Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism / Architecture 2011

Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism / Architecture, since its inauguration in 2007, has been envisioned as correlated and complimentary to each other. For 2011, Mr. Terence Riley, chief curator for Shenzhen event, has proposed the theme as “ARCHITECTURE CREATES CITIES. CITIES CREATE ARCHITECTURE” (城市創造). The theme sheds light on reciprocal relationship among architecture and urbanism in the context of time and place that supports environmental sustainability and generates cultural vitality.

Hong Kong’s theme for the 2012 Biennale, “TRI-CIPROCAL CITIES: THE TIME, THE PLACE, THE PEOPLE” (三態城市：時間 · 空間 · 人間), is a variation, or extension of the theme. As the former deals with the most critical issues of current Shenzhen, the latter acknowledges specific issues of Hong Kong. Shenzhen, with a fast growing economy, vast supply of land, and explosive growth, is distinctive in its architectural and urban identity. Hong Kong, on the other hand, has witnessed several rounds of economic booms and recessions, possesses a very limited land supply, can only have impulsive growth through regeneration, and its urban space and architecture have become one indistinguishable entity.

“Tri-ciprocal” and “Jian” 闢

Hong Kong’s theme addresses the tangible as well as the intangible aspects of the city and its architecture, global trends as well as specificity of the time, the place, and the people.

“Tri-ciprocal” is a word we derive from “reciprocal”, which emphasizes the interplay of time, place, and people, each being significant dimensions that shape the essence and quality of a city. They represent peoples’ attitudes towards the passage of time as the most dictating element for the management of environment. Urban features derived from specific ways of living, and the integrated cultural ambiance sensed and generated by the people, including permanent or transient residents, are evidence of space and events that are marked by people through time.

Although commercial buildings in Ginza, Tokyo exist only 10 years in average, most buildings outlast the life span of people, and cities generally outlast buildings. We believe that three elements aforementioned are the most decisive factors that provide the long-lasting character and vitality of a city, and hopefully direct our eyes beyond current fashionable vocabularies and arguments.
The Chinese theme, if translated directly, means “Three-phased Cities: the time, the place, the people”. However, behind "time, space, people". There follows the word “間” (Jian) behind. This word means "realm or dimension", but may also mean "in-between". Therefore the subtitle also refers to "in-between times, spaces, and peoples", and indicates an abstract and intangible relationship.

Analogy of City’s Biological Time

The Biennale draws an analogy between the development of a city and the biological time of a person, and wishes to render comparative representation of cities at their different biological times, in order to provide valuable mutual references.

If Shenzhen is like a teenager with boundless energy (constructive and destructive) and infinite possibilities, Hong Kong is like a middle-aged person who focuses the challenge of mid-life with “ups and downs” “success and failures”. Although with different issues, Taipei and Singapore belong to the same “age group”.

Tokyo, on the other end, overtaken with shrinking economic power and population, is like an old person who needs to consolidate life.

Sendai, severely damaged by 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, needs to get back on its feet, like a person hit hard by a life-threatening accident.

New York City, arguably between middle-aged and old, is similar to HK in density and vertical development.

While most Chinese cities carry long historical lines, they are also being transformed at lightning speed, and voices of managing both the old and the new are on the rise.

Occupy the City – Cultivate Public Realm in the Cities

When building designs and city planning are realized, we need to “occupy” them both physically as well as psychologically, so as to make the building home, and the city our collective home. We, as citizens, have to cultivate the public realm, in streets, in plazas, in public and private buildings. The public realm, including public space, public art, public infrastructure etc, reacts to development of cities differently depending on history and culture, phase and rate of development. For young cities in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region, like Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Guangzhou etc., the definition and formation of the public realm takes on a path of the least resistant, mostly because of the top down policy driven by the young cities government authorities as well as their lack of historical baggage. For “mid-life crisis cities” like Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore, the emergence of the public realm takes on a more complicated dimension since its colonial history, existing fabrications, and social or economic development have to be confronted and resolved. The mature cities, like NYC, Paris, or Vienna, responded to the formation and definition of public realm in a more delicate balance between the public and private interests.

