



PROF. JASON POMEROY'S GREEN AGENDA STARTS WITH CHANGING PERCEPTIONS, LOBBYING FOR GREEN ARCHITECTURE AND THEN FINALLY PRACTICING EACH AND EVERY SUSTAINABLE PRINCIPLE THROUGH HIS PORTFOLIO OF "GREEN PROJECTS".

BY SINDHU NAIR

PEOPLE MAKE THE CITIES



SKY GARDENS

Above: Prof. Pomeroy's role is to change perceptions; right: Newspark Residences, by Pomeroy's Studio with an innovative park and skygarden, part of a green orientated eco-township, located in Malaysia.



THE MESSENGER Above and left: As an academic and a practicing eco-architect, Prof. Pomeroy conveys knowledge on sustainable design through lectures, writings and even a television show called "City Time Traveller". Images taken from the TV show.

Singapore-based architect and TV personality Prof. Jason Pomeroy's tryst with sustainable design began from his childhood, when he started playing in his parents back garden, "a humble, yet lush green space with an abundance of flora, fauna and a pine tree". Prof. Pomeroy's early forays into sustainable architecture began when he learnt to build wigwam tents using timber branches as a frame, and his mother's bedsheets as the enclosure.

But the turning point that sealed his fate as an architect was a visit to St. Paul's Cathedral, when he was just eight. "I was blown away by the domed structure and the lofty interior of this amazing building," he says.

The craving for beautiful spaces in relation to the larger context of nature continues. "When studying architecture at Canterbury I was interested in how high-density cities, like Hong Kong and Singapore, try to salvage open space for social amenities and recreation. That led me to doing my research degree at the University of Cambridge, where I explored sky courts and sky gardens in tall buildings and high-density mixed-

-use developments," says Pomeroy. Working in a part of the world that allows him to utilise this knowledge and to see projects coming to fruition in some major Asian cities, such as Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Beijing, and Singapore, is part of his dream. He speaks to *Glam Interiors and Design* about the sustainable factors he has incorporated in each of his projects and his ideas of bringing those concepts to the Middle East.

What are your most memorable completed projects?

As an architect, I would have to say designing the first embodied zero-carbon prototype house in Asia, which was a reinterpretation of the traditional Malay Kampong House. This spurred further research and development into carbon negative design, whereby the dwellings effectively act as power stations generating more energy than they consume. As an academic, I am proud of my research into the role of sky courts and sky gardens as part of a vertical urban theory for 21st century hybrid cities - once again, drawing rigorous lessons learnt in reducing

carbon footprints by using nature as a means of ambient temperature reduction, carbon sequestration, rain water and pollutant absorption. All the while embracing their socio-spatial properties as alternative social spaces. This also satisfies another project that I'm proud of - the publication of my second book, 'The Sky court and Sky garden: greening the urban habitat' (Routledge 2014) which summarises 10 years of my research. Finally, as a TV presenter, being given a second season of 'City Time Traveller', and being able to share with the public how people maketh the city; and not vice versa.

What are the biggest challenges of pushing the green agenda in Asia?

I think the biggest challenge isn't actually physical, but it is changing people's perceptions about green architecture. The stigma of green design costing 30% 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



Which is (are) your favourite building(s)? And why?

I have so many favourite buildings that span centuries, but each have their special place in my mind as they take into account a particular point in life that has left an indelible, transformative mark. The calmness and tranquillity of Canterbury cathedral coupled with the smell of burning incense and the cold touch of stone and marble was a comforting experience during those pressured times at Canterbury School of Architecture. The sheer scale of the Beijing Olympic stadium and its awe-

buildings. There is an awakening that the costs initially associated with green design are marginal (1-5% 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 based on fact and reason. This will help de-mystify green architecture. Who would have thought that Pomeroy Studio's Carbon Negative Villa in Singapore (i.e. generating more energy than it can consume), the B House, can be built for the same cost as an average house? We are fortunate enough to be in a position to make affordable green design a reality and are able to demonstrate this through our portfolio of green projects.

How can your 'style' of sustainable design be adapted to the Middle East, specifically Qatar? Which buildings in the Middle East would you say have the principles of sustainable architecture?

I guess our cities, buildings; landscapes and interiors do have a particular look and style, and have often been described as almost nautical given their white curvilinear surfaces and sleek timber

“The ability to distil the essence of past building traditions and their socio-cultural and environmental responses to the local context provide the basis for passive environmental and culturally sensitive design for the present.”

terraces that are punctuated with sky gardens. Yet, they are born out of a process that balances a creative vigour with an academic rigour and embrace what the Studio refers to as the 3Ds – to ‘Distil, Design and Disseminate’. The ability to distil the essence of past building traditions and their socio-cultural and environmental responses to the local context provides the basis for passive environmental and culturally sensitive design for the present. This is underpinned by rigorous social, spatial and cultural research as well as environmental modelling. The lessons learnt from such endeavours are then disseminated through books and lectures for the benefit of future generations. Because it's a process rather than a style, it means that our designs can bear the essence of Qatari culture. The best examples of sustainable architecture in the Middle East are often those from the past – the ancient city of Isfahan, which typifies the Chahar Bagh quadrilateral garden and courtyard-orientated development; or the works of Hassan Fathy immediately spring to mind.



