AIA Hong Kong Symposium: Building Regional Practices

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Event: AIA Hong Kong AGM & Building Regional Practice Symposium

Date: October 25, 2025 (Saturday)

Time: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Venue: Miller Theater, Asia Society, Hong Kong

Sponsors: AHEC and AECOM

Supporting Organizations: HKIA, RAIA International Chapter, RIBA Hong Kong Chapter, and UAP Hong Kong

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AIA Hong Kong AGM & Building Regional Practice Symposium

Date: October 25, 2025

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Opening Remarks

Eric Ho (Co-founder and Director, Architecture Commons; President 2025, AIA Hong Kong):

We're just about to get started. Thanks for your patience. Please be seated; there are plenty of seats in the front, so don't be shy. Thanks for coming—I know it's early on a Saturday morning and some of you traveled and rushed to be here, so thank you.

I think I'm going to get started so we can get the day going. We have quite a lot of content today, and thank you again for being here for our Building Regional Practice Conference focusing on Southeast Asia.

At AIA Hong Kong, one of our core values is to explore Hong Kong architecture’ s design and profession’ s identity within the regional context. It is with this in mind that, starting three years ago, we began traveling with our members to different Southeast Asian countries and cities—Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangkok, and recently Manila—to understand the legacy, current conditions, and future opportunities with international and local building industry experts.

This symposium aims to bring all these journeys and insights together and provide architects in Hong Kong with an in-depth exploration of the evolving architectural and urban landscape across Southeast Asia. Many of you practice or have projects in Southeast Asia. This symposium gathers the process we started three years ago with our past presidents, Yimei and Johnny, to look at these contexts and offer the challenges and opportunities for architects to expand our influence and practice in the region.

How do we build a practice that is regional and global? The following topics provide a framework for discussion and will be integrated into today's panel discussions, including sustainable material choices for projects, regional practice frameworks and challenges, adaptability to local contexts, scalability, landing new clients, and the position of Hong Kong as it relates to Southeast Asia—our advantages and disadvantages.

I want to thank our sponsors, AHEC, who have been our biggest supporter for many years since our founding, and also AECOM, who have helped us shape the pertinent topics of discussion for today. We have a panel later in the day dedicated to that.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce Mr. John Chan, our dear friend and Regional Director of Greater China and Southeast Asia. John has been with us as a partner since the beginning of the chapter and has accompanied us on every single trip to Southeast Asia. He has shared knowledge about the building industry, not just architecture, but also the economy of the region. Every time we travel with John, we learn what is happening in each country, the history, the legacy, and the current state of affairs. He might just be the person who can answer all those questions across Southeast Asian countries.

Please join me in welcoming Mr. John Chan.

Opening Speech

John Chan (Regional Director, AHEC):

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to thank AIA, especially President Eric Ho, for inviting me to attend today's event, and also the leadership of AIA Hong Kong, the whole team I have worked with for 23 years.

I represent AHEC, the American Hardwood Export Council, which promotes the application of sustainable natural wood materials with several goals and missions. Today, we are not just promoting wood for interior design but for building environments that combat climate change.

Today marks the 34th anniversary of AHEC, which chose to set up its regional office in Hong Kong for ASEAN and Greater China, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and the greater mainland. Since 2023, after COVID, China has been the base for AHEC programs, collaborating with AIA and the Society of Architecture in China, Shanghai, and other areas.

In the next few years, as I told Eric, Johnny, and the leadership of AIA Hong Kong, Hong Kong will be a very important base for outreach to ASEAN as the region’ s economy grows rapidly.

Let me briefly introduce AHEC. It is the leading international trade non-profit organization for the U.S. hardwood industry, active in over 50 markets. We promote sustainable American hardwood worldwide, supporting designers, architects, technical experts, research, and creative collaboration to demonstrate the range, beauty, and environmental responsibility of American timber, including softwood.

A few highlights of American hardwood sustainability credentials:

- The growth of American hardwood forests exceeds removal every year. The forest naturally regenerates. Every two minutes, the U.S. hardwood forest grows by the size of a football field.
- Wood products have a negative carbon footprint. Trees absorb carbon dioxide during growth, which is locked in the product and not warming the planet as long as the product is in use.
- American hardwoods are sustainably managed resources. We promote the use of all species, including under-utilized ones like red oak, maple, and cherry, alongside commonly used walnut and white oak.

AHEC promotes American hardwoods across Greater China and Southeast Asia. Our key strategy is to work with specified architects and designers to share knowledge on the benefits of American hardwood. This has worked well in China, which is now the largest importer of American hardwood, a market that was zero 34 years ago.

Despite challenges in China, Southeast Asia is the next big market. Vietnam is currently the world’ s second-largest market for American hardwood. We aim to bring the successful China model to Southeast Asia.

We chose AIA Hong Kong as our collaborator because Hong Kong is a free economic city and a base for AHEC.

I’ m happy to see architects, interior designers, strategic planners, and representatives from major firms here today—from the U.S., Australia, the UK, and Hong Kong—so we can work together toward this goal.

I recently returned from a tour with my colleagues, including Vivian Tan, who works closely with Eric and Shannon. We visited Manila, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam again. They all welcome AIA, especially the Hong Kong team, to collaborate on environmental design with natural wood materials.

When I say natural wood, I mean not just American hardwood but any wood that meets sustainability criteria. We do not discriminate. My job is to promote sustainability and

natural wood products from the U.S., which are environmentally friendly and bring warmth to new environments.

Architects and interior designers, please consider using natural wood materials, especially as we fight climate change.

Thank you for allowing me to share about AHEC and our collaboration with AIA Hong Kong. This is just the beginning. We look forward to the future.

Thank you very much.

Session 1: A Showcase of Collaboration

Moderator: Shannon Ho (Executive Director, AEDAS; Vice President 2025, AIA Hong Kong)

Welcome to the first panel. We will discuss collaboration between clients and international and local architects in the Southeast Asia region. We will explore the dynamics of these partnerships, highlighting challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned.

We will start with a 10-minute presentation by Stefano Tronci, Associate Principal and Asia Pacific Sustainability Lead at SOM, followed by Ms. Yee Tak Lau, Director at KPF. Please welcome Stefano.

Presentation: Collaboration in Practice

Stefano Tronci (Associate Principal, Asia Pacific Sustainability Lead, SOM):

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for having me here today. It’ s a pleasure to speak with you about collaboration—collaborative systems.

SOM may be famous for some of the buildings we have designed, but you may not know much about the processes behind those designs. Today, I want to focus on collaboration internally among disciplines and externally with clients and partners.

I will focus on four questions through four projects that required extensive collaboration to reach the right conclusions—questions that might otherwise be dismissed as impossible. These are: climate risk, adapting heritage buildings, speed of construction, and sustainability systems.

1. Climate Risk – Vietnam Project

We designed a city and community in Vietnam that must live in harmony with nature. The site is prone to flooding, located at a bend of the Saigon River in Ho Chi Minh City, which floods several times a year. The challenge was to design a community that not only survives floods but thrives in a changing climate.

Collaboration involved urban planners, environmental engineers, and the client to understand climate risks and hydrology. The client needed convincing about the immediacy of climate risk, which is very real in Southeast Asia.

The architecture resulting from this process is a new kind of Southeast Asian tropical architecture—responsive and adaptable to different scenarios. This project is being finalized and will be built soon.

2. Adapting Heritage Buildings – Singapore Project

How do we retrofit existing buildings rather than demolish them? This is a challenge in Hong Kong, Singapore, and elsewhere.

We worked with local partners on a competition to preserve Shenton House, a modernist building from the 1970s in Singapore’ s CBD. Instead of demolishing it, we explored maintaining the structure and adding new elements.

We proposed building two large cores beside the existing structure and connecting them with a transfer structure, then adding 10 floors of timber on top—something never done in Singapore. The building would become a boutique hotel, preserving heritage while adding new functions.

This required constant collaboration among architects, engineers, and stakeholders to answer difficult questions. The result is a 40% reduction in embodied carbon and 60% operational energy efficiency, with various green certifications.

3. Speed of Construction – Vietnam Master Plan

Vietnam is developing rapidly. We designed a master plan and two buildings for the APAC 2027 summit, starting from land that was water in early 2025. The land has been reclaimed, and construction is already at the first floor.

The challenge is designing at a speed that matches construction progress. We simplified design decisions by rooting them in science and evidence, such as structural bending moments defining truss sizes.

We designed shading and columns oriented to prevailing winds to make outdoor spaces usable in tropical climates. The design was data-driven and adaptable as construction progressed rapidly.

4. Sustainability Systems – Hong Kong Project

In Tung Chung Business Hub near the airport, we designed a building aiming for the lowest carbon footprint possible in Hong Kong.

Collaboration involved convincing clients, consultants, and approval bodies to prioritize embodied carbon reduction. We minimized concrete use by designing a steel bracing system to handle lateral forces, reducing embodied carbon below Hong Kong Green Building Council limits.

We integrated solar panels into louvers, contributing 6.5% of the building’ s energy consumption. To protect these features during value engineering, we linked them to LEED Platinum certification requirements, making them indispensable.

We also designed a shopping mall interior clad entirely in bamboo and timber from a Hong Kong company importing bamboo from China, creating a natural, daylight-filled retail environment.

Thank you. I hope this gives you some ideas to think about. Please feel free to ask questions later.

Presentation: Collaboration and Mission

Yee Tak Lau (Director, KPF):

Thank you, Shannon, and thank you, Stefano, for the great sharing. Good to see you again.

I’ m Yee Tak Lau from KPF Hong Kong. We have many KPF alumni and colleagues here, so feel free to reach out to them with questions.

To talk about collaboration, we first need to understand ourselves. I will share a bit about our mission, means, and inspirations, then discuss some projects in Southeast Asia.

Our mission is to elevate studies through context, craft, and performance.

- **Context:** We start with understanding the context deeply. We have offices in New York, London, and other parts of the world, with colleagues immersed in local cultures and projects.
- **Craft:** We focus on craft throughout design, from concept to execution, including materials research and constructability.
- **Performance:** Collaboration is essential to enhance building performance and quality of life. We work closely with clients, consultants, and construction teams.

We leverage technology, sustainability, and most importantly, community. We learn every day from each other, using big data and resources that allow us to achieve in days what used to take months or years.

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Session 1: A Showcase of Collaboration

Yee Tak Lau (AIA RIBA HKIA, Director, KPF):

Sustainability is something we cannot ignore. We are all working towards pushing the envelope and the limit within the context we have. We learn from each city and each governance; there are different ways to achieve sustainability, especially from Singapore,

which is leading the way, China catching up, and all parts of Southeast Asia joining in the efforts to push the envelope.

We never forget about who we're working for—the users, the contacts, the neighbors. We keep constant conversations with the different stakeholders we work with, as well as the owners, to ensure the buildings are good neighbors to all.

What inspires us is how we can work across regions, bringing experience from across the globe—from North America and Europe, where we started, to Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East over the last 20 years. We work across different sectors, moving from big urban blocks to more surgical insertions into residential, mixed-use, education, and research sectors. Our scope ranges from master plans, architecture services, facades, interiors, to applied technology like energy modeling.

We strive to reach the human scale without losing our touch, but obviously, different contexts call for different scales. We are very lucky to be involved in various projects worldwide.

Focusing back on Southeast Asia, it is a very special context—half the size of the US or China, with 11 very diverse countries and a population density similar to China. Working with these 11 unique countries, we have learned a lot. We have started quite a few projects in the area, including Singapore, Indonesia, Bangkok, and Vietnam, where everyone is currently working.

For example, the Robinson Centre in Singapore, completed in 2019 just before COVID, features a lush podium roof and an accessible green rooftop, partly due to government requirements. Our KPF office is also located there. Another project is the Calm Center, a campus development for St. Tell Group, where we pushed the envelope by creating more semi-outdoor public spaces with multiple ground planes to encourage interaction and social space before entering the research and office areas.

Then there is Changi Terminal 5, a long-term project with almost a million square meters of gross floor area, expected to be completed in 2030. It is a great learning experience as an airport is arguably the most international location a city can have. We are designing an indoor environment that is column-free, with more greenery and fresh air, looking into future-proofing mobility and transport.

In Indonesia, we have the Sequoia Tower and the Holographic and Luminary Towers, which may be part of upcoming building tours.

Closer to home in Bangkok, we have residential projects and hotels, many of which you may have visited. One project I want to highlight for collaboration is One Bangkok, also part of the building tour itinerary. We got involved in 2016 when the site looked very different. In 2024, we opened phase one with almost 1.9 million square meters of gross floor area fully completed.

This project was not achieved by a single architect or designer but under the leadership of a single client. The site is about 1.73 hectares, carefully curated by SOM for the master plan. We work with many local architects. The client developed the project with one singular basement designed by a local architect, holding all the towers and podium. The landscape and open areas cover up to 50% of the site, designed by PLandscape. The retail podium in the south is by LIDE, and two other retail podium blocks, Zone 2 and Zone 3, are by KPF. On top of the podium are all the towers: two residential towers (one by a local architect, PIA), two boutique hotels and one office by 849, two towers by SOM (the Ritz Carlton and an office tower), and two other towers by KPF.