Through these exhibits, we wish to survey how to integrate history and historical elements while allowing for adjustment and development, how physical forms and aspirations of cities change through the course of time, how the vitality of the citizens flow and transform urbanity and architecture accordingly, if there are any past ideas and visions that are still valid today, and how to develop culturally, economically, and environmentally sustainable places. We wish to survey characters, strength, and contradictions of architecture and cities through these relevant issues.

We wish to show a dream city, no matter of what age, is like a person who has compassion and wisdom of the old, sophistication and practicality of the middle-aged, and purity and vitality of the young.

The Curatorial Team for the Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism \ Architecture 2012 are Gene K. KING, Anderson LEE, Julia LAU and Tris KEE.
Gene K. KING  
Chief Curator  
Founder, King Shih Architects

Mr. King is a Registered Architect in the State of New York and Taiwan. He worked at renowned architectural design firms including Edward Larrabee Barnes Architects and Rafael Vinoly Architects in New York for 10 years.

In 1999, he established King Shih Architects (KSA) with Erin C. Shih in Taipei. KSA devoted to explore the characteristics of Taiwan local architectures and the combination of design and the environment. Architectural works of the office include the Fine Arts Museum Park area (including Expo Hall) for the 2010 Taipei International Flora Exposition, the Environmental Research Center and Luming Plaza of the National Taiwan University, Kaohsiung Medical University Library, Presbyterian Da-Dao-Chen Church, etc.

Mr. King acted as editor-in-chief for Dialogue, a monthly, bi-lingual (English and Chinese) publication on architecture, design, and culture from 1998 to 2005. The Magazine took a critical view towards Asian condition in global framework. Awarded the Best Magazine and Graphic Editing Awards of the Golden Tripod Award organized by Government Information Office of Taiwan, it was considered one of the most progressive and influential publication in the region during Mr. King’s term of service.

Mr. King also took up Chief Curator for “2004 Architecture Exhibition – Taiwan” (2004) and “New Taiwan Landscape Movement Exhibition” (2005) organized by the Council for Cultural Affairs, Executive Yuan of Taiwan. He organized various international architectural events, including serving as the Chief Consultant for “Landform Series” and “Gateway Series” International Competitions (2004) organized by Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transportation and Communications Taiwan, “Cities Inspiring, Asia” and “Explosion and Implosion” International Architectural Symposium.

Also as a writer, he won The Literature Award of China Times and United Daily News (1982) and National Literary Award in Fiction (1989), which are considered as important honours for Chinese literature in the region. He has published four collections of short stories and essays. His latest work is a historical novel Dream of the Seven-Pronged Sword released in October 2011.

Anderson LEE  
Chief Curator  
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong  
Founder, Index Architecture Limited

Mr. Lee received a Master of Architecture from Princeton University. He is a Registered Architect in the State of New York, and a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

Anderson worked as a Project Associate and Project Architect at Steven Holl Architects (SHA), New York. While at SHA, he was in charge of designing the Lake Whitney Water Treatment Plant in Connecticut and the Tuttle Residence in New Mexico. He was also involved in design for prestigious projects such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Finland, the Residence Hall of Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Anderson founded Index Architecture Limited in 2000. The architectural practice encompasses multidisciplinary services providing conceptual and technical consultancy on urban planning, architecture, interior design and product/ furniture design. Index has been participating in a wide range of exhibitions and design forums which include 2007 & 2009 Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-city Biennale, the ‘40 under 40’ exhibition in Shanghai, China PRC (2007), Asia Design Forum (2004), etc. The works of Index is widely published in periodicals and design journals such as SCMP post magazine, Domus, Elle Decoration, Perspective, d+a, Hinge, etc. The practice has received design award from American Institution of Architects (AIA), HKIA and Perspective magazine.

Anderson has been an assistant professor at the Faculty of Architecture, the University of Hong Kong since 2003.
Besides teaching design studio and supervising Master of Architecture thesis students, he has been the Program Director for the Career Discovery Program (HKU) since 2004. He also served as invited guest critic at Princeton University, Yale University, Cornell University in the U.S. and Meiji University in Tokyo.

