

SINGAPORE TATLER
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THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO LUXURIOUS LIVING

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GREEN MILE

More than just achieving beauty, award-winning architecture firm WOHA shifts the conversation towards crafting sustainable spaces and cities equipped for global warming



In Singapore, look at any green building, vertical garden or structure built with sustainable design in mind and it's bound to be touched by WOHA, the distinguished architectural practice founded by Wong Mun Summ and Richard Hassell. That's not to say every project was conceived and designed by them, but that their guiding principles on how a building should interact with its environment has shaped the landscape of the Little Red Dot in the last two decades. For that reason alone, anyone who revels in the garden city that is Singapore has them to thank for the pleasant cityscape.

During interviews, designers' narratives usually delve into the intricacies of their creative journey and their continuous quest of achieving form and function. In my hour-long conversation with WOHA, the talk often drifted to the effects of global warming. Climate change isn't just a passing fascination for the duo; in fact, they've recently authored *Garden City Mega City: Rethinking Cities for the Age of Global Warming*—a provocative proposal on how to save our cities and our planet through smart and sustainable design decisions.



WOHA BEING

Partners Wong Mun Summ and Richard Hassell have moved forward on WOHA Being, an umbrella entity through which they'll be developing a series of projects. The Maison&Objet Asia Designers of the Year aim to use this as a platform to showcase thoughtfully sourced homeware, as well as to launch initiatives that highlight and promote local Asian crafting skills.

BY KISSA CASTANEDA. IMAGES COURTESY OF WOHA (PHOTOGRAPHY: JING WEI, PORTRAIT: PATRICK BIRGHAM HALL, AILIA ULUWATI)

MODERN LANDMARK

The architectural practice has worked on a wide array of projects, ranging from residential homes to public projects. Here are a few of our favourites in Singapore:

PARKROYAL ON PICKERING



OASIA HOTEL DOWNTOWN



SCHOOL OF THE ARTS SINGAPORE



"WE WERE VERY LUCKY BECAUSE WE STARTED AT A TIME WHEN SINGAPORE ITSELF WAS ACTIVELY TRYING TO BECOME A GREEN CITY"

THE PERFECT STORM

When they founded their practice in 1994, both Wong and Hassell had already been focusing on sustainability—their deep engagement with the subject has formed the ethos of WOHA ever since. "We were very lucky because we started at a time when Singapore itself was actively trying to become a green city," says Hassell. "We grew with the city itself." From crafting "sky villages" to encouraging the use of "screens of green", the real value of their work is not about the arresting structures, but how deeply they consider the building against its urban setting and the ways in which to improve the liveability—from a micro to a macro level. "It was the unique intersection of the relevance of our approach vis-a-vis government regulation, and the tropical climate, that allowed us to build our practice," stresses Wong.

"It all changed with the movie *An Inconvenient Truth*," adds Hassell, referencing the turning point when sustainable design began to be taken seriously. Since 2006, vertical gardens and the overt greening of both interiors and architecture became *au courant*, but WOHA insists that it's just the beginning. In the 22 years the duo have addressed the subject, they've devised a quantifiable approach to measuring the impact of sociable architecture and sustainable cities, which they've outlined in their most recent tome.



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Created with Patrick Bingham-Hall, the book outlines WOHA's philosophy and was devised to share their roadmap to a sustainable future



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

The Oasia Hotel Downtown has an open-air lobby and a striking facade that shades the building; Skyville illustrates their idea of layering to promote liveability; plants aren't considered ornamentation, but a way of promoting ventilation, sustainability and wellness

THRIVING ARCHITECTURE

While a rating tool is useful in ensuring green standards, the best way to experience WOHA's work is to see it in real life. Anyone who has seen the multi-awarded Parkroyal on Pickering relates to the arresting impact of their unconventional thinking. "Parkroyal was successful as a prototype," says Wong. "It allowed us to develop our ideas on a bigger scale. It also helped that it had seductive images, which helped to push the agenda forward."

WOHA, however, is about more than just creating green spaces. If the definition of design is that it's a solution, then the problem they're actually addressing is how to make the world more liveable for people today and for future generations. "One of our criteria is civic generosity, which relates to how a development facilitates the public life of a city," says Wong. While the duo insist that their impact is felt more abroad—with projects from Australia to Taiwan, and having made the rounds as key speakers in notable conferences overseas—it's hard to overstate how key WOHA has become in creating a liveable, lovable and future-ready Singapore. Next time you see the Oasia or shop in the Space Furniture flagship store on Bencoolen Street, be thankful that designers as generous as the two work in our midst. 🍷



For more information, visit woha.net