

Planning and implementation of community facilities in Hong Kong

Patrick Lau

The importance of enhancing community development by means of sound urban design retaining local characteristics is a key issue for our city. One problem in Hong Kong is that the Government, when carrying out planning for different districts, does not pay enough attention to the preservation of local characteristics. Places like Tseung Kwan O and Ma On Shan are classic examples where traffic and road transport overshadow any human or pedestrian activities. When one goes to these places, there is simply no street culture, let alone characteristic community elements.

I believe we need to understand local needs and lifestyle thoroughly before we can devise any sound urban design strategy. That is why I have emphasised on the importance of listening to the views of the District Councils and local residents in the urban redevelopment and planning process. District Councils should also take the lead in community planning and assist in the implementation.

Although the Urban Renewal Authority did undertake to consider incorporating the marriage theme into the redevelopment of Lee Tung Street in Wan Chai, and is also moving towards a more promising direction in the redevelopment of the Graham Street area by attempting to protect one of the oldest traditional wet markets in Hong Kong, these efforts do not give genuine priority to the preservation of our local character.

The Director of the Department of City Planning of New York City praised the existing Graham Street area as one of the most beautiful and characteristic cultural area in Hong Kong - I hope the authorities will take heed and take good care of this special place.

Another problem is the lack of coordination when implementing what has been planned. This is best illustrated by the chaotic situation in Tin Shui Wai. There is a common misconception that there was a shortage of community facilities in Tin Shui Wai as a result of poor planning. In fact, such facilities were accounted for in the initial planning stage, but it was the Government's inability to put them in place that caused the subsequent problems.

For example, the ground floors of all public housing estates in Tuen Mun were originally planned for such uses as community services



HKU SPACE Community College, Kowloon Bay

and kindergartens. Such facilities could soon be open for use by the public once the renovation works were completed. However, the Social Welfare Department, responsible for approving the applications, decided that the various funds would only be scrutinised and approved one by one after people had taken up residency in these public housing estates. As a result, the relevant services were not available to residents even after they moved in. Subsequently, residents had to look for kindergartens and schools in other

districts. Therefore, matching facilities in the communities must be coordinated with the implementation of the relevant planning, and that efforts must be made wherever possible to solve such coordination problems.

I think the greatest difficulty lies in the very long time required by the various departments for their vetting procedures: the completion dates of community facilities could not meet the needs of the residents. I sincerely hope that coordination inadequacies in planning and project development can be minimised,



HKIVE Learning Resources Centre, Shatin



whilst the efficiency in decision making and vetting procedures will be highly enhanced. If so, we shall not have to see any more districts awaiting the completion of a local community centre or a swimming pool for 10 years.

In fact, the various matching facilities should first be properly completed and operated by adequate manpower for the provision of services, so that residents can enjoy the services immediately after moving into the district. The authorities should seriously review the current mentality of building public housing first and providing matching facilities later. In addition, it should consider attracting people from different walks of life to move into the district by improving the community facilities, thereby promoting the local economy, providing more job opportunities in the district, and helping to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Only in this way can we provide a long-term solution for tackling social problems and implement an urban planning policy that is people centred.

Patrick Lau

Prof Hon Patrick Lau is a LegCo Member, Fellow Member and Past President (2001-02) of HKIA, Honorary University Fellow, Honorary Professor and former Head of the Department of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong. He is also Chairman of the Tender Committee of the Housing Authority, Founding Chairman of the Professional Green Building Council, former Vice Chairman of the Town Planning Board and Director of the Architecture Centre.

PGBC 2009 Spring Report

NEW PGBC Council 2009-2010

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NEW Cycle of PGBC

2009 signifies a new cycle of PGBC. PGBC was jointly formed by the founding institutes in late 2002. The biennial chairmanship is based on a rotational basis, starting from HKIA, then HKIS and HKIE. HKILA and HKIP are pleased to only take up the supportive role until their further notification.