Julia LAU  
Curator for Venue & Programme  
Founder, Traces Limited

After graduating from University of Oregon in Architecture (B. Arch.), Ms Lau joined Spence Robinson Limited where she received her formal training in Hong Kong before obtaining her license. Her urban planning and design portfolio ranges from church, schools, offices, hotels, service apartments, retail (cinema, skating rink, etc.) and a number of notable large scale residential and mix use complexes during her years at Sun Hung Kai Properties Ltd. This include projects like “Leighton Hill”, “Chelsea Court”, “Le Sommet’ to name a few. From in house architect to project director, she was blessed with much opportunity in delivering a wide variety of projects. For 8 years, she worked on the Kowloon Station Development Phase 3, 5, 6 & 7 (a total of approximately 6.5 million sf) which includes “The Arch”, “Elements”, “Cullinan”, “The Harbouview”, W Hotel, Ritz Carlton and the tallest tower in HK – ICC (492mPD). After this signature project, she has founded her own practice Traces Ltd.

Julia is a Registered Architect in Hong Kong and an Authorized Person (List 1). She has also obtained “PRC Class 1 Registered Architect Qualification”. Professionally, Julia has served the HK Institute of Architects and the American Institute of Architects, HK Chapter for a number of years under several posts including Council Member and Treasurer, etc. Currently, she is a Council Member of the Professional Green Building Council. On the public service front, Julia is a member of the Town Planning Board and Hong Kong Housing Authority, a Council member of Academy of Performing Arts. She has also served on The Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries and Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC) for many years, and advocates cooperation of Architecture and the Allied Arts.

Tris KEE  
Curator for Community & Media  
Assistant Professor, Director of Community Project Workshop, Faculty of Architecture, The Hong Kong University

Tris Kee received a Master of Architecture and a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Waterloo, Canada. She was named to the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Roll of Honor and received the Ontario Architectural Association Guild Medal 2002. Prior to returning to Hong Kong, she worked in architectural practices in Rome, London, Amsterdam and Canada.

Tris is a Registered Architect in Hong Kong and Canada, a Professional Member of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA), Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC),
the Hong Kong Institute of Architectural Conservationists (HKICON) and an Executive Committee Member of the Hong Kong Interior Design Association (HKIDA). As an architect, Tris has participated in the design and completion of Phase 2 of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Park, a number of MTRC/KCRC stations and residential developments at the Peak.

As the Director of Community Project Workshop (CPW) at The University of Hong Kong, Tris has been involved in a number of community-based projects; namely, District Aspiration Studies, Conservation Management Plans for heritage buildings, Revitalization Schemes for the Development Bureau, Public engagement sessions for Pok Fu Lam and Kwun Tong Waterfront Promenade.

Tris also teaches at the Department of Architecture at The University of Hong Kong in Professional Practice, Aspects of Contract Management, Career Discovery and Studios. Tris has taught both undergraduate and graduate students in other institutions including Cornell University, University of Washington and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Rome Studio. Tris was one of the Design Jurors for the Perspective Award 2011, the Panel Moderator for HKIDA Professional Roundtable Seminars 2011 and one of the speakers at the International Design Alliance (IDA) Conference 2011 in Taipei.

Some of the details for the event are listed below:

**Event** : 2011 Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism \ Architecture

**Theme** : Tri-cipocal Cities: The Time, The Place, The People

**Venue** : Kowloon Park and Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre

**Date** : 15 February to 23 April 2012

**Opening Hours** : 10am – 6pm, Mondays to Saturdays (except Thursdays)

- 10am – 7pm, Sundays and Public Holidays
- Closed on Thursdays (except Public Holidays)

**Target visitor** : Local, mainland China and overseas visitors

- Professionals in the architecture, design and cultural realm
- General public, including students and community groups, etc.

**About the Exhibition Venue**

The 2007 and 2009 Biennales were held at the former Central Police Station Compound and the West Kowloon Waterfront Promenade respectively. Both locations were normally off-limits and were opened to the public only during the events.

This year the exhibition will be held at the Kowloon Park populated by local citizens and tourists. This exhibition will no doubt inject a new kind of energy to the park thus expanding the interaction with the park visitors of diverse background.

The Exhibition and its related cultural programmes and community events will be held at various venues located in Tsim Sha Tsui (TST). The activities originate from within
Kowloon Park and stretch towards the Miramar Shopping Centre and Knutsford Terrace to the east and the China Hong Kong City to the west. The far-reaching extent of the activities echoes the Curatorial Theme of "Public Realm" of the cities in different stages of development.

