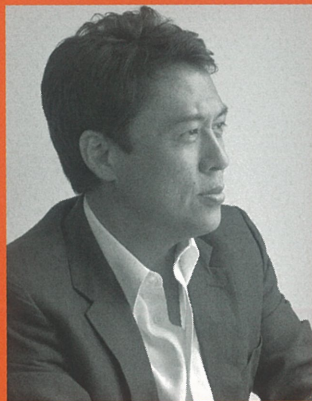
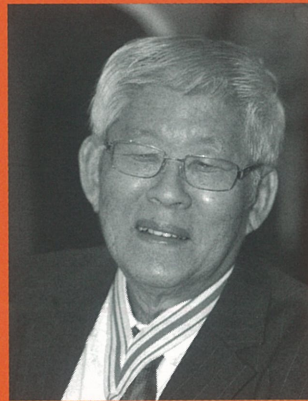


# Discourse



Chan Soo Khian



Tay Kheng Soon

## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Written by Teo Yee Chin, MSIA

This is a conversation that started back in 2001, when Chan Soo Khian (Soo Chan, as referred to in ArchDaily) was invited to lead a tropical workshop for third year students in the School of Architecture in National University of Singapore.

The workshop was intended to give students a hands-on building experience while tackling the exigencies of our tropical climate. The results of this workshop featured in this magazine (then called Singapore Architect, or SA) drew a sharp response from Tay Kheng Soon on how the box, a key component of the workshop brief, was a slavish derivative of modern architecture from the west. This initiated an exchange that played out in public over the next two issues of SA.

Since that time, both have moved on. If you talk to Kheng Soon today, you will hear his acceptance of architecture as a mere service industry. You will hear how architects should all be more concerned about the macro scale (macro being the largest, after meso, micro and nano) - the dynamics of global politics, economy and culture that fundamentally define how Singapore needs to operate.

Soo Khian, on the other hand, as expressed in an interview with The Straits Times some years ago, has left the doubts of tropicality behind. He has become fully assured in the underlying philosophy, methods and products of his architectural practice, thus enabling SCDA to develop their works locally and overseas with a clear focus. But clearly the

fundamental dichotomy has endured to this day. Seventeen years on, the debate is re-ignited. We gladly reproduce here the conversation of the past, and also publish, for the first time, the exchange that is, even as we read, currently unfolding.

For today's young architects, the rectilinear language is not in question, and for sure there are also other geometries in play now, considering the possibilities that parametric softwares have afforded us. If anything, the rectilinear is the neutral base onto which additional complexities, narratives of sustainability, community and tropicality, are being overlaid. This is practised by all the successful architects of the day, not just SCDA.

Perhaps the landscape is now flat, dehistoricised - looking back to acknowledge sources has become unimportant. Correspondingly, influences received are not weighted - one instagram post is just as valid as the next. For this very reason, even if the box appears to have won, it is particularly urgent to read this conversation now, for architects to question anew the identity of our architecture.

The Singapore Architect would like to express our gratitude to Soo Khian and Kheng Soon for agreeing to publicise this exchange. We applaud their generosity and open-mindedness, and most of all their commitment to a vigorous atmosphere of discourse.

## DISCOURSE

## PAST CONVERSATIONS

## BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION  
TO THE 2001  
TROPICAL  
WORKSHOP  
IN SDE, NUS,  
BY LOW BOON  
LIANG

YEAR  
2001

Year 2001 – Neo-Tropicality

## THE TROPICAL WORKSHOP SERIES

At the Department of Architecture, School of Design & Environment, NUS

“Conceptually, architectural aesthetics has been dominated by the visual language of solids and voids, volume and mass, and surface and plane. Because of the equable climate, the building enclosure does not need to be the absolute limiting barrier. The wall is therefore not the main feature... not the most important architectural element in a building. The roof is the main feature.”

Tay Kheng Soon, in *Line Edge and Shade* by Robert Powell, 1997.

For the past five years, the Architecture school has been conducting a series of 6-day workshops for the graduating students of the BA(Arch) Course, led by a prominent, or a young generation of practising architects that inspired, stretched and explored notions of ‘tropicality’ beyond the confines of the normal studio design project.

The topics/projects have evolved through the years – they may be driven by specific climatic and site context, material and construction aspects, to lifestyle and other more ‘theoretical’ or speculative issues. The workshops have ranged from studio-based programmes, on-site work, to hands-on constructions. Last year (2000), the workshop leader (Mok Wei Wei) organised a programme of fieldwork (public and expert interviews/surveys) of 4–6 different issues exploring the condition of ‘tropicality’ in Singapore (HDB void decks and public areas, pedestrian network and atrium spaces in the CBD, Orchard Road and Chinatown, green corridors and transportation corridors) resulting in an audio-visual presentation from each group held at the Gallery of The Substation. The year before (1999), the workshop leader (Ho Kwon Cjan) presented a scenario to the class of groups of people shipwrecked on an island (several real sites chosen on Bintan island) and requiring the building of basic shelters with limited selection of

materials (the actual work was done on 1:10 scale in the studio). Another year, under the leadership of Tay Kheng Soon, the students were divided into 3-member groups camping out at the Scouts Camp at Sarimbun – each group was again given a selection of materials in which they had to construct actual shelters with 3 functional spaces and tested in actual field conditions.

Students appear to enjoy projects that can take them outside of the studio for a good part of the time, but that does not necessarily preclude studio-based projects or a combination of both. But it is essential that a realistic set of goals can be met for the short duration of the workshop, with the results ‘visible’ or appreciable at the conclusion of the workshop.

The theme for the 2001 workshop in the series was “Neo-Tropicality” (see box). It was led by Chan Soo Khian of the firm SCDA, assisted by Rene Tan and the tutors from the department. The guest jury included Ernesto Bedmar, Sonny Chan, Kerry Hill, and Robert Powell.

The 16 projects submitted for review showed an engagement with the subject of ‘Neo-Tropicality’ running the gamut from concerns with spatial (and physical) boundaries of tropical architecture to more

## ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore  
Architect #210  
The Tropical Workshop  
Series written by Low  
Boon Liang, 2001

by Low Boon Liang

**The jury at the Neo Tropicality review, February 2001**

The theme for the 2001 workshop in the series was 'Neo - Tropicality'. It was led by Chan Soo Kian of firm SCDA, assisted by Rene Tan and tutors from the department. The guest jury included Ernesto Bedmar, Sonny Chan, Kerry Hill and Robert Powell.



experiential (and phenomenological) approaches. The scale of the projects (though physically limited to two 3m cubes) ranged from singular functional spaces and typologies that may be 'expanded' by accretion and repetition (multiple-cellular units), to those of less determinate use and limit (and extended by implication through 'borrowed' or 'shared' spaces). Some of the proposals resolved in specific material and construction parts, while others were open-ended in their pursuit of systems and 'poetic' interpretation.

