town Corporation (currently known as JTC Corporation) formed in 1968 to spearhead industrial growth. A site was chosen atop an 80-foot-long hill commanding sweeping views of the area and a design competition was held in 1969. The winner, selected from 34 entries, was Architects Team 3 led by pioneer architect Datuk Seri Lim Chong Keat, who designed many significant buildings in the 1960s and 1970s including the Singapore Conference Hall.

The building's sense of gravitas comes from its brutalist design, an extension of modern architecture known for massive, unadorned and unpretentious structures built from raw concrete. Lim Chong Keat also added nautical design

elements – from the outside, the cantilevered upper storeys gave the building the appearance of a ship's hull and the tall clock tower, a mast.

"Jurong Town Hall is a product of an exceptional period in our history, and its architecture captures the spirit of an era when our pioneer generation was boldly imagining and developing the future of Singapore," says Ng Lang, CEO of JTC Corporation. "Even today, it stands as an innovative landmark embodying what the JTC spirit stands for."

In 2000, JTC moved to the JTC Summit, and the building was renamed iHub in 2004 to attract start-up technology companies who needed affordable office space. Upper levels were subdivided into many units until 2005, when Jurong Town Hall was gazetted first as a conserved building before it was designated as a national monument in 2015.

To peel back the layers of history, Kok Hiang and his team found information and inspiration from a surprising source: old copies of the Singapore Institute of Architects Journal which had



detailed coverage of the competition and original photos. He also met a long-time JTC employee, who regaled the team with stories about the old building. The result is a masterpiece that continues to reflect the spirit and essence of the building.

The grand entrance

Visitors to Jurong Town Hall enter an airy square concourse atrium, the building's focal point. From high above, natural sunlight streams through a glass ceiling, illuminating glossy white stucco walls and marble floors buffed to a mirror finish. Surprisingly, the marble is original, says Kok Hiang, a testament to using quality building materials.

Overhead, the upper floors appear stacked in cantilevered tiers, creating a visual effect that emphasises horizontal lines, which Kok Hiang explains is typical of the original architect's design aesthetic. Kok Hiang referenced this aesthetic when he created the thin horizontal brass strip that runs along all four walls of the concourse, level with the lintels of the door openings.

In the centre of the concourse, a massive cantilevered white concrete and marble staircase leads to the basement. Special waiver was sought to preserve it, as the height of the handrails would not meet current building code.

Illuminating the void

At the far end of the concourse, 2 walls in original white ceramic tile slope down through narrow voids to the basement below. The voids, likely added for air and light circulation, had been sealed over during previous renovations, but Kok Hiang reopened the space and installed sculptural light installations above them. Tidy rows of wires dangling naked bulbs at various lengths, some continuing straight through to the basement, draw the eye to the spaces without overpowering them.

Retro 70s events

The ceiling in the main auditorium was of interest, with curious 70s-style curved details that Kok Hiang describes as almost marine in appearance. To update the acoustics of the great hall, he chose a wall treatment that referenced the original dark wood walls that flank the stage, creating a herringbone-like texture of wooden planks.



A wainscot in matching dark wood covers the lower portion of the walls, providing a further design connection between the stage and hall.

Functional spaces

Over the years, every square foot of usable space was sectioned off for office rentals. Glass windows that overlooked the atrium lobby were boarded up. A recessed terrace with stunning views was closed off. Now, the spaces have been stripped back to their original bones and the upper levels reveal airy open spaces and wide corridors illuminated by natural light that streams in through restored windows.

Design motifs

In updating spaces for contemporary use, such as breakout rooms and meeting spaces, Kok Hiang retained the spirit of the building through décor motifs. Hexagons are instantly noticeable, adorning walls, carpets and glass panels. "If you look at the outside of the building," he says, "you'll see that it's actually shaped like two elongated hexagons, so we replicated that."

