

# FUTURARC

The Voice of Green Architecture in Asia-Pacific  
2Q 2024 | volume 85

## IN-BETWEEN SPACES



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Dear *FuturArc* readers,

I read somewhere that the purpose of life lies not in either/or situations, but in both/and states.

I realised this applies too to the theme of this issue where we look at in-between spaces. In today's (mostly) space-starved urban context, every inch matters. Projects taking up ancillary functions should be designed as integral spaces that contribute to the whole as more than the sum of their parts.

What is the whole and what are the parts? As we investigate and look at projects that make up the in-between domains, across different dimensions of function, time and space, we realise that the most effective of such spaces are those that do not immediately call your attention to their 'in-between-ness'. This seeming paradox highlights their essential beauty, especially when they are crafted with environmental sensibility and sustainable principles.

From the level of the city and neighbourhood to individual buildings and everything in between, this issue explores projects from China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Singapore and Vietnam that make us rethink their design, purpose and impact.

We are also taking you on photographic journey to experience the idea of the 'in-between' more literally—we are showcasing some familiar interstitial spaces, from India, Malaysia, Taiwan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and 'interweaving' them into the different sections of this magazine.

Captured by *FuturArc's* very own lead designer Hans Lim and contributor Nipun Prabhakar, their unique eye for detail immediately draws you to the often-overlooked nooks and crannies that make up the whole architectural tapestry. The pictorial narrative shows how these spaces are used by people and animals, and for informal activities in alleyways to siestas on steps.

The next time when you wander into a place, take a pause and reflect for a moment—are you in a space in between two points, or are you simply at where you are.



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# The FuturArc Interview

## ZHANG TANG

Founder and Principal of YIIE

## LIU TAO AND CAI CHUNYAN

Co-founders and Principal Architects of Atelier tao+c

by Weili Zhang

Due to decades-long urban growth in China, the metropolitan landscape has become awash with megaprojects—at least from afar. When we look closer, in between the towers that are typically magnets for economic activity are vital everyday spaces that provide a setting for commonplace interactions. What do these real building blocks of community look like? What role do these spaces play in the context of increasingly diverse layers of society? What do we do with ageing buildings? *FuturArc* contributor Weili Zhang spoke to three architects based in China to discuss their discovery and crafting of these seemingly ordinary places into deep, meaningful domains for the communities.

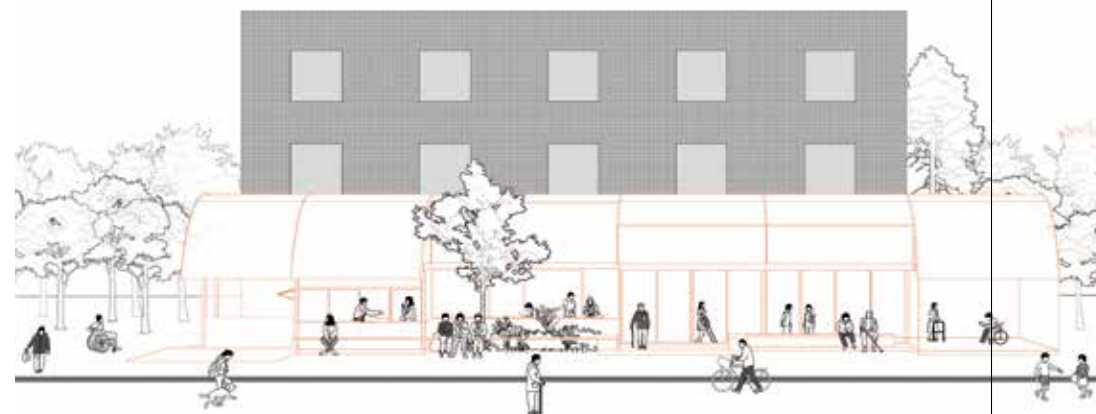


Image courtesy of YIIE Architects

1



2

Image courtesy of Atelier tao+c





Photo by ICY@ICYWORKS



Photo by XIAOZHI@ICYWORKS

1 Elevation of Yulin Alley 2 Façade elevation of Over Bakery 3 to 5 Yulin Alley (clockwise from left): café; a space accessible to everyone, including children and the elderly; programmes and development timeline of the project

**ZHANG TANG, FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL OF YIIIE**

**WZ: Your hometown Chengdu is considered a new ‘first-tier’ Chinese city like Beijing and Shanghai. How do you see Chengdu—its urban life, architecture and its popularity with millennials—vis-à-vis other places, especially from the perspective of a working architect in this city?**