This creates a very nice quilt with interlocking programs—towers by one architect, podiums by others, and the basement by a local architect. This collaboration and respect under strong client leadership allowed us to deliver such a large-scale project in a short time.

A key to linking everything is having a common vision with multiple loops for people moving through the site: a Civic Plaza, a retail loop through all zones and buildings, a 1.5-kilometer food loop, and a 2-kilometer art loop. All architects and designers are on the same page to create a continuous experience flowing through the site.

The master plan guides everything so that walking through the site does not feel like all buildings were built at once. You can see different textures, fabrics, and scales designed by different architects but respectful of each other's design language. The client’ s vision of building a city without a top-down master plan has been successful.

Because of the vast retail variety, we had the chance to experiment with a different retail plan, deviating from traditional arcades and grand atriums. We conducted internal feasibility studies to convince the leasing team that this concept could work. The retail plan is funky, with a pavilion surrounding an open space called a piazza, supporting retail serving the hotels and office towers. It is more outward-focused than inward-focused, with more natural light entering the retail stores.

The grand plaza was debated extensively on whether it should be outdoor or enclosed. We concluded it would be a naturally lit but enclosed space for now, with the possibility to open it up in the future to fresh air, making it more like a piazza.

We also learned from our Hong Kong projects about connecting bridges to complete the loops, shop-house shop-front designs, and connections to public spaces.

Regarding the towers, Tower 4 will be the first completed tower on site, facing the most prominent public corners. It features a shingled curtain wall system with sculpted terraces reminiscent of a Thai steeple profile, which has been very well received. The client even wanted to add more, but that was after the structure was done. We incorporated this theme into the interiors and lobbies.

Another experimental office tower has a gigantic 4,600-square-meter floor plate, 150 meters long, a nice end piece to the Civic Plaza. All floors will have park views, though not facing Lumphini Park. We also incorporated as much natural ventilation as possible, allowing occupants to open windows if they choose.

These are great tests and experiments that could not be achieved without conversations with the local team, client, and our design offices. We had a great party for the opening last fall, which I see as a positive and encouraging sign that we can integrate global practice into specific markets to develop unique projects.

Thank you.

Moderator Shannon Ho (Executive Director, AEDAS, Vice President 2025, AIA Hong Kong):

Thank you, VTech. Please be seated. We'd like to invite Stefano to come on stage to start our panel discussion.

Thank you, Stefano and VTech, for your inspiring sharing. This session is about collaboration with local architects and clients. To start, I want to learn about the collaboration between yourself and local architects. Usually, KPF and SOM are the designers for the projects, but you need very strong local counterparts—local architects or local APs—to help realize the project to the end. Can you share the process of how you select your local AP or local way?

Yee Tak Lau (AIA RIBA HKIA, Director, KPF):

We try to make friends. Whenever we travel or meet at business meetings, we always try to get to know local developers. For KPF, we are very lucky. We have many alumni, so in every city we go to, we have friends who introduce us to local architects. We get to know them. Sometimes, it's not just KPF selecting local architects; local architects also want to collaborate. It's a two-way street. We want to form a network of support where we all value design and find exciting projects to collaborate on.

It's also about experience and relationships built over time with some people we work with. One thing we look for in finding the right partner, especially in a new city or market, is shared values. The ethics behind a building or city design are crucial. We need partners who share the same vision so that difficult questions can be addressed collaboratively to find the right solutions.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

Sometimes, is it climate-pointed as well?

Yee Tak Lau:

Yes, exactly. You start learning from one another and start a conversation. If you're sitting around the table, you're already somewhere in between—you have a point of connection. Instead of coming in with a fixed idea, you start a conversation, understand who you're

working with, and find those points of connection. From there, you build a relationship and hopefully a building.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

You mentioned that in some projects, different architects do the buildings, and you do the podium. For that case, do you have one local counterpart or different parts?

Yee Tak Lau:

We work with at least three architects, not counting structural engineers and others. There's D103, A49, and PIA, as I mentioned. They have an important role as local architects for our buildings and also design their own adjacent buildings. They are very aware of design value and technical requirements. It works well because they don't feel sidelined; they are equal counterparts and valuable design advisors. This is part of the reason for the project's success.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

Most Southeast Asian countries have a long history and strong cultural roots. For your projects, do you appoint specific cultural consultants, or do local architects act as your cultural consultants? For example, in the annual lecture, you collaborated with a famous local architect, Loxley, who is a guru of local architecture. Can you share the role of local architects as cultural consultants?

Yee Tak Lau:

Local architects and clients are our gateway into different cultures and places. Ultimately, we design for people, the main stakeholders. If you don't understand the people you're designing for, what's the point? People mean culture, behaviors, ways of gathering, which we may not know yet. Architects and clients open that conversation, and we approach it with humility—knowing what we don't know and asking questions.

The result is architecture that is no longer an international style the same everywhere but adjusts to locality, climate, and culture. That's very beautiful. Calling someone a cultural consultant can feel distant from the city and context. We prefer to travel, spend time in the city, and live in the context for some time, then return for workshops and meetings. Through this, we learn the way of living.

For example, when we first designed a semi-outdoor space in Bangkok, after six workshops, the team realized air conditioning might be necessary. We personally experience and identify with the local way of living.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

I want to touch on accessibility, a key issue and part of our design DNA. When your client approaches you, I expect they are quite well-developed. Is it fair to say that more developed Southeast Asian countries are more willing to invest in accessibility? Can you share

differences in client dedication to sustainable buildings, for example, Singapore versus Vietnam versus Manila?

Yee Tak Lau:

There is definitely different awareness and understanding of climate change and the construction industry's responsibility. In cities like Singapore, the government mandates many things, defining the rules of the game that everyone follows. In developing countries like Vietnam or the Philippines, awareness may be lower. We provide the right education, but not from a pulpit.

For example, in Manila, we are designing a project with strong sustainability ambition because the client understands that tenants in 2030 will demand it. It becomes a cost, budget, and profitability issue. We speak their language, emphasizing long-term strategy and establishing ESG strategies. Some clients are more short-sighted, focusing on budget and getting the project done.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

Go ahead.

Yee Tak Lau:

Clients usually want to know the return on investment and initial costs. The push and pull factor is working better now because the whole market—from clients to engineers to construction—is more familiar with sustainability. When we first introduced ventilators to stop airflow, many were skeptical, even mechanical engineers. But as the market matured, it became normal practice.

Having the whole industry push for best practices helps the market get used to sustainability, making it no longer a barrier but a standard part of design.

There is also a human component. Even clients not initially thinking about sustainability can be made to understand it's about their legacy—what side of history they want to be on. Talking about their role as actors of change for their city and future generations can shift their thinking from short-term profitability to long-term impact.

We provide pathways for clients to learn how to make a difference. Generally, it's a successful battle, though it depends.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

I suppose clients come to you determined to pursue LEED certification, while others ask about payback periods. Can I summarize it that way?

Yee Tak Lau:

Yes. Nobody works for charity; it's always about business, money, and profitability. But rather than taking easy shortcuts for profit, clients want to build profitable buildings with a different ethos. It may be more management effort on their side, but trusting us to lead the

process helps. It doesn't always work, but some of the best buildings come from this process.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

Great. Besides building elements, is there a shift in material trends to achieve sustainable buildings? You mentioned bamboo or timber.

Yee Tak Lau:

Absolutely. Timber use is still limited in many countries. Singapore allows it, Hong Kong finds it difficult, and the rest of Southeast Asia asks, "What is timber?" Our approach is to understand what open products we can use and their properties.

When comparing timber and concrete, concrete is cheaper unit for unit. But when you factor in weight reduction, foundation work, construction speed, and other costs, prices become similar. Then you can discuss carbon and sustainability.

Technology, AI, and efficiency help us look at material costs holistically, beyond initial cost and transport. Carbon must be part of the equation, with trends starting in the US and coming to Asia.

We always start locally to see how close we can get materials and focus on efficiency. We avoid bulky, inefficient designs that require redundancy. Smart building and learning through context are very important.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

Stephanie mentioned Hong Kong is difficult with many constraints on materials. Can you share differences between Hong Kong, Singapore, and developing countries like Manila regarding experience and constraints?

Yee Tak Lau:

Hong Kong's problems are mostly self-inflicted. We make it difficult with an outdated and inflexible system. Whenever you propose something new, people resist, waiting for the next person to try. Nobody wants to take responsibility.

Thirty years ago, Hong Kong was the innovation center for the region. It should rediscover that identity and push forward so cities like Singapore don't surpass us.

Singapore is very government-mandated, defining sustainability as an existential problem. It's an island in a tropical environment and must act.

Developing countries like Manila may lack sophisticated codes, so we rely on international standards and have more open, creative conversations without the roadblocks Hong Kong faces.

There is still room to push for new materials and construction methods in Hong Kong, but it takes much more effort and persistence from architects and clients.

In the future, we hope to invite government officials to participate in these conversations.

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Date: October 25, 2025

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Session 1: A Showcase of Collaboration

Context: Vietnam / Philippines / Thailand

Moderator: Shannon Ho (Executive Director, AEDAS; Vice President 2025, AIA Hong Kong):

Maybe to find someone to root for us from the government side. I think that would be very, very beneficial to the profession and to the city. It's quite ironic, right? When the city or the country has developed more, it has actually imposed more constraints, and it makes the whole building less creative in a way, and more constrained because we're concerned more about safety. But at the same time, we're limiting ourselves to exploring new ideas.

So thank you, VTech, for volunteering, as that will definitely include you in future panel discussions to talk about sustainability and try to influence and raise awareness of the government on how we can help bring back all these innovative ideas for Hong Kong architecture.

One last question before I open up to the audience. Your clients come to you because KPF and SOM are famous for their international building style. Can you let us know how you make your building not just another building in any city but very specialized and tailor-made for your specific SDC?

Yee Tak Lau (AIA RIBA HKIA, Director, KPF):

Well, I guess it sets in our mission very clearly: context, craft, and performance. So every building we look at, as you can see from what I briefly showed, is not a single style or aesthetic that we are pushing for. When we design a building, we use a very iterative process to take in all the input, and we work with the client. So it's not just a KPF design; it's a design with our stakeholders, with our engineers, with our locals, and the client. This is where we get all the input, and we develop the concept together.

So we are very confident to say that each design is unique. Even though the team is there, the reputation is there, and we benefit from expertise and experience from many of our colleagues, I'm also very excited to look forward to each project because it's going to be something quite brand new, basically learning from what we've received.

I also believe that the city and architectural buildings are a reflection of the age that they were designed and built for. So possibly, maybe the city of glitzy glass and metal buildings with curtain wall facades and straight surfaces down to the floor—that's the past, which responded to different necessities and requirements decades ago.

The city of tomorrow is a lot more climate responsive. We're going to start having office buildings that have deep shading, balconies, and greenery everywhere. Different kinds of materials such as timber or low-carbon materials. All of these, and people, rather than having one mono-functional building inaccessible from the surroundings, like monuments to finance or something, buildings will have to be a lot more porous to people, to the environment, and adaptable to different functions. Because also, that city of complete precise zoning is kind of fading away, and our city centers want a lot more humanity, a lot more connections. We are the people that need to think that way and design in that direction.

Moderator: Shannon Ho:

Great, thank you. So I suppose it's globalized knowledge but localized design for you all. I'm going to open up. Scott can't wait to ask his questions.

Scott Brooks (Director, Imagennix; Chair, 2025 H&A Committee, AIA Hong Kong):

Thank you. I'm Scott Brooks, chairing Honors and Awards for the chapter. I'm looking forward to seeing some of these projects in future submissions.

Thank you for a very interesting high-level context and collaboration view. The question I want to ask is sort of drilling down to a project level—part design development, part post-occupancy. So it's a two-part question, maybe one for each of you if you don't mind.

Both of you talked about retail elements in these projects, and you presented unusual retail projects. So on the design development—bamboo, rattan—battled with leasing. I'd like to hear a little bit more about that. What were the battles? How were they resolved? And then the public journey through the Bangkok space, and I'm assuming this is now post-occupancy. So the post-occupancy feedback from leasing—how did that process go?

Stefano Tronci (RIBA LEED AP BD+C WELL AP, Associate Principal – Asia Pacific Sustainability Lead, SOM):

For that process, it was really about not just leasing, actually. Several other partners along the design process were asking questions about why we need to go this way. This is not

common. Why do we need not just bamboo? Why do we need all this daylight coming into this space? Why do we need to rethink the way retail has been designed, especially for that project that is by the airport, so by definition not a marquee central super-high?

I think the whole conversation is on one side technical—making sure that we know the people that can make it happen, making sure that the code allows us to do it as well so that we don't get blocked at submissions and so on. On the other side, it's taking the time, taking our partners hand-in-hand through the process and making them imagine how the space is going to feel like, making them imagine how people will want to come back because they feel differently than any other community, more than the city or outside the city as well.