After the first six-year cycle of PGBC, the duty of chairmanship is now turned back to HKIA again. Thanks to the leadership of past chairmen, including Prof. Patrick S S Lau, HKIA (2003-04), Mr Kenneth Chan, HKIS (2005-06) and Ir Reuben Chu, HKIE (2007-08) in the formation era of PGBC.

In the new cycle, PGBC aspires to lead a number of new initiatives that further "promote a better sustainable built environment through professional involvement" - the aim of our establishment. The key ones include a proposed eco-village in a restored landfill site and the formation of "Hong Kong Green Building Council" (香港綠色建築議會).

Under the Board of Education & Research (BER) as chaired by Mr K K Choy, PGBC continues to organize CPD seminars on green buildings. In March 2009, the first technical seminar was "The Next Generation & LEED Refurbishment".



Professional Green Building Council

Technical Seminar 1/2009

The Next Generation & LEED Refurbishment

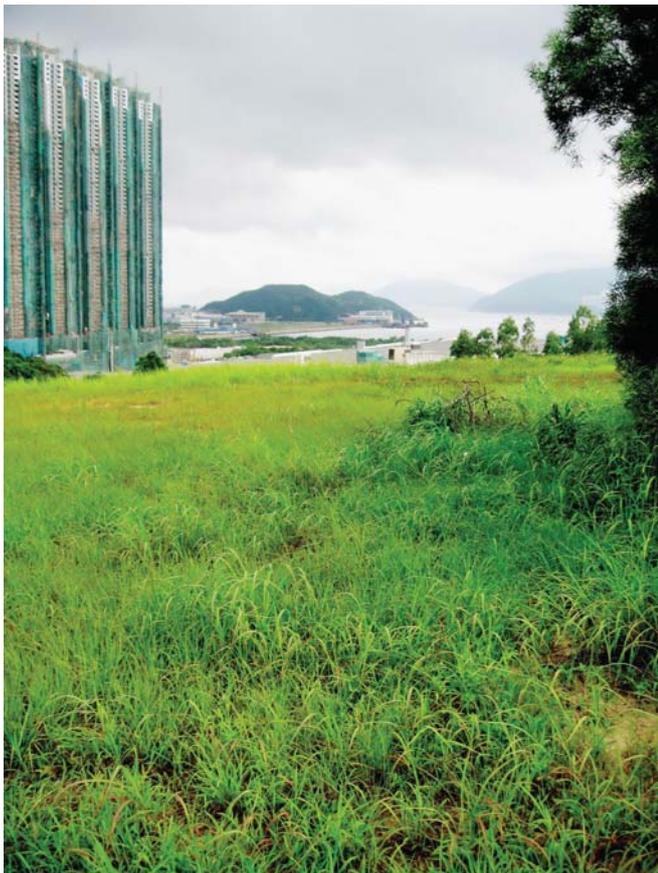


NEW & Green Life of Landfill Site

Under the Board of Sustainability (BOS) as chaired by Mr Sam Cheng, PGBC is in the process of launching a feasibility study on turning a brownfield site (from a restored landfill area) to become a green and sustainable eco-village that demonstrates the state-of-the-art design and technology as well as promotes the practice of green living in Hong Kong and our region. The vision is to evoke and evolve ONE PLANET LIVING, as a pioneer in zero / low carbon yet happy and healthy lifestyle.

A potential site in Tseung Kwan O has been identified. The restored landfill location is in proximity to nearby MTR stations and some high-rise developments (mostly under construction). The gentle sloping site, with sea view from one side, is now prevalently covered by grass, together with certain distinct landfill site restoration features.

PGBC needs more people, both professionals and others, with green heart and mind to help make this dream project come true. The challenge lies on not only the master planning and design but also the articulation of a sustainable operation and business plan. Welcome all to participate in our design workshop as well as to collaborate with our working group. It is a dream by us, and for us and our children.



