

Architechnique theme for DATUM: KL 2013

BY E JACQUI CHAN

The practice of architecture is ever evolving. The last decade has seen advances in design, technique and processes, aided by technology.

The advancement of technology has in a way changed architecture, and with it, comes a new set of advantages and challenges. This issue is set to be addressed at the upcoming DATUM: KL International Architectural Design Conference 2013. Organised by the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM), the conference, with the theme Architechnique, will be held at the KL Convention Centre on June 21 and 22.

Architechnique is a portmanteau of "architecture" and "technique". It is an attempt to stretch the contemporary definition and perception of "architecture beyond architecture".

"Among the topics, the forum will look at how technology has evolved and how architecture needs to adapt to the evolution. Of course, on the flip side, technology can also be a restriction," says PAM president Chan Seong Aun.

He feels that in order to produce good architecture, it is important for an architect to understand the limits of technology. "As we move forward, more technology will begin to influence architecture and vice versa."

Chan, who started his one-year tenure as president in April, has made the adoption of technology, in particular Building Information Modelling (BIM) software, a key goal for PAM this year.

"Nowadays, many of the design tools have gone electronic, so architects are using BIM to design very complex buildings. If you tried to design such buildings 10 or 20 years ago, it would have been very difficult to achieve and the cost would be extremely high," he says.

According to him, adoption of technology in architecture is still relatively low in Malaysia. "However, Malaysia is a rather unique case,



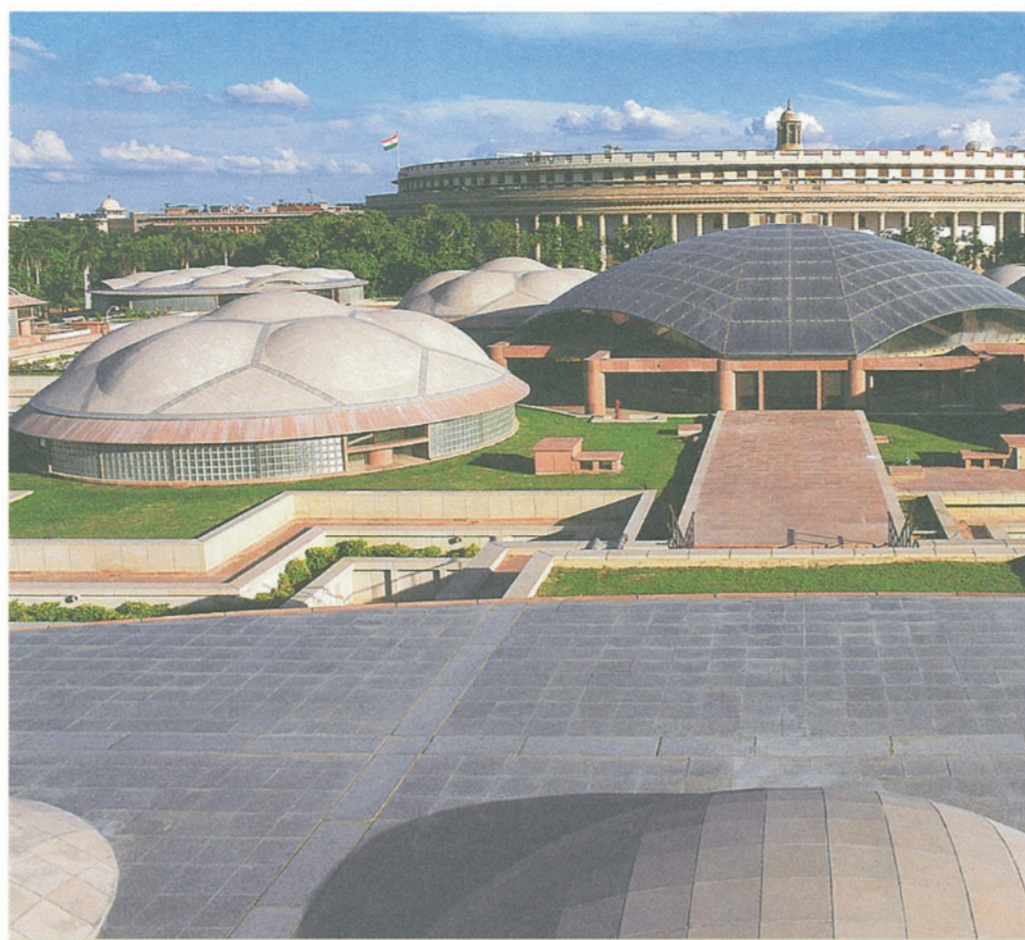
Chan: As we move forward, more technology will begin to influence architecture and vice versa