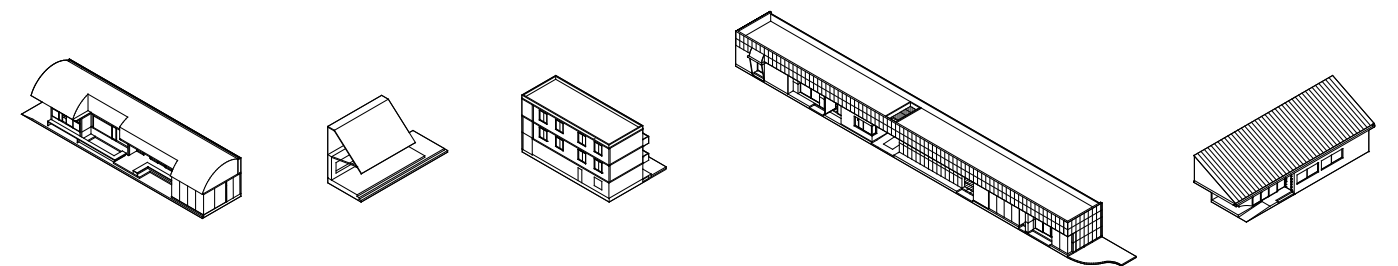
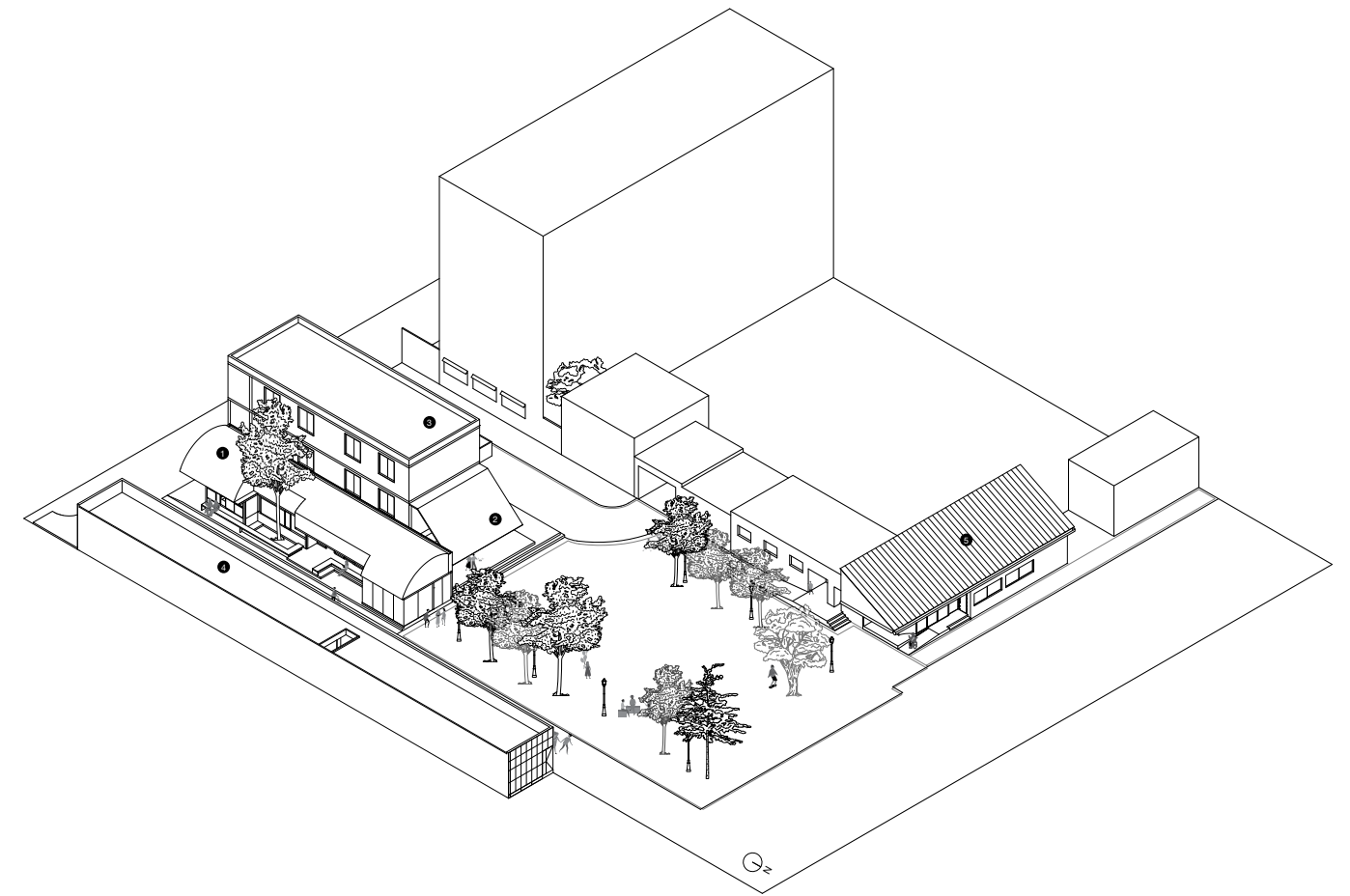
**ZT:** I first ran a café-cum-exhibition space in an old neighbourhood in 2016. It was during that time that I came to know about issues and organisations regarding local communities. That indirectly led to the Yulin Alley project after my return to Chengdu from Japan where I studied, in 2018.