In the proposal submitted by the group "Hinged Skins" for example (see box), the solution was very much a simple system of screens made flexible by duplication and hinging, and dependant on a variety of material and porosity to respond to temporal and environmental changes. It had an abstract quality through its use of the generic rectilinear plane that was a means to enclose, define, colonise, and extend space beyond the confines of the primary cubes (perhaps in more resolute instance, two 'rooms' and the 'compound') – thus, the *extra*-unit relationship (as opposed to the more usual preoccupation with the *intra*-unit). Hill thought that it was a simple, elegant solution which concept was easy to grasp. Powell praised it as 'not skin-deep,' but going beyond mere cosmetic application through the skin's spatial extension. Sonny Chan agreed that the movable 'skin'

provided more than 'layering' but added a new dimension in redefining interior-exterior relationship. Bedmar, however, felt that the proposal relied too much on the variety of material and the need to move parts rather than allow the space to be expressed through the movement of the person.

Another proposal ("Collector of Elements") emphasised the experiential qualities of a 'tropical' space (taking its inspiration from Steven Holl's Cranbrook Institute of Science). The poetic interpretation of this submission was a contemplative space derived from the judicious and finely scaled use of three interposing elements of rock, timber/concrete, and water, and placed in counterpoint to integrate light, movement and sound (see box). The neutrality of context and function (Rene Tan: "Can this be installed in Finland, or Argentina?") precisely allow the subjective interpretation of the tropical variants of light, sound, smell, movement and haptic qualities different from another. The imbedded meanings transcend the physical form. Bedmar argued that its beauty lay in approach taken by team, while Hill attributed its success to its simplicity and subtlety. Chan Soo Khian commended the sensitive exploration of materiality, scale and crafting of the model.

ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore Architect #210  
The Tropical Workshop  
Series written by Low Boon Liang, 2001

## BACKGROUND

BRIEF FOR  
TROPICAL  
WORKSHOP  
WRITTEN BY  
CHAN SOO  
KHIAN AND  
LOW BOON  
LIANG

YEAR  
2001

## THE 2001 TROPICAL WORKSHOP – NEO-TROPICALITY

### Objective

The objective is to explore the idea of 'tropicality' beyond the commonly known aspects and solutions that we see around us today.

Students are required to go beyond the typical weather related repertory of tropical architectural elements like the 'screen', the 'canopy', 'pitch-roofs', etc. In other words, students are expected to search for solutions that are **spatially and tectonically related** – open plan, interlocking sections, nature of enclosure, etc. In addition to dealing with the empirical concerns of tropical architecture, students will be required to develop in parallel other architectural design issues such as space, material, texture, scale, order, sustainability, etc.

### Design Task

Students are to design a 'tropical space' within a volume not to exceed 2 modules of 3m x 3m x 3m. These cubic spaces can be combined horizontally, stacked vertically, set apart or may intersect. There is no restriction as to how one interprets the notion of tropical space, or the programme within it, or the amount of construction within it. The only constraint is that the design does not exceed the confines of the specific imaginary volumes.

### Presentation requirements

The work done will be presented in *model form* (a 1:3 scale model of the overall design, and if appropriate, a larger-scale model of a detailed area integral with the design); a 1:20 scale **drawings** of 2 plans and 2 sections/elevations. The final (submission) drawings should be digital with predetermined common line weights and font sizes and typefaces. The materials used should be representative of real materials. Students are encouraged to explore the tectonic materials beyond those normally used in architectural scale models. These could include found objects, cast resins, metal meshes, industrial, prefabricated or off-the-shelf construction materials. Emphasis should be placed on connections and how different parts and materials come together.

### Leader

Chan Soo Khian

### Tutors

Chan Yew Lih, Chow Kok Leong, Li ShiQiao, Li Xiaodong, Vincent Lim, Low Boon Liang, Ruzica Stamenovic, Tse Swee Ling, Rene Tan

### Guest Jurors

Ernesto Bedmar, Sonny Chan, Kerry Hill, Robert Powell

Brief written by Chan Soo Khian and Low Boon Liang

## ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore  
Architect #210  
The Tropical Workshop  
Series written by Low  
Boon Liang, 2001

## BACKGROUND

PANEL  
DISCUSSION  
BY ROBERT  
POWELL,  
KERRY HILL,  
SONNY CHAN,  
RENE TAN  
AND  
CHAN SOO  
KHIAN

YEAR  
2001

# THE 2001 WORKSHOP AND GENERAL DISCOURSE IN TROPICAL ARCHITECTURE

A summary of the panel discussion at the end of the workshop  
(edited, and in no particular order):

- Robert Powell: "Tropicality" has come a long way in the last 15 years, from translating the vernacular (Jimmy Lim), re-thinking the environment (Tay Kheng Soon), to interpreting contemporary vernacular (William Lim) all dealt with different ways of looking at the proposals presented in the workshop represent some of these evolving ideas and discourse tropical architecture is no longer bamboo and atap, no longer just climate, but also the tactile and sensual qualities of tropical spaces.
- Kerry Hill: Architecture and its making becomes part of the actual world... so the nature of, and the selection of appropriate scale of the model is important... the most successful schemes of the workshop are those which stuck within the confines of the brief, and taken two or three simple ideas (whether it is about skin, or about emotional aspects of tropicality, and so on) to develop and work through clearly... they do not over complicate and are not all things to all man... they progress cumulatively... determines the emotional 'reading' of that space.
- Sonny Chan: The primacy of natural ventilation for architecture in the tropics continues to be relevant while focus has shifted as architects look for direction within their own confines... the more successful schemes included one that looked at the use of verandah in a new way.
- Rene Tan: The workshop is an opportunity to raise questions and not necessarily arriving at the answers... is there such a thing as 'tropical architecture'? how is it different?
- Chan SK: Time does not make for better (tropical) architecture... not just theorising or the notion of representation... or hanging on to the vernacular or exploration of universal and globalised concepts... Eric Lye puts it to a question of 'identity' - that one should be in touch with one's own cultural roots rather than globalised society, and go beyond representation to a common language of tropical architecture.
- Ernesto Bedmar: The best schemes are those that understand the experiential aspects in tropical architecture... the movement through (tropical) space that constantly and subtly shapes and
- Kerry Hill: Not to the extent of a loss of sense of 'place'... as in building in the local craft and material.

## ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore  
Architect #210  
The Tropical Workshop  
Series written by Low  
Boon Liang, 2001

CONVERSATION  
BETWEENTAY KHENG  
SOON  
AND  
CHAN SOO  
KHIANYEAR  
2001NEO-TROPICALITY  
or NEO COLONIALISM?

The #210 issue of Singapore Architect disturbed me a lot. Particularly the report on – Neo-Tropicality – The Tropical Workshop Series at the Department of Architecture, School of Design and Environment, NUS led by Chan Soo Khian. I was disturbed because of the unconscious underlying formalistics in the way the exercise was framed for the students.

To understand my being disturbed, I have to go back to 1959 when our school of architecture first started. The issue then was tropicality. It still is. This is how elusive the subject is. The difference is that then, we were in the throes of decolonisation. The issue of tropicality in architecture design was therefore part of the context of freeing oneself from the political and taste-dictates of our masters. Today, it seems that tropicality is more of a fashion statement.

Times of course have changed although tropicality itself has not. And there is now a new-world order, "Internationalism" is now called "Globalisation" and there is little resistance to the hegemony of taste, of the rich, the powerful and the highly publicised, i.e., from the West and from Japan. In my time, Internationalism began at home. To be internationalist is to be ourselves first. With my background, I am therefore disturbed how easily, even eagerly, today's young and sometimes not-so-young architects emulate, no, are so easily "inspired" by the master designs of their self-elected mentors. They see no irony in it. In my eyes it is Neo-Colonialism! It is slavish! Why should we volunteer to be publicists, ciphers, agents and amplifiers for others? Nothing wrong with learning from others, but neglecting one's own agenda is serious neglect. And claiming "Neo-Tropicality", as new territory, is it not a falsification, covering old grounds with new turf?

Please do not mistake my tone. I do not doubt the sincerity, the dedication to excellence, the sensitivity and the skill in making convincing sensuality out of the materiality of form and space. It is the seeming unconsciousness of the dictates of design language that I am concerned about. When Soo Khian and others less explicit, extol the virtues of interlocking rectilinear cubic,

forms define the "task" for students as contained in a 3m cube, it is no wonder that they respond with variable planes and 'hinged skins'. This confirms that the subliminal message contained in the cube was transmitted and received. Are those involved aware that they have perhaps unwittingly legitimised the primacy of the cube and the surface plane as the language of form and space applied to the problem of tropical aesthetics notwithstanding the physics of tropical design? Is the claim to newness deliberate or deluded arrogance in not acknowledging the 'Neo-Plastic' origins in the exercises of the 1920s in Europe by Theo Van Doesburg, Georges Vantongerloo, Malevich, Gerrit Rietveld, Piet Mondrian et al, conscious? If it is not conscious, it should become so because, it will then bring some honesty and maybe modesty to those 'servants' who emulate their masters to become their own man so to

Today, it seems that tropicality is more of a fashion statement.

**Are those involved aware that they have perhaps unwittingly legitimised the primacy of the cube and the surface plane as the language of form and space applied to the problem of tropical aesthetics notwithstanding the physics of tropical design?**

speak. Recycling their ideas and calling it "neo-tropicality" does not disguise the derivative origins of the 'new' designs nor is legitimacy gained simply by allying to the righteous quest - tropicality. The

limitations of emulation should be recognised for what it is, studious efforts at learning, no more.

Having got it off my chest, I have to say that the 'new' work is skilful and I prefer it to the kind of "karaoke or obiang architecture", legitimised by 'post modernism' that has so contaminated our architectural space. In principle there is no difference. Both are slavishly derivative. And so, my regret is that the 'new' style defers and deflects the quest. The quest for a contemporary architectural aesthetic of tropicality in our own terms and none other. Making beautiful buildings by celebrating cubes and planes is definitely not the approach to the development of a new language. It is a cop out. Worse if it misleads students and promotes consumption of the 'exotic' in the way, the magazine "Wallpaper" does.

ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore Architect #211  
Commentary written  
by Tay Kheng Soon,  
2001

CONVERSATION  
BETWEENTAY KHENG  
SOON  
AND  
CHAN SOO  
KHIANYEAR  
2001

## WHO IS AFRAID OF THE NEO-TROPICAL ?

• ASKS CHAN SOO KHIAN  
> TAY KHENG SOON REPLIES

Chan Soo Khian writes in response to Tay Kheng Soon's commentary ("Neo-Tropicality or Neo-Colonialism?") published in our last issue #211. Tay in turn furnishes his counter-reply\*

**CSK:** Tay Kheng Soon's commentary in Singapore Architect #211 provides for a catalyst to a much needed discourse in Architecture.

**> TKS:** I am pleased that Soo Khian shares this need for discourse.

**CSK:** My response will be in 2 parts – (1) the intent of the tropical workshop at NUS; (2) neo tropicality and the formal design language of SCDA Architects defined. The agenda for the workshop at NUS was two-fold:

First, it was meant to further discussions on tropicality through the exploration of the treatment of in-between spaces and ambiguous boundaries that are an integral response to the architecture and climate of the tropics and to further explore the idea of materiality through investigations on the permeable skin, the perforated surface, the tectonic screen – fixed, manually or mechanically operable.

Second, it was meant to consider defining a new tropicality.

I must first reframe the intent of the Tropical Workshop as outlined in the brief given to the students.

- The task was to explore tropicality beyond the elements what we commonly associate with tropical architecture, shading, cross ventilation, landscape etc.
- The 3 x 3 x 3 metre cube was the volumetric limits of the exercise – not an attempt to "legitimise the primacy and the surface plane of the cube" as Kheng Soon alleges. Many schemes were not pure cubes. It was to contain the scale of the presentation.

**> TKS:** Were it to be so innocent, there is little to say, but there is a context to consider. Non-adherence to the cube may not be creative rebellion but inaptitude.

- The 27m<sup>3</sup> volume makes the exercise viable – students had to construct within the given limits. Students were encouraged to further explore the notion of the tropical through material and spatial constructs. The intent was to engage the students in the process of making, and in doing so, familiarise themselves with issues of structure and material.
- To explore alternative materials, technology, found objects and incorporate them into the project.
- To facilitate discussions on Basic architectural issues such as universal ideals of scale, composition and proportion.

**> TKS:** And what might these be in the presence

of an accomplished practitioner of the rectilinear composition?

