

Reaping the benefits of winning PAM-TSCSL

Sabahan Mak Thur Pei won the inaugural PAM-Tan Sri Ar Chan Sau Lai Architectural Award (PAM-TSCSL) in 2012. The graduate of the University of Western Australia had submitted her final year's work "Four Square House Design Problem", which was praised for its refreshing design for a common architectural undertaking, blending nature and social interaction seamlessly.

Chua Yheu Shen, a graduate of the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AASA) in the UK, won the PAM-TSCSL award last year. Chua's rain roof project was lauded for challenging the transport typology for buses and the possibility of creating a cell that will generate an environment with cycles of self-cleansing using rain.

Read on for the two architects' thoughts on winning the award and its impact on their lives.

MAK THUR PEI, PAM-TSCSL WINNER 2012

The Edge: Please share with us the idea and inspiration behind your winning entry.

I got the idea for the form of the project from Peter Eisenman's Berlin Holocaust Memorial: the solid and void spaces and volumes. My intention for the project was to create a close connection with nature, to bring natural light and air, and green into our living environment. It was about blending nature with our built environment and living spaces as well as promoting social and family interaction. I maintained all those elements in my university projects and strive to continue to do so in my career now.

To me, these are the fundamental aspects of a healthy living environment and the basics of living. It's a pity that these issues are not properly addressed in a lot of residential developments these days. I think it is very important that we value these aspects, not only in residential buildings, but also in all built environments. Interaction with nature and community is very important, but it's something that has been greatly neglected in our modern society.

How has the award helped your career?

It gave me a lot of confidence and encouragement. I'm currently working with my father in Mak Arkitek Konsult in Kota Kinabalu and I find that because of my award, the clients are confident too. They have high expectations and anticipate interesting, award-winning concepts and designs for their projects.

On a personal note, my family is proud of my achievement, especially my parents. My late mother was very proud of me, which motivates me. I just lost my mother about two weeks ago; I'm here today because of her. I owe a lot of my achievements today to her upbringing.

With all these expectations, I know I have to keep up my standard and not fall anyone. Most

Awards also help people outside the profession see what is good architecture. I think most people who are not in the field don't know this. What they recognise is sometimes superficial. Awards can help people understand the deeper meaning of architecture.

What are your thoughts on the calibre of the young Malaysian architects?

I don't think I'm in a position to comment on this as I graduated only two years ago. However, I do think the younger generation is benefiting from the Internet, which has opened up the scope for learning. And the best thing is that a lot of the information is free. I believe the younger generation is making good use of such information to gain exposure to the outside world.

What projects are you working on now?

I'm working on two -- T1@Bundusan and The M Residences, which are both in Kota Kinabalu. The former is a medium-scale commercial development comprising a commercial block and an entertainment hub, while the latter is a medium-scale residential development with 12 exclusive apartments and 48 reasonably priced apartments.

MAK THUR PEI



importantly, I must not disappoint Tan Sri Chan Sau Lau for giving this award to me. I will always strive to create better architecture and to change the living environment and improve our living standard. I also hope one day I will have the chance to bring Malaysian architecture to the international stage.

Mak was praised for her design that blended nature and social interaction seamlessly

Why are awards of such importance to the profession?

In all professions, recognition is important. It motivates you. You know you have been recognised and will have to keep up the standard and keep improving so you don't let anyone down. I guess it helps push the advancement of the profession.

CHUA YHEU SHEN, PAM-TSCSL WINNER 2012

The Edge: Please share with us the idea and inspiration behind your winning entry.

My interest has always been in architecture's role in our cities today. I approach the city as a project and a problem, studying how building types can be renewed by establishing architecture's most fundamental attributes relating to the theory of type and typology and experimenting how architectural ideas of the city can provide alternatives to design philosophy dominated by the disciplines of urban design and master-planning. This is the core subject I studied over the years at AASA.