It is true that Chengdu is an important metropolitan centre and is regarded as a new-first-tier city these days, but being in the southwest of China, it does have a special sense of locality unlike other megacities. The fact that it is not an industrial or trade powerhouse like Shanghai and Guangzhou gives Chengdu more room to consider the civilian aspect of a city. It is also a place rich with scenic and touristic resources, which all contribute to it having a special branch in the local administration that focuses on community building and regeneration, which to my knowledge is unique in China.

You could also see it under the larger umbrella of the city government’s effort to promote cultural tourism, which happens concurrently with a rise in café culture—Chengdu is supposedly the number one city in China when it comes to the number of cafés. A café, as you know, is but one venue where one could observe the daily lives of local people. As the concept of unique stores or spaces ‘curated’ by private owners becomes phenomenal, Yulin—an old neighbourhood in the city centre—assumes the role of an experimental ground. Along with a strong media culture and the existence of both governmental and private platforms, the city provides opportunities for many young homecoming architects like myself.

**WZ: Your first project of note is the community centre and plaza at Yulin Alley, an old neighbourhood in the heart of the city. It comes across as having a very youthful presence that contrasts with its surroundings. How did the project come about and how does it fit into the urban context? How does the local community utilise the space?**

**ZT:** The local committee of Yulin posted an invitation for external designers/planners to collaborate in neighbourhood building. After some communication, I decided to submit a competition proposal for a new space they were envisioning. We were lucky that our thoughts aligned with the organisers’, so we began working together to polish the concept.



5

Images courtesy of YIIIE Architects

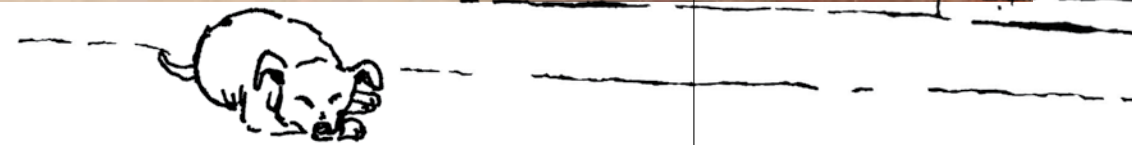




# steps/ threshold

Where there is no public furniture in civic places, sometimes the next best thing on which to sit and take a breather is steps or raised threshold. From the pedestrian to the dramatic, these stepped spaces accessible to the public are often used as a spot for respite, a temporary stop to catch one's breath or thoughts, by oneself or with others.

**1** At Patan Durbar Square, Kathmandu, Nepal: the orange-draped statue is of Hanuman, an Indian deity prominent in Hinduism; on the steps are people selling vegetables in boxes. **2** A street scene in Mundra, Kutch, Gujarat, India where everyone, including animals, often use the threshold to sit, play or relax. **3** Dogs taking a nap at the threshold of a door in Kathmandu, Nepal.





# TERMINAL 2 AT KEMPEGOWDA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, BENGALURU



All photos by Ar. Ekansh Goel © Studio Recall



“Is there a more interstitial space than an airport? It is the most terminally liminal area: between cities, between flights, between appointments, between everything”<sup>1</sup>, observed author Roy Christopher regarding the nature of airports.

Due to the common perception that airports serve mainly as a transitory space, as a bridge between ‘landside’ and ‘airside’, many of them have been designed in a purely functional manner to handle administration while ensuring the security of passengers and goods. This often resulted in sameness and a lack of sense of place. In *Naked Airport: A Cultural History of the World’s Most Revolutionary Structure*, Alastair Gordon wrote: “While the early days of flight created a new awareness of landscape and architecture, the view from the jets made everything look the same ... once inside the plane, nothing much happened. The lack of sensation would be compensated for by the in-flight screening of movies and other forms of distraction.”<sup>2</sup>

It is from this perspective that passenger terminals were thought to be able to offer something else to humanise the experience of what is innately a rushed and restrictive mode of travel. Airport design in the mid-century period imbued their identity with a sense of grandeur to uplift passengers’ spirits by using metaphors of flight such as soaring structures, wing-like forms and streamlined engineering. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and to this day, the design trend has reflected an expression against “technological fatigue”<sup>3</sup> and incorporated more natural or biophilic elements, such as blurring distinctions between inside and outside, as well as inserting swaths of the landscape into the terminals.