So the moment that there is an experience and there is an emotional connection to design, there is a bigger value, such as sustainability and sustainable materials from the Hong Kong company, then it starts to be a more easy conversation to have. But it's a long process and it requires quite a lot of steps, and you know, not getting frustrated on the way, and eventually you get there.

Stefano Tronci (continued):

Regarding the loops you’ re asking about, actually I correct myself—only one part of the retail podium is still under construction and should be opening Q3 next year. That would be the completion of the loop. But the majority of the connections on the multiple levels are in practice already, and it's being very widely used.

I think there are two main reasons for it to be successful. First, similar to the central portfolio, it's all by one landlord. So the operation hours, the connectivities, the levels are all coordinated. This makes sure it's a very smooth way to move through the whole portfolio, although it's multiple buildings.

Second is the variation of the quality of the space. With the loop, it goes through tenant space, public open space, and closed space, so you don't feel like you're in a tunnel just getting from A to B. You feel like you're on a journey to wander around. There are also opportunities for you to look out and see where you are and locate yourself.

Within the overall building massings, there are multiple buildings that make people stop, pause, and actually enjoy the buildings on different levels. We started it from the MRT connection in the B1, which is overall parking and activities for people going to work. They go directly to where they need to. But for visitors or those spending more time in the retail area, the multiple levels really help to open up the space other than just walking on the perimeter and also in the main arcade.

In that variation, add on top is adding the interest. There are also specific programs designed. For the art loop, they have rotating artwork programs. For the food loop, they

have different themed festivals. So it's a program-rich space that brings more footfall throughout the project in that sense.

Scott Brooks:

Do you have tenant feedback yet?

Stefano Tronci:

They are completely leased out. So I think in a way, it's good feedback, yes. Because honestly, we're a bit nervous. It's a very competitive market in retail in Bangkok. So we are managing to help the client establish other than the major players that we've had to bring in their share of tenants.

Audience Member:

Thank you. The content is really inspiring, so I have to ask—there are actually a lot of questions I want to ask but I have to get some focus.

Today we talked about collaboration and we've been focusing on local architects and clients. We haven't talked much about the consulting team in general, especially a lot of the engineering collaboration. I think a lot of these are big projects, so my questions would be about how we work with the engineering team.

I'd like to focus a bit more on the structural part because in Yicat’ s sharing of the Robson Square, one image that really hit me was the Sky Garden, probably something very similar to Hyson as well, but how the column was standing by slanting—a very not easy structure, probably to convince the client to build and maybe very expensive.

So in this case, it's creating a very beautiful sky garden. I'm sure there's a huge process of how to convince the engineer, but also how to convince them to convince the client, and probably ultimately to convince the city or the government. I also assume there's a process that could be quite different in a foreign country.

So that's something I would like to hear more about.

And then to Stefano, more specific to the heritage project, because now we know we have to get all these engineers on board to help us convince the client and everyone on sustainability. But when it comes to a heritage project, it's even more difficult.

The whole structural concept for your office building is really inspiring, and I cannot see that happening in Hong Kong, probably not in the next five to ten years. Can you also share a little bit more of the process?

I think it goes back to how all this collaboration works, especially I understand for SOM there’ s an internal structural engineering team, so there’ s also a bit of the in-house and

working totally with someone from the outside. Maybe during the sharing, you can also touch base a bit on that difference.

Thank you.

Yee Tak Lau:

Okay, I have to be very honest. I didn't personally work on the Robson Square project, but the way we typically address something out of the ordinary—not a rectangular square box—we definitely involve our structural engineers at the very beginning of the design process to make sure it's the most efficient and also the most usable space.

Knowing our client, I don't think they're going to let us go easy on the iterations and the studies that we have.

Regarding the roof gardens, we also have an understanding. I think the most important is the shading factors and also the wind load. So basically, with our KPF environmental animation, it's the first thing that we use—the level of comfort that we can do when we introduce space that people can go outside to design it both with the structure, with the MEP, and also with the design consultant.

Sorry I cannot fill in a bit more detail on the process, but I'm sure down the road when you visit or we discuss with our other colleagues, we can bring in more insights into that process.

Stefano Tronci:

On my side, for that particular project, you're right. We have different disciplines in the office, which is a luxury. Here in Macomb, we have all of these different disciplines represented too.

So if we start a project, there is always a structural engineer on board; there is always an environmental engineer on board as well. Any concept starts with a "what-if" question that needs to be answered by everybody.

From a structural engineering perspective, I think it's never about "not possible," but about "is it feasible to get to this kind of design?"

Applied to a heritage building like that one, you don't know if you're in competition, you don't know the status of that structure. Is that concrete structure strong enough to last another 50 or 60 years?

So we had site surveys, structural principles, then we sat through ceilings to figure out how the beams are in different places, realizing with our local partner, who had such engineers on his side too, how far we can go in terms of impacting the existing structure and where we have to draw a line.

In that case, it was absolutely "do not touch these foundations." We can build structures around the foundations before we escalate everything. But then that building has to stand on its own and not be impacted by any new work.

That's how the concept of those two huge cores and strong columns came to happen. Everything else is easy because then it's just a matter of figuring out how much concrete and steel you need in different parts and what you're going to do on top.

But the process of observation and discovery is fundamental in order to understand how you can save a building like that and what you can do within that kind of environment to fulfill, on the other side, the client's program and brief because they still want to build all that GFA and get all the money through that particular project.

Moderator: Shannon Ho:

Do we have time for one more question?

Audience Member:

One last question, sorry. I know we have to move on, but Stefano, you are working on a timber paradise. Can you share a bit more about that? I know it's confidential, but...

Stefano Tronci:

It's not only carbon neutral; it's carbon negative. Hopefully, that's it.

But it's a building that we cannot say too many details about because it is confidential. It's a high-rise in Manila which is going to be either the first or one of the first carbon-neutral hybrid timber high-rises in Southeast Asia.

Even in that kind of scenario, the question was how do we do this? First of all, why do we want to do a building in Southeast Asia? The answer is easy: it's about carbon, it's about light of destruction, and so on.

How can we do it with a code that doesn't necessarily allow for high-rises to be built that way? We figured out a way to create different compartments—fire compartments vertically—that will isolate the areas where timber is structurally utilized.

So there's an answer to the code in terms of fire, and we can use timber to make the whole building lighter in that case. With the main structure, there's still concrete. So in a nutshell, it's still a concrete building. If the timber goes on fire once it's built, the building still stands, which is a very important safety answer to provide.

From that point onwards, it's about figuring out cost, as I was mentioning before, and how to make sure that the client is behind us with these ideas. But it's going to be pretty spectacular.

I don't know if you guys have ever been in an office building that has timber beams and timber ceilings. It's a whole different kind of environment than any of the standard office spaces that we have here.

My hope is that buildings like this will generate a different kind of momentum. My hope, since we're talking about collaboration, is that longtime competitors like KPF and SOM do not compete on things like sustainability or progress of the industry. You can't compete on who designs the most beautiful building, but there are things that we both align on in terms of values and ethos that we have the power to push together and have a true impact in our community.

So yeah, that's the end of it.

Moderator: Shannon Ho:

All right, I think that wraps up this morning's panel discussion. Thank you very much, Stefano. Thank you, Yee Tak. Thank you.

Session 2: Innovating and Creating New Opportunities

Context: Vietnam / Indonesia / Thailand

Scott Brooks (Director, Imagennix; Chair, 2025 H&A Committee, AIA Hong Kong):

We're going to have our second panel right away. We have a very interesting format that will be led by me, Scott Brooks, chair of the HNA committee.

I'm going to follow a similar format to what Shannon just went through. I'll have each of the speakers briefly introduce themselves, and then we'll come together for a discussion.

Where we're coming from: we're now going to look at this regional expansion from a very different scale with two young practices. Most practices expand regionally by accident. They chase a client relationship, win a competition, or follow a developer.

But what separates sustainable growth from expensive failures is a strategy. I think both of these firms reflect a strategic approach to how they've grown beyond Hong Kong.

Let's start with Wesley, who is first in the slides here.

Wesley Ho co-founded Napp Studio in 2016 after working with KPF and OMA. The founders' academic and professional pedigrees underpin a practice that blends rigorous formal inquiry with cultural resonance, positioning for continued expansion in bespoke experiential design.

Napp Studio completed Saka Museum in Bali last year, which Time Magazine named among the world's greatest places in 2024—a recognition that signals premium positioning in a

market that often treats architecture as commodity procurement.

Wesley?

Wesley Ho (Assoc AIA, Co-founder and Design Director, Napp Studio):

Morning, everyone. To start with our practice, I co-founded it with Aaron Zhang, who is my undergrad classmate from Hong Kong U. Later on, we worked across different parts of the world. He went to Seoul and Stockholm, and I was in New York.

For the Bali project, how we actually broke into the new market was a long story full of surprises and coincidences, I would say. It actually traces back to my time working at OMA New York, where I worked across different scales—from product design all the way to master planning for Facebook, which didn't happen at the end.

One of the most iconic projects was the Magnus X Machina fashion exhibition at the Met. The whole premise was that we dressed up the Lehman Wing into a ghost-cut three-drawer, completely masking out the interior of the space because the centerpiece was a Chanel wedding dress for pregnant women.

Later on, we also got commissioned, when I was at OMA, to lead a team fairly early on to work on the centerpiece for the Met Gala, which talked about how man and machine correlate. One was laser-cut white flowers, and the other was real roses.

Because of this background, when we first started our practice in Hong Kong, somehow it was even before Tycoon and M+ were built, but we already got engaged in some early exhibition design. Our first was an exhibition for the M+ pavilion.

Later, we were approached by others, including Tycoon, to revamp the whole heritage exhibition, which is still ongoing—a three to four-year exhibition remodeling process.

This was the first one where we worked on the prison cells. We actually removed a lot of unnecessary elements to showcase the original beauty of the prison cells—the architecture itself. The metal structure also resonates with the building’ s prison-like aesthetics.

The new one is the magistracy courtroom.

How we got to the Bali project was because we did a lot of exhibition design, including one for the Hong Kong IA annual awards. We used teabag structures at the Mills, which resonated with the textile history.

One of my New York colleagues back then was an intern, and I was a junior. We chit-chatted, and 10 years later, almost, he suddenly texted me on Facebook. He said, "I have a friend who wants to have this art installation in Hong Kong using fabric." They saw the teabag structure we did for the Mills and thought maybe that could be related.

Her fabric was actually bioengineered silk that glows under UV light, made in Kyoto, and she had this whole idea about a love temple. We redeveloped another version using this

fabric, but this time with a two-way weaving pattern.

That project then got invited by Singapore’ s Marina Bay Art Science Museum. We knew the curator there, and the curator got hired by the Balinese client to be the museum consultant. One day, the Balinese client emailed us. At first, I even thought it was a scam. We verified it, and that’ s how we literally got the project without any competition or preliminary pitching submission.

It includes all the different kinds of spaces we somehow touched upon during our previous projects.

So yeah, that’ s the short version of the story. We can go on.

Scott Brooks:

Thank you for that. You just answered my first question in the follow-up discussion, so I need to do some work to adjust.

Scott Brooks (continued):

Coming up next, I see there’ s a continuing OMA connection.

Quan Ho Lee established MLKK Studio in 2016 after a stint with OMA. The practice has built a reputation for materiality research and a distinctive niche at the intersection of architectural craft, social impact, and material innovation.

Their award-winning spatial storytelling, particularly commercial interiors across Hong Kong, mainland China, and Southeast Asia, demands addressing the operational complexity of maintaining design standards across multiple jurisdictions and regulatory environments.

Please welcome Kwanho Lee to the stage.

Kwanho Lee (HKIA, Co-founder and Partner, MLKK Studio):

Thank you. I'm Kwanho from MLKK Studio, and thank you for the opportunity to share some of our journey throughout the last 10 years. Same year as Wesley—I didn’ t know that.

We started in 2016 with the aim to really contribute to some common good and bring positive impact to our society. One of the very important things is that we put it on our website front page because that is why we started the studio.

This is the Miyama School. It's basically a charity, but we started the studio because of this project. We wanted to dedicate most of our time to be able to visit Miyama, to work with the locals, creating interaction, and it’ s still going on. It’ s 10 years but almost complete.

That reflects who we are. We are people who really like traveling, like to understand culture, like to understand different people and how they think, and also to be able to help and

assist their buildings. So we have that sense as a character.

Apart from this social architecture agenda, we are very fortunate to collaborate with a lot of retail brands.

These are our footprints around the globe, but if you look closer, the blue dots are actually from a single client, which is our first client, with whom we have more than ten years of collaboration. They are an international brand.

So, to address your question, Scott, when we work with very close clients, they actually bring us around the world.