The main indoor exhibition area is located at the thematic exhibition hall of the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre (HDC) in the park. Four bamboo pavilions of various sizes will be built at the Sculpture Walk, the Park Lane Roof Garden, and the outdoor café of HDC. Visitors will also find site-specific installations and art pieces at the Maze Garden and the circular fountain facing the HDC.

The exhibition will employ “Bunk Bed” as a basic unit for the exhibitors to react against. This concept is in response to the limitation of suitable indoor exhibition space within Kowloon Park, and it is inspired by the high density housing phenomena in Hong Kong. It further provokes an overwhelming sense of collective memory of the Hong Konger and reflects the colonial past of Kowloon Park as a former military barrack.

Hong Kong–Shenzhen Co-operation
The concept of Bi-City Biennale is “One theme, Two exhibitions” co-hosted by Hong Kong and Shenzhen. The Shenzhen exhibition will run from 7 December 2011 to 18 February 2012. Hong Kong and Shenzhen are co-organizing a number of events and activities during the months of December 2011 to April 2012. Four exhibits from Shenzhen will travel to Hong Kong after the end of the Shenzhen exhibition to mark the continuity of this bi-city event.

About the Exhibits
The Biennale will showcase around 50 exhibits from more than 10 countries or regions, including Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Australia, and the U.S. Renowned architectural practices such as Steven Holl Architects (SHA), Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), Reiser & Umemoto Architects (RUR), Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates (KPF), Architecture Research Office (ARO), Norihiko Dan and Associates. Hidetoshi Ohno will be joined by young and local talents to create a platform for exchange of ideas.

Programmes and Community Events
Another important aspect of the Biennale is to have the public and various aspects of the community to be actively engaged in both prior and during the exhibition through different activities, hence to develop an interactive relationship between the public and the Biennale. We hope to bring a more public oriented and community engaged Biennale for citizens of all ages and background.

The Biennale is honoured to receive positive response from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Antiquities and Monuments Office, architectural, design, cultural and art organizations, tertiary institutions, to full support and assist in
organizing a number of programmes and community events. The proposed events include:

**Performances:** To cooperate with our strategic partner the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts for the performance for the opening ceremony; to cooperate with various local performance arts groups. This will contribute to multi-cultural presentation on the idea of the Biennale theme.

**Film Screenings:** To cooperate with our strategic partner Hong Kong Arts Centre for screening films related to urbanism and architecture.

**Symposia + Forums + Workshops:** To cooperate with various professional institutes, community groups, tertiary institutions for conducting a series of symposiums, forums and workshops. With the platform, local and foreign renowned architects, designers, artists, scholars will be invited to discuss and exchange ideas on architecture, urban design and sustainability development, etc. A number of tertiary institutions form Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Taiwan) will conduct student workshops to explore different thematic topics related to the Biennale theme. For example, a workshop called “Vertical Village” will be organized by Taiwan cultural art group. Our partners includes, Hong Kong Architecture Centre, Hong Kong Ambassadors of Design, Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design, etc. (More to be find in the attached list).

**Guided tours:** Guided tours will be organized for schools, community groups and the public, introducing the concepts and technologies behind the works, so that participants can understand the significance and appreciate the complexities of urbanism and architecture.

**Website and Social Networks:** The public could found the latest news of the Biennale through the Biennale website, blog, Facebook, Twitter, Weibo and YouTube accounts and exchange ideas.

1. The Curatorial Team for the Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism + Architecture 2012 (from left to right, Tris KEE, Gene K. KING, Julia LAU and Anderson LEE)
2. Group photo at the Press Conference at the Heritage Discovery Center, 9 November 2011.
3. Model showing the venue at Kowloon Park
4. Site plan showing the locations of the exhibitions and events
5. Rendering showing the proposed bamboo construction at Kowloon Park
6-9. Selected photos of the exhibits
10-13. 2012 Hong Kong / Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture Opening Ceremony on 16 Feb 2012
14-15. 2011 Shenzhen / Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture Opening Ceremony on 9 Dec 2011
INTRODUCTION

TK: Welcome to the HKIA Journal roundtable discussion on the innovative office environment. We are delighted to have a distinguished group of experts to share their ideas with us.

DC: Office market in Hong Kong has been quite robust and there is a severe shortage of office space in the CBD. The government, in the latest policy address, has indicated that it will encourage the development of a CBD2 in Kowloon East. My question to the expert panel is how, as architects, can contribute to the creation of a quality work environment for Hong Kong.