**CSK:** Through these exercises, students experienced first hand the essence of the chosen materials as they integrated different components together at full scale and explored how various parts come together through detailed drawings and through actual construction of the projects.

In this sense, Kheng Soon may have missed the real intent of the workshop. He has superficially associated what he perceives to be implied formal preferences in the exercises. The students are conscious about the underlying intent and to their credit, they are able to decide for themselves if they are coerced into a hidden agenda.

There was no intent to legitimise any particular geometry or design methodology or to push a certain aesthetic.

**> TKS:** The best of students are of course never coerced, but it is sobering to realise that in the short history of architecture in Singapore, every architecture movement and new style emanating from the dominant architecture media are avidly replicated in Singapore in some form or other over all these years.

**CSK:** We are at the tail end of the tide of post-modernity and deconstructivism, the former, a lesser by-product of which Kheng Soon terms as "obiang" architecture. In the relatively short history of Singapore's Post-Independence architecture, how, if at all, can we differentiate between a return to an architecture that bolsters conservative tendencies – (of a revivalist orientation of traditional, vernacular or regionalist architecture) or a more place and material specific new modern tropical architecture? Is the term "Neo-tropicality" an account coined in support of the architectural status quo of the recent past or an account to challenge it?

**> TKS:** The critical issue is language, design language not style. Style is simply particular usage of language. Of course, new materials and technologies dictate appropriate responses. The issue is not a return to the past in pastiche manner but the challenge of articulating a new language appropriate to new materials and the new times in the context of geography. Certainly, new styles would arise out of the new language. Conversely, no new style can arise from old language.

**CSK:** I would argue that the "neo-tropical" is not a disjuncture with what has been happening in the recent past. It is a continuation of the consciousness of tropicality first raised by Kheng Soon and his generation of architects;

## ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore Architect #212  
Who Is Afraid of The  
Neo-Tropical? written  
by Chan Soo Khian  
and Tay Kheng Soon,  
2001

CONVERSATION  
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SOON  
AND  
CHAN SOO  
KHIANYEAR  
2001

Jimmy Lim's reinterpretation vernacular, William Lim's contemporary vernacular etc.

> TKS: There is a great difference in my insistence on language rather than style. To lump us together is to gloss over the fundamental difference between theirs and my position.

CSK: There is already a new generation of architects in Singapore who work within the framework of the new tropical. The new tropical (neo tropical) is not about timber-slatted buildings or about rectilinear forms.

> TKS: Why then the persistent rectilinearity?

CSK: It is about a continuing process concerned with dealing with the tropical climate with new structural and formal devices.

> TKS: My complaint is that while there is this new generation of architects, they are using the same old rectilinear language. Thus, while there are "new formal devices", in which I would include transparent planes made up of timber or metal slats, where is the exploration of a new language of form which surely the ambition for a "neo tropical design" might seek to achieve? Instead, what I see is merely a tropicalising of neo-plastic and De Stijl architecture of the 20's recycled into the tropics.

CSK: The resulting products, by different architects while easily lumped together because of certain visual commonalities in the form, are in fact very spatial, tectonic and different in many ways. These buildings tend to favour the free plan and consciously engage Landscape within tightly defined lots.

> TKS: This effort, in itself is no evidence of any ambition for a new tropical formal language but skilful or less skilful adaptations of the old design language to the tropics, no more, despite the rhetoric.

CSK: What is troubling in Kheng Soon's article is the moral high ground from which he prescribes the virtues of the approach during "his time" in addressing the issues of building in the tropics. I subscribe to the fact that it is time to leave the baggage of our colonial past behind. We should not be reactionary. What does he mean when he extols that we should search for tropical architecture "in our own terms"?

> TKS: By this, I mean a commitment and courage to search for a new language that's all...

CSK: In the end, the architect's ideas have to be realised and his ideas are judged against his built works. K.K. Hospital, Marine Parade Office Building – are they not "international" in approach?

> TKS: They are attempts at evolving the new language as opposed to a premature capitulation to the dictates of metropolitan taste.

CSK: Are they themselves in "our own terms" and what exactly are those terms?

> TKS: These terms are design linguistics. My comment on tropicality is not borne on a moral high horse but out of exasperation with the facile and supine recourse to European design baggage. The success or otherwise of my personal achievement in architecture is not the issue, the issue is the proposition I wrote in, "The Architectural Aesthetics of Tropicality," in "Line, Edge and Shade". What I enjoin my students and professional colleagues to do is to strive for a new language. It is all too easy to succumb to old ones especially when they sell and mark one out as up-to-date in the eyes of the cloying media.

CSK: I do not feel the need to be apologetic for the fact that there is a recognisable formal language in our works. That is the deliberate result of a consistently rational approach, a clear expression of space and structure and a preoccupation with clarity of assemblage and fabrication.

> TKS: Yes, but has it to be in terms of the preferred or privileged European design language of the 20s? This, of course is Soo Khian's right and no one can object to his choice. But I suspect that he claims more than this and this is where I would engage him in discussion.

CSK: I see no virtue in a pliable anonymous architecture or one that self-consciously tries to assert a superficial national or cultural identity.

> TKS: This I totally agree. But this is not the choice. This kind of stylistic jingoism, we can all do without. And in that sense, I appreciate that Soo Khian does not do.

CSK: I do not feel compelled currently to address the socio-political concerns in architecture in Singapore, especially if there are hardly any politics in the first place.

> TKS: How right to be disdainful of a politics that is moribund where it involves the arts, but the issue of design language surpasses any such socio-political discourse. Language is the means to articulate form and space using the 'syntax' of materials, fabrication, climate and functionalities. Language is thus an issue of soulful utterance arising from an intense struggle for self-knowledge and identification to place. If one is a Universalist, locality is only relevant as a political not poetic source; Universalist style is the politic in a polity, which sees the West as exotic. If Soo Khian can state that as a Universalist, he transcends place,

## ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore Architect #212  
Who is Afraid of The Neo-Tropical? written by Chan Soo Khian and Tay Kheng Soon, 2001



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BETWEENTAY KHENG  
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AND  
CHAN SOO  
KHIANYEAR  
2001

then there is nothing to discuss with him though the issue of language remains an issue of intense concern for those whose poetics is rooted to place.

**CSK:** We have reaffirmed our belief in our design process through a clarity of language and material coherence and a commitment to be place specific.

> **TKS:** Surely, a commitment to "place-specific" must go beyond the rendering of the local in terms of the metropolitan definition of the universal if it is not to be mere token. But, of course, this is my own bias. This is precisely the emancipation I am seeking in the emancipation of design language. To locate this quest in socio-political terms maligns the deep emotional entanglement with place this involves.