I still remember the first time we talked about setting up our own store because there is some history with that brand before our setup. We told the founder that we love to have our own studio, we love to collaborate with them continuously, and we love to be the one able to travel around the world and help set up their stores and designs.

So actually, it’ s an active strategy, an active approach to propose that we can be the one because we understand them, and we also love to travel. We take both benefits and then go around the world to help them do this.

Around that time, we started from Australia all the way to Hawaii.

This is from Hong Kong—the first store that we designed for this brand.

Each retail project focuses very much on the distinctive character of that location because there’ s the agenda, right? We want to travel to different locations, bring out the goods from that, and then be able to tell the client, "Okay, we can do something special for you to be that new market."

For example, in one project, we used cork in a very different way—in a three-dimensional, sculptural way.

In Australia, which is the main headquarters of that brand, we dealt with nostalgic design of an in-construction, in-progress kind of mood, which you can always see in an Australian suburb.

In Korea, we played with red brick that contrasts with the architecture, having a conversation with how we play with material but in a different sense to give a very different character.

In Taiwan, we played with bricks; in Malta, behind these tiles and brick identity.

In Houston, a city famous for rock and a futuristic kind of vibe.

In Hawaii, very differently, but recycling most materials because they are very far away, on an island, and everything is expensive. They do have a gigantic recycling facility and yard that we can play around with all this material.

One of these materials is actually from the Pearl Harbor shipyard deck that we reclaimed, and it’ s very fun.

Then we come to Southeast Asia. This is the first store in Singapore, playing with the character of rattan.

We love to collaborate with local people as well, so...

[End of Transcript Chunk 3]

AIA Hong Kong AGM & Building Regional Practice Symposium

Session 2: Innovating and Creating New Opportunities

Challenge 2: Scaling – Maintaining Quality While Managing Over Distance

Wesley Ho (Assoc AIA, Co-founder and Design Director, Napp Studio):

We are not just getting the local kind of character material but we really talk to people. The red tin lamp is actually one of the very old masters who carved this red tin chair. We talk to them, saying, "We have an idea, we want to collaborate with you, what can we do?" Then we start that conversation and development with local craft to create these beautiful things.

This is another project in Manila, part of the Southeast Asia projects we developed. Sometimes we are not focusing just on the material but mainly on the context—how we developed the idea from a local very famous architect. We had limited time to understand a part of it, but thanks to AIA inviting me to Mandela's, we visited the architect's office, which was amazing and helped us understand much more.

That is how we strategize our business: collaborating actively with clients to propose how we can work together and bring us to different places to set up the first store. After that, it becomes easier because people see that you have worked at that location. This approach has brought us not only to Manila but also to Indonesia and Thailand. That is the short answer to how we expanded through the first projects.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

Thank you very much. Let's come back up on stage. We are now starting at the time we were meant to finish, but you have just answered the first question in our agenda. We are

taking a slightly different approach now, focusing not on design philosophies or aesthetics but on business mechanics and expanding a new practice outside its home market.

The format is three challenges, allowing 20 minutes each. The first challenge, market entry, has been largely covered. The second is scaling—maintaining quality while managing over distance. The third is competitive positioning—how to establish a reputation and specialization that protects design integrity when clients often view architecture as commodity procurement.

We have Wesley and Juanjo sharing strategies from their practices, actual projects, and client conversations. Yutak and Stefano are also here to provide the large practice perspective.

Beginning with the entry problem, ASEAN is growing tremendously but is a competitive market. Market entry differentiation is important. Now that you have started and expanded your practices beyond your home markets, what have you learned? Would you take a different approach?

Juanjo (Yee Tak Lau) (AIA RIBA HKIA, Director, KPF):

When we grew in the first few years, we relied heavily on one or two clients. That gave us an edge and a very secure way to grow as a small practice. We were very young and lacked business training, accounting, and HR knowledge. Those first years were crucial to understanding how business works and carries on. I would do the same again because it gave us a secure way to learn. Without a very collaborative client or long-term collaboration, it would have been a struggle and caused anxiety as a young practice. I consider myself lucky to have had an easier path.

Wesley Ho:

I also felt lucky to start with OMA, which was similar in environment—conceptual-driven design and many iterations. At one point, I asked myself what else was missing from my career besides design. That was the other part of practice. When I returned to Hong Kong, I sought a practice focusing on professionalism to experience the full spectrum of project phases. My Kiva training helped complete that puzzle. Now, running my own practice, design and professionalism go hand-in-hand. It allows me to discuss with clients beyond design because I understand other parts of architecture.

Our office started with many exhibitions, which is unusual for a practice because people usually think architects only design buildings. This led us to develop work around the art and cultural scene. When a Balinese client signed us, even though we had never worked on a museum interior before, our collaborations with artists gave them confidence. I remember the first meeting where the client focused heavily on design and respected us, which is rare. One PM tried to comment on our design aesthetics, but the client stopped him, saying, "No, you wouldn't comment on that." That was unusual and interesting.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

In both cases, establishing credibility involved some luck—working with a client with a global footprint or building on projects that led to others. You answered my original question about the Saka Museum before I asked it. The first step was probably The Mills project? Tell us about securing that.

Wesley Ho:

That was very challenging. The design process for the second museum happened during COVID. We won the competition for The Mills, but the first approach was difficult. We don't consider ourselves a very material-oriented practice, but that project was an exception. The brief had a limited budget, and we didn't want another exhibition using foam boards and panels.

The Mills textile is a strong part of the concept, but using textile to showcase an annual award show is hard because printing on fabric is tricky—you can't get very fine or sharp prints. As architects, we are picky about images, and if we don't get award-winning images right, people won't be happy. We kept researching and found teabag material, which is strong and can have high-quality prints. The exhibition became a draping exercise.

During COVID, we couldn't get GBPV, so originally people were supposed to walk underneath the panels, but they could only walk outside. We flipped the fabric. The draping inspired a Japanese artist to find us. Sometimes pushing project boundaries leads to surprises and attracts the right audience. Without COVID, some things might not have happened.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

Quickly, about ESOP—were all of you working internally at ESOP in the beginning?

Wesley Ho:

No, only one of us was the first in-house architect for the brand. When she left to set up a studio with us, we talked to the brand. The person was very supportive and encouraging. It was bold to propose collaboration to a big company, but he was responsive. We started picking destinations—Japan, Korea, USA. He didn't say yes immediately, but over 10 years, we explored. Sometimes it was their need to open markets or open stores without enough in-house staff, so they gave us help. It was a long-term collaboration that grew into a global footprint.

The key is delivering the standard they expect. It was not easy; we put in a lot of hard work to establish credibility. We were lucky to have the opportunity to explore design creativity and show it. Without those years of hard work, we couldn't build the portfolio or formulate our core design philosophy.

Our approach is to treat each project uniquely, like a reporter investigating and researching, translating it into something innovative and forward-thinking, not just nostalgic. That

philosophy has grown stronger over time.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

That leads well into scaling without losing control. You mentioned wide distribution of projects in many locations. Wesley, your museum and cultural projects demand rigorous detailing. How do you manage design intent across distance? You are based in Hong Kong but working on a museum in Bali. How do you ensure standards, review, and quality control?

Wesley Ho:

I learned from The Mills the importance of mock-ups and material reviews. You can never trust pictures because screens vary. During COVID, objects could still be transported. We reviewed materials, sent them to clients, and received feedback.

For the Balinese project, the concept revolves around local geology and Balinese Hinduism. Each space is inspired by a natural material. We tried to acquire local materials for each major space to create a palette. Since we are based in Hong Kong, we didn't understand local materials well. The client explained different woods in Indonesian terms, which don't correspond to Western names like oak or fir. They explained how each wood is used in tribal art and vernacular architecture.

We translated the materials with local versions and worked together to rematch the palette. The client engaged in the local process for furniture we designed.

Ultimately, I had to travel to Bali during COVID, a 12-hour trip with delays. Face-to-face meetings at major milestones are necessary to ensure alignment. Alignment in values is crucial. We used a collage of iconic Bali scenery mapped on plans to showcase themes. These images helped keep the project team aligned during sourcing and design.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

John, you may have something to add about timber? Kwang, you also work with precise material execution across markets.

Kwanho Li (HKIA, Co-founder and Partner, MLKK Studio):

We love traveling and took every opportunity to fly to project sites. Early on, our Asian miles were high. We love working directly with craftsmen, often hands-on. For example, with the Raptor and Pebble Wash projects in Hong Kong, we engage closely.

I haven't shown our latest project in Macau involving Portuguese tiles. We went there to learn traditional tile-making and translate it into modern patterns and colors. We do many iterations, never a one-time approval. We learn how things are traditionally made, understand limitations, then push beyond them to create something unique.

For OpenSeaProcessing, it's difficult due to limited travel. Sometimes we rely on social media technology like Messenger, Facebook, FaceTime to teach craftspeople how to build

bamboo façades or lay flooring. We even meet them outside Myanmar in Thailand. It requires creativity but is worth it and natural for us.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

I imagine there are parallels with large firm experience. Stefano, you spoke about collaboration and control. How do you ensure what is delivered matches the design?

Stefano Tronci (RIBA LEED AP BD+C WELL AP, Associate Principal – Asia Pacific Sustainability Lead, SOM):

What you describe resonates with me—understanding the process of fabricating materials that may not be obvious choices. We know how to design standard details for interiors, ceilings, or aluminum cladding. But when creating a component using materials I had never used before, it requires learning the fabrication process, trusting the manufacturer's knowledge, and integrating that into our coordination and detailed design work.

We ensure the manufacturing quality is embedded in our work so that when it reaches the construction phase, the quality is not forgotten. The standards we associate with drawings and work must be respected; otherwise, cheaper solutions may be chosen that don't represent the quality and detail we intend. Users will appreciate the quality when they experience the space.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

Can I add two responses? One key difference between small and large scale is the scheduling and administrative processes that ensure newly developed crafts and components can be adopted by different people. That is very difficult.

Small projects have the luxury of direct control. Large projects risk industrialization without reflecting on materials. The challenge is to embed knowledge and expertise into large-scale projects. Communication and learning from younger practices like yours are essential.

Rita, do you want to weigh in?

Rita (Supporting Organization Representative):

I share what Stefano and Wesley mentioned. We went through rigorous mock-ups and material selection. The specificity relates to the nature of the materials. There is a limit to craftsmanship in some materials, but when working with materials like terracotta or natural stone, there is more opportunity for artisanal quality.

We learn from the latest technology and ancient artisanal methods. The design conversation and material choice enable a more organic procurement process across projects, from small boutique designs to larger-scale ones.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

Thank you. As your practices grow, there will be a point where you must institutionalize and implement large firm processes. Do you want to become that or stay a hands-on practice

working closely with clients? That is an unintended result of this conversation.

Let's move on to the third challenge: repositioning for premium value. Asian markets often procure commodity services where the lowest fee wins, especially in contracting, but also in architecture.

Wesley, your recognition for the Saka Museum signals premium positioning. How do you frame your value proposition in client conversations? How do you curate your portfolio to maintain this position?

Wesley Ho:

I believe opportunities come when people are ready. Our office maintains different portfolio folders for architecture, interior, retail, office, etc. For new clients, they often find us because they saw something we did. The first meeting is crucial to see if client and practice values align.

Clients may have different values initially. You can either share knowledge to help them understand your approach or find collaborators they trust to smooth the process. We love collaboration and work with graphic and branding designers.

For premium value, we don't believe we can cover every part of a project. I believe in expertise and collaborating with specialists elevates our status. Working with famous branding or advertising agencies helps clients see us as a team, which elevates our projects when approaching new clients or project types where we lack full experience.

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

Slightly different question to you, Juanjo. Evolving from ESOP, how do material research and storytelling differentiate your work, especially in commercial interiors?

[End of Transcript Chunk 4]

AIA Hong Kong AGM & Building Regional Practice Symposium

Date: October 25, 2025

Venue: Miller Theater, Asia Society

Session 2: Innovating and Creating New Opportunities

Context: Vietnam / Indonesia / Thailand

Kwanho Li (Co-founder and Partner, MLKK Studio):

"Materials are often treated as more functional. So I'm wondering, as you expand beyond ESOP, is material a leading element of your proposals? And if not, how do you shift the conversation from cost to value and talking about materials?

We are lucky in a way that we are very focused on design in the process. We don't really have time to worry about how to position our setup, etc. But that is also our weakness. We are very focused on how to create things, but then we are very weak in how to tell that story, how to consolidate with branding, etc.

After several years, friends and people came to me and said, 'OK, you guys have a lot of works. You can even put them on your website or through your Instagram.' These ads are very consistent in a way; they can see that design approach or methodology through our works. But we didn't really have time to consolidate things and tell other people, 'Hey, I'm doing these things,' etc.

So when that time happened, we started to think, 'Oh, maybe we should review our works and see what other common methodology or things happened throughout creativity.' That's why we started some of our exhibitions, kind of open travel show data. We consolidated several projects and then saw what came in between. We found that a lot of them are actually talking about material and also context and art.