NEW "Green Building Council"

With the sincere support of Mrs Carrie Lam, Secretary for Development, the formation of Hong Kong Green Building Council (HKGBC) is moving ahead. PGBC is one of the 4 founding organizations for HKGBC. The other collaborating founders are Construction Industry Council (CIC), Business Environment Council (BEC) and BEAM Society.

HKGBC will be more encompassing in term of membership, with a view to engaging a wide spectrum of stakeholders that can collaborate and transform the built environment towards sustainability. It is a part of the global movement in forming Green Building Councils, and HKGBC is going to join the World Green Building Council (WGBC). WGBC currently has more than a dozen of members (such as GBC Australia, Canada GBC, Japan Sustainable Building Consortium, UK GBC and US GBC) as well as some emerging members (from Spain to Vietnam, etc.)

One of the key initiatives of HKGBC will look after the green building labeling rating tool in Hong Kong. With that, the Government will have a well-recognized basis to require all public projects for green building assessment up to certain rating. Similarly, such practice is potentially extendable to the private sector at an appropriate time.

Given our compact urban form, Hong Kong can become a city of green buildings in the future!

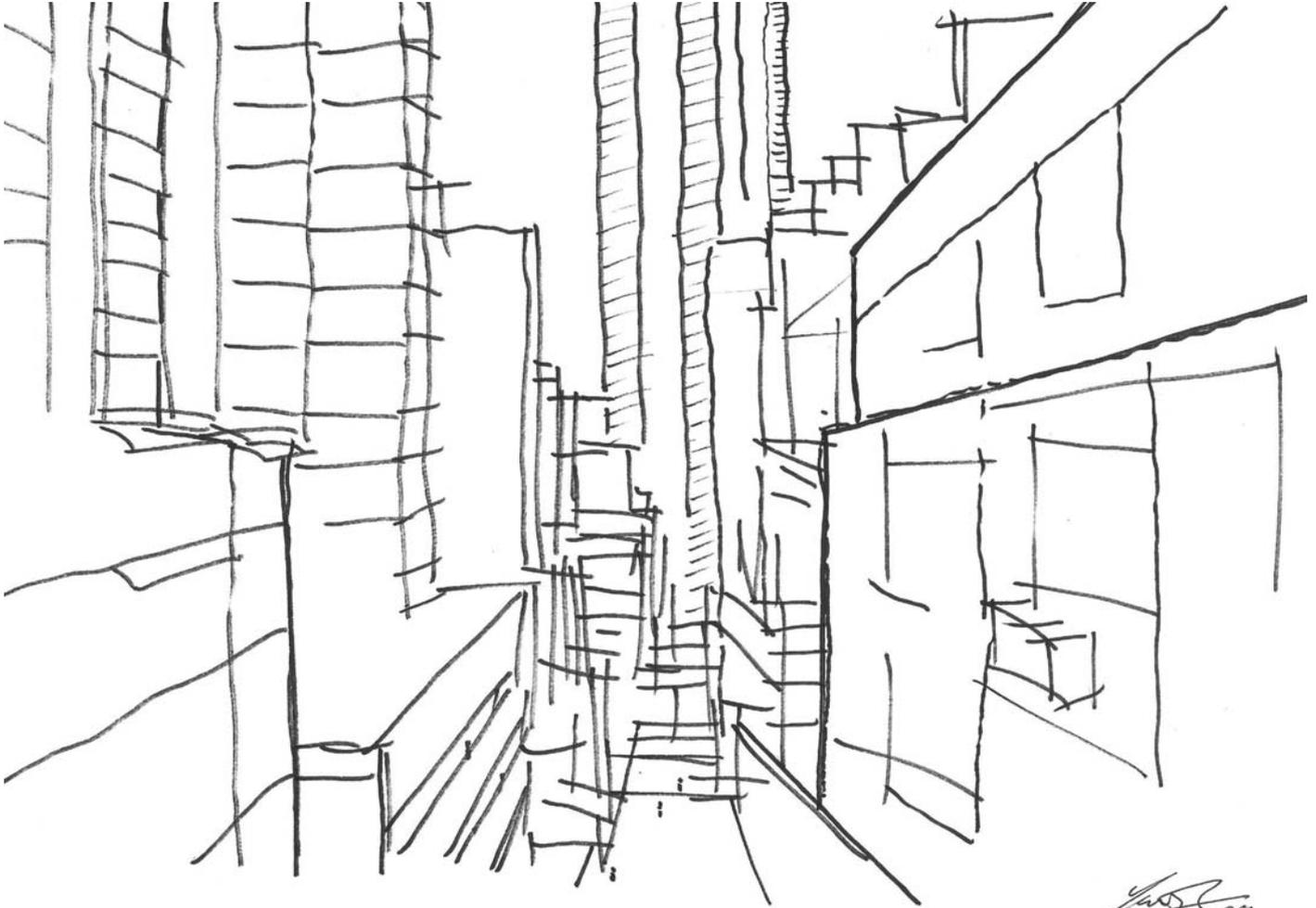
K S Wong

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"ArchCom" in Hong Kong

Platteen Tsang



This is a sketch of the urban area in Central. However, pedestrians are too small in scale to be seen.

"Re-Urbanization"

It is very important to clarify that high-rise developments are not equal to urbanization; high-rise developments could be one of the many approaches of urbanization. Urban area could be referred as the built environment. The opposite of urban is rural, countryside. However, between urban and rural, there are settlements in the areas between urban and rural areas, therefore, depends on the density and level of activities in an area, areas such as inner urban, semi urban, semi rural, etc, could be identified. These terms are less meaningful than it sounds, the most important

thing is the relationship between the development of an area and the life style of people living, working, or relaxing in that particular area.

Hong Kong, due to its hilly geographic characteristic, some areas had been urbanized for many decades. Central, for example, has been highly developed. Old settlements in Central usually seen as high density in the foreigner's eyes, but in compare with the construction projects in the same area after millennium, the density of old settlements is fairly low. In my viewpoint, recent