You can find firms that are so technologically advanced and at the same time, you can find firms that are pretty much a one-man show still doing 2D designs. So, there are different levels of adoption but that's probably true for most developing countries," says Chan.

He believes that cost is a factor, noting that cutting-edge technology usually comes from developed countries and is expensive. "The first adopter always pays the highest price. Only when it becomes more mainstream will the price drop."

Speaking at the forum this year will be architects who have moved towards new design philosophies that incorporate technology and technique-driven approaches, he says.

Below are snapshots of some of the personalities who will be speaking at the forum.



Library for Indian Parliament

To Raj Rewal, the principal of Raj Rewal Associates in India, many of his works can be characterised in the idea of "rasa". The concept of rasa in ancient Sanskrit texts is defined as an expression of diverse emotional content for the arts.

The world-renowned architect believes that architects should be able to express a variety of sentiments through their work, for if architecture has no emotional impact, the work will have no character or flavour.

Some of his landmark buildings include the Hall of Nations, Asian Games Village, the National Institute of Immunology, Central Institute of Education Technology, the Television Centre, Indian National Science Academy, World Bank Building, the housing for the British High Commission, and the Library for the Indian Parliament. All these buildings are located in Delhi. Rewal also designed the Lisbon Ismaili Centre in Portugal,



RAJ REWAL,
RAJ REWAL ASSOCIATES, INDIA

and most recently, the Indian Embassy in Beijing, China.

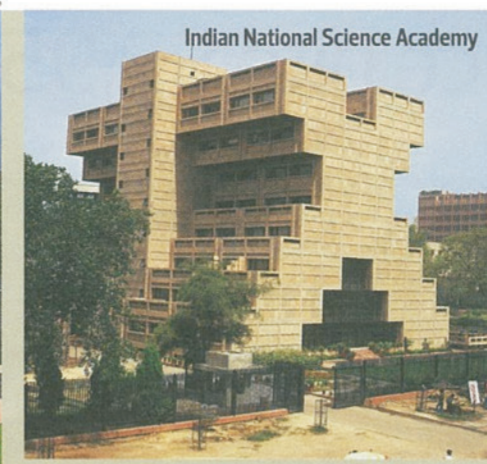
An example of his design philosophy is the Library for the Indian Parliament, which Rewal sees as a house of knowledge and symbolically, a place of enlightenment. The aim, he says, was to design a library complex that resonates with its surroundings and evokes the traditional

spirit of enlightenment but is based on modern technology and values of democratic India.

The inward-looking building reflects a specific preference for serene spatial enclosures rather than forms of grandeur, and the spirit is close to the ambience of the Ranakpur temple where natural light is filtered through a variety of domes.

A project close to his heart, and one he calls, a "challenging design proposition", is the Ismaili Centre in Portugal. As Islam is part of the wider Indian culture, the design explores several concerns regarding sacred space that are close to him.

Rewal based the design of the hall's façade on modern stone fabrication and construction techniques, combined with the analytical power of contemporary software. The roof of the prayer hall and the supporting walls are designed as a *jali* in prefabricated local granite stone elements,



Indian National Science Academy



Ismaili Centre

and these are joined together and braced with stainless steel elements. An integral part of the design is the landscape.

In his long career spanning more than 40 years, Rewal has received several national and international awards, including the Gold Medal from the Indian Institute of Architects, Robert Mathew Award from the Commonwealth Association of Architects, Great Master's Award and the Chevalier Award by the French government.

His works are widely published and solo exhibitions have been held in Delhi and Chandigarh, India, and in Parma, Italy. Another exhibition is scheduled to be held at the Pompidou Museum in Paris in October.

Rewal is an Associate of Royal Institute of British Architects, and a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Architects. He has taught at the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi and at the MIT in Boston.