We further investigated our works and talked about a lot of forgotten materials, recycling aged cultural elements, and how we translate them into innovative things. That became the theme of what we submitted last year for Paris Design Week — how we translate that research into store design and through design.

I think that is one thing: being able to communicate with a new kind of show and tell what we are. The other thing that is lucky for us is that we have a lot of physical work because retail spaces are very fast-paced and there are many physical points that people can visit. They can really experience and feel what we have done.

Most clients actually find us because they have visited some of our work. They feel, 'OK, you guys are really talented, creative, or very involved in these things,' and they want us to help them rethink what they can do in their brand.

So back to your point, how we convince the client to do our methodology is not really a problem for us because they find us first for trying to get our methodology. So I think that's lucky because we don't have the problem of having to align with our client's approach — they really trust and like our approach already. I think that is a successful way to grow for our studio."

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

"I think you're saying it's lucky, but it's not. I don't think it's about luck. I think you're putting in the effort to curate and communicate your portfolio so that people find you because of that.

Now, my next question — I think everyone who does any kind of consultancy faces this, right? People find you because of some work you've done that they really like, and then they hear your fee and say, 'Oh, why is that not like this other proposal which is half of yours?' Can you give an example of having faced that and how you addressed it?"

Kwanho Li:

"Actually, it happened a lot. But I do have some positive stories to tell. Last year, we did one project, but our fee was much higher than the one who did it otherwise. Ultimately, it is really about how you manage to convince the client not just through your work but communication. Communication is very important — how you present things, how you talk, and whether you understand what your client is trying to look for.

At one point for that project, when they first looked at the pricing, they were almost looking at a checklist — whether you cover this or that. It was like a fiscal check, check, check. But that checklist is so standardized and doesn't really do justice for practice, especially when you have a lot to offer in terms of aesthetics and design. It's hard to evaluate design on a checklist.

When we tried to convince the client why we were worth that price, we had to explain a little further why we need certain processes and how long those things take to get to the point where you can actually get a project that aligns with the aspects we care about. One of those projects was also an exhibition.

When we got that project, there was literally a huge price difference between us and some competitors. But throughout the first few meetings, we managed to explain how much time things need to be done and, even within a short period, how much manpower is needed. That's how we justified the price point.

In the process, we also gave a much more detailed description of how we safeguard the detailing and quality of the output. We provided a pretty in-depth project schedule early on, including when we were doing different submissions and marketing. They became convinced and felt much more secure about it."

Stefano Tronci (Associate Principal – Asia Pacific Sustainability Lead, SOM):

"Do you want to address that as well?"

Wesley Ho (Co-founder and Design Director, Napp Studio):

"Price is always a tricky thing. Many clients come and ask, 'What is your price?' Usually, we don't really stress over that because we already know it may not be our time. We like to work with aligned mindsets. If clients approach us, they are looking for creativity. We often choose those projects rather than a client coming to you and saying, 'I have this amount of money,' and then we do things for them.

We prioritize like-minded clients over cost-effective clients. That makes our work and life easier in terms of design concepts. Many times, when we have problems with pricing, we

know the client comes to us because they like our concept or design. We can tell them, 'OK, we can just provide you the concept or early stages, and then you can find other people to realize it.' That way, you take the most out of our studio and save money from other more efficient practices.

We do have these projects, but sometimes throughout the process, we start to let them know what the problem is. They realize it after several collaborations. If they only take your concept, they will find out the difference between their project and some of our other projects. We tell them that is because we didn't follow through all the detailing and execution. At this point, they consider changing things. Throughout the process, they learn why it is important to have a flow of service and why our service is valuable. That makes the change.

But yeah, it's always a problem in all businesses, small or big firms."

Scott Brooks:

"I like the analogy to ticking boxes because it reminds me of RFPs and the tendering process, which I've been on both sides of. The best proposals have always dug down to what the client actually requires and not just answered by ticking boxes.

I want to throw a question out to Nita because I imagine KPF responds to a lot of requests for proposals. Are there distinguishing factors or tactics that you find effective across different markets?"

Yee Tak Lau (Director, KPF):

"That's a very big question. Luckily, I have phones and Google. I'll attempt to say, like all colleagues, the best way to convince the client is to show them what you've done. Built work is always your best representation of what they can get from the process.

Of course, we have to show them exactly what they're saying. Somebody can say they can do a concept or a building for you in four weeks and hence the fee. What we're doing is investing the amount of investigation, commitment to communicate, to collaborate, to have a very unique building for what the plan is asking for. Hence, that's the cost coming through.

We are very transparent about the resources we put through. It's fair; as we always say, we're not trying to make a lot of money. We're just trying to make our process accounted for in limited buildings.

In those cases, we receive positive feedback. Of course, there are times we need to compress or be creative, but that becomes case-by-case."

Scott Brooks:

"For those difficult cases, would you give in eventually?"

Yee Tak Lau:

"Absolutely not. We stay case-by-case. We have long-term clients, and every client we have has a long-term relationship. But they are always difficult in terms of fees every time."

Scott Brooks:

"I want to also seek Kwan Ho’ s advice on that too."

Kwanho Li:

"Well, I guess the bottom line is we won't lose money to do a job. We don't buy jobs."

Wesley Ho:

"I agree. Totally agree. But whether or not we are stretching it is a whole lot of consideration on our current load. If we are already too busy, we might not be able to. So it's really face-to-face. But for repeated clients, we always give them priority because we know what we are getting into and they understand us. Maybe there will be an economy of scale and the number of projects, etc., but it varies.

I find what clients are most masterful at is scope creep."

Scott Brooks:

"Okay, so I haven't managed to make up any time here, so we're still running 30-odd minutes behind. We've covered entry strategies, operational scaling, premium positioning. Do we have any questions from anyone in the audience for our two panelists here? Or are we all hungry?

You have a question, John?"

John Chan (Regional Director, AHEC):

"Oh yeah, but not one of them."

Scott Brooks:

"I know. If there's no other questions for them, I ask. Otherwise, I wait. You know?"

Audience Member:

"Yeah?"

Scott Brooks:

"Okay, I think it's okay. Please."

Audience Member:

"I heard before that somebody said ASEAN has 11 countries? 11 members, right? ASEAN? But I only know there are 10 because now we are promoting our program to bring up Southeast Asia. I just remember that Kwan Ho had taught in Myanmar or Burma and you had in Indonesia in Bali. You know, he's also very attractive, you know. So which one is number 11? Maybe I heard something wrong."

Kwanho Li:

"I didn't say 11. Two years ago, I had 11 finalists in honors and awards because that comes... No, I made a mistake."

Audience Member:

"I heard something wrong."

Kwanho Li:

"Right, right. Nothing there."

Moderator (Scott Brooks):

"Okay. Would you please join me in thanking Leslie and Kwan Ho for the sharing? Thank you very much for your time here.

So for us, we do have lunch there. If we turn left and walk 20 seconds, there's lunch there, and we will continue to have this discussion that Scott started in terms of the different challenges. We have five different challenges each at the table, so you can either have different conversations or use that as a way to understand and you can protect our different speakers on what challenges they have.

We'll come back here in one hour at 2:30. We start at 2:30. We have a quick lunch. Committee members and extras, we turn right because we need to take a photo together. So lunch turn left and then come to team members turn right and let's go.

Thank you. See you in an hour at 2 o'clock."

End of Part 1 Transcript

Session 3: Streetscape, Domesticity and Housing

Prof. Eunice Seng (Head of Department/Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Hong Kong):

I want to start by setting the context of raising questions—figuring out and imparting how to ask the right questions, how those questions call for architectural responses, and how they are inherently architectural questions. I have about 15 minutes, so I will do a focused reflection via Singapore.

Decades ago, Singapore consolidated its land in the early 1960s and rolled out the first land parcel auctions. This process, started by the president of what was then called the URD (Urban Redevelopment Department), has continued since. Many agencies have been involved in designing Singapore’ s built environment. This process is not just top-down government planning; it includes bottom-up critiques from residents.

Singapore’ s government, which is now almost 60 years old, has an unprecedented track record of realizing master plans and visions planned decades ago. There are many tracks of green spaces that were anticipated in the master plan, color-coded and realized over time. This cycle resembles agricultural land fallowing, waiting for development.

I want to quickly look at how housing has been thought of—from typological moments to a shift focusing on the ground—which will open up further conversations.

Recently, I visited Singapore and saw footprints of two residential blocks in the Punggol Digital District, northeast Singapore. These were planned as high-rise student dormitories for the Singapore Institute of Technology but are now parks, with only the foundations laid. This shows how the ground is being rethought.

As a trained historian and architect, I find housing in Singapore cannot be discussed without the notion of crisis, a perpetual crisis also shared with Hong Kong. My current work, *The Aesthetics of Contingency*, starts with the fire that displaced thousands, making land acquisition central to housing policy. The Land Acquisition Act and Housing Act were introduced around the same time, with the Housing Development Board (HDB) founded in 1960 after the colonial trust ended in 1959.

By 1970, Singapore was rapidly developing new towns, learning much from Hong Kong. Both cities exchanged knowledge on construction technology, land organization, and typological exploration throughout the 1960s and 70s. Singapore has always been big on 30-year projections, starting in 1961 projecting to 1991, and more recently a vision plan for 2030.

In the 1950s and 60s, housing was primarily thought of in terms of numbers—millions, thousands. For example, comparing plans from 1958 and 1964 shows a shift from the British picturesque garden city approach to a streamlined, environmentally conscious plan oriented north-south to avoid the harsh east-west sun. Traffic infrastructure was organized efficiently in rings with two hierarchies.

This shift happened in the mid-60s, with Tehching Wan, who was not an architect but hired to crunch numbers, emphasizing that housing design and planning are tied to social structure, geography, history, and economic development. Housing was integrated with other policies like parks, transport, education, and family planning. Housing was even used politically to advocate neutrality, with rhetoric suggesting that if everyone is housed, social unrest would be minimized.

By 1971, the goal was to build one flat every 26 minutes—a remarkable claim. I teach a 12-week housing lecture, so this is a compressed overview.

Moving from the 60s and 70s to the millennial era, there was a shift from typological and quantitative thinking to intangible, qualitative concerns—lifestyle, well-being, and care.

The garden city concept evolved into the green city nation over about 50 years, moving away from British notions.

The ground became very important, thought of sectionally and with layers and depth. The concept of “Remaking Our Heartland” (ROH) is well known in Singapore. Land is no longer just physical but symbolic of where your heart is. Architects like WOHA have been leading this endeavor.

Pilot towns and estates on the island’s periphery have been activated to remake the heartland, emphasizing de-layering the ground and thinking about multiple grounds, including the sky. After 20 years of sky gardens, HDB is now removing them, which I can explain further during Q&A.

The ground is housing and community, absorbing multiple programs and multiplying vertically. Various scales of the ROH scheme show how the heartland is redefined, especially at the edges. The Singapore Parks Department, one of the largest in the world with over 5,000 workers, plays a key role in gardening the nation.

Punggol, now a digital district, was farmland and pig rearing 50 years ago. Resettled residents have returned, showing continuity rather than displacement. Multiple entities collaborate here, including HDB, Ministry of Education, Parks Department, WOHA, and smaller practices.

The digital park includes the Singapore Institute of Technology, with a distinctive red pedestrian link connecting blocks. I do not intend to celebrate uncritically but to provoke thought.

Buckminster Fuller, who loved Asia, visited Singapore in the 70s and made a statement that if you work the environment right, it reforms itself. This is relevant to Singapore’s approach.

However, there are always cracks in utopia. Rem Koolhaas wrote about the dystopian aspects of Singapore’s utopia, noting that the beneficiaries are citizens—but what about the 500,000 non-citizens?

One of my research projects, *The Unnational*, looks at inclusion from the perspective of those excluded from the master plan, especially highlighted during COVID. There is a multicultural quarter in housing, but questions remain about inclusivity.

For example, domestic workers are often excluded from the green spaces designed for residents. We are investigating how inclusive these grounds really are.

I want to leave you with these questions. As the first speaker, I raise questions that my colleagues can later attempt to solve. The spatial agency gap refers to rethinking public space—who gets to partake and how we can design inclusively.

I look forward to discussing this more during Q&A. Thank you.

Moderator (Eric Ho):

Wow, a lot of good questions for us to ponder. Let’ s now hear from Peter Brannan for his perspective. Please join me in giving a round of applause for Peter.

Peter Brannan (Managing Director, Asia Pacific & MENA, Arquitectonica):

Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me. That was a very interesting presentation.

I want to talk about streetscape and domesticity in the Southeast Asian context, but not by showing you a project in Southeast Asia.

I’ m Peter Brannan, Managing Director for Arquitectonica in Asia Pacific and the Middle East, based here in Hong Kong.

A bit about Arquitectonica: founded in 1977 in Miami, we are a global practice with projects in 60 countries. We have an integrated approach to architecture and holistic delivery, with 13 offices worldwide. We provide comprehensive services—architecture, planning, interior design, landscape—and work on all types of projects, from stadiums to residential, mixed-use, and transport.