**CSK:** A clear agenda informed by spatial plasticity, materiality and structural clarity transcends mere style.

> **TKS:** Yes again, but it is not style I am concerned with, it is language, that is the slippery beast that the issue is.

**CSK:** A "signature style" implies a shallowness and facadism.

> **TKS:** I would not let the issue of language slip away so easily as a discourse on style and facadism as this evades the issue yet again.

**CSK:** It is resilient enough to be able to absorb cultural and climatic nuances of place.

> **TKS:** Yes, but, I have to say again, that the terms of the privileged language has to be questioned.

**CSK:** It is clear now that Singapore in particular is an emerging global city. The search now is not necessarily for a unique identity, it is a search for an architecture that speaks of a universal idiom with local relevance. It is the common language of classic modern architecture tempered with culture and custom, climate and construction without the anonymity of late modern architecture.

> **TKS:** I presume this means blithe acceptance of the hegemony of Western taste. This is one's choice of course. But, I had used the term "cop-out" to describe my reading of that position in my earlier essay but I now revise it to read "opt-out", as more accurately reflecting the presumption of universalism in Soo Khian's position. My regret is that this position sweeps aside any quest for authentic sensibilities derivable from the poetics of any place and subjugates this to the dictates of metropolitan linguistic terms. Indeed, this is the aesthetic high horse one has seriously to object to!

**CSK:** The Workshop at NUS by coining the term "neo-tropical" had the motive not only to restore but also to challenge the current status of tropicality. We are, in no way, claiming a higher or a totally new ground. However, it is timely to challenge certain comfortable notions of the all-important issue of identity usually tied to the vernacular. What is Singapore's vernacular anyway? Is it really the colonial Black & White Houses and the traditional "Shophouses"? Aren't these themselves "re-interpretation" from the past colonial architects schooled in the neo-classical and Beaux-arts tradition of architecture, adapting the vocabulary of classical architecture to the climate and cultures of the place?

> **TKS:** But this is precisely the problem. It is the presumed 'rightness' of the primacy of the metropolitan language that any artist of the ground must struggle to be released from. It is a servility that leads to sterility. Thus, I enjoin my fellow architects, especially talented ones to explore language itself and not be uncritical of the forms and styles in which all of us, in the metropolitan margins, are socialised.

**CSK:** Likewise, we should recognise the possibility of a continuing research based on a new modern interpretation of the tropical within the frame work of the ideals spelt out in the brief of the Workshop to address culture and place.

To do that, one needs to suspend disbelief for a moment and push for paradigm shifts within the matrix of what we already know about the issues of building within this region. It is with that spirit that we hope for the one unexpected solution from the Workshop to jolt us and to further our own research on the subject.

> **TKS:** A laudable ambition indeed! It is just such a hope that prompted me to write the critique on the "neo-tropicality" workshop. I hold out the expectation that a truly new tropicality is not a servile derivation of plane, solid and void but as I wrote, of "line edge and shade". Finally, let me thank Soo Khian for taking the trouble in responding and in allowing the discourse on the architectural aesthetics of tropicality to take place.

*\* Editorial note: The paragraphing of Chan Soo Khian's original standalone piece has been modified for clearer legibility of the subsequent point-by-point reply furnished by Tay Kheng Soon.*

## ARTICLE REF.

The Singapore Architect #212  
Who is Afraid of The Neo-Tropical? written by Chan Soo Khian and Tay Kheng Soon, 2001

## DISCOURSE

## CURRENT CONVERSATIONS

CONVERSATION  
BETWEENVLADIMIR  
BELOGOLOVSKY  
AND  
CHAN SOO KHIANYEAR  
2017

**Soo Chan:**  
“Architecture is  
about preserving  
a way of life, not  
simply introducing  
a new formal  
language.”

## PREFACE

*By combining such concepts as phenomenology, sustainability and formal exploration, which have become part of a particularly Singaporean conception of architecture, Soo Chan of SCDA Architects occupies an unusual niche within the architecture profession. To complement this wide range of interests, his firm also engages in a wide range of activities, working on architecture, landscape, and interiors projects, and even acting as its own developer on a number of occasions. In this latest interview from Vladimir Belogolovsky's "City of Ideas" column, Chan discusses the early experiences that led to his current understanding of architecture, and how the context of Singapore has affected his designs.*



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**Vladimir Belogolovsky: Was architecture on your mind from an early age? What was it that first attracted you to the discipline?**

**Soo Chan:** I was deeply influenced by the house I grew up in, the Khoo Kongsi compound in Penang, an island off the west coast of Malaysia. Khoo Kongsi was planned around a central communal courtyard where many generations of my extended family lived, and it is a UNESCO World Heritage site today. I can still picture the spatial and light qualities of the long and narrow house I grew up in, punctuated with open air wells. I remember the smell of fresh rain coming deep into the house on to the sunken courts, and the pockets of light and darkness in the house.

This childhood experience probably influenced my decision to study architecture and the kind of work I do. I remember always making things, playing with building blocks and

model kits. I also love to draw. My father was into development, which he did on the side, and I liked being at construction sites with him. Looking back, I really appreciate growing up being close to my family and to nature.

**VB: Could you touch on your experience studying architecture in the US?**

**SC:** I left for the US in 1980, right after high school when I was 18, and went first to Washington University in St. Louis and after completing my Bachelor of Arts there, I pursued architecture at Yale. After graduating, I stayed in the US for three years, working for various architects until 1990, before coming here to Singapore.

**VB: And who did you work for in the US?**

**SC:** A number of firms. First, for Allan Greenberg in New Haven.

**VB: The classicist... I am looking at your work and I am not quite seeing the connection...**

**SC:** Well, these were the 80s, the heyday of Postmodernism. Being at Yale I was also exposed to Deconstructivism and Poststructuralism. We had such critics as Rob Krier, Thomas Gordon Smith, Robert Venturi, Bob Stern, Philip Johnson.

**VB: Sounds like you were committed to the architecture of the times.**

**SC:** Totally and sincerely. I had a passion for classical architecture and Postmodernism was very attractive to me then.

**VB: And at Greenberg's office, were you drawing columns with Corinthian capitals?**

**SC:** And pediments, and entablatures with cornices and friezes, and acanthus leaves [Laughs]. And



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imagine, there were no computers back then. We had to draw all those details by hand. Then I moved to New York and started working for Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates. It was a transition to a new scale but still it was the Postmodernist period. I continued working on similar projects for a while even after coming here to Singapore. I started my own firm in 1995 after working on historic renovation projects for a few years, and then there was no more classical architecture.