To move away from engineered concrete and tempered glass as the main design expression, major airports are racing to extensively apply wood-based materials, which are not only seen as imparting a ‘warmer’ and more tactile sensory experience, but also potentially reducing embodied carbon in the construction. Some examples include the wood-clad Oslo Airport expansion<sup>4,5</sup> and the massive laminated timber structures of Terminal 2 at Mactan Cebu International Airport.<sup>6</sup> The trend continues with more mass-timber airports planned to be built in the coming years, such as the remodelled Portland International Airport<sup>7</sup> and Dock A at Zurich Airport.<sup>8</sup>

## HUMANIST AND ROOTED IN NATURE

A more recently opened example can be seen in Bengaluru, the capital of the state of Karnataka in India. Being one of the country’s largest urban areas, the megacity is dubbed ‘the Silicon Valley of India’ due to its rapidly growing IT, engineering and defence industries (including various aerospace R&D and manufacturing facilities<sup>9,10</sup>).

Since 2008, Bengaluru has been served by Kempegowda International Airport in Devanahalli, located 40 kilometres away from the city centre. It was expanded with the 255,000-square-metre Terminal 2—which commenced domestic operations in January 2023 and opened international operations in January 2024—increasing the airport’s annual passenger capacity by 25 million.

1 The landscape has been designed to reflect the idea of “a terminal in a garden” as a nod to Bengaluru’s nickname as the garden city of India 2 Drop-off area 3 Check-in area 4 Planters hang from the latticed bamboo ceiling, which also serve as sunshading for the skylights



## LONGHOUSE WITH AN *ENGAWA*

“The architecture resembles a bridge or a temple. Watching the people sitting on the porch enjoying their *onigiri* (rice balls), it feels like this architecture is a reminder of something important that modern Japan has lost.”

In light of the above poignant observation by the architects, one begins to see this longhouse project in a different light. In a deeper sense, it seems to encapsulate the concept of ‘in between’ in various ways—in terms of space, time and people.





# IN PRAISE OF PUBLIC SPACES

by Ian Tan, PhD

Think about Hong Kong.

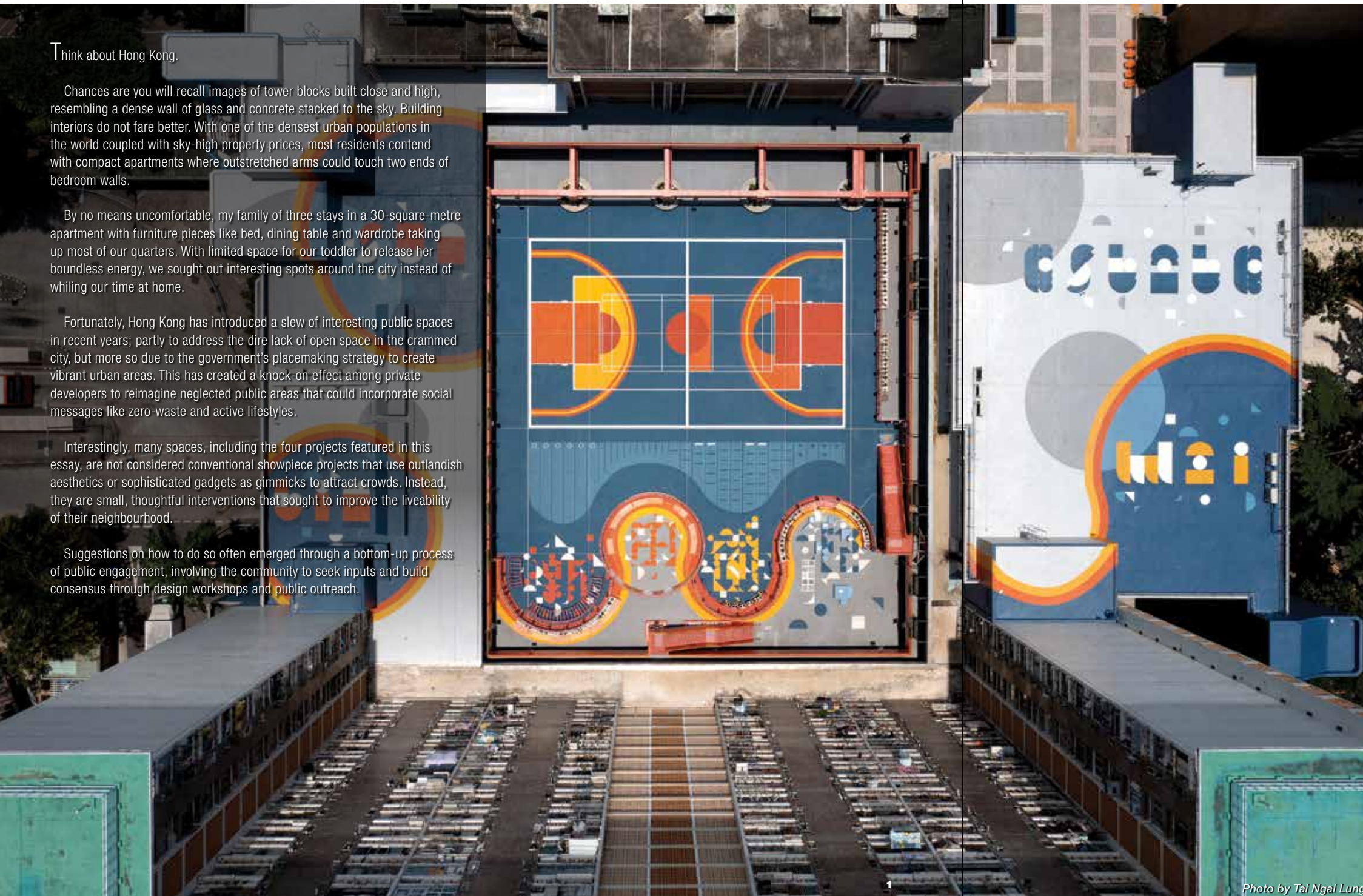
Chances are you will recall images of tower blocks built close and high, resembling a dense wall of glass and concrete stacked to the sky. Building interiors do not fare better. With one of the densest urban populations in the world coupled with sky-high property prices, most residents contend with compact apartments where outstretched arms could touch two ends of bedroom walls.

