

PROPERTY

MANAGEMENT

Gender equality in view for the next generation

But women not convinced quotas are the answer for balanced representation at executive level

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Stella Abraham had a stint in the hospitality industry but ended up pursuing a career in real estate.

She started about 15 years ago selling houses in Notting Hill, London. Not the nice places from the films one might be thinking of, but "the dumps", she recalled.

Born and raised in Hong Kong, but having lived in England, the United States and Australia, Abraham is now the national director and head of residential leasing and relocation services at JLL in Hong Kong, an unusual position for a woman.

Among 2,862 real estate companies listed globally, only 62 have women comprising 30 per cent or more of their board membership, Bloomberg Intelligence Asia analyst Robert Fong said.

But if board representation is rare, top executive positions are

extra pressure on herself. "It's a little voice in my head, sadly it is. I am a female! Unfortunately, we question ourselves. We often don't stand up and say I want it. We need to get better at that."

Mabelle Ma, a development and valuations director at Swire Properties, also said she could not really find an example in which being a woman had disadvantaged her or held her back.

Ma started her career in 1990 with a development firm before moving to Swire, where she has worked for almost 20 years. She is a rare case of success in a lucrative industry that has always been largely male-dominated.

Ma was the first woman appointed a general manager at Swire and is now one of three women in its senior management group. "I really can't say there's any discrimination, at least in my world," she said.

Comparing real estate to other industries, Abraham does not find much difference in terms of gender equality. "I think the whole world is kind of seen as a man's world, unfortunately," she said. "It's not just real estate. I think it is all business."

In real estate, Abraham said, gender equality varied a lot from company to company. But establishing quotas did not seem to be the right solution to reduce disparity. "I sit on the fence when it comes to quotas," she said. "Sometimes I believe in a quota, and other times not. And it's all about individual situations, depending on which company you are with, maybe."

Christina Gaw, a managing principal and head of capital markets at Gaw Capital, shares a similar opinion. "I am not necessarily buying or focusing on the quota," she said. "Putting a number [on it] is not needed."

In March 2013, the chairmen of 35 international and local companies backed the launch of the 30 Percent Club by the Women's Foundation. The 30 Percent Club says it is not a call for a quota, but aims to bring more women onto corporate boards.

Although there is still a long way to go before there are as many female faces as male ones in top positions at the city's main companies, Ma said things were getting better.

"Nowadays, people do realise ... the importance of gender diversity," she said. "The trend, I think, is to have a balance."

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STELLA ABRAHAM

even scarcer. There are only two real estate firms in which women have made it to the top: Soho China, with Zhang Xin as chief executive and Yan Yan as president, and Longfor Properties, which is chaired by Wu Yajun.

Looking at such examples, "it seems you have to create the company to sit in that CEO spot", Fong said at a seminar organised by the Women's Foundation last month.

Three successful women shared with the *South China Morning Post* their views on gender equality in the real estate sector and how hopeful they were about the next generation.

Abraham said being a woman had not been a hurdle. "I can sense there is a difference between men and women in the workplace, but I personally haven't felt any discrimination," she said.

However, she did admit that being a woman had made her put

DESIGN



The Idea House in Malaysia interweaves the latest green technologies with traditional features of village houses to create an income-generating zero-carbon dwelling that also benefits from cross-ventilation, natural light and shade. Photos: SCMP Pictures



LOOKING AT THE PAST TO FIND SOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Simple, sustainable and eco-friendly designs needed to meet the challenges of urbanisation in Asia can be found in traditional dwellings

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Around the world, huge amounts of human energy are spent in the pursuit of sustainable cities. Beijing alone, intent on rehousing 100 million rural people in cities in the next six years, has set ambitious targets for greener building. With the earth's resources now undeniably finite, it is the holy grail of urban architecture.

But what if much of all this brouhaha boils down to reinventing the wheel? Could the obvious in terms of sustainable design have been with us for hundreds, if not thousands, of years?

Jason Pomeroy, a British architect and academic who founded Pomeroy Studio in Singapore in 2012, believes so.

Pomeroy, who sits on various green building boards and has penned two books on eco-architecture - *The Skycourt and Skygarden: Greening the Urban Habitat* and *Idea House: Future Tropical Living Today* - wants to travel with China on the road to sustainable urban development, and he is doing it by looking forward, with a view to the past.

Pomeroy says he has always been fascinated by the concept of living in harmony with nature.

He says that childhood interest is perfectly timed, given the growing need for sustainable,

eco-friendly solutions to meet the challenges of urbanisation in Asia.

Pomeroy, who is special professor at the University of Nottingham and the Universita Luav di Venezia, reels off a clutch of data. "Fifty per cent of our carbon emissions are associated with the built environment, and 80 per cent of this is associated with cities. By 2050, 9.6 billion people may be walking the face of this earth. In 2030, 50 per cent more energy will be consumed by that additional population and 40 per cent more water; plus we will need about 35 per cent more food."