developments in Central are more like "re-urbanizing" the area. Then, I realize such thinking is only partially right. As explained previously, high-rise developments are not equal to urbanization, hence, increasing the building heights in an area that had been well developed could not be seen as a "re-urbanization". The missing key point is that urbanization must involve the life of local residents. Development without taking into account the life of local residents could result in a decline of the area despite the newly polished high rise block. Urbanization, usually referred to a growth of an area from rural



Even kids know to viewing a model from its "street level".

status, do not simply concern the physical development, but also the economic and social factors. An overwhelming in the physical development will break the balance between the three primary factors, thus lead to an uncontrolled urbanization.

Human Scale

Having emphasized the importance of people in an urban development, it is time to elaborate also the importance of human scale in terms of urban design. Similar to architectural and town planning design, urban design is for the people, rather than the billboards and car parking spaces. Therefore, understanding people's life style is, on one hand, a critical thinking; on the other hand, a designer should see a built environment from the perspective of a human level, not from a helicopter, nor from the 80th floor of a skyscraper. The way people perceive a built environment will be largely influenced by its appearance.

Mr. Edward Leung, an expert in cultural and built heritage management, once explained to me that architecture couldn't always be

judged by its appearance. I agree with him, and I also believe that urban design should be similar to architecture; appearance isn't always the most significant characteristic. In terms of urban design and community development, linkage between physical spaces could enhance the relationship between communities. Local people, as well as visitors, could enjoy their life in areas where they can gather, relax, shop, walk, etc. Psychologically, human being will feel more stressful in dense or enclosed areas. In Hong Kong, the construction of high-rise buildings, and the so-called screen-wall effect, is exactly creating a dense and enclosed atmosphere in inner urban areas such as Central. Moreover, mega structures have little contribution to the community developments, because the proportion between a mega structure and a human is just like that between furniture and an insect. Therefore, a human being walking in an area full of huge shopping malls or massive skyscrapers, by all means, is similar to an insect crawling through the gaps furniture.