DK City Plaza



ABDUL HARRIS OTHMAN,
RDA-HARRIS ARCHITECTS, MALAYSIA

Malaysia's RDA-Harris Architects designs everything from townships and urban spaces to complex and simple buildings, and to a lesser extent, industrial products such as furniture. Its founder Abdul Harris Othman calls its designs "contextual".

"For example, our buildings are site specific, and relate to the surrounding context without compromising on the design objectives. Though we do not impose any particular style, we insist on appropriateness of form, scale and harmony with the surrounding built and natural environment," he says.

Abdul Harris won a Colombo Plan Scholarship

to study in Australia in 1975. He matriculated at Norwood High School before studying at the South Australian Institute of Technology (now University of South Australia). He returned to Malaysia after 10 years abroad, followed by a six-year stint in Brunei.

In 1992, he was appointed the principal architect of KLCC and the architect-of-record for Petronas Twin Towers. He then moved on to establish RDA-Harris Architects in 1995.

Among the first few commissions the firm secured was the urban design for Putrajaya. The firm has projects in the region and the Middle East and is engaged in the master plan of Marrakech city centre, Morocco.

"We define [it as] 'good architecture' when the basic contextual criteria are met. Further the architect has to use the full arsenal of design knowledge and techniques available to him — the tectonics, forms, scale, space planning and so on, while juggling clients' needs, costs, authorities' requirements and ensuring sustainability," says Abdul Harris.

"An architect that has a strong grasp of design fundamentals, and has good 'design manners' will invariably produce good architecture. In addition, his particular exposure and nurturing such as his travels and upbringing will form his design DNA. Good DNA produces good results, and vice versa," he adds.

He believes that architects are pivotal and key players in shaping our built environment. "As history has shown, our built environment — cities, buildings, houses, parks — is a reflection of our society and civilisation. A thousand years from now, someone will dig up Kuala Lumpur, so we — the architects, developers, politicians and other stakeholders — have to get our act together."

For his presentation at the forum, Abdul Harris will speak on his approach to design, the various techniques he and his team employ, the things that inspire them and how they think as designers.

His practice has won international and local awards, including ARCASIA Gold Medal, Macau 2003, PAM Gold Medal in 2002 and a competition in Abu Dhabi in 2005. In 2007, his design for Serendah House, Malaysia, was nominated for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture for the 2005-2007 cycle.



ANDREW MAYNARD,
ANDREW MAYNARD ARCHITECTS PTY LTD, AUSTRALIA

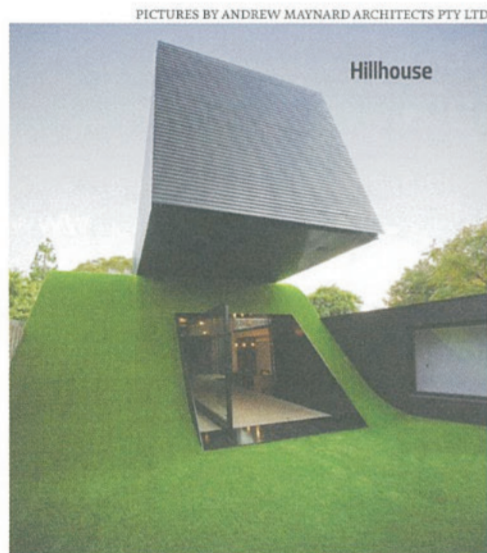
Before studying architecture, Andrew Maynard was into all things related to science fiction, video games and skateboarding. It's little wonder then that his work is often described as playful and inventive.

Maynard, the director of Andrew Maynard Architects in Australia, graduated with a bachelor's degree in environmental design and a bachelor's degree in architecture with honours from the University of Tasmania.

A few of his notable projects are Hill House, Vader House and House House, all in Melbourne. These projects are just some examples of his ability to think outside the box and create a sense of fun in his design. In 2012, Hill House was the winner of the Victorian Architecture and overall Vision awards.

Maynard was named Best Young Architect at Treehugger's Best of Green Awards in the US in 2010.