These spaces are also where he has introduced colour: brass, chrome, shades of lime, orange and other earthy tones that provide subtle winks to the building's 70s roots. The maritime theme is continued in the rounded corner detail, or 'fillet' of the internal doorways, a style that was popular in the 1970s.



Tan Kok Hiang: 4 things that contribute to a successful restoration

"Beauty has a huge role to play in society. It is one of those things in life that brings about positive feelings. For conserved buildings, usually one of the qualities they must have is aesthetic merit. So I'm dealing with a beautiful thing, and then I get to make it even more beautiful. How great is that?"

1 Know the history

"I try to go back in time and think, if I were Chong Keat or part of his team, I would have been influenced by what was relevant to the times. So it's about understanding the building through research and immersing yourself in it and the period."

2 Know the architect

"If you look at Chong Keat's previous buildings, his focus on horizontal lines creates a layering effect. I believe those architectural lines have given me a rule to follow."

3 Add a light touch

"It's about bringing out the building. If you have to add anything, it's about adding it so that it becomes more relevant to the times without compromising the original intent."

4 Love the building

"You need love. I've enjoyed this project very much."

More on Jurong Town Hall

It is among the 7 national monuments built after World War II. According to the National Heritage Board, the building was gazetted as a monument because of its national significance, being built during Singapore's early years of industrialisation and was the work of a pioneering group of local architects.

The building is also part of Singapore's modern architecture that reflect the gradual awakenings and aspirations of nation-building after 1945. Through careful balancing of land use needs and in consultation with the Conservation Advisory Panel and other stakeholders and communities, a significant number of modern buildings have been protected over the years. These were presented in URA's exhibition, 'Heritage of our modern past' to celebrate their value and importance to Singapore's built heritage. The exhibition was on display at the Singapore Heritage Festival in 2017 and 2018.

For more information on Singapore's built heritage, go to <https://ura.sg/consportal>.

From a dot

“Art is like life, it is not a sprint but a marathon to be enjoyed.” Renowned artist Sun Yu-li reminds us of the simple joys of creating art and its profound impact in a city.

Writer **Serene Tng**

Artist Sun Yu-li has placed Singapore on the art world map, with his art displayed in prominent places worldwide. In Singapore, his distinctive sculptures can be seen in various public spaces such as those at Suntec City, Paragon Shopping Centre and the URA Centre. He discovered the universal language, a formal language of the metaphysical and uses his paintings and sculptures to express his concept of a transformational dot, connecting people, cultures and cities. He believes art is for everyone and has created unique opportunities that bring children and the community together to create art.

His latest initiative (teaming up with ArtBeatz) was a live art jamming session over 2 days as part of URA's third annual Urban Planning Festival. The result was beautiful art created by 200 youths at The URA Centre. We catch up with him on the importance of art in a city and how everyone can enjoy it.

Why is art important in a city?

Art in the city injects a new form of excitement. It is a vivid part of our memories of places. Sculptures offer a more permanent form of structure that create a lasting association with a particular place. For example, many of us think about the iconic dragon structure when we recall our growing up years at playgrounds in housing estates. The dragon structure is a vivid image we associate with playgrounds. And this has become part of our collective memory as a society and country. There are very few physical icons that can capture our different phases of modernisation. Sculptures, if placed properly can serve this purpose well.



Above | Artist Sun Yu-li's "Celestial Earth" sculpture at The URA Centre entrance (image at the top) and kids contributing to the live art jamming at URA's urban planning festival, a collaborative project conceptualised by Sun Yu-li and facilitated by ArtBeatz. The project serves to recreate the splendour of modern civilisation and how it has come to be.



You founded Sculpture Square which has become a significant space supporting artists in the realm of 3D art. How did this come about?

It was by chance that I became the founder of Sculpture Square, an art space dedicated to the showcase of sculptures. From the mid-1990s. I worked from my studio at Sophia Road and walked to Middle Road often. 2 buildings at the junction of Middle Road and Waterloo Street caught my eye due to their unique architectural features and a notice was put up in 1995 to transform the site into a 7 storey commercial building.