Placemaking and cultural activation are key to our humanist approach. The image on the screen is Taikuhoy in Guangzhou.

We practice authentic community design, focusing on the human experience and designing for growth and adjustment over the life of buildings.

I want to share a case study underway in Miami. Although we do many projects in Southeast Asia, this project is interesting because it reflects a reversal: bringing Asian ideas back to the United States and the West.

The U.S., Canada, and Australia are “car countries,” heavily dominated by cars, influenced by early 20th-century ideas like Frank Lloyd Wright’ s Broadacre City, as opposed to Corbusier’ s city approach.

In Asia, density is much higher, and public transportation is better developed, especially in Hong Kong. We find ourselves bringing Asian ideas to the U.S.

In Miami, Arquitectonica designs many luxury residential projects—flashy and great—but this project is different. It’ s called Hue Hub, in central Miami, a 48,500 square meter site, similar in size to Taikuhoy in Guangzhou.

Hue Hub includes seven towers, 238,000 square meters, 4,000 apartments, and 22 townhomes. The developer is an Italian builder who retired to Miami and was puzzled by the lack of affordable housing and density there.

The site plan shows the red dotted line marking the project boundary.

The client wanted to create a community environment like those experienced in Europe

and Asia, combining community, sustainability, and affordability.

We started with three pillars of sustainability, which Stefano touched on earlier: commercial, social, and environmental. These pillars work together.

Commercial sustainability means the project must be viable and profitable. The client achieved efficiency by fitting 4,000 apartments into seven towers, reducing cost per unit in a city dominated by landed housing.

He also secured regulatory and tax incentives for high-density building, including tax breaks for helping the city with affordable housing.

He obtained long-term rent agreements with agencies like the police, fire brigade, first responders, and hospitals—people who need to live in the city but often cannot afford to.

Cities like Miami, London, and New York struggle with this issue. Los Angeles requires affordable housing in luxury developments, with mixed success. This is one way to address the problem.

Social sustainability includes a workforce housing commitment with 3,000 apartments reserved for teachers, first responders, and public employees. This overlaps with commercial sustainability.

The development is community-centered, with two acres of public parks, libraries, streetscapes, daycare centers, cafes—everything to create a community familiar to those in Hong Kong, except for outdoor dining.

The first two stories of the buildings are dedicated to public and community use.

Environmental sustainability includes a tunnel form system and modular prefabrication brought from Italy, which were unknown in Miami. This method speeds construction and reduces timber use.

Passive design strategies are employed—naturally ventilated hallways, facade shading, landscape, and water features in public spaces.

We are consciously reducing car use, promoting walkability and cycling, although eliminating cars entirely is impossible in Miami.

The site plan shows the distribution of landscape, sidewalks, and hardscape, designed for people rather than cars.

Another plan shows pedestrian and cyclist networks, ensuring cars come later in the design process.

Images show public spaces between buildings. These ideas are common in Singapore’ s HDB complexes and Hong Kong, but new to Miami.

Two-story spaces for cafes, workshops, or offices are included for locals.

We differentiated buildings through color and artwork to give residents identity and orientation, unlike some uniform developments like Chung Kwan O.

Local artists created murals on all seven buildings, adding character.

While greenery is limited, we worked closely with the client to understand his construction system, avoiding flat, straight high-rise towers typical of older Hong Kong and HDB residential buildings.

[End of transcript chunk.]

Session 3: Streetscape, Domesticity and Housing (continued)

Jonah Ing (AIA, Senior Manager, Projects, Swire Properties):

Thank you, Eric, and thank you for having me here this afternoon. Today, I' m talking a little bit about Swire Properties' sustainable development strategy and how we approach developments presently and for the future.

I think everybody knows Swire in Hong Kong, so I won' t spend a lot of time talking about our history. We are an established property developer in Hong Kong and mainland China, with over 33 million square feet of investment properties and hotels. We' ve been a developer for over 50 years, but Swire as a company—not necessarily properties—has been around for over 200 years. Regionally, in Asia and Australia, we' ve been around for about 160 to 150 years. The reason I bring this up is that because we' ve been in this place for so long, we are kind of beholden to the place where we are, and we look at the long term. We have a very long-term perspective in what we do and in building long-term relationships.

Swire Properties takes on the basic principles of our parent company and our rich history. So it' s pretty straightforward—or almost inevitable—that we approach all our projects with sustainable development at the heart.

This is our sustainable development strategy for 2030, based on five pillars. Peter also talked about their pillars of sustainable development. Our vision is to be the leading sustainable development performer in our industry globally by 2030. Much of our ESD strategy aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and focuses on science-based solutions to sustainable development.

The five pillars are: People, Partners, Places, Performance (economic), and Performance (environmental). At the center of this is Places, because for us, it' s the most important aspect. As Eunice mentioned earlier, and she mentioned Buckminster Fuller, it' s absolutely correct that if you don' t have the right environment, nothing else works quite well. But once you establish the proper environment, everything else seems to come together.

When we talk about Places, we talk about how we transform and regenerate the place, but not change it so much that it loses the essential qualities of its history. These things are very important to us—the cultural history of a place and the physical properties of that place.

When we talk about People, it’ s not only Swire employees but also the surrounding community, our tenants, and the residents who live in our projects. It’ s important for us to build healthy living environments so they can prosper economically and live in good health.

Our Partners are long-term, like-minded collaborators—whether joint venture partners for developments, bigger clients, vendors, consultants, architects, landscape architects, suppliers, or contractors. We seek long-term relationships.

Performance in the environment means we aim for carbon neutrality, like everyone else. We use not only passive strategies but also technological strategies. Technology has advanced quickly in sustainable development, which helps us, but we always look for natural and passive strategies that work for everyone without complicating things with too many layers of technology and investment.

Economic Performance is very important to us as developers. We can’ t do what we do unless we make money. I won’ t sugarcoat it—we’ re here to make money. But we look for sustainable economic growth and sustainable returns. We don’ t expect to get 100 percent of our investments back immediately; we look for the long term.

We have been successful enough to reach our 2030 goals six years ahead of schedule, and now we are the number one best-in-class in sustainable development globally. Looking forward to 2050, our strategy centers on net-zero carbon. We are investing in clean energy, engaging tenants to understand their future needs, and exploring innovative technologies and passive strategies to bring our carbon footprint to neutral by 2050.

Our biggest project that reflects our SD2030 strategy is the Taikoo Place redevelopment—placemaking and placekeeping. Placemaking refers to transforming the place, and placekeeping refers to resilience: climate resilience, social resilience, and economic resilience. We’ re in it for the long haul.

People may not know the history of Taikoo Place. We’ ve been there since the late 1800s, originally as sugar refineries. Over 140 years, the site has transformed from industrial to commercial and now to a fully integrated mixed-use community. It took 160 years, but the transformation has been fantastic.

Initially, it was all factories. We did some early techno hubs in the 1970s and 1980s, which have since been replaced by our newest One Taikoo Place and Two Taikoo Place. These are among the highest order of sustainably developed office buildings. We have created a series of urban green spaces to enhance the overall community.

The buildings themselves are private realms controlled by one owner, and we rent out the spaces. But we have tried to create a ground plane for the entire community and public to enjoy, integrated into the Taikoo Place district. There are different types of connectivity, including direct connections to the MTR at two locations and a series of footbridges around Taikoo Square. We see level one as a public space within our private areas. We manage everything, but it’ s pretty much open 24 hours.

We focus on four qualities in our spaces: Livelihood, Vibrancy, Resilience, and Well-being.

- Livelihood means diversity of offerings: office, residential, retail, F&B, leisure, and greenery. This creates economic and social opportunities for tenants and the community.
- Vibrancy is about creating a vibrant social environment. We support many events such as the White Christmas Fair, street markets, and “Project After Six,” where local musicians and artists perform. We also bring in public art to engage residents and the public.
- Resilience focuses on environmental and climate resilience, as well as social resilience. We connect back to the community and create opportunities for engagement in community development. It’ s a long-term process that nurtures a creative and healthy sustainable community.
- Well-being, especially after COVID, has been a priority. We’ ve added features to ensure health and well-being for residents and tenants, including air quality monitoring, clean water assessments, more exercise spaces, and healthy food options. Well-being also includes emotional well-being, designed for enjoyment of the spaces. We promote biodiversity in our public spaces. Surprisingly, native species have returned to Taikoo Place, despite it being a dense office area.

Projects like Taikoo Place and Taikoo Hoi are investment-based projects. It’ s easier for us to control development because we own these projects long term. We can invest in systems that save money over time, whether in energy or maintenance.

From an economic perspective, creating healthy and vibrant spaces leads to tenant retention, contract renewals, and sustainable economic returns. This also builds our brand as a quality developer with a long-term focus.

Briefly on our Southeast Asia projects: Swire has done several projects across Southeast Asia, mostly trading properties where we invest and then sell. These are harder to manage sustainably post-occupancy because it’ s difficult to enforce sustainable practices on owners. We try to build the hardware and make it easy for owners to understand the benefits of sustainable design, but it’ s up to them to take it further.

Our first Southeast Asia project was Eden, designed by Thomas Heatherwick, with the premise of “garden in the sky” or “living in the garden in the sky.” The idea was to bring

gardens right up to the units, with lush landscaping on balconies so residents feel like they’ re stepping into a garden.

Savya Rasa, just outside Jakarta and under construction, means “living in balance” in Sanskrit. The balance is between humans and nature. These are luxury residential projects, and it’ s challenging to push sustainable development principles in this market, whether in Singapore or Jakarta.

We have minor stakes in Vietnam with Empire City, a large mixed-use development similar to Pacific Place or One Bangkok, with office, residential, and retail. We have like-minded JV partners willing to invest more in sustainable practices, but since we’ re not the main project managers, we don’ t oversee the detailed sustainable development opportunities.

The River is a residential project in Ho Chi Minh City, a luxury development by the river. We’ ve pushed for more integration with the river’ s edge and developed green space in front.

For all three projects, we look at the essential qualities of the place and engage partners and consultants familiar with the area’ s social expectations from clients and the community. This is very important to us.

Lastly, I want to speak about a project I’ m currently working on: Upper House Residences in Bangkok. The architect is Foster and Partners, and the landscape architect is P Landscape, who also worked on projects in Bangkok and Hong Kong.

This project consists of two super-luxury residential towers: the lower one with 150 units and the taller one with almost 250 units. Construction has just started, and we expect completion in four to five years.

The location is unique—on Wireless Road, which has an interesting history as the ground zero for modernity in Thailand. Wireless Road’ s name comes from the first radio station in Thailand, established in 1920. The Wireless House is at 1 Bangkok, just down the street. Our site is front and center, adjacent to one of the city’ s most prestigious parks, Lumpini Park. About 500 meters away is Benjakiti Park, a repurposed industrial area now designed as a green park and stormwater retention facility, functioning as an urban forest.

The two parks are connected by the Green Mile, an elevated walkway. We plan to enhance the Green Mile to strengthen connections to the parks and allow our project to leverage these three significant environmental assets.

Our sustainability goals for this project are consistent with all our projects. Atelier 10 is our sustainability consultant. We focus on embodied carbon, biodiversity, habitat preservation, and resilient design for climate change.

Southeast Asia faces strong climate change impacts due to its geography—surrounded by oceans and vulnerable to intense climate events. Our sustainable strategies focus on water

use reduction, pollution control, and social health and wellness, which is a strong cultural aspect in Thailand.

Our first studies are based on massing and simple analyses of the architect’ s designs. We identify positive sustainable features and design opportunities.

Foster is designing facades to respond passively to climate pressures, intense heat, and sun in Bangkok. We incorporate active control systems for energy reduction—high-efficiency FCUs, daylight sensors, air filters for healthier air, and high-performance envelopes.

One notable feature is an awning at the façade of residential units, inspired by traditional Thai houses. This helps with thermal comfort by controlling sunlight and heat gain.

We conducted an in-depth biodiversity study of the site and surrounding areas, leveraging proximity to Lumpini and Benjakiti Parks. The site hosts various species; during construction, wildlife may migrate to adjacent green sites or parks. For example, water monitor lizards live in Lumpini Park and sometimes venture out.

Artist impressions show double-height balconies for ventilation and views back to Lumpini Park. The design includes a sky amenity floor with clubhouses and wellness facilities. The towers are 200 and 270 meters tall, allowing for multiple community interaction spaces, including a sky amenity floor.

Benjakiti Park features an elevated walking platform above green marshes, serving as an urban wetland for stormwater retention and flood control.

Regarding materials, we initially considered terracotta cladding for its lower carbon footprint. However, due to limited local expertise and the need to import panels, which would increase carbon emissions, we opted for locally sourced panels.

The sky amenity floor in the lower tower spans three floors, including wellness facilities like spas and hydrotherapy pools, active wellness areas with gyms and yoga rooms, and social amenity spaces for private dining and socializing.