**VB: What made you change?**

SC: Trips, exhibitions... I started traveling and I really liked projects by Schinkel, Rietveld, Kahn, Mies. I always liked these architects, but at the same time, I also wanted to go back to the basics and to me, classical architecture was a very important foundation. I like calm spaces. I was never drawn to Deconstructivism, which I saw in the famous

1988 Deconstructivist Architecture show at MoMA. I knew it was not for me. I was much more interested in structure, order, sequence of spaces, center, symmetry. Another exhibition that was important for me was on Viennese secessionists. I liked Josef Hofmann, Otto Wagner, Joseph Maria Olbrich, as much as Wright or Le Corbusier. I also liked the fact that the secessionists designed everything from the spoon to the city, so to speak. But summarizing, what I took from the Postmodernism is the importance of looking back and learning from history, analyzing various building typologies.

**VB: You are a multidisciplinary firm and besides architecture, you do landscaping, interiors, furniture, and product design. Could you talk about that?**

SC: I conceive my projects in a holistic manner. When I design a project, I think of the interiors flowing

seamlessly onto the landscape. So interiors, landscape, and architecture are inseparable. I started designing tables, chairs, sofas, and other products for homes and offices early on, in collaboration with design companies. I like them as stand-alone objects but also I like to integrate them into spaces of my own design as much as possible.

**VB: Is there a particular progression from project to project in your work?**

SC: I try to be clearer now and focus on fewer ideas, as well as a more refined palette and detailing than in the beginning. What I like most about working here in Singapore is the ability to design and program transitional spaces, the boundaries between inside and outside.

01 Soori Bali, Indonesia, 2005. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

02 Soori Bali, Indonesia, 2005. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

03 EDITION Sanya, Sanya, China, 2012. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

04 EDITION Sanya, Sanya, China, 2012. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

05 Cluny Park Residence, Singapore, 2017. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

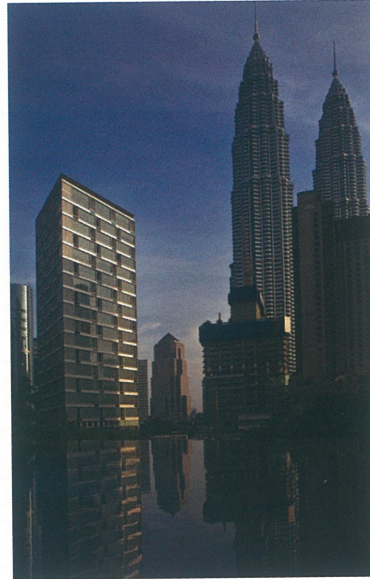
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**VB: Would you say there is such a thing as a Singaporean approach to making architecture?**

SC: Well, if you look at the work of Kerry Hill, WOHA or my work you can see many similarities in how our projects relate to the climate and region. But most importantly, Singapore does not have a weight of history as it is a relatively young nation. Our post-colonial architects are very open and free, and experimental. I would add that our architecture is universal. My architecture is universal. We utilize globally perfected building technologies and aesthetics. What makes us distinctive is how we bring landscape into buildings, particularly up to high-rises.

**VB: Do you have a particular position on green architecture?**

SC: I don't really talk about it consciously but many of my projects embrace sustainability and are Green Mark or EarthCheck certified. It feels natural to me. I think green architecture should be every architect's baseline. I would rather talk about the ideas behind the architecture itself.

**VB: "Architecture itself," meaning?**

SC: Meaning that beyond sustainability, there is the formal and spatial expression of architecture in context. It could be about how one space transitions into another... As an architect, how do you distill the essence of place? How do you evoke a spirituality of place formally? I use green architecture to generate these feelings and to humanize spaces, but it is more important to me to sustain culture and a sense of place, to interpret living traditions. For example, when I designed my resort in Bali

I tried to generate spaces based on traditional planning techniques used in the design of temples and rice irrigation planning in the region. Such things are important because architecture is about preserving a way of life, not simply about introducing a new formal language. To me, cultural sustainability is just as important, so it is not just the use of green technology or formal techniques.

I like designing spaces that are phenomenological. Materiality, light, and structure, and spaces in between buildings or parts of buildings are very important to convey such a feeling, both in horizontal and vertical projects.

I first started incorporating gardens into single-family houses, inserting them in between rooms by breaking closed volumes into a system of pavilions. As the scale of my projects grew, I incorporated these green spaces into larger and taller projects.

**VB: The experience of in-between spaces, such as large multi-story cavities in buildings by you or WOHA, are a very distinctive Singaporean experience. To be able to feel the breezes and see the city all around you on various levels within buildings is something very special.**

SC: In our residential buildings, we combine various apartment typologies such as the famous double exposure units developed for the Marseille Block by Le Corbusier. We fuse similar apartment types with landscape in our quest to develop more responsive, regional solutions.

**VB: What you are describing seems consequential for this climate. Yet, it is rare to see these ideas imple-**

**mented in other locations with similar climate conditions, which means it is encouraged here more than in other places. There is a favorable policy in place.**

SC: There are local codes that encourage this type of green architecture. For example, if you introduce a cavity or a cutout within a building, all the floor area that happens to fall outside of an imaginary 45-degree line, projected from the exterior edges towards the core, is free for the developer. If there is no height restriction the developer can add these areas to the project as various outdoor communal spaces.

These ideas and regulations first appeared in the late 90s based on tropical modernist projects and vertical gardens as proposed by Geoffrey Bawa in Sri Lanka. By then we abandoned the Postmodernist model of the Greek temple. These vertical garden ideas were embraced by many Singaporean architects. We started experimenting with buildings that pulled apart and now a whole planning mechanism is enforced from top down.

But I am much more interested in refining a particular formal language based on volume, line, and plane. Over the years, a clear formal language that can be applied to absorb site and program has served us well. It is not dissimilar to that of classical architecture.

**VB: Could you talk about your residential projects in New York? I am interested in how architects bring their regional ideas to new places and how their work transforms in the process. Do you think your ideas can be used in cities situated in much colder climates such as New York?**

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SC: It is a challenge, of course. To keep the heat in you need to introduce technology, double-glazing with low emissivity coatings, but the glass can be pushed deep inside to present a transitional zone; to bring as much of the outside in as possible. In New York, you rarely have the opportunity to design something freestanding. Most buildings are grouped together and are located within mid-block as part of the overall urban fabric. So in New York we try to work with orientation and bring as much sunlight as possible deep into the building through multiple notches, slots, and slivers of space. We are also introducing pools of water to animate space through a connection of inside with outside. These are not necessarily for swimming but for bringing light reflections, the sound of circulating water, and tranquility for a full phenomenological experience.