Certainly, no one likes to be feeling like an insect, therefore, urban design in Hong Kong



These photos were taken before and after the opening of Hong Kong Architecture Centre's new premises in Central; showing an aging urban area could be rejuvenated through refurbishing an old shop with a refreshing shop front.

must begin to focus more on human scale, such as the connectivity between spaces and streets, width of pavements, positions of sign posts, etc. Fancy architecture could be an icon in a place, but too many iconic constructions lower the values of iconic constructions themselves; urban design becomes the key to harmonize and balance the personality of different architecture.

Hong Kong Architecture Centre

Hong Kong Architecture Centre (HKArC), with the support from HKIA, opened the first premises in Central in December 2008. HKArC's new centre is located in an area deem to be redeveloped. However, it doesn't stop the centre to rejuvenate the area, through a lively and creative approach - organizing interactive activities and attracting people to visit the area. The result is positive and encouraging. Thus, explaining the importance of human scale in community development and urbanization, should a comfortable, pleasant, and lively living environment is to be created.

Platteen Tsang

Assistant Centre Manager
Hong Kong Architecture Centre



Experiencing Architecture Walk- Perception in Detail

Hing-Wah Chau

"Authentic architectural experiences consist then of approaching, or confronting a building rather than the façade; of the act of entering and not simply the frame of the door, of looking in or out of a window, rather than the window itself."
- Juhani Pallasmaa⁽¹⁾



Fig. 1 - Railing in the Hong Kong Bank Headquarters

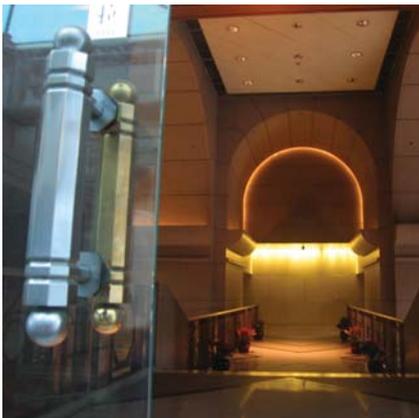


Fig. 2 - Door handle leading to the Standard Chartered Bank Headquarters

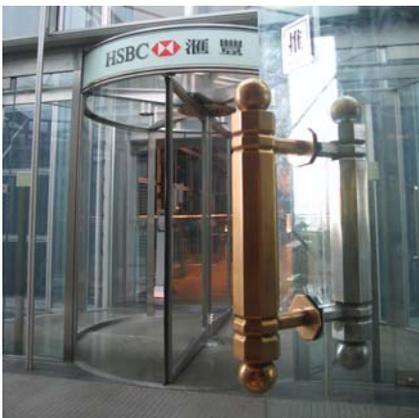


Fig. 3 - Door handle leading to the Hong Kong Bank Headquarters

Architecture Walk is a programme jointly organized by the Hong Kong Institute of Architects and the Hong Kong Tourism Board for tourists to have better understanding of Hong Kong architecture through a 3-hour walking tour in Central on every Saturday morning, starting in the Hong Kong Planning and Infrastructure Exhibition Gallery next to the City Hall, visiting historical monuments, such as the Former Central Police Station, the Legislative Council Building and the St. John's Cathedral as well as some renowned buildings, including the Hong Kong Bank Headquarters and the Bank of China Tower. As a tour host for nearly 3 years, Architecture Walk to me is not only an opportunity to share with the tourists, but is also a continuing discovery tour to perceive and experience the architecture in detail.