As for the inspiration behind my winning entry, I looked at our excessive annual rainfall to complement my unit's brief. It was a chance visit to a KL wet market during one of the monsoon periods that sparked the idea of how randomly opened umbrellas, overlapping each other, gave shelter from the rain and created a cooling effect. With my love for complex geometry, I embedded the idea of rainfall into a rigorous geometrical system to create a typologically enhanced environmental condition.

How has the award helped your career?

Winning an award definitely bestows a positive recognition on you. For instance, at my workplace Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) in London, I'm recognised as an award winner by my peers and the top management of both our UK and US offices. The management was proud to add on to their list of staff members with coveted awards. As a result, KPF's confidence in and baseline expectation of me are high.

In our fast-moving industry, the word spreads and because of that, I have had the pleasure of getting invited to join some local teams and to participate in upcoming projects in Malaysia.

Why are awards of such importance to the profession?

At AASA, we were taught to believe that we are and will be visionary architects, that our ideas will lead and excite the momentum of future

developments. In my five years at AASA, I won awards but still, I was not sure of my level of competence in the outside world until I received this award.

To a certain extent, this award gave me the assurance that I was capable of pushing back the boundaries of what I believed in and gave me the confidence to realise my full potential as an architect. Along the way, I learnt that if you want your hard work and achievement to be noticed, a coveted award is the answer.

How different are the profession's practices, opportunities and regulations in Malaysia and the UK?

I have worked for three years in London -- at KPF and before that at Foster and Partners. I had the privilege of being given the opportunity to work in London, one of the most exciting cities in the world.

Having worked both in the UK and in Malaysia, I see a lot of difference in the working practices. London is a place of high cultural sensitivity, so any major project is scrutinised for months, sometimes years, before it receives planning permission. The UK's regulations are incredibly complex, from pre-planning to post-planning and all the way to construction. For pre-planning proposals, we have to go through many stages, from a series of pre-application consultations with the council, getting support from the councillor, conservation officers, English Heritage and the mayor to planning application, public consultation and planning committee meetings, which in total could take up to a year or more. It is because of this lengthy process that the British call it the 'Planning Maze'.

In terms of post-planning and construction in the UK, I see that the variety of procurement methods allows the industry to move faster in terms of pace and efficiency. For example, in Malaysia, you typically construct a building via the traditional procurement route where design and construction are two separate phases. This means that the architect designs first and the contractor builds later.

In the UK, especially in London, the developers are much more aggressive, have more time and are more money-conscious. As a result, the design and construction, even planning, phase could all be happening at the same time. This is only achievable via the management contracting procurement route. My current project is being procured in such a way and I find it to be quite intelligent.

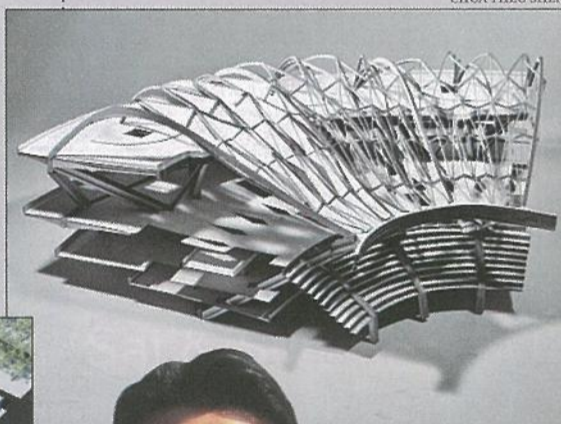
What are your thoughts on the calibre of the young Malaysian architects?

Malaysian architects are incredibly talented, especially when it comes to designing homes. I personally think Malaysian architects are among the best home designers in the world. I believe this is due to our cultural mix and tropical weather that allow more creativity in the blend of material, form and spatial composition. Malaysian architects are also well versed in technical knowledge and I think perhaps the area that needs improvement is communication and experimental and analytical skills.

What projects are you working on now?

At the moment, I'm the lead consultant for several main packages and the contract for London's South Bank Tower, which is currently under construction. It will be one of the tallest residential towers in the UK when completed.

CHUA YHEU SHEN



Chua's winning design was sparked by opened umbrellas overlapping each other at a KL wet market