By no means uncomfortable, my family of three stays in a 30-square-metre apartment with furniture pieces like bed, dining table and wardrobe taking up most of our quarters. With limited space for our toddler to release her boundless energy, we sought out interesting spots around the city instead of whiling our time at home.

Fortunately, Hong Kong has introduced a slew of interesting public spaces in recent years; partly to address the dire lack of open space in the crammed city, but more so due to the government's placemaking strategy to create vibrant urban areas. This has created a knock-on effect among private developers to reimagine neglected public areas that could incorporate social messages like zero-waste and active lifestyles.

Interestingly, many spaces, including the four projects featured in this essay, are not considered conventional showpiece projects that use outlandish aesthetics or sophisticated gadgets as gimmicks to attract crowds. Instead, they are small, thoughtful interventions that sought to improve the liveability of their neighbourhood.

Suggestions on how to do so often emerged through a bottom-up process of public engagement, involving the community to seek inputs and build consensus through design workshops and public outreach.



1 Sports and social facilities atop Sun Tin Wai Commercial Centre 2 Co-created mural at Spark City Mong Kok 3 The podium of 83 KING LAM STREET 4 The recycling station branded as GREEN@WAN CHAI

Photo by Tai Ngai Lung

Photo by Clapper Studio (Morris Chan)

Photo by Kevin Mak of 1km Studio, courtesy of New World Development Company Limited

Photo courtesy of ArchSD





Photo by Matias Bercovich

1



Photo by Nyan Zay Htet

3

## TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

### MORE THAN JUST CHILD'S PLAY

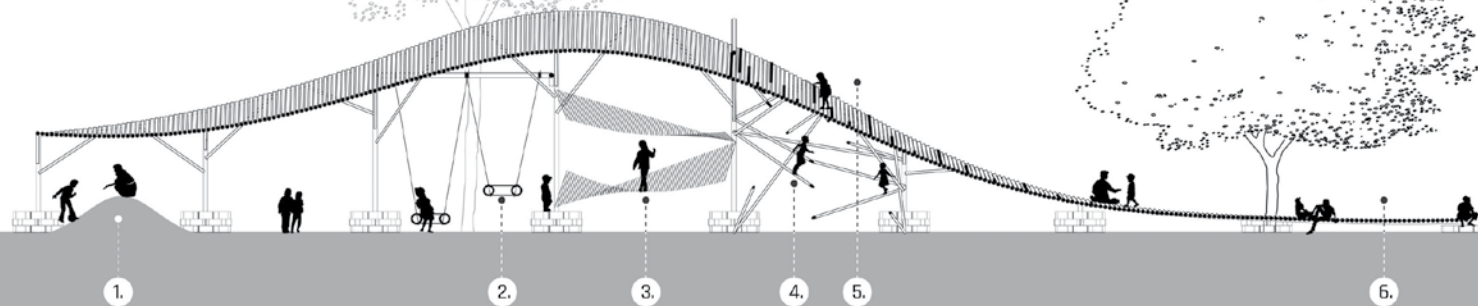
For some of us, some of the most fun or memorable times would be during recess or break time in between study periods when we were in primary/ elementary or middle school. For those few precious minutes, some kids would rush to grab a bite, while others would burst into a common square or schoolyard to play and expend their 'potential' energies.

In this way, play areas in schools can be considered 'in-between' spaces insofar as they are occupied by the kids in between lesson periods or in between after-school and home; and the areas themselves are often spaces in between separate buildings or structures.

Here, we look at two intimately scaled interventions that have been thoughtfully and sensitively designed and engineered to optimise the space given for kids to play. They could even potentially lead the way into replacing the use of concrete for such small-scale constructions in the country.