High density of skyscrapers is undoubtedly a popular iconography of Hong Kong. It is common for tourists under tight schedule to take images by the hurried eye of camera, focusing on the external appearance and visual impact of the architecture, ignoring other sensory perceptions, leading to the loss of tactility. In fact, genuine architectural encounters are multi-sensory. "It is not enough

to see architecture; you must experience it."⁽²⁾

During the Architecture Walk, apart from appreciating the architectural form and spatial quality, it is inspiring to experience the architecture at the level of the detail. The art of detailing is "the joining of materials, elements, components, and building parts in a functional and aesthetic manner."⁽³⁾ As demonstrated by the railing in the Hong Kong Bank Headquarters (Fig. 1), the joining of different components: handrail, fastener, support and balustrade is obsessively and minutely detailed, emphasizing on the tactile qualities of the materials employed. Norman Foster discusses the design of this railing by mentioning that "it is an approach that requires concern for the smallest elements; no detail should be considered too small. Also, a handrail, like furniture, is subject to constant physical touch by the users of a building".⁽⁴⁾

Door handle is another element that can heighten our perceptual awareness in the spatial transition. To Peter Zumthor, door handle serves as a "special sign of entry into a world of different moods".⁽⁵⁾ This is clearly exemplified by the carefully selected door handles on the passage connecting between the Hong Kong Bank Headquarters and the adjacent Standard Chartered Bank



Fig. 4 - Corner treatment in the Hang Seng Bank Headquarters



Fig. 5 - Edge treatment of the access leading down to Lan Kwai Fong from Wyndham Street

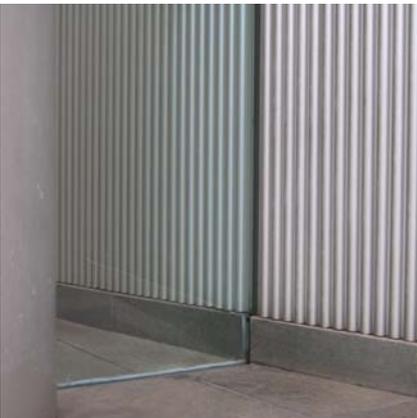


Fig. 6 - Continuity of metal cladding of No. 8 Queen's Road Central

Headquarters. Signifying the change of atmosphere, the door handle facing the Standard Chartered Bank Headquarters is in bronze colour to match with the yellowish brown granite clad interior (Fig. 2) while the door handle on the same glass door facing the Hong Kong Bank Headquarters is in silver colour echoed with the "High-Tech aesthetic"⁽⁶⁾ (Fig. 3).

Details provide visual/ tactile sensations and at the same time convey meanings. "Details are much more than subordinate elements; they can be regarded as the minimal units of signification in the architectural production of meanings...The detail tells the tale."⁽⁷⁾ For example, the consistent round edge corner treatment on both the building form and the interior design of the banking hall of the Hang Seng Bank Headquarters (Fig. 4) convincingly provide the overall effect without sharp corners⁽⁸⁾, reinforcing the corporate image on traditional belief of handling issues smoothly. Paying attention during the Architecture Walk can disclose the details that may be previously ignored or unnoticed. I would like to quote the edge treatment of the popular pedestrian access leading down to the famous tourist spot, Lan Kwai Fong from Wyndham Street as an illustration. Such edge treatment

possesses tectonic quality and authentic materiality by exposing the juxtaposition of the new metal frame and the old concrete wall behind (Fig. 5). Tectonics is the interrelated art of structure and construction⁽⁹⁾ reflected in the "poetics of construction".⁽¹⁰⁾

Poetic details arousing sensation are intimately related to the materiality. "The character of a poetic detail resides in the relationship of texture and of construction, in the nature of colour, light, reflection, surface, and in the way materials are juxtaposed."⁽¹¹⁾ The glittering metal cladding of No. 8 Queen's Road Central designed by Rocco Yim continues from interior space to the street outside (Fig. 6), establishing a visual connectivity and delivering a distinctive urban texture.

Similarly, the translucency of the glass panels of the elegantly designed footbridge next to the Cheung Kong Centre offers the delight of filtered and indirect light, taking the distinguished Bank of China Tower as the backdrop (Fig. 7). As a pedestrian walkway, this aesthetic pleasure is readily accessible to the general public.