With my architect's instinct, I knew it was a pity for these 2 historical buildings to be demolished. As a sculptor, I was aware of the scarcity of venues dedicated to the display of 3 dimensional art. I shared this project with my friend and patron Edmund Cheng, deputy chairman of Wing Tai. Both of us had a common interest and worked earnestly on the Sculpture Square project. In 1996, under the National Arts Council Arts Housing scheme, both buildings were set aside for use as the Sculpture Square.¹

Why do you involve the community in creating art together in Singapore and other cities?

Art does not just belong to the museums or to those who can afford it. It has to be linked to the community. By involving the public, it enables everyone to enjoy the process and creation. It opens up minds and stimulates the inner creative instincts in all of us. And when one paints from the heart, there is no right or wrong.

About the urban planning festival

The month-long festival from 22 March to 27 April 2018 attracted 2,000 secondary and tertiary students and teachers from 35 schools, who gained deeper insights on urban planning and design through a series of exhibitions, workshops, talks and tours. Winners of the Challenge for the Urban and Built Environment (CUBE) 2017 were also announced. The top 3 winners were teams from Jurong Junior College, River Valley High School and Singapore Polytechnic. CUBE is an annual workshop and competition for tertiary schools organised by URA since 2009. The 9th edition saw over 145 students from 16 schools experience being urban planners first hand in November 2017, with ideas to turn Mei Chin estate into the new "heart" of Queenstown. Follow CUBE on facebook @CUBEStudentWorkshop for updates on more educational programmes in future.

¹ Sculpture Square has evolved since then. It no longer has a permanent exhibition space. 3D art continues to be supported through other means such as curating and commissioning. The Sculpture Square space is now home to Objectifs, the centre for photography and film.

At a glance

We check out the latest events and happenings shaping the landscapes and neighbourhoods around us.

PRESIDENT'S DESIGN AWARD SINGAPORE 2018

Check out the P*DA recipients

Check out the recipients of the President's Design Award (P*DA) announced on 17 July 2018. Established in 2006, the P*DA is the highest design accolade in Singapore. It was revamped in 2017 as a biennial award with a greater emphasis on the impact of design in transforming work and business; raising the quality of life; enhancing culture and connecting communities; and advancing the design industry and the role of designer. It is jointly administered by URA and the DesignSingapore Council.

When PD*A 2018 exhibition 18 July to 30 August 2018

Where The URA Centre ground floor, 45 Maxwell Road

Web www.designsingapore.org/pda



Visit the exhibition: "No more free space?"

In spite of being one of the most densely populated country in the world, Singapore's architects, planners and place makers have found creative ways to create delightful free spaces. This is the story presented at the Singapore pavilion at the 16th Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition from 25 May to 25 November 2018. The exhibition is commissioned by URA and the DesignSingapore Council and curated by the Singapore University of Technology and Design and the National University of Singapore. The Singapore pavilion will be re-staged at the National Design Centre and URA Centre in 2019.

Web More info www.nomorefreespace.com



Share your stories on Jalan Besar

This curved shophouse along Serangoon Road is one of the 8 pre-World War II shophouses that will be put up for conservation status by URA as announced on 25 May 2018. These will complete the cluster of heritage buildings in the Jalan Besar conservation area. If you grew up in Jalan Besar or have fond memories of the area, share your stories with us.

Contact ura_cons_portal@ura.gov.sg

Create new ways to enhance wellness in malls

How can we improve people's health and wellness even in shopping malls? 3 teams have been shortlisted from an earlier call for proposal to showcase their innovative prototypes that can be introduced in malls as part of the annual URA-REDAS (Real Estate Developer's Association of Singapore) SPARK Challenge launched in November 2017. The prototypes are on display at 6 shopping malls.

Where City Square Mall, Millenia Walk, Orchard Central, Raffles City Shopping Mall, The Centrepoint and Velocity @ Novena

When 25 June to 13 July 2018