**VB: Could you talk about your role not only as an architect but also as a developer?**

SC: First, my motivation to be a developer is to allow me to be pure as an architect. Being both a client and designer gives me a lot of control. It opens many opportunities and allows me to select the kinds of projects

I want to explore and the way I want to do them. For example, I always wanted to do a resort, but I didn't know anyone who would commission me, so I went ahead and initiated such a project on my own in Bali. Soori Bali led to a number of resort commissions in other places, including the Maldives, Sanya, and Lijiang. I did the same in New York. I wanted to do a project there, so first, I designed a house in Westchester in 2000. It was called "A house for four seasons" [Prickly Pear] and the idea was to make various parts movable. In summers, the house would open up and undress and in winter, it would close up and bundle up. However, this project was never realized. Then I decided to develop a residential building near the High Line on 29th Street. The building will be finished later this year. Once I started this project, it attracted the attention of local developers and I was hired for two more commissions in the same neighborhood and another in midtown.

**VB: What did you learn from being a developer?**

SC: Now I sympathize with the developers a bit more [Laughs]. Well, it gives you a new perspective

through which to understand the entire process. It is not just about design issues. You understand the whole picture and you try to exploit the full potential of the site, budget, marketing, and program.

**VB: What would you say is the intention of your work?**

SC: Simply put, I try to design spaces that can evoke an emotional response while continuing to hone the formal and spatial vocabulary that I am interested in pursuing. I strive to design spaces that are calm and are qualified by space, light, and structural order.

## BIOGRAPHY

VLADIMIR BELOGOLOVSKY is the founder of the New York-based non-profit Curatorial Project. Trained as an architect at Cooper Union in New York, he has written five books, including *Conversations with Architects in the Age of Celebrity* (DOM, 2015), *Harry Seidler: LIFEWORK* (Rizzoli, 2014), and *Soviet Modernism: 1955-1985* (TATLIN, 2010). Among his numerous exhibitions: *Anthony Ames: Object-Type Landscapes* at Casa Curutchet, La Plata, Argentina (2015); *Colombia: Transformed* (American Tour, 2013-15); *Harry Seidler: Painting Toward Architecture* (world tour since 2012); and *Chess Game for Russian Pavilion* at the 11th Venice Architecture Biennale (2008). Belogolovsky is the American correspondent for Berlin-based architectural journal *SPEECH* and he has lectured at universities and museums in more than 20 countries.



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01 SkyTerrace@Dawson, Singapore, 2006. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

02 OneKL, Malaysia, 2004. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

03 118E59 Condominium, New York. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

04 Central Park South Condominiums, New York. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

05 TwentyOne Angullia, Singapore, 2016. Image Courtesy of SCDA Architects

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2017

## My comments on Chan Soo Khian's latest ideas on architecture

by Tay Kheng Soon, May 2017

The terms “post-colonial,” “phenomenology,” “materiality” and “universality” stand out in Soo Khian’s interview with Vladimir Belogolovsky for My ArchDaily April 2017. Soo Khian emailed me this article as a rejoinder to the discussion we had about “box” architecture many years ago. We agree to update that discussion based on his interview and go public with it in the interest of general education. That the interview represents his latest thinking he wanted to acquaint me of it. I appreciate that. For me it is also an opportunity to respond with my latest thinking too. We both have moved on.

Firstly I must say that Soo Khian is a very talented architect and very articulate as well. His works show remarkable aesthetic consistency and technical prowess. He is among the small well-acknowledged group of trend-setting architects in Singapore who are gaining global attention. Their works deserve deeper discussion and appreciation.

I am glad that Soo Khian raised the “post-colonial” thing. It is my pet concern. It is important to be aware of the need to be “free” immersed as we are in post-colonial mind-space now referred to as “globalisation.” Here I agree whole heartedly is where to restart our discussion. My previous critique of “box” architecture was and still is my felt disdain of the dictates of rectilinear aesthetics as the de-facto “universalism” Soo Khian refers to and to some great extent adheres to. Plainly we have ideologically different lenses through which we see things. Still it is good to be clear what these are and what we see through these lenses.

I am a Liberationist. He is a Universalist. A Liberationist is one who seeks to be free of implicit and explicit ideological orientations to the extent that this is possible. A Universalist is one whose ideological orientation is that there are universal norms and truths honed in advanced technologies that are valid everywhere and should be adhered to. These universals are the product of the dominance of the West. Whereas Liberationists like myself, while we do not reject technological advances we seek to be discriminative and not automatically presume superiorities implied in these so-called superior universal technologies. My Liberationist position is

therefore suspicious of the implicit power-relations involved in adhering to “Universalism.” These are two different world views. By contrasting them we may gain a deeper understanding of how our sensibilities are shaped. This is not a quarrel. It is a discussion.

As a Liberationist, I constantly ponder over the hold rectilinearity has over design aesthetics. I wonder if it is a learned response among post-colonial peoples who still look up to the West, genuflecting at the altars of its thought and style. Thought and style are after all a part of cultural politics. It is a global power play between the strong and the weak. When China was rich and powerful in its glory days all peripheral nations copied its style and values. It is relevant here to quote Kishore Mahbubani, “*The big danger that Singapore faces is that if the Singaporean mind remains primarily Westernised, it will miss out on the big Asian Century coming our way.*” What new architecture might emerge if we free ourselves from Western modes of thought?

It is not easy to change the idea that modernisation equals westernisation at the subconscious level. What deeper grip can this idea have when it is accorded “universalism” by Soo Khian? This explains the dominance and appeal of the hard edge, the rectangular geometry and the grid-like planar style of architecture that he and many aspiring architects and clients in the non-west favour. In many ways such style almost always guarantees success. The market expects it. The media applauds it. Success of course depends on doing it well and Soo Khian excels in refinement and consistency within this idiom.

That this kind of architecture happens to jive exactly with post-colonial expectations as the height of sophistication is no wonder. Seen this way, the curvilinear architecture of a Zaha or a Gehry is not a contradiction. Their rebellion against rectilinear orthodoxy only serves to frame rectilinearity all the more by contrast. But the question that I have no clear answer to as yet is how to be “free,” i.e., how to be true to our self, our climate, our history and our potential in the World. What would such an architecture look and feel like? Let me try to explain the complexity of the challenge.