There have been some major shifts in the 21st century working environment due to the accelerated urbanization and globalization. Rapid integration between Hong Kong and the mainland economy, especially the increased connectivity of the Pearl River Delta cities also affects how we work in Hong Kong. The new economies based on service industries and financial markets and the quickening pace of technological advances also affect the work environment. The new rail networks, like the Eurostar connecting London to continental Europe, the northeast corridor in the US from Washington DC to Boston, and the express railways in China create new economic clusters that are not based on a single isolated city, but rather on a region — the regional economy.

Looking at the Pearl River Delta and Hong Kong, we are in a region of almost 120 million people. If we can travel to Guangzhou in half an hour, then why couldn’t Hong Kong become the CBD of the Pearl River Delta? Therefore, our office market can serve more than just the local city requirements — it can serve the whole region.

Hong Kong is now ranked the third most important global financial centre, behind London and New York. How will that translate into the provision of office requirements in Hong Kong? The US-based Heritage Foundation recently ranked Hong Kong as the freest economy in the world for the 17th year in a row, and we attract the world’s third largest amount of foreign direct investment. Approximately 6,500 foreign and mainland firms now have offices in Hong Kong, of which about 3,600 are regional headquarters.

With Hong Kong emphasising knowledge-based, high-value-added industries, there is ever-increasing demand for supervisory workers and professionals in the workforce. However, there are skills gaps in our workforce. Most workers in Central probably have more similarities with people in London working in the same industry than with local shop owners down the road. While our built environment needs to function well as a world city and to some extent cater to Hong Kong’s prominent role in the global economy, how can architects design office developments to create innovative work environments, enhance community cohesion and encourage local culture?

Hong Kong’s Grade A office market has a very low vacancy rate and the average office rental in Central is now the highest in the world, significantly impacting the competitiveness of Hong Kong businesses. The annual new supply of Grade A office space in the past two years has been less than a million square feet, and this is driving up our office rents and making our businesses less competitive.

If you look at New York, the office housing companies in the finance, insurance and real estate sectors are more or less 90% concentrated in Manhattan and the London CBD provides one-third of London employment but occupies just 2% of London’s land space. But in Hong Kong, our CBD actually accommodates a lot of other trades, so are we actually making the best use of our office accommodations? If you look at the newly completed Grade A office buildings in the CBD since 2010, they account for only 18% of total new Grade A office space in Hong Kong. So the concept of another CBD or “CBD2” is not actually new, because over the past 10 years new Grade A offices in Kowloon East and Quarry Bay have actually made up 48% of new Grade A office supply.

So why is there still a shortage? Why is there still demand in the CBD? I can give a case study of Kowloon East. A 2011 study by the Planning Department showed that the companies who move into Kowloon East are not really relocating from Central, tenants who relocated from Central made up only 9.2% of all tenants. The key reason for leaving previous locations was high costs, which 68% of respondents cited as their primary reason. Next were availability and the ability to meet space requirements, cited by 60%, then good access and transport, 36.2%. Therefore, if given a choice, everything else being equal, people probably won’t want to move to Kowloon East. The CBD will continue to have a strong appeal because of its prestigious status and the agglomeration effect. I think there will always be demand for office space in the
CBD because it's a status symbol and because it enables personal contact. Professor Saskia Sassen of Columbia University and the LSE has done a lot of studies, and one of her key findings is that the complex financial requirements of the capital markets actually require a lot of personal contact, contact that can only be provided in a highly concentrated area, so that the crucial players are concentrated spatially. However, is such a concentrated, high-rise development model desirable and can architects humanize the congestion through design?

Another point I would like to parallel is to perhaps address that despite very strong GDP growth over the past decade, the incomes of the lowest 10% of our society have actually not improved. If we look at the 1996 and 2006 figures, the median income from main employment for the lower 10% remains at HK$3,200. Obviously, Hong Kong needs to be competitive by providing facilities to our businesses, but how can the wealth generated by businesses be better distributed to our society at large?

Therefore, the question really is — are we to provide and create innovative and reasonably priced office space for our businesses, how can we make those developments more of a public good, so that they can better serve our society, rather than just the tenants and the landlords.