The "cataclysmic effects" associated with climate change "perfectly position us as designers and thought leaders to try to tackle some of those issues", he says.

Global assessment methods, such as LEED and BEAM, Green Star in Australia and Green Mark in Singapore, all have their place and are "a move in the right direction", but as legislations become more stringent, Pomeroy says, all buildings will need to adapt and change, and be greener in the future. "We would also advocate for carbon monitoring: how much energy per year is this building/landscape/interior consuming?"

Pomeroy uses the analogy of Stone Age man and woman sitting at the mouth of their cave,



Jason Pomeroy, Pomeroy Studio

benefiting from natural light and ventilation. Once fire was discovered, they adjourned inside, and over millions of years, as man metaphorically moved deeper and deeper into the cave, we have become more reliant on artificial sources of illumination and ventilation, which compromises our carbon footprint. "I would advocate a return to the mouth of the cave, like our forefathers," he says.

Moving on to our more recent ancestors, Pomeroy points to the traditional village houses of Southeast Asia, and the courtyard-oriented *hutong* of China - climatically appropriate designs that brought light and ventilation naturally into the structure before the days of air conditioning and electric illumination.

"As we become more technologically advanced, there is always this inclination to stretch for solutions, but many lessons can be found in the past. It's about being able to reinterpret some of those lessons," Pomeroy says.

As he has done, creating the Idea House in Malaysia, which he says is the first zero-carbon house in Asia that takes on board many principles of the village house tradition, interwoven with the latest green technologies. Its passive design is respectful of the lie of the land, encouraging cross ventilation, natural light and shade. The roof collects water for household use, while photovoltaic cells provide enough power for a family of five. Surplus energy can be put back into the grid, providing an opportunity for income gen-

eration. Prefabricated modular construction enables the house to be built in 12 weeks, and is easily extendable as the family grows.

Taking this concept further is another Pomeroy project, the B House in Singapore, which is under construction. A reinterpretation of Singapore's traditional black-and-white bungalows, based on modelling and estimations, the home's passive design principles, maximising the surrounding greenery, should make it carbon-negative, at a similar cost as a typical detached home. Even in steamy Singapore, the B House should maintain a comfortable indoor temperature of 22 to 24 degrees Celsius, without the need for artificial cooling, Pomeroy says.

The host of popular architecture television series *City Time Traveller* is not seriously suggesting we all go back to living in bark huts - let alone caves. However, Pomeroy views applying the age-old concepts of scalable design, energy and resources conservation, cost-efficiencies and provision of social spaces as "essential" for the modern high-rise landscape, given population increase. He likens this notion to the Darwinian process of design.

"The best green designs are the ones that stand the test of time. Buildings that have lasted from the past, having withstood natural selection, are the buildings we can be learning from in order to design more suitable sustainable structures today. Then, hopefully, that legacy will similarly be transferred 100 years in the future."

STYLE DAVID RODEN



What: Sand tool box
Why: Made from sustainable white oak, this organiser holds A4 paper too
How much: HK\$2,250
Where: Tree, 28/F, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 2870 1582



What: Kisimi Bleu nature end table
Why: Beautiful driftwood set in acrylic resin for dramatic effect
How much: HK\$18,800
Where: Tequila Kola, 1/F, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 2877 3295



What: Max three-legged bar stool
Why: The crescent-shaped seat is in solid oak
How much: HK\$3,840 each
Where: Archetypal Concept Store, 15 Moon Street, Wan Chai, tel: 2320 0580



What: Rea wall light
Why: Takes the shape of a splitting amoeba or, as the designer, Neil Poulton, says: "The Star Trek Enterprise"
How much: From HK\$1,900
Where: Artemide, 1/F, Ruttonjee Centre, 11 Duddell Street, Central, tel: 2523 0333

ON THE MARKET



Stanley Court
The project comprises 21 townhouses surrounding a resort-style swimming pool and gardens. Each has a private roof terrace, a garden, a terrace, a roof and two covered parking spaces. On offer is a house of 2,049 square feet in terms of saleable area. It has a separate living and dining room, three bedrooms with three ensembles, three bathrooms, a kitchen, a garden, a terrace, a roof and a maid's room. Asking rent: HK\$148,000 inclusive
Agent: Christine Chong (9648 6082) of Landscape Christie's International



Redhill Peninsula, Cedar Drive, 18 Pak Pat Shan Road
On offer is a house of 2,836 sq ft in terms of saleable area. It has a split-level living and dining rooms, four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a guest toilet, a kitchen and a servant's quarters. It also includes an 804 sq ft garden, a 292 sq ft rooftop and a side roof. Asking price: HK\$76 million
Asking rent: HK\$128,000 inclusive
Agent: Peter Ho (6026 6688) of Colliers International

