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JASON POMEROY

Fresh from hosting *City Time Traveller*, a 12-part architectural travel series that recently aired on Channel NewsAsia, award-winning Singapore-based eco architect Jason Pomeroy shares with *travel 3Sixty* the inspiration behind his love of design, his favourite project and what cities may look like in the future.

WHAT IS ECO-ARCHITECTURE?

Eco-architecture pays particular respect to the natural environment and harnesses the elements (sun, wind, rain) to drive down our daily water and energy consumption, thus preserving the environment and our resources for future generations. The 'eco' prefix

also suggests an emphasis on ecology and bio-diversity, thus ensuring that whole eco-systems live in balance with humans in buildings that are not only sensitive to these inhabitants, but enhance their prospects. Our work embraces such ideas but goes further in its sustainable building quest to balance the importance of

human needs to create places that draw the essence from cultures and traditions.

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR LOVE FOR ARCHITECTURE?

Strangely, it was playing in my parents' back garden – a lush green space with an abundance of flora and fauna. There, I learned to build earthen

enclosures and set up a wigwam tent – early forays into sustainable architecture! But a visit to London's St Paul's Cathedral when I was eight sealed my resolve to be an architect; I was blown away by the building's domed structure and lofty interior!

WHY ARE YOU DRAWN TO ECO-ARCHITECTURE?

I've been conditioned by the places I've lived. I grew up in London, a great city with wonderful parks and garden squares within the urban habitat. When I was studying architecture at Canterbury, I was interested in high-density cities like Hong Kong and Singapore, and how they try to salvage open space for recreation and retain low carbon footprints despite their potentially energy-intensive, high-density settings. That led me to a research degree at Cambridge, where I explored high-rise eco-architecture and the role of skycourts and skygardens.

WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE AMONG THE PROJECTS YOU'VE EXECUTED?

It has to be The Idea House in Malaysia – the first zero carbon home in Asia, which was certainly advanced for its time. I was fortunate to be able to demonstrate its green credentials in a book and documentary that helped spread the importance of zero carbon development in the interest of owners never having an energy bill again.

WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK AT A BUILDING?

I'm passionate about passive design in order to reduce consumption – something that architects have been doing since the beginning of time. The Georgian terraced houses in London are incredibly versatile buildings that embrace natural light and ventilation. Technology has allowed us to forget this, and consequently, increased



Artist impression of the Eco Pod, a soon-to-be-developed resort in Malaysia designed by Jason Pomeroy.

our carbon woes by relying on energy consuming light fittings and air conditioning. A return to basic design principles is the key to successful sustainable design that balances functionality, emotional content, cost efficiency and environmental responsiveness.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN GREEN BUILDING?

The biggest challenge is perception. People need to understand that it's not what a sustainable building costs, but actually what it saves. Hopefully, the stigma of green design costing 30 per cent more than normal buildings will continue to be challenged and demystified as more green buildings are assessed in terms of their capital and operational costs in comparison to non-green buildings. Improved habitable conditions, reduced energy and water consumption and greater social mobility all contribute to an increase in savvy property purchasers basing their decisions on such tangible savings and lifestyle improvements.

WHICH COUNTRY IS LEADING THE GREEN BUILDING PACK?

Singapore is taking bold steps towards greening the urban habitat. The garden city is quite literally greening many a hardened city surface area through the exploration of skycourts and skygardens. Singapore is taking active steps to consider the social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits of urban greenery.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THE SITES YOU VISITED DURING THE FILMING OF CITY TIME TRAVELLER?

Aesthetics may change with time but the basic spatial and cultural needs of man have remained the same for hundreds if not thousands of years. I've had the privilege of researching and exploring many different Asian civilisations, and the buildings and places they created. They have been forged through an almost Darwinian process of natural selection, where only the strongest design ideas survive. Superfluous detail gets quickly erased in history – what is retained is what is often key to a

from the 7th century ancient city of Varanasi, rich in spiritual content, to the majestic Palaces of Hue, and the magical ruins of Ayutthaya. What transcends culture though is an indigenous civilisation's understanding of basic environmental and social needs, embodied in many of these historical buildings. This insight as to how people once lived before the advent of technology, and how many of the basic principles of the past can be distilled to sustain communities for the present and future, is what has become applicable in our green building design method.

WHY IS ECO ARCHITECTURE THE WAY FORWARD?

The built environment constitutes 45 per cent of global carbon emissions, and at our rate of current development,



The award-winning B House in Singapore, by Jason Pomeroy.

people's living habits. In Asian cultures, we see the heightened importance of the kitchen as the centre of the home, the verandah as a social space, and occasionally, the courtyard as the provider of natural light and ventilation. These elements transcend geographic location, and we can see similar models from Thailand to India.

WERE ANCIENT BUILDERS ALREADY IMPLEMENTING ASPECTS OF GREEN BUILDING BACK THEN?

The places I've visited span the breadths of time, ranging

we will be heading towards cataclysmic climatic changes that will result in transmigration of populations due to drought, tsunami and food shortages. Designing with nature in mind to stave off climate change is key to our survival. Temperature, humidity, sun and wind path, noise, and the natural greenery and biodiversity of a place are the starting points for our design creations, as are the local socio-cultural forces that are ripe for reinterpretation and abstraction. These allow us to create award-winning green cities, buildings, landscapes and interiors. **K!**