



Interview with Dr. Ken Yeang, Malaysian Architect



The Solaris Building in Singapore is a flagship project for Eco-Architecture. Copyright: T.R. Hamzah & Yeang Sdn. Bhd. (2015)



Macau Masterplan – Dr Ken Yeang advocates the creation of a wholly innovative ecological approach to masterplan design. Copyright: T.R. Hamzah & Yeang Sdn. Bhd. (2015)



Dr. Ken Yeang is a Malaysian architect, ecologist and author known for his signature ecoarchitecture and ecomasterplans. Yeang is an early pioneer of ecology-based green design and masterplanning, carrying out design and research in this field since 1971. He is named by the Guardian as “one of the 50 people who could save the planet”.

What is your motive or goal in your professional practice?

To do the best design and built work that we can. We require our design work to fulfill these 4 considerations:

- It must function excellently i.e. It must work well. If a design does not work, then it is useless.
- It must give pleasure and happiness to its users, which is for us the true purpose of architecture and master planning.
- It must be aesthetically fulfilling and as beautiful as we can make it.
- It must meet the usual criteria e.g. Be super green, be delivered within budget (costs), meet local Authorities requirements, be high quality of construction, etc.

Which architectural styles do you utilize?

Essentially our architectural style is “ecological”. Our designs should look “green”, hirsute, verdant and organic.

Which offices or other designers have influenced you in the past?

Malcolm Wells (US architect, now deceased), Le Corbusier, Kisho Kurokawa.

Which of your projects serve most as demonstration pieces, and why?

Every one of our projects serve as “demonstration pieces” where different projects extol, investigate and advance different aspects of our green agenda, where we are constantly seeking to advance the idea of design as “ecomimesis” (ie. Imitating the properties and attributes of ecosystems by design) and to explore the idea of buildings as “constructed ecosystems” and as “living systems”.

Does traditional Asian building culture influence your work?

We can learn much by investigating and understanding the principles of all traditional buildings everywhere (i.e. traditional architecture from anywhere in the world, and not just from Asian traditional buildings). The principles of traditional architecture are principles that people have developed over time as effective intuitive responses to the climate of the place where it is located. We seek in our work to first understand the principles underlying traditional architecture of the locality, and then seek to reinterpret these principles and devices in a contemporary way using latest technologies, as “critical regionalist” design.

Is there a set of building or energy use standards that particularly interests you?

We seek to design our buildings now as NZNB (Net Zero Energy Buildings), besides being net water ("closing the loop") and net waste.

A lot of your buildings integrate with a tropical climate. What are the special challenges for the "Bioclimatic Skyscraper" in temperate or colder climates?

Bioclimatic design in temperate and cold climates is a bit more complex than bioclimatic design for tropical climates as here we now have four seasons to contend with, being 2 extreme seasons (summer and winter) and 2 very nice seasons (spring and autumn). Applying bioclimatic design principles to cold climates and temperate climates often involves the greater use of "mixed-mode" environmental systems during the mid-seasons (i.e. during spring and autumn) where we use the mix-mode systems to extend the pleasant comfortable mid-seasons, to reduce the period for cooling in the summer and the period for heating in winter. Façade design is also different for temperate and cold climates locations as we need to keep out the sun in the summer but let in the sun in winter.

How do you perceive your impact on modern architecture?

The impact of our work on modern architecture is not so much a radical departure, but simply an extrusion of modern architecture to its next level, which is to become systemically ecological to become "living systems" as against being just "inert inorganic masses". The latter is what modern architecture had been.

What advantage(s) has your international education and upbringing brought to your practice?

An international education gives one a more balanced, thorough and reasonable understanding of the ways of the world at an early age. An international education and upbringing give one a greater level of self-confidence and self-respect to deal on par with the Western world, and averts the "cultural cringe" that often accompanies those with a provincial upbringing. Most importantly, an international upbringing enables the development of a more diverse sense of humour.

What do you see for the future of ecological architecture?

Ecological architecture is simply a phase in the development of architecture, and I see designing ecologically which may be a compelling issue today, but in time it (say, within the next few years) will rapidly become "mainstream" and be simply a standard part of all our way of designing.



Dr. Ken Yeang is credited as the inventor of the "Bioclimatic Skyscraper". Copyright: T.R. Hamzah & Yeang Sdn. Bhd. (2015)



Kowloon Waterfront Masterplan – a green masterplan which includes the novel use of "eco cells". Copyright: T.R. Hamzah & Yeang Sdn. Bhd. (2015)