Respecting and bringing out the 'essence' of materials has been the most widely pursued



Fig. 7 - Translucent glass panels of the footbridge next to the Cheung Kong Center overlooking the Bank of China Tower



Fig. 8 - "Cascade" street furniture on the external steps of the Centrium



Fig. 9 - Stone paving of the Pottinger Street

tactic in the recent search for 'reality' and 'authenticity' in architecture",⁽¹²⁾ this involves giving new life to familiar materials as well as exploring the use of non-conventional ones, including the exploitation of plastics in the construction industry.⁽¹³⁾ The eye-catching street furniture entitled "Cascade" designed by local architect, Gary Chang, on the external steps of the Centrium is a demonstration on the innovative use of coloured plastic sheets. Their repetition in use along the steps can arouse our awareness of their material qualities in addition to fulfilling their function as street furniture.

Materiality of urban detail can evoke memories, "memories of certain atmospheres experienced".⁽¹⁴⁾ The richly textured surface of the stone paving of the historical Pottinger Street (Fig. 9) is the trace of weathering worn by time. Walking on the stone paving is a stimulating experience, giving aesthetic pleasure to the eyes and connecting us with the tradition.

The exposed bricks of the Foreign Correspondents' Club (Fig. 10) are also an attractive texture appealing to our sensory perceptions. On top of the visual impact, the appeal of material is tactile, sympathetic to

the touch. The articulated material can enrich the vocabulary of architecture. "Architecture, with its silent spatiality and tactile materiality, can reintroduce essential, intrinsic meanings and values to human experience."⁽¹⁵⁾

Along the route of the Architecture Walk, the magnificent masonry details of the Legislative Council Building are impressive. As stated by the Governor Sir Frederick Lugard (1907-1912) in the opening ceremony of this building on 15 January 1912, "their massive granite walls and pillars they stand unrivalled in the Far East, a monument of which we may be proud."⁽¹⁶⁾ The elaborate detailing reveals the significance of this building and at the same can be understood "in a larger context embracing the place, the means available to handle and work stone, the social expectations and the designer's intentions."⁽¹⁷⁾

Walking along the Architecture Walk encourages me to rediscover the familiar city context in which I live. By returning to the primordial encounter, experiencing architecture in detail exalts the value of tactility and perception.



Fig. 10 - Exposed bricks of the Foreign Correspondents' Club



Fig. 11 - Masonry work of the Legislative Council Building

Footnotes:

- (1) Juhani Pallasmaa, "An Architecture of the Seven Senses", in *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, Tokyo: a+u, 1994, p.35.
- (2) Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, p.33.
- (3) Marco Frascari, "The Tell-the-Tale Detail", in Kate Nesbitt ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, p.501.
- (4) Norman Foster, "Handrails and Bicycles", in *Norman Foster: Foster Associates: Buildings and Projects Vol. 3 1978-1985*, Hong Kong: Watermark, 1989, p.240.
- (5) Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006, p.7.
- (6) Charles Jencks, *Architecture Today*, London: Academy Edition, 1993, p.288.
- (7) Marco Frascari, "The Tell-the-Tale Detail", p.501.
- (8) Peter Moss, *Skylines Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: Form Asia, 2005, p.60.
- (9) Eduard F. Sekler, "Structure, Construction, Tectonics", in *Structure in Art and in Science*, ed. Gyorgy Kepes, New York: George Braziller, 1965, pp.89-95.
- (10) Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995, p.387.
- (11) Steven Holl, "The Poetic Detail", in Peter MacKeith ed., *Archipelago: Essays on Architecture*, Helsinki: Rakennustieto Oy, 2006, p.95.
- (12) Richard Weston, *Materials, Form and Architecture*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2008, p.193.
- (13) Victoria Ballard Bell, *Materials for Architectural Design*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2006, p.219.
- (14) Maarten Kloos ed., *Amsterdam in detail*, Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 1996, p.9.
- (15) Steven Holl, *Intertwining*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, p.11.
- (16) Anthony Dyson, *Commemorative Booklet for the Opening of the Legislative Council Building*, Hong Kong: Government Information Services, 1985, p.30.
- (17) Richard Weston, *Materials, Form and Architecture*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2008, p.43.

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