

The Inspiration Issue!

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PROPERTY
NEW VS RESALE
WHAT SINGLES SHOULD BE CHOOSING

YES, YOU CAN HAVE A BATHTUB IN AN HDB FLAT!

life in the GREEN LANE

text JASON POMEROY
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B House, two landed properties in Bukit Timah, Singapore.

LONDON, 7.45AM SATURDAY

I am awoken by an eager eight-year-old who is about to give me an education in creating buildings using a gaming software. I'm staying with Mario, my life-long best bud, his beautiful partner Samantha, and their adorable son, Ethan. I came back to the UK to give a lecture at Nottingham University, only to find that the ghastly weather ripped trees out of the ground and laid them across rail tracks - effectively disabling national rail and cancelling said lecture. This means an extended stay in London with friends and family before heading off to Venice to give a similar lecture.

I give my young architect the brief to design me a house and am soon getting into the swing of requesting optimised natural light, natural ventilation, sturdy durable materials sourced locally, courtyards and lightwells. As my obtuse demands increase, I find that my young architect seems to be taking everything in his stride, as if he was simply taking my order at a 'drive-thru' diner. Is that it? he asks. Yes...for now, I reply.

I sit back and relax with Mario and Sam, tucking into a full English breakfast with a spot of bubbly on the side, oblivious to the machinations of my young architect beaver away on the I-pad at the corner of the kitchen bar counter. Before I could even finish my second cup of coffee and open my copy of FT Weekend, I get a tap on the shoulder.

"Can I show you now?" he asks politely.

He shows me a three dimensional model of the house, a pavilion that defies gravity given that it is supported by a sole structural staircase, but is flooded with natural light, has the requisite openness to provide natural ventilation, is constructed of solid masonry and glass for both thermal performance and durability whilst not compromising the amazing views that he has also been able to sculpt in the landscape. I look at Mario, and then at my young architect. I'm impressed. Applied Technology to conceive space is an amazing thing - but needs to be used sparingly.

When I studied architecture, drawing boards and isograph pens were the convention. Three dimensional drawings

were created using said pens on tracing paper, with the further aid of a 30 degree or 45 degree set square to create hand-drawn isometric, axonometric, orthographic, and two-point perspective drawings that sought to convey the three dimensionality of the spaces being envisioned by the author. Whilst a great way to be able to communicate ideas to your built environment professional peers, such means of representation were still not so easily understood by the layperson. The advent of computer aided design in both two and three dimensions not only revolutionised the labourious manual drawing workload but provided an opportunity to cut, slice, peel and peer into spaces - thus affording clients a greater understanding of the volumes being created for him or her.

Fast forward many years, and we see that spatial software is not just for the educated built environment professional anymore, but percolates into popular culture. Building complete 'sim cities' using software is as much to do with conceiving spaces as it is about creating Utopian / Dystopian fantasy urban habitats. It has become so straightforward that an untrained eight-year-old is now able to conceive space. Is this a good thing? Absolutely. It means that youngsters and dare I say older clients too, are able to use such tools to convey their ideal spatial experiences and preferences

visually to their friends / design teams respectively.

The difficulty comes when the untrained start to think that they can design the buildings and interiors themselves, based on the assumption that their three dimensional blocks of space will actually survive the ravages of social, economic, environmental, spatial, cultural and technological influences. As they say, a little knowledge can be dangerous. Designers similarly need to be mindful that technology does not overtake the creative process. The basics of form, mass, texture, proportion coupled with the core principles of sustaining humanity, the natural and the built environment serve as important parameters when designing, and provide the foundation from which to be able to create places that can engage society emotionally. Relying on technology runs the risk of design by numbers that leaves people feeling cold about where they inhabit - invariably reducing the idea of place to nothing more than space.

A balance is therefore needed. The ability for the designer to conceptualise and generate designs that can be tested, honed and refined through the sparing use of technology provides the necessary balance between the creative and the technocratic, and makes for more robust, sustainable solutions. Those that can balance the two will go far...and I'm hoping for big things from my young architect. ●



Left Jason's host family in London, Mario, Ethan and Sam. Right Young Ethan's rendering. Bottom left Festival Tower, from Jason's vertical urbanism research.



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