Luxury residential buyers prioritize wellness amenities but also seek exclusivity and privacy. We designed spaces to provide pockets of privacy behind trees and more public areas at ground level for the broader residential community.

An impression of a living room shows how awnings reduce glare and heat, allowing residents to keep blinds open and maintain views while saving on air conditioning costs. Clerestory windows bring in warm, indirect light, enhancing comfort.

To conclude, the five pillars remain central to our approach. In Southeast Asia, we are fortunate to have good people and partners.

My final message on sustainable development is this: the health of humanity and the health of the planet are inseparable. Changes in how we live are necessary to ensure the well-

being of future generations. How we build for the future through sustainable development and green building strategies will shape people’ s living habits.

This is where we can make a difference as designers, architects, and developers. These are the opportunities before us, and as we move toward the future, this is the biggest question we must address.

Thank you.

Session 3: Streetscape, Domesticity and Housing

Context: Singapore / Thailand

Eric Ho (Co-founder and Director, Architecture Commons, President 2025, AIA Hong Kong - Moderator):

Supporting a Hong Kong model to Southeast Asia, or in your case Peter, you're exporting it out to Miami, which is super interesting. But I think there are two pertinent topics here: one relating to the connection to the ground—streetscapes and public spaces—and the other is high-density urban living, whether it’ s the standing from antiquity or Singapore housing.

My question is, in these two areas, and you can pick one that fits your area of research or expertise, what are the things most pertinent about the Southeast Asian context that we can learn? I notice elements relating to the tropical climate and the culture, which is definitely more nuanced. In your work, what are the top two things you would highlight?

Peter Brannan (Managing Director, Asia Pacific & MENA, Arquitectonica):

Southeast Asia is definitely a place where I can experiment. The environment is conducive for that, which is interesting based on my experience. Sorry, it’ s a hard question, so I’ ll go first.

I had a chance to work at the beginning on the Bangkok project. My team member is also working on Savya Ravstad, and we had discussions back and forth about similarities. What we found was that whether it’ s in Savya Ravstad or Bangkok, people are really interested in connecting to nature and living in balance with it. They may be more used to that than what we have here.

Here, we don’ t have the opportunity because things are so happening; we don’ t have the space to make areas bigger and greener for people to wander and create their own opportunities. In Bangkok, it’ s essential—they want that. Even our JV partners indicated that sometimes what we try to do is a little too formal; we need to be less specific or heavy-handed and allow things to happen naturally. That’ s how life is there.

That’s a bit different from my experience working with my wife’s community, where they want predictability—they need to know how things will work every time. Maybe it’s because we don’t have much space or the economic model here puts more pressure on everyone to make enough money to live properly. So, the expectations are probably different.

I’ve never lived in other parts of Asia, but spending time in Bangkok over the last few years, I noticed people seem calmer and more content. They have a license to be so, and maybe it’s cultural or generational, but they enjoy things that aren’t necessarily tangible as we want them to be.

Prof. Eunice Seng (Head of Department/Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Hong Kong):

I come from a law perspective, currently ahead in some learning from law research and education, which I hope will contribute to practice. I have been working and teaching as both academic and practitioner in Hong Kong and Singapore.

In a region with extreme economic and social discrepancies, the previous idea of importing models, like the Singapore model, is quite obsolete. I welcome disagreement, but I think humility is needed to translate observations of what the ground means in Bangkok, for example. The importation model presupposes that something working well here will work well there, which is a rather obnoxious view unless we talk about luxury residences, where some universality may exist.

When discussing grounds and public areas, it’s a very different conversation. For example, we had 70 students spend a week in Jakarta collaborating with two schools to create installations. They returned surprised, reporting that they learned a lot about making techniques and realized the experience was reciprocal, not just teaching what we do in Hong Kong.

We are trying to inculcate observational and translation skills—how do we observe other pre-made architectural propositions? It’s important to re-center our approach. The nuances in streetscape prosody are so diverse that no model can simply be exported or imported.

Stefano Tronci (RIBA LEED AP BD+C WELL AP, Associate Principal – Asia Pacific Sustainability Lead, SOM):

I think we have recently encountered interesting topics. One fortunate thing about working in this part of the world is the unique opportunity to live in Hong Kong and experience how we live with the environment, and how that happens differently in Singapore, Jakarta, and Bangkok. Each city has different cultures.

The Thai example is funny because Malaysians and Thais sometimes come to Hong Kong just to witness how frenetic we are. Hong Kong has more access to green open space than

any other city, with country parks totaling 60% of Singapore’s total area. It’s an inside-out city, unlike London or New York, where parks are on the outside.

Talking about how buildings meet the ground is very important to sustainable urban design. The example I showed in Miami is all public space where people can come and go. Other private residences have walls, which is a different experience. We’re more interested in how buildings meet the public, as in Hong Kong, New York, or London, where that connection becomes social and challenging to design, considering street shading and pedestrian movement.

We face ongoing challenges. Bangkok’s Sukhothai Road is madness compared to Ho Chi Minh City’s District 1, which still has French-designed roads, medians with trees, proper lanes, pavements, and buildings. Thank God they kept them. In Bangkok, trees were cut down to make more lanes for cars, canals were filled in, and a New York planning code was adopted where buildings slope back to allow more light into the streets.

But in Bangkok, this causes the street to bake, discouraging walking. More public space, walking and bicycle space, more trees, and public participation are needed. Streets become more valuable when cars are removed and replaced with people. That’s what we’re finding.

Jonah Ing (AIA, Senior Manager, Projects, Swire Properties):

Yes, somewhat. There are different models and similarities. What I was saying about Bangkok is that area is like an experiment, a new Bangkok modernism with developers around the park area. The connection of plazas, streets, and high-rises is a typology across cities, though they differ.

When I was with SOM, we finished One Bangkok, just down the street from the wireless station, which was retained. One Bangkok is a classic Hong Kong development with an NTR connection. I wish there was more ability to connect to the park. Those challenges likely led to bridges across the park or something.

Main streets are interesting—even if they have greenery on either side, they don’t actually connect. You often have to go up and across, and crossing the street at ground level is dangerous.

Wesley Ho (Assoc AIA, Co-founder and Design Director, Napp Studio):

Yes, you really do take your life in your hands crossing the street. I want to say that we need more understanding of the planet. I’m privileged to have obtained a grant to research housing from two perspectives: flooding and typhoons. Typhoons don’t obey national borders.

We will look at housing projects in these areas and follow any one technique. Bangkok and Hong Kong are tied together in this regard. Our team will explore these relationships, which

is a different paradigm in architecture. Usually, housing is looked at typologically, axonologically, or sectionally, but rarely do we understand what the ground is made of.

Bangkok is progressive; they started the sponge park to deal with flooding.

Eric Ho (Moderator):

I want to open the floor for questions. Anyone?

Audience Member (Chen):

A question for Jonah. My office is located in Long Island East, where I stayed for a long time. I was impressed because there used to be a language ranking for the type of place in Long Island East, but because of the vision of Swire, that linkage was temporarily cut during development.

When I worked there, I was impressed by the long vision to tear down buildings and reconstruct through one or two typhoons. The whole experience lasted over 10 years?

Jonah Ing:

Yes, I was there when I first started working there. They were talking about it, and they had just finished at least the space by then. They are always regenerating, even in 2023. So, that’ s about 15 years from planning to construction and completion.

That’ s what Swire does—they look at redevelopment for a generation and the next. The buildings we tore down were fine, but they weren’ t responding to people’ s needs now. Ten years ago, they wouldn’ t work today.

Connectivity is important. We discovered when doing Pacific Place and other projects that connectivity creates opportunities—economic, social, and environmental. It frees up ground level to do other things rather than just roads.

Audience Member:

We are impressed because you tore down buildings and created a biodiversity park linking all buildings. I come from an economic perspective—how do you convince internally about payback and long-term development for a 10-year-plus project?

Jonah Ing:

Initially, I thought it was crazy to tear down buildings that were fine. But people who have been there longer explained that Swire is a six-generation company. They still have family members involved.

They put out money upfront, knowing payback may not come in 10 or 20 years, but maybe 30 years. That’ s okay. Sustainable economic growth means creating something positive. We don’ t need to make the most money, just enough to continue.

Tenants are happy, companies want to stay because employees are happy. This leads to client and resident retention. Resale values remain good because buyers understand they

get quality and intangibles.

You can’ t think about things for 20 years; you have to think much longer. For us, it’ s essential—the money is well spent.

Audience Member:

Thank you for the mission. As tenants, we really appreciate that biodiversity park.

Eric Ho (Moderator):

Tenant validation there. If there are more questions, we can leave them until the last session. We will gather with the afternoon panelists for a round of questions from the audience. Thank you so much for being with us and for the very interesting presentations.

Let’ s take a five-minute break and then come back for our last session and final Q&A. See you in five minutes.

Session 4: AECOM Showcase: Cultural Landscape

Moderator (Eric Ho, Co-founder and Director, Architecture Commons, President 2025, AIA Hong Kong):

I think we're going to get started now. I know we're a little bit behind. Let's have a seat first, David. I'm going to introduce you. As part of our symposium, we're excited to have colleagues from AECOM to support the terminologies and topics of investigation of what the symposium is about. We're pleased to have David Jung, Principal Vice President of Landscape Architecture, AECOM Asia Co. Ltd. David is responsible for landscape architecture in Asia and is a licensed professional landscape architect registered in California. With 30 years of working experience, he leads design practice working on key projects throughout the Asia region. He is a hands-on practitioner managing, designing, and implementing a diverse portfolio of projects ranging from large-scale urban master plans to site-specific detailed design. The previous panel discussion on biodiversity and what Peter was saying about touching the ground will be a very good segue into David's presentation. So let's have a round of applause for David. Thank you for coming.

David Jung (Principal/Vice President, Landscape Architecture Asia, AECOM):

Thank you. Thank you everyone. I first want to thank the AIA and Eric for inviting me to this opportunity to speak to you today. I also want to thank my colleagues, who are mostly in the audience, so thank you for that. I appreciate it.

I was going to walk through this presentation slowly, but I think I'll run through it a little faster. Hopefully, you'll enjoy what I have to say. One of the key things for me is obviously

my name is David Jung. I'm with AECOM, which is an infrastructure and engineering firm. I am a proud landscape architect. I think that intersection is an important one to think about as I talk through these projects because, honestly, for me, it is about changing priorities. It is also about looking for opportunities in terms of how we practice.

Let me quickly go through this. I'll talk a little bit about myself, some history, just to give you an understanding of where I come from and how that has influenced my practice.

I'm talking about changing priorities, and I think that's one of the things as you practice over time that you always think about, both personally and professionally. Over time, priorities change. What I want to do today is share some observations and my thinking about how I approach the profession and how I see the practice changing.

I am from Los Angeles, born and raised there. That certainly impacted how I think about landscape. I'm on the edge of Boomer and Gen X generations — not to date myself — but that influences my thinking. My father was a landscape architect, and that legacy is important. He grew up in an immigrant family; as a cliché, his family ran a restaurant in Los Angeles. He went to Berkeley and Harvard and worked with Peter Walker and Hideo Sasaki, as well as architects like William Pereira, looking at projects such as the Transamerica building in San Francisco and master planning for Irvine.

I grew up spending a lot of time in the office, seeing how he worked both in business and design practice. I also went to Berkeley and Harvard, which were formative years for me. I worked for Peter Walker and ultimately with Hargraves, a protégé of Peter Walker. That experience started me thinking about designing with natural processes, which is a hallmark of that practice.

For me, it's always been about process and craft — how we build. When I look at a project, I always ask: how are we going to build that? One of the key things for me is the intersection of art, nature, and science. I approach work with that mindset.

Over the years, the market has changed, and so has the focus. That is part of the process — how priorities evolve in your work. Art remains important in how I look at projects, especially the integration of art into the natural landscape.

For example, the Guadalupe River Park project with Hargraves in San Jose, California, involved converting an existing flood control channel into a river corridor. We focused on natural processes — using ecosystems and forms to inform design — ensuring the flood control functioned well while providing leisure and recreational experiences for the community.

Back to Los Angeles, where I grew up near Glassell Park in the middle of the LA River, the geology of the river transformed the city. Originally a natural river channel, it was channelized in the 40s and 60s due to flooding. Recently, there have been master plan studies for the LA River to rethink the corridor, balancing flood control with sustainable,

accessible landscapes. This integration of infrastructure and landscape is something I think about in my work.

My journey has taken me from Los Angeles to Hong Kong and Singapore, with a stop in China along the way. My evolving perspective is based on work here and how I see the practice changing. Adapting to urban changes and flexibility are important. Issues in Hong Kong and Singapore such as climate change, climate resilience, social equity, culture, and heritage are key priorities.

Innovative landscape architecture must consider mechanisms that address these ideas. Urban resilience and identity are especially important in Singapore and Hong Kong. Singapore’ s greenness as a garden city is well known, but as an island, resilience is critical. There are projects involving reclamation that consider both process and function, ensuring resilience while addressing social and cultural issues.