**1 & 2** Bamboo Playground: One end of the ribbon-like structure starts as a bamboo mat floor; section **3 & 4** Infinity: Overall view with kids playing; section

1. The hill
2. Hanging tires
3. Fishing net
4. Bamboo jungle
5. Climbing wall
6. Resting area

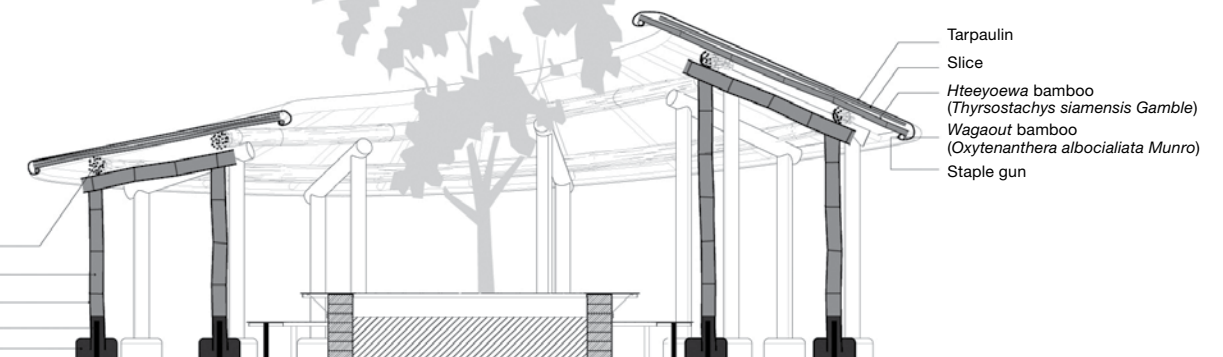


2



- Bundle
- Waboegy or giant bamboo (*Dendrocalamus giganteus*)
- Frame
- Rebar
- Concrete

4



- Tarpaulin
- Slice
- Hteeyoewa bamboo (*Thyrsostachys siamensis Gamble*)
- Wagaout bamboo (*Oxytenanthera albociliata Munro*)
- Staple gun



# SENTOSA SENSORYSCAPE

First of its kind in Southeast Asia, Sentosa Sensoryscape is no ordinary 'walk in the park'.

Covering an area of 30,000 square metres, it is a connector 'extraordinaire'—a 350-metre walkway linking Resorts World Sentosa in the north and the beaches in the south, punctuated by six distinct sensory gardens, crafted to bring the island's natural environment right into the sensory spheres of visitors and nature-lovers alike. At night, the specially designed spaces come alive with 'phygital' experiences, adding a new layer of interactive experiences for the visitors.

Of its architectural design, Christopher Lee, Principal of Serie Architects, representing Serie + Multiply, highlighted the two principal experiences that they wanted to create for Sensoryscape. One was the unimpeded experience of the landscape as it is; so that is why the landscape is designed to 'flow' from the ridge towards the beach. The other was the two-tier walkway that

lets visitors approach and experience the spaces differently—via the ground level walkway that will give them one of the key viewpoints, and an elevated deck where they could peer into the structure, as it were, through the openings.<sup>1</sup>

At the outset of the project, this precinct has been regarded as a canvas, where specially designed spaces and nodes can be weaved together to form a memorable experience as one walks along the north-south spine of Sentosa. Presently, it has evolved into a multi-sensory walk, enhanced with interactive digital light art and augmented reality to form immersive day-to-night experiences for all guests.

**1** Interior view of Scented Sphere **2** ImagiNite video projection at Tactile Trellis  
**3** View of lower walkway and hammock seating **4** Site plan; the integration of landscape bends across the north-south spine facilitates better cross ventilation and passive cooling **5** Site section



**4** Upper Deck  
1:25 ramp with 6m landings  
From +117m to +122.75m  
1:25 ramp  
From +122.75m to +121.5m  
@+121.5m



**5** Beach Plaza @+106.35m  
1:12 ramp  
From +106.35m to +112m  
112.41m  
114.62m  
Lower Deck  
1:25 ramp with 6m landings  
From +112m to +117.75m  
116.74m  
117.75m  
1:25 ramp  
From +117.75m to +116.5m  
@+116.5m  
116.5m





