

PRESSAGE

THAILAND
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ON WHEELS

**MARC
JACOBS**
A NEW ERA

TASTEMAKERS
THAILAND'S
ARBITERS
OF STYLE

MONGOLIA
LEGENDS
LIVE ON

**TIRAWAN
TAECHAUBOL**

"I USED TO WORK AND LIVE FOR FUN. NOW,
EVERYTHING I DO, I DO FOR SOMEONE"

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The routine of life often inures us to our surroundings, whatever impressive edifices lie nearby. But to Professor JASON POMEROY, the buildings are embedded in the fabric of each country's distinctive culture and history

THE ARTICULATE HOST of the architectural travel show on Channel News Asia, *City Time Traveller*, and founding principal of the Singapore-based urbanism, architecture, design and research firm Pomeroy Studio, Professor Jason Pomeroy has studied Ayutthaya and Chiang Mai in his quest to reveal the human side of design. He designed the first zero-carbon and negative-carbon homes in Southeast Asia, and believes in a

motto of "Distil, Design, and Disseminate" – using lessons learned from the past to design for the future.

YOU'VE BEEN TO BOTH ANCIENT AND MORE MODERN ARCHITECTURAL SITES IN THAILAND DURING YOUR TRAVELS AND FILMING. WHICH WAS, THOUGH, THE MOST STRIKING TO YOU, AND WHAT DID IT TELL YOU ABOUT THAI CULTURE?

For me, I think it was Wat Chaiwatthanaram. It is hard not to draw a comparison with Angkor Wat in both its Khmer architectural influence, and the steps one needs to ascend in reaching the

summit of the central prang. This awe-inspiring structure would have been cloaked in gold or bronze, and glistened under the sun. It would have been highly visible from all around Ayutthaya, and therefore a memorable symbol of King Prasat Thong's victory over the Khmer people. His edifice evokes the cultural spoils of such a victory – evidenced in the ornate nature of its characteristic Khmer architectural motifs, carvings, and bullet-shaped

form. The composition of the steps also effectively manipulates human movement, as it does in Angkor Wat and many a temple complex around the world. Humility and reverence to greater being(s) can be engendered through bricks and mortar. Here, we find that the steep steps slow one's passage of movement, and almost makes one bend lower in respect to the creator, the King, and the relics within – reverence and respect that I find in abundance in Thai culture.

HAVE YOUR TRAVELS CHANGED OR ENHANCED YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON DESIGN?

It isn't everyday that you get to explore 18 cities in a five-month period! It's like cramming years of architectural education and research over a long weekend! I've had the privilege of travelling the world extensively, but the more you travel, the more you realise how little you actually know, which is an amazingly humbling experience. The two series of *City Time Traveller* have allowed me to bring my architectural observations to a broader audience. At the same time, my urbanism, architecture, design and research firm combines design and research – a balancing of creative vigour with academic rigour!

YOU CREATED THE FIRST ZERO-CARBON HOME IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, IDEA HOUSE, AND FOLLOWED IT UP WITH A NEGATIVE CARBON HOME, B HOUSE. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM CREATING THESE TWO DESIGNS, AND WHAT'S NEXT?

The great thing about both those properties, the Idea House and the B House, was that many of the techniques we used to achieve their carbon zero and negative statuses were actually first developed by our ancestors hundreds of years ago. Many of the passive design



THIS PAGE: PROFESSOR POMEROY EXPLORES MANILA OPPOSITE PAGE: PROFESSOR JAMES POMEROY



techniques used in the Idea House (Malaysia) were drawn from the traditional Malay Kampong houses that were built before the advent of electricity – and therefore air-conditioning. They were designed in a way that would maximise natural ventilation, such as high roofs that would allow the air to circulate, and open verandas surrounded by foliage that would cool the breeze as it passed through the house.

Another major learning point is the importance of culture and tradition in designing the built environment. At a basic level, eco-architecture

harnesses the sun, wind and rain to reduce energy consumption. However, Pomeroy Studio goes beyond this, and draws on the essence of local culture and tradition to create environments that positively impact people's lives.