Modern architecture post Bauhaus became stripped of its humanism, its creative non-conformism and its artistic verve. Its machine aesthetic was appropriated and it became the “International Style.” Taken on by big Western Corporations, boxiness, made up of rectangular repetitive flat planes framed by vertical and horizontal geometrical articulating lines using factory produced panels and extrusions made both business and aesthetic sense. It thus spread everywhere. Indeed, ‘progress’ was emblematised this way. And the non-west lapped it all up as tokens of their own progress. It is their stake in measuring their status in the new “universalism.” The work of Soo Khian has however gone beyond bland boxiness and achieved a remarkable vivacity in the use of regulated geometry. The commitment has remained but the execution has greatly advanced. His foray into Bali and New York testify to his mastery of “universality.”

The deconstruction of the phenomenon of western aesthetic hegemony deserves book-long treatment. For now, this is my take on the “box”; not literally a total enclosure but the right angular planar and linear system of ordering spatial and formal intentions. In the hands of a talented designer like Soo Khian, rectangular aesthetics takes on effervescent qualities of coherence, consistency and visual dynamics that enthrall and captivate. It is the “phenomenology and materiality” he is able to conjure that conjures admiration.

It is a sign of the times given the pervasive post-colonial mentality that this approach is deemed the height of good taste in design. So how does one express “phenomenology and materiality” qualities beyond the de-facto design language? How to express Soo Khian’s desire for “seamless flow of spaces between interior and landscape” through a different kind of architecture? These are rightfully important design questions. Is there a more suited design language that is true to people and place?

Soo Khian rightly asks, “*How do you distil the essence of place?*” I ask this question too but my answer has to go beyond architecture as individual buildings. Let me explain. Spatial and formal design has to traverse up and down from Nano scale i.e., interiors to microscale, that is individual buildings or architecture to meso scale which is neighbourhood and town design and finally to macro scale, i.e., regions. The question of style and content, in my view has to be addressed beyond the

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micro remit of architecture defined by statute and by practice. In short it is a question that is too important to be left to architects in their present self-conception defined by the market and within their customary architecture theory.

In this sense, Soo Khian's quest that "*Architecture is about preserving a way of life, not simply introducing a new formal language*" is a defence of the "universalism" of his design language but is also paradoxically its limitation. In addressing tropical eco-aesthetics its geometrical purity has to become a scaffolding to drape greenery upon. Culture politics requires it. Thus Soo Khian, Woha, Siew Man Kok and Ken Yeang have all been driven to do this, theorising notwithstanding.

It seems to me therefore that this approach has inevitably reached its logical end. But it may still have some way to go before finally it gives way to a totally new urban development paradigm, the result of the slow motion collapse of the economic and conceptual underpinnings of current urban order. In other words, as spatial and formal design-thinking rise up the ladder of scale; meso and macro scales will then demand a new design language and strategy. Hopefully within the new urban order, architecture will then be re-energised by a new humanism enabled through decentralised urbanism made possible by e-commerce and climate-responsible participatory design. Diversity by both thematic requirements underpinned by new sensibility a new aesthetic order may arrive in through participatory consensus and organic happenstance.

At that moment, environmental sustainability would then no longer be mere token. In this prospect, I do have some sketchy ideas but Soo Khian is right that, "*architecture has to distil the essence of place.*" Not just place but also "Time". For it is a time predicated on the end of the logic of toxic Neo-Liberal Global Capitalism that will spur the new thinking. With it a liberation from the hegemony of the post-colonial mind-set embedded in the mantle of the so called "universalism" of western intellect and style, architecture and urban planning will then have new roles and a new language. The celebration of westernised architecture's end comes in tandem with the end of Western Economic and cultural hegemony. Daring to think way ahead of the curve has become necessary.

Previously Unpublished  
Comments written by  
Tay Kheng Soon submitted on  
May 2017

Response written by  
Chan Soo Khian submitted on  
Jan 2018

## A Universal Design Language that Speaks Outside the Box

by Chan Soo Khian, Jan 2018

Thank you, Kheng Soon, for your spirited rejoinder to our conversation seventeen years ago and more recently in response to my ArchDaily interview. I welcome your critique of my work, to which I would like to respond. I would like to correct the characterization of my architecture as "box architecture" and a "universal architecture" as it is too narrow and misplaced. A thorough reading of that interview, re-published in its entirety by SIA, will reveal that my concerns are far wider and more nuanced.

The "box architecture" referenced by Kheng Soon is stylistic typecasting. The box is neither Eastern nor Western. Most traditional architecture is mired in the rectilinear. I believe that there are some universal truths to architecture. After all, humans respond similarly to the needs of shelter and protection. Good architecture can evoke an emotional response to these basic needs.

My stance is that universality in architecture does not equate to a homogeneous architecture. A developed design language can create an architecture that distills the essence of a place. It allows for the indulgence of using the language to express materiality, phenomenology and the potential poetry of space-making. Being facile in a design vocabulary is important as it takes away the technical design struggle in making architecture. Through this structure, architecture has the ability to universally adapt. Every architecture, whether Classical, Modern, or Asian vernacular, has its own sets of rules and proportioning systems that if expressed correctly can create an authentic sense of place.

The personal architectural language at SCDA is beyond the box. It is a design language developed over a period of twenty years, with a consistent formal vocabulary of line, volume and plane. The fundamental elements of SCDA's architecture (light, space, transparency, materiality and order) aspire to humanist qualities such as serenity, beauty and order. The spaces are composed to be experienced sequentially through choreographed processions that recenter and realign the perceptual 'axis', terminating in land-

scaped vistas or open spaces. The approach is phenomenological and is about the emotional response of the user to the space.

The figure of architectural forms, which are often a series of rectangular boxes, define external spaces such as courts and gardens that carry the same importance as the forms around them. Special emphasis is accorded to the transitional space, the space between the indoors and outdoors. The consistency of this language allows for the design studio to respond to the demands of program, site and culture in diverse locales, from the densely urban to the very remote while grounded in humanist values.

As to Kheng Soon's exertion of his liberationist tendencies - I would leave it to him to further explain how he is not influenced by any external ideologies in an increasingly interconnected world. Is there a possibility he can free himself from universally-perfected technologies and construction methods that he has rejected as pandering to the West? Let us instead move outside such closed thinking and towards advocating a personal architectural language that allows us to transcend boundaries while remaining rooted in the essence of the place. I will close here by reiterating my respect for Kheng Soon's thought leadership and his ability to stimulate architectural discourse. I appreciate SIA for agreeing to publish our written exchange, and I hope that this will further encourage interchange of ideas.