In Hong Kong, connectivity and efficiency as an urban environment are vital. The city is an inside-out city, surrounded by green spaces. Some colleagues are working on the Northern Metropolis, where sustainability, greening, and resilience are now main focuses — a shift from past new town developments.

I think about the intersection of art and nature in my approach. Nature-based solutions are a big part of our office’ s work. These solutions are policy-driven responses to engineering challenges requiring natural-based responses. Natural processes involve using ecosystems to lead design, creating shapes and forms, and viewing landscapes as open systems to foster sustainable, accessible environments.

Balancing these two approaches is crucial, especially for projects like the Northern Metropolis. Everyone talks about greener cities, but what does that really mean? Social and cultural values are also part of the process. My team considers how social values influence design — how to create opportunities and programs that respond to changing cultural and societal dynamics.

Cultural values involve retaining heritage and the quality of place that resonates with people. Every site has a history — ecological, historical, or cultural — that needs to be revealed and utilized in design. Balancing modern development with cultural retention is important for future projects.

Community and diversity are central. Landscapes play a key role where buildings meet the ground. Designs that create community, facilitate engagement, and promote knowledge are vital for social interaction and connection with nature.

Inclusion in design requires flexibility to relate to diverse stakeholders. This was discussed earlier today and is a key synergy every designer strives to manifest.

Promoting social cohesion is essential. While designers cannot predict ultimate outcomes, creativity helps envision positive and challenging aspects to create viable, successful

communities and places. Placemaking is important, especially where infrastructure and landscape meet.

Now, I’ ll briefly run through some projects to illustrate how these principles apply and how priorities have shifted in response to ecological, social, political, and economic changes.

The first project is the River of Life in Malaysia. Similar to Kuala Lumpur Park and the LA River, it was a channelized flood control river running through Kuala Lumpur. We won the competition to redevelop it and have built sections over the last five years. The river is ten kilometers long with five zones. Each zone was considered in terms of its impact on surrounding communities socially, economically, environmentally, and culturally.

Some environmental aspects were less successful than hoped, as some design ideas did not come to fruition. However, we successfully reimagined and revealed cultural and social aspects of Kuala Lumpur. For example, a mosque at the confluence of two rivers was overgrown and hidden but was rediscovered and reconnected to the river corridor, enlivening the area and bringing people back to the river.

This project shows how infrastructure and river restoration can reveal and connect communities. Having the community face the river again was quite successful. I personally enjoy visiting to see the ongoing changes.

In Singapore, we have done many ABC (Active Beautiful Clean) projects. These focus on existing waterways and flood control channels, enlivening them to create better social and cultural experiences while improving water quality and biodiversity.

These projects connect to landscape corridors and walkable paths throughout Singapore. The integration of water infrastructure with social infrastructure is a strength of Singapore’ s approach.

Old canals, similar to those in Los Angeles, are being rethought for greening, water habitats, and biodiversity. The government supports these initiatives through the ABC program to create more livable, humane, and enjoyable landscapes.

Climate is a challenge — it’ s very hot in Singapore. I travel between Hong Kong and Singapore, and it’ s brutal. Greening helps mitigate heat, and programs like ABC contribute to climate change adaptation.

Some techniques we use include soil bioengineering, which is low-tech but effective. We test plant species for robustness and resilience in canal environments. This helps develop strategies to add green elements to canals, improving usability and aesthetics.

Singapore excels in considering citizen health, wellness, and lifestyle in design. Boundaries become opportunities. As a landscape architect in an infrastructure company, we look for opportunities to enliven spaces, catering to social, cultural, and environmental aspects.

Education is part of this process — connecting people to nature and helping them understand the function and social meaning of landscapes. This connection is key for community and environmental futures.

We also use the concept of rewilding — a controlled approach to nature — balancing artistic design with natural aesthetics to create beneficial environments that function well and inform users.

Another strategy is creating green cells within canals, testing processes and outcomes. Similar to China’ s sponge city concept, Singapore is exploring how to soak sites and use water management and flooding as opportunities to create viable landscapes.

For example, the Sports Hub along the Kalong River connects to Marina Bay. This project integrates natural landscapes with connectivity and systems running throughout the city.

Activating these spaces with recreational, leisure, and social activities is embedded in the ABC program. Usable spaces like cycle tracks, running tracks, and play areas promote social cohesion.

Biodiversity is another focus. We continuously integrate native planting and habitat considerations into projects in Singapore, Hong Kong, and China.

The Singapore Sports Hub is a different but related project — a new stadium built on the old National Stadium site. It serves as a community hub, and I have personally walked through it many times for exercise.

The design considers social programming, greening, and connectivity. Sustainable, nature-based solutions like bioswales collect and treat water from the stadium, running through the landscape.

Sustainability is a constant goal. We strive to apply best practices in every project.

The social aspect of the Sports Hub is vital — it is not just a venue for events but a true community hub, offering spaces for recreation and social interaction.

[The transcript cuts off here.]

Session 4: AECOM Showcase: Cultural Landscape

David D. Jung (FASLA, Principal/Vice President, Landscape Architecture Asia, AECOM):

The last project I'm going to talk about is a Hong Kong project, West Kowloon Terminus, which I worked on with ADIS and AECOM as part of the AAJV. It was quite a wonderful experience—very complex in terms of management, design, and process with MTRC. For me, I wanted to think about what this project means in terms of the history of international travel within Hong Kong. That legacy is really important. I also wanted to consider how to

create a more vibrant public realm and a greener, park-like environment on an infrastructure project.

Additionally, I focused on how to bring in the culture and heritage of Hong Kong into the design. The interior views of the project reflect this. We discussed extensively the notion of connectivity and Hong Kong's role within the Greater Bay Area. Its location in West Kowloon is surrounded by quite a bit of green space, and we aimed to connect those aspects around the station through adjacent neighborhoods, including the cultural district.

This was a challenge with the architects—to think about what that looks like and what it means. It wasn’t necessarily a priority for them, but as a designer, it was a priority for me. I received many comments about the number of drawings I produced, but it’s necessary to explain what we’re trying to do and what it will look like. This is a common issue landscape architects face, especially when working with engineers and architects. However, this process is important to focus and direct priorities for every project.

Connectivity within West Kowloon is crucial. From a sustainability and engineering perspective, we considered weights, slopes, and landscapes. We aimed to create a more biodiverse landscape, thinking about Hong Kong’s landscapes in terms of parkland, shrubland, and a promenade, which is a grassland based on the weights viable for the trusses. We worked closely with structural engineers, architects, and MTRC to enliven the landscape ecologies.

We also considered habitat, particularly bird habitats, and what that means for planting and plant species. While thinking about the public realm and urban park, we had to remember there is still a station underneath, so vertical integration of program and landscape was a key part of the design.

Regarding biodiversity, we conducted extensive research and worked with David Gallagher, our environmental specialist, to identify appropriate plant and animal species for the Hong Kong context. Our initial ideas emphasized how green we wanted the project to be and how to create a dynamic green urban landscape.

The outcome, as with any project, is never quite what you expect, but there are successful aspects. Walking up the promenade offers a pleasant experience and wonderful views, making it a very good project in that regard.

We also discussed social spaces and placemaking. Both Singapore and Hong Kong face challenges because large groups gathering are often discouraged. However, these social urban spaces need to be viable and flexible, and this may evolve over time.

In conclusion, I believe landscape is a catalyst for change. It is the intersection where buildings and ground meet, where communities, social, and cultural aspects merge. This is central to my practice and how I believe we need to work.

Looking forward, key priorities include addressing climate change—what that really means for communities and how we can use data-driven solutions to transform policy ideas into community-based designs. Promoting social values and integration through everyday landscape decisions helps foster better social cohesion.

When I visit Singapore or Hong Kong, I’ m not sure I would call them beautiful cities overall, but there are beautiful aspects. This is important for the future of design, landscape architecture, and the integration of architecture and engineering.

Cultural resonance is always important; designs must connect to the community and residents. Placemaking is critical, and there are projects that clearly work in this regard. The connection between people, heritage preservation, and development is vital as priorities evolve.

Fostering urban resilience—social, cultural, economic, environmental, and ecological—is essential. From today’ s conversations, I sense like-minded thinking on these issues. We must be adaptive and flexible because the challenges are urgent, especially in landscape design.

Finally, these changing priorities create opportunities to build more vibrant and sustainable cities and environments, which is what we all strive for. Thank you all for your time.

Moderator Shannon Ho (Executive Director, AEDAS, Vice President 2025, AIA Hong Kong):

Thank you, David. We have a little time for questions. I’ d like to invite Scott Brooks and myself to join David on stage to tie the panels together. David, you mentioned the urgency of counter-resilience. Going back to earlier presentations, like Stefano from SOM discussing how cities absorb rising water, landscape architecture, urban design, and planning are becoming increasingly integrated.

In our small firm, we have a landscape architect because every decision involves landscape integration. Sometimes architects don’ t fully understand the importance of landscape choices. So, I want to start by asking: How do you see the future of the landscape architecture profession and its role, especially given the context of Southeast Asia, with many low-lying cities facing rising sea levels? How will landscape architecture evolve in this context?

David D. Jung:

One key thing is that landscape architects need to take the initiative. They need to be present and proactive, not just wait for a brief. It’ s important to be clear about what you want to achieve with every project. You have to push architects and engineers and be knowledgeable about architecture, planning, and ecology to make strong statements about your vision.

It’s often a battle, and you don’t always win, but being part of the process is essential. Some firms, whether in the States, Europe, or Asia, do well by having clear priorities and criteria. We all need to find like-minded individuals across roles—clients, governments, architects—where we can make a difference.

Many of you have worked on fabulous projects because of collaboration and support. Partnerships and long-term legacies are important—not just personal or firm legacies, but also the owner’s and architecture firm’s legacies. We need to think beyond building codes and raise ties across professions.

Moderator Scott Brooks (Director, Imagennix, Chair, 2025 H&A Committee, AIA Hong Kong):

I want to open the floor for questions. We have time for one or two.

Peter Brannan (Managing Director, Asia Pacific & MENA, Arquitectonica):

David, that was a great presentation touching on many challenges we face. I work on Diaboli, trying to build a bridge across, and politics often complicate things despite good intentions.

One challenge we don’t often explain is that some politicians don’t like us. We get stuck on immigration issues. The rewilding subject has been discussed in Hong Kong for some time. I recently returned from Bali, where I saw rivers and streams flowing naturally, which was emotionally connecting and soothing.

In Hong Kong, we have many rivers, but the government and engineers tend to channel them. It would be great to restore them to their natural state and bring back the sound of flowing water. For example, Bowen Road in Hong Kong is a beautiful place where you can hear birds and water. Have you done any projects restoring streams like that?

David D. Jung:

Not in Hong Kong, but I agree that’s one of the beautiful things about the city. We share those channels and engineering challenges. When you come down the hill, there are only a few natural streams left, which is quite miraculous, especially compared to places like Singapore.

I know there have been presentations to the Hong Kong government about the ABC program and similar initiatives in Singapore. That would be an interesting initiative for Hong Kong to pursue. They are working on the coastal trail and waterfront loop ideas, which could be pushed forward. If there’s interest, our team would be happy to engage.

Audience Member:

I’ve been hiking trails on Caloosah for about 20 years and have seen the gradual degradation of those trails. It’s a persistent issue, but I’m glad to see efforts to stop it.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

Maybe one last question?

Audience Member (middle of the room):

Thank you for sharing your rich experience. You've worked on very large landscape projects. From an academic perspective, there seems to be a connection to landscape urbanism. What is your future projection for landscape urbanism, especially in contexts like Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, Singapore, and China?

David D. Jung:

That's an important aspect. It's about finding opportunities. I did a study at HKU on smaller urban spaces and how to connect them within Central Hong Kong—small alleyways, public parks, escalators—all connected pieces. I hope students continue exploring these connections, considering culture and heritage.

We've worked on larger rural-framed and urban regeneration projects in mainland China. Singapore is also looking at connectors through programs like ABC. There are always more opportunities.

As societies change, with aging populations, we need landscapes that benefit communities and connect people to greener environments, which is important for health.

Ultimately, we need to advocate for these projects. Concepts like water corridors in Hong Kong are apparent to designers but require political and economic feasibility to realize. Politics and economics often drive what happens more than design itself.

In Asia, I've realized that activating political and economic mechanisms beneficially is crucial for all of us.

Moderator Shannon Ho:

That's a great note to end on. I was at the Inclusive Play Conference recently, and politics is indeed key to aligning government and professionals to push boundaries and elevate cities and countries, especially when things are challenging.

Please join me in giving a round of applause to David for a fantastic presentation.

Closing Remarks:

We'll take a quick photo and then need to clear the venue by 5:30 PM. Shannon will lead us for drinks nearby at the Conrad Hotel to relax and continue conversations. Let's meet at the entrance in 10 minutes.

Thank you all for coming and thanks to all the speakers for their wonderful contributions.

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