While we have explored what is possible on land – through the Idea House and B House – and what can be done in the air – through skycourts and skygardens – I now

want to explore the viability of expansion onto water. With rising real estate costs in urban centres, and massive urbanisation leading to overcrowding, alternative spaces need to be found to house and sustain growing urban populations.

Water accounts for two-thirds of the earth's surface, and I am exploring how we can create waterborne communities that can expand and contract according

to socio-economic need. These ideas shall be crystallised in my next book, *Pog and Play* (ORO Editions), written during my tenured professorship at Università IUAV di Venezia, in arguably the most famous waterborne community, Venice. Bangkok has a rich heritage of developing onto water – particularly with its floating markets. There are lessons to be had in the book, and we look forward to applying these strategies in Southeast Asian cities, which are perfectly positioned for this sort of development.

FOR SOME CITIES YOU'VE VISITED, YOU'VE SEEN A SHIFT AWAY FROM THE "PLATE-STACKING" MODEL OF DESIGNING HIGH-RISES, TO A "HAMBURGER" (MULTIPLE TYPES OF SPACES SANDWICHED TOGETHER). HOW FAR ALONG THIS SHIFT IS THAILAND?

I think there's still quite a long way to go, as the major city of Bangkok has yet to match density levels like Hong Kong or Tokyo that necessitate the concept of what I call a 'vertical urban theory'. This is where you are having to stack city functions one above the other given the shortage of space – a bit like a multi-stacked hamburger! With half the world's population living in increasingly

dense urban habitats, space is a commodity in need of preservation and replenishment. The ability to consider a spatial sustainability as a counterpoint to social sustainability is key to the success of our high-density vertical urban habitats in the 21st century if we are to foster a greater sense of community.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES FACING BANGKOK IN TERMS OF ARCHITECTURE DESIGN, GIVEN IT IS SUCH A DENSELY BUILT-UP CITY? HOW MUCH ROOM IS THERE TO GO GREEN?

I think the biggest challenge isn't actually physical, but it is changing people's perception of green architecture. The stigma of green design costing 30 percent more than normal buildings will continue to be challenged and de-mystified as more and more green buildings are assessed in terms of their capital costs and operational costs in comparison to non-green buildings. There is an awakening that the costs initially associated with green design are marginal (1-5 percent over non-green buildings) and yet the upsides considerably outweigh the former. Improved habitable conditions, reduced energy and water consumption and therefore utility bills and greater social mobility all contribute to an increase in savvy property purchasers basing their decisions on these tangible savings and lifestyle improvements. This requires the tangible benefits being clearly spelled out that are based on fact and reason. This will help de-mystify green architecture. Who would have thought that a Carbon Negative Villa in Singapore (i.e. generating more energy than it can consume) can be built for the same cost as an average house?

YOU'VE AUTHORED *IDEA HOUSE: FUTURE OF TROPICAL LIVING TODAY, AND MORE RECENTLY, THE SKYCOURT AND SKYGARDEN: GREENING THE URBAN HABITAT... BUT FOR YOURSELF, WHAT BOOKS DO YOU SEE AS MUST-READS OR EYE-OPENERS?*

As an academic, I'm a prolific reader. For my books, academic papers and for when I'm researching for my TV series, I read a lot of classic reference material regarding the history of cities and architecture – such as David Watkin's *A History of Western Architecture*. But when I'm reading for fun, or to glean lateral sources of inspiration, they can often be found outside the sphere of architecture. I'm currently reading *The Craftsman* by Richard Sennett. He's one of my heroes. He discusses the meaning of craft and explores craftsmanship in different industries ranging from goldsmithing during the medieval ages through to how Stradivarius became a master craftsman of violins, violas, cellos and double basses during the 18th century. I find it eye-opening to be able to find parallels between my craft, as a green architect, with the thought processes of other industry professionals historically. ■

FROM LEFT: CHIANG MAI'S PANYADEN SCHOOL; AYUTTHAYA'S WAT CHAIWATTANARAM; CHIANG MAI'S 137 PILLARS HOUSE