Photo courtesy of Hoang Le

1

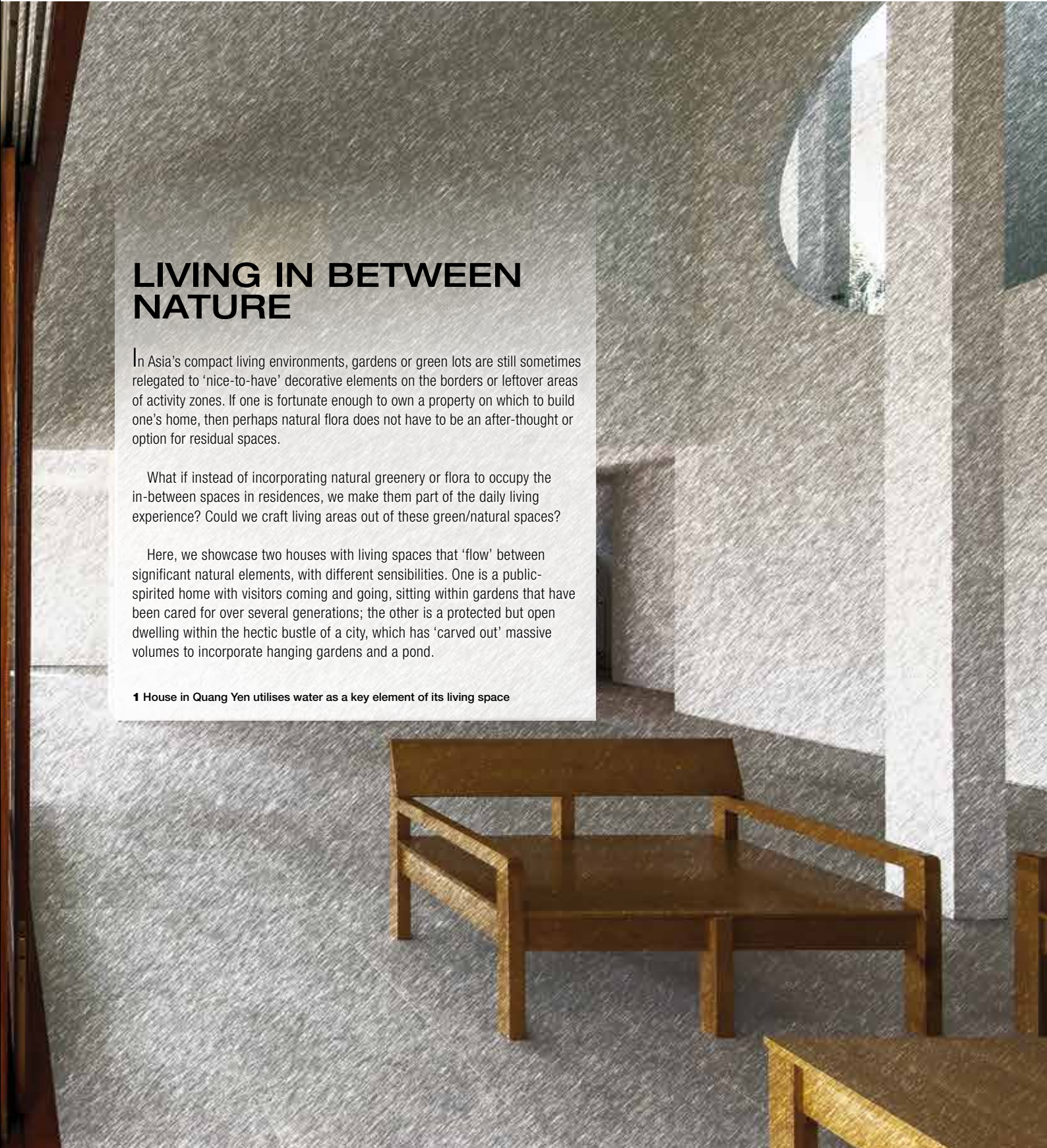
## LIVING IN BETWEEN NATURE

In Asia's compact living environments, gardens or green lots are still sometimes relegated to 'nice-to-have' decorative elements on the borders or leftover areas of activity zones. If one is fortunate enough to own a property on which to build one's home, then perhaps natural flora does not have to be an after-thought or option for residual spaces.

What if instead of incorporating natural greenery or flora to occupy the in-between spaces in residences, we make them part of the daily living experience? Could we craft living areas out of these green/natural spaces?

Here, we showcase two houses with living spaces that 'flow' between significant natural elements, with different sensibilities. One is a public-spirited home with visitors coming and going, sitting within gardens that have been cared for over several generations; the other is a protected but open dwelling within the hectic bustle of a city, which has 'carved out' massive volumes to incorporate hanging gardens and a pond.