OFFICE SUPPLY AND LAND USE

FH: First, I would like to ask if there is an office in the middle of Oxford Street in London which is in a 100-year-old building with a stone façade and columns, very high hearth, large windows, but no central air-conditioning, but located right in the middle of Oxford Street. Would you define that as a Grade A office? Our problem is clear — there is too large a gap between Grade A offices and Grade B and Grade C offices in Hong Kong.

DC: The high rents of Grade A offices tend to serve mostly global or large corporations. It is unlikely that the local tailor would be able to rent a Grade A office.

FH: Since we have a shortage of Grade A office space and demand for Grade A offices is huge, it pushes up land prices, making us less competitive. I think people who want to be in Central will remain there for many reasons. They probably go there because of the floor plate size requirement, prestige, human contacts, etc. I find that the problem in Hong Kong is, we don't offer enough choices of high quality office space, not necessarily graded "A" per se. Even in our practice, we do have clients for medium-scale office developments, for example, the Man Yee Building or Luk Ho Tung Building, that kind of development. They all aspire to be Grade A in terms of provisions, but in terms of floor plate area, it’s all different how much they can plot as constrained by the site they have. So according to the "market norm" these high quality offices would still be technically short of a Grade A. My next question is, for example, the Oil Street project, if the brief actually allows you to do office buildings, would a developer prefer to do a residential building than an office building?

DC: But then that is where the government comes in and the reason for the O2P. The government has the duty to assess the needs of society and plan accordingly. Therefore, it doesn’t need to give developers a choice if the planning is supported by credible studies. It can stipulate in the land lease 'office development only' with a certain GFA, so developers can submit bids accordingly.

KYS: But that doesn’t necessarily have to be the case, even in Central, if you look at the main roads and then the secondary roads, there are actually a lot of opportunities. The Entertainment Building for example can dedicate part of the corners and then reach out to the public. In fact, we are doing some of that amalgamation and I have talked to different building owners, and you are absolutely right, some of them will for all sorts of reasons insist that they are comfortable with their existing lot, so why should they talk to anyone about giving some of that up for the benefit of the surrounding neighbourhood?

BL: For a high quality office requirement, floor plate is extremely important. Even these sites in Central, if they appoint individual re-developers, or small amalgamation, would not offer the floor plate of a Grade A office building.

That's why there is this discussion on the Kowloon East opportunity, where change of use from industrial or IO to Grade A office building offers a much larger plot. That's the opportunity there.

I want to make some specific urbanism analysis of the Hong Kong situation. Where is the old CBD? which are the limits? If we go to the east, now that Swire has done their redevelopment for PP3, would you call that the CBD, or is it just the fringe of the CBD? To the west, if you go a bit beyond the Central Market, it is almost the fringe of the old CBD. Now in the past, the CBD expanded northward because of reclamation, but now reclamation has been halted by the Proclamation of the Harbour Ordinance. There are certain psychological factors as well — within the CBD you can walk, say, from your office to the Hong Kong Club. You are able to walk from your office to the bank. That's the sort of advantage needed as a locational vector to form a CBD. Therefore, there must be a certain limit. But I would still encourage us to look at some government offices. I am not talking about the west wing. There are some government offices along the harbour front, Revenue Tower and so on. These offer opportunities if they are displaced with some new harbour front CBD-type Grade A offices. These are some opportunities which the government or ourselves should look at seriously.

Let's look at the CBD2 idea in Kowloon East. Facing the constraints in the old CBD, we have the idea of a new CBD in Kowloon East. Kai Tak, together with the Kowloon Tong area would offer such an opportunity — while never being able to replace the old CBD, it would provide an alternative for some companies. However, for the past few months I have been advocating that there should be a CBD3, looking at the Pearl River Delta, at the northern New Territories. This is a vision for the next 20 years, so that there will be Sharp Street and the Harbourside area, north area, upon its re-planning and the proximity to Shenzhen, able to capture the advantage of Qian Hai's future redevelopment and enable Hong Kong to grow.