His conceptual and built work has been exhibited globally in New York, Budapest, Osaka, Sao Paulo, Tokyo, the prestigious



Hillhouse

Salone del Mobile in Milan, and most recently in Barcelona, where his Ilma Grove House received a commendation at the prestigious World Architecture Festival.

"I like the sound of how my work is described. However, I simply want my architecture to be a lot more than just buildings," says Maynard.

A fundamental moment in his career, he says, was when he decided he did not want to be an architect.

"Instead I wanted to produce architecture, yet remain unchanged as a person. I decided my interests in sci-fi, video games and skateboarding would remain my influences into the future. The things that made me most happy as a child and a teenager still make me happy now. I have always



House House

been determined to not put away 'childish things' and avoid the stereotypes of 'the architect'," he says.

He believes that good architecture is defined by a strong idea, though the idea does not need to be overt. "Quite often, overt ideas can distract us from how bad a building actually is. The idea could be as simple as how a person interacts with a window sill; how a structure inhabits a city or how two materials are detailed. It is the strength of the idea that is most important and knowing when to drop the weak idea and start again is one of the most important disciplines an architect can have," says Maynard.

He is also a firm believer of working smart, not hard. He points out that if the work can't be done during normal working hours on weekdays, then the project is poorly managed.

"To design good architecture, you need a good life," he says.

On his presentation at DATUM, he says, "I'll be speaking about ideas rather than architecture, from small houses to urban interventions, mobile structures and robots."



MARTIN KLEIN,
MORGER + DETTLI ARCHITECTEN AG, SWITZERLAND

"Good architecture is always a result of good contextual work," says Martin Klein, partner in Switzerland-based Morger + Dettli Architekten AG.

"The design work can be described as a synthesis of sensory perceptions and knowledge. From the interaction of conception and construction, it follows the form," he adds.

The German-born 35-year-old studied architecture at Technical University Tampere in Finland and later at Technical University Karlsruhe, Germany. He has since set up home in Basel, Switzerland.

Among Morger + Dettli Architekten's notable projects are the Sports and Swimming Centre in St Moritz, Claratum in Basel, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein in Vaduz and House Trancauna in Lumbrein.

Klein says his firm's work is based on a contextual method of working. He looks for important as well as seemingly unimportant



Sports and Swimming Centre

elements, and always identifies the specific circumstances of a location.

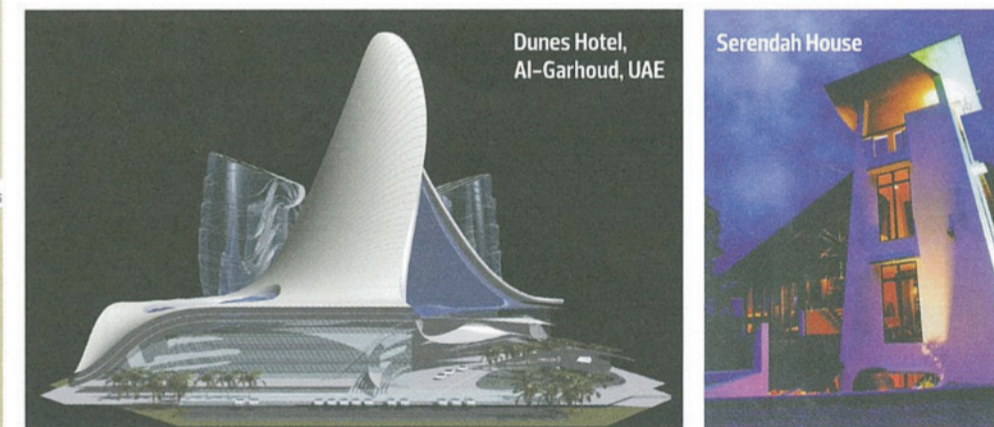
"By searching for clues this way, we succeed in giving the rational process of integration a suggestive and poetic touch. As such, our architecture is less the result of formal intentions and far more, reflects our general approach," he says.

He will be sharing an overview of the firm's current work, including realised projects and ongoing works at DATUM.

"I will try to link the projects to the craft and techniques of the designs, and how they enable the realisation of the projects," says Klein. Examples will include high-rises, museums, public buildings and housing developments.



Claratum



Dunes Hotel, Al-Garhoud, UAE

Serendah House

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