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UTAR CAMPUS

AN EXPLORATION ON URBANISM

SERI CHENANG RESORT

THE LIGHT POINT

HOUSE AT SENTOSA COVE

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THE LIGHT COLLECTION I

WATER FRONT

PLUS: IN CONVERSATION WITH DATUK SERI LIM CHONG KEAT / ARCHIDEX 2014 & ACA 16TH /
LENGGONG VALLEY VISITOR CENTRE / REVISITING TANJONG JARA

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AN EXPLORATION ON URBANISM

An urban design competition in Vietnam sees CHORD Studio collaborating with Perunding Alam Bina to explore and demonstrate ideas on urbanism through comprehensive studies of the site, the local culture and its unique landscape.



CHORD Studio, a design research collaborative based in Melbourne, Australia were shortlisted for the second stage of an international design competition for a new township in the new urban area on the Thu Thiem Peninsula, in Vietnam. Upon the shortlisting, Perunding Alam Bina was roped in to strengthen the team in preparing a comprehensive proposal for this visionary new city. This new town covers 770 hectares, including 130 hectares of Saigon River water surface. The design competition for these three key urban areas covers an area of 26 hectares, and would eventually form the identity of the new city that would represent modern Vietnam.

The brief called for a 13-hectare Central Plaza that will host key events of Ho Chi Minh City, such as festivals