FH: I think Kai Tak is heading in the wrong direction if you look at its masterplan. The majority of it is planned for residential development and in discussions in developers or at public occasions, people seem to confuse Kai Tak with Kowloon East. The second CBD, as I understand it, refers to Kowloon Bay, which is next to Kai Tak, and it has very little to do with the rail and the other development that is going to happen in Kai Tak. In Kai Tak, there is very little office space just a few blocks.
FH: Exactly! If the government really has this ambition to make Kowloon East, including Kai Tak, a second CBD, it must review the current plan. We need critical mass to make this vision a workable reality.

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

KS: It is now clear that we are going to have a CBD2, though the final planning is still to be decided. And I think Barnard's proposal is more forward-looking. Certainly from a planning perspective, we can talk about the options and propose something. I am thinking that, for HKIA, there are probably two aspects: the planning/macro dimension and the architectural level.

DC: I suggest we now move to a more micro level. Obviously sustainability and green buildings are part of our agenda for future office projects. Are we doing enough in Hong Kong?

KS: When we talk about the common good in Hong Kong, it is not only about the spatial aspect, but also energy consumption. Commercial and office buildings are actually the major chunk of power consumption. In order to effectively reduce our carbon footprint, better office design with lower energy consumption will be key challenge. Some upcoming designs, like the Tamar Headquarters, are actually trying something new. One important thing is that it’s not only about technology, but also culture and behaviour. At Tamar, the office lighting in general is dimmer than the normal Grade A office level. This is a new trend — because we are using more electronic devices, the back light can actually be much lower than normal. Similarly in the master planning for the Science Park Phase 3, they are also trying to keep the general lighting in office space lower. It’s more than technology, but really a new office culture.

Certainly another thing related to culture or lifestyle is the expected level of comfort within the office. When we go to countries like Japan or Singapore, people in offices, even government officials, dress more casually. Hong Kong is a bit behind from this cultural perspective. Another core issue is the existing building stock, which is an upcoming challenge for all the major global cities, including London and New York. In Hong Kong I think we are again lagging behind, since we do not have many office upgrade projects. There are some, but they are still a minority in Hong Kong compared to other cities. Retro-investment in existing office buildings is something that we should pay attention to and do more of.

KYS: Architects will always face the dilemma of how to make a beautiful building and an effective piece in one. You know you should not always put a curtain wall on top of a concrete shell, and call that an office building. You should not put LED lights all over it and make it look like a Christmas tree. How is that compared to just a bare concrete shell, with just traditional wall-insulation? But you know the developers and the building owners will come to you and say I want my building to be sharp, I just want it to stand out. So, there is always this contradiction. Look at how much timber we are using, how much wet trade we are still using to construct a building.

DC: Definitely, our building industry is lagging behind in terms of technology and construction methodology.

KYS: But the thing is, do you actually throw away all the aesthetic elements? Do you still want the building to glow at night, have all those flashy lights coming up? This is still going on, even on these Energy Efficiency certified buildings. Why? Because of the aesthetics, you want the city to look beautiful and attractive at night, instead of dark and gloomy.

DC: I don’t think the developers care more about aesthetics than making money; but then they are not mutually exclusive — beautiful buildings can also be profitable.

DESIGN QUALITY

BL: One thing we question is why there are all these new office buildings which are not designed to be environmentally conscious, scoring high in BEAM Plus. There must be some mechanism to encourage such measures. The mechanism of submitting a technical proposal plus the land bid, there is something I believe for the new disposal of land in Kai Tak and other government sites. I think, as architects, we should give our support for, say, a month of consideration for a new site when the two envelope system [technical and commercial bids] is used. There should be strong support from the architectural community if they implement environmental measures in the projects. Although this is a requirement, you will have new opportunity. The other thing is the GFA concession issue and BEAM Plus certification. It’s still not in a mature stage, but in a more mature stage, a certain certification up to Platinum level should be served and linked to a higher GFA concession ranking. So there is a new sense for an assessment; to score really high and that would provide an incentive for the developer.

DC: But are you just looking at the initial stage, or over the lifetime of the building? Because it can be a BEAM Plus Platinum certified building in the beginning, but if it is not well maintained it could end up being a worse-off building. But the developer has already got all the concessions and benefited.

KYS: The GFA concession encouragement can be quite dangerous, because you are encouraging developers to build more, right? I think there are actually more ways to contribute to qualifying a building as a really fantastic building; by the way you actually service it, or even just the context and the micro-environment you have to give to the building, rather than on pure GFA terms and conditions. I think there are also other ways to satisfy the