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GREEN LANE

text JASON POMEROY
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Jakarta. Manila. Bangkok. Kota Kinabalu. Kuala Lumpur. And back again, with an episode of Singapore thrown in for good measure. If project deadlines weren't enough, the whistle-stop tour of hotels and their ballrooms for events had me crying for mercy. From design charettes in small meeting rooms, to keynote speeches at conferences, to lectures at universities, to finally my book launch. Yes, it has finally been completed.

It was a welcome sight. Arriving back at the studio, I was greeted by a brown cardboard box in which the contents - 4 proofs ahead of the first print run, represented a 10-year labour of love. To celebrate the occasion, and to coincide with Esquire magazine's feature of yours truly as a one of the 'Heineken Ministry of Mavens' (I had to Google it too), a party was thrown at the sky terrace of the new Park Royal hotel in Singapore. The venue was somewhat fitting, as the building similarly incorporates the very subject matter of my new book - The Skycourt and Skygarden: Greening the Urban Habitat. I tried my best to inform a euphoric audience of the social, spatial, economic, environmental, cultural and technological virtues of such sky-rise social spaces from around the world.

I presented a précis of the book, and how such vertical landscaped social spaces have been incorporated into cities as a consequence of inner city migration, urbanisation, and the depletion of open public spaces. Skycourts and skygardens offer more than just aesthetic value in their ability to incorporate landscaping, but can also provide environmental, socio-economic and psycho-physiological benefits. Ambient temperature reduction (and thus a reduction in energy consumption), income generation through fee levying of skygarden observation decks, and enhanced productivity of the workforce given the presence >

The Book is Out!



The absence of such vertical cities in Europe is perhaps due to the preservation of historical buildings.



of space and urban greenery, are just some of the benefits of incorporating such social spaces. In addition, I explained how they help reduce the perceived densities of high-density urban habitats, and provide a means to replenish the loss of open space as a consequence of urbanisation.

Referencing historical and contemporary precedents that range from the hanging gardens of Babylon to the National Library Singapore, the book investigates how skycourts and skygardens have become the new accepted urban social spaces of our time, alongside other historical types such as the arcade, the retail mall and the hotel lobby as forums for people's interaction, rest and recuperation, and as a means of short cut through the city. Using graphics and full colour images throughout, 40 current and forthcoming skycourt and skygarden projects are referenced from around the world, including the Shard (London), Marina Bay Sands (Singapore), the Shanghai Tower (China) and the Lotte Tower (South Korea) - enabling conclusive 'prompts for thinking' for their future design.

My presentation was well received, and it was interesting to note how my European guests yearned for a visionary approach to their respective home cities. The absence of such vertical cities and their social spaces in Europe is perhaps understandable given the preservation of historical buildings that has led to the generic European city becoming an 'urban museum', filled with built artefacts that cater for nostalgia

tourism and its associated income generation. It comes as little surprise that the spatial, social, economic, cultural and environmental properties of skycourts and skygardens have instead influenced the planning legislation of more high-density urban environments, and particularly those in Asian cities, such as in Singapore.

The evening concluded with the presentation of the 2013 'Design for a Sustainable Future Award' - an award programme established by Pomeroy Studio in the interests of promoting green design amongst the best global architecture students, to our star intern Matthew Humphreys. Matthew not only excels at his academic achievements, he has contributed to the office with his innovative ideas.

I will be commencing a book tour later this year that will take in Europe, the US and SE Asian universities. I believe that the subject matter comes timely. The multi-faceted nature of skycourts and skygardens act as flexible and adaptable social spaces that also allow them to adjust to a city's idiosyncratic future expansion plans - thus addressing the issue of urban densification by being able to 'top-up' on existing building's roof tops, or 'fill-in' the intermediate skycourt spaces as the need arises. To this end, they have a unique way of future-proofing the design of our cities, and acknowledge the importance of a spatial sustainability to replenish the loss of social space through urbanization. On a simpler level, they are also wonderful places to hang out in! ☺

To find out more, read 'Skycourts and Skygardens: Greening the Urban Habitat', available end of October in Kinokuniya and other major book retailers.

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