1 House in Quang Yen utilises water as a key element of its living space







31

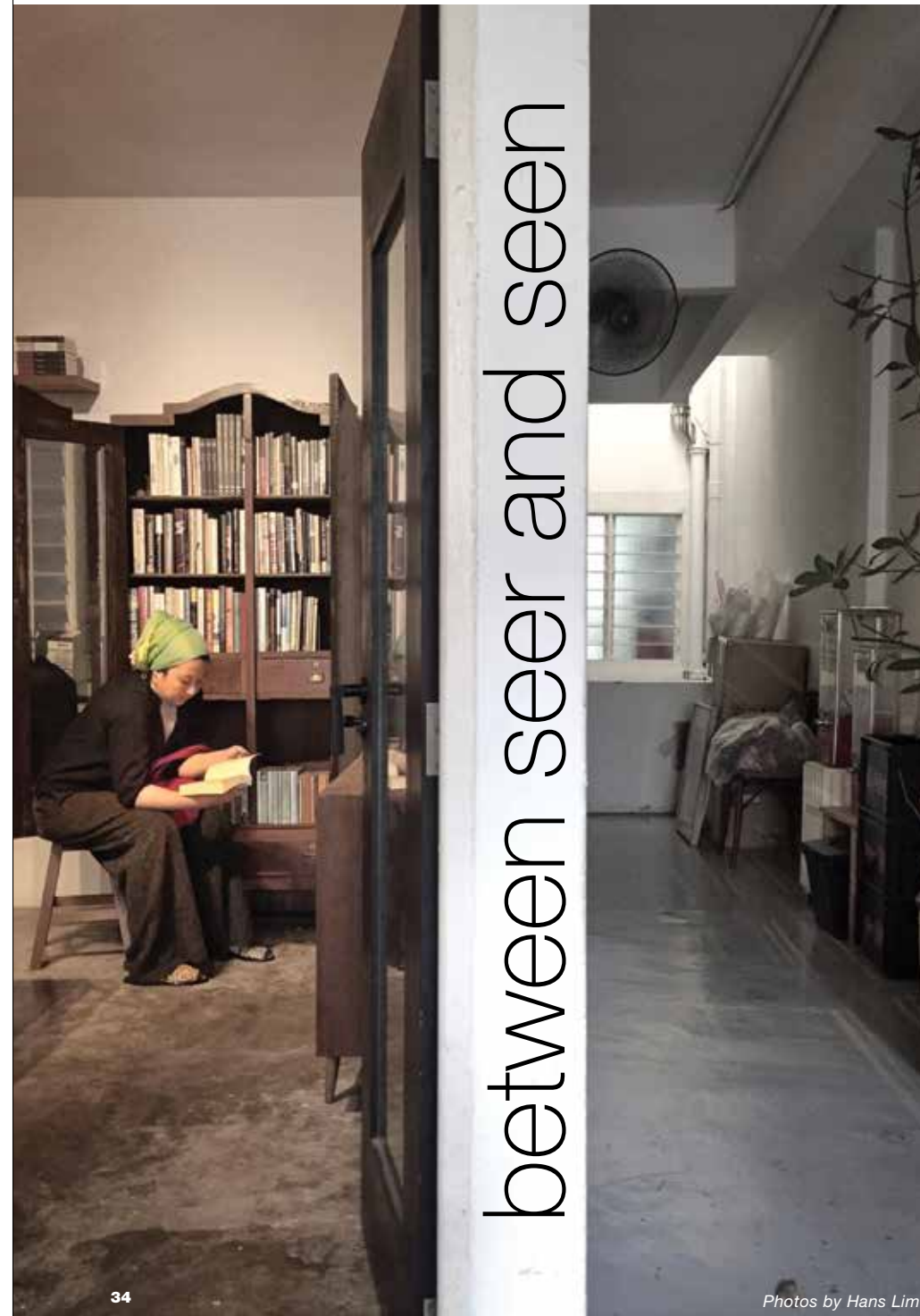


32

A trick of the lens or a particular spatial perspective? Between one's eyes and the camera lens, how different the spaces around us could look. **31** Sliced spaces and a vanishing point at Leisure Commercial Square in Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. **32** At a 'crossroad' before an alley in George Town, Penang, Malaysia. **33** A journey through time at the underpass of the Universiti Malaya Medical Centre in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. **34** Is that the girl with a pearl earring? That is a girl with a pearl-green hijab at a vintage and second-hand bookstore at The Zhongshan Building, Kampung Attap in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



33



34

Photos by Hans Lim

between seer and seen



**Nipun Prabhakar** is an independent photographer and architect who works with various South Asian indigenous communities, working at the intersection of ideas, artefacts, folklore and the built environment. His work has appeared in major publications like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, etc. In 2023, Nipun was invited to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London to present his work on architectural photography. He is also the founder of Dhammada Collective, a design group working towards a conscious, sustainable and equitable world. Nipun has been contributing his voice in words and photography to *FuturArc* since 2021. His way with words and pictorial portrayal of issues that matter to him have found a deep connection with the magazine team and readers.



**Hans Lim** has been the designer of *FuturArc* for the past 18 years. He has contributed to the magazine winning top accolades in the Media Publishers Association Singapore (MPAS) awards. Hans is the owner of design firm Nie O One Design that has worked on various creative work for associations such as Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia (PAM) and numerous architectural publications such as *Architecture@* for BCI Central. He is an avid photographer with a keen eye for detail. His photos have attracted the attention of organisations such as Apple and TEDxPetaling Street, as well as publishers in Asia—they were showcased across different platforms such as social media, videos, books and magazines. Hans continues to hone his craft by pursuing his interest in film photography, alongside a renewed appreciation of sketching, and synthesising them with his professional graphic design skills. He hopes to publish a monograph of his own photographs in the near future.