ONLY GREEN SPACES Above and inset: The B house by Pomeroy Studio; and the Trump Tower at Century City, which will be the tallest residential skyscraper in the Philippines when completed in 2016. Sky terraces and extended box ledges of differing sizes function as shading devices to counteract the greatest impact of the sun whilst giving the tower its iconic peeling effect.



THE IDEA HOUSE Commissioned by Sime Darby, The Idea House is an environmentally perfect house that leaves no carbon footprint on this planet. It generates more energy that it uses, which means that it is more than a carbon-zero house, it is a carbon-minus house.



inspiring form instilled fear in me as I walked across the structure of the roof to get a glimpse of the Beijing skyline from the top whilst filming my TV series, 'City Time Traveller'. The Menara Mesiniaga building in Kuala Lumpur by Ken Yeang was my first experience of an eco skyscraper that tested his early ideas, and highlighted the potential for a commercial form of architecture that can push the boundaries of sustainable design. It's not just buildings that inspire but also the places, and Venice never ceases to amaze me. The ability to negotiate the narrow alleys and waterways to eventually arrive at the grand Piazza San Marco is a marvel that will always entertain, inspire and induce contemplation.

Other architects who have influenced you and your work?

An interest in the abstraction and reinterpretation of cultural practices and traditions of people, coupled with the climatic features of a place, meant that

I spent a lot of time studying the design works of Charles Correa and Ken Yeang and the writings of Kenneth Frampton. This was in the interests of creating architecture with a regional identity that bore the essence of a culture, yet did not cross into the realms of pastiche or fantasy. There is also the influence of places I have worked or studied. Perhaps the polarised educational environments of Canterbury and Cambridge acknowledged my passion for balancing the creative aspect of design for the built environment with an objective approach to generating design solutions that were based on fact and reason. Both institutions provided a balance between the creative and the academic, and an absorption into sustainable design before the notion of geographically sensitive green architecture became en vogue.

If you could choose skills from signature architects, which ones would you choose from Sir Norman Foster, Louis Kahn, I.M.Pei, Le Corbusier,



CONCEPT DESIGN Jahabab, a mixed-use development designed by Pomeroy Studio in Penang, Malaysia. The development includes low and medium-cost housing, a retail bazaar, a hotel and a religious school, community centre, and incorporates passive design techniques that maximise natural light and ventilation, thus lowering energy usage.

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 design method from the macro scale of the city to the micro scale of the dwelling.

Tell us more about your role as a presenter on television?

As an academic and a practicing eco-architect, the lecture theatre is a means of being able to convey knowledge on sustainable design. This naturally transfers to the books that I've written. People who have read my books and attended my talks suggested that I should consider bringing such ideas to a broader audience, hence the medium of TV. I met a producer who in the same instance was interested in creating an architecture travel series. I suggested a format that would allow the exploration of two capitals, old and new, thus giving 12 episodes.

These cities would then be explored in terms of their past, present and future. After several discussions between the channel and ourselves, the format was agreed, the cities selected, and the buildings picked. They wanted someone who could then be able to communicate the story from an expert viewpoint as a practicing architect or an academic. I have the fortune of straddling both and so have become 'The City Time Traveller'. We have completed two seasons of the show, and I also had the privilege of completing another architecture series called 'City Redesign', and a short for the BBC – both focused on Singapore architecture as the nation turns 50. Other architecture / design-related programmes are in the pipeline.

“Ken Yeang worked tirelessly to promote the role of ecology intertwined with the built environment in order to enhance the ecosystem as well as people’s lives.”

Frank Lloyd Wright and Frank Gehry?

Whilst these architects all have their place in architectural history (some more than others in my view), I'd probably look to a different set of architects for my environmental / evidenced-based design ethos. From your list, Foster comes closest with his particular take on hi-tech architecture that appeals to my modular construction sensibilities. I would far rather replace some of the above with people like Ken Yeang who have worked tirelessly to promote the role of ecology intertwined with the built environment in order to enhance the ecosystem as well as people's lives.

What city would you recommend to travel to for its architecture?

I've had the privilege of travelling the world extensively, but the more you travel, the more you realize how little

you actually know, which is an amazingly humbling experience. The places I visited have spanned and withstood the test of time. They have ranged from the 7th century ancient city of Varanasi, rich in spiritual content, to the 21st century city of Tokyo that is a hotbed of technological ingenuity laid upon centuries-old socio-cultural practices. I've also seen the majestic Palaces of Hue, and the magical ruins of Ayutthaya. What transcends architecture though is an indigenous civilisation's understanding of basic environmental and social needs embodied in many of these historical buildings. Shelter from the elements, natural light, natural ventilation, locally sourced materials, folklore influence and a spatial planning as to who can come in and occupy a particular space, and who must stay outside, can be found in all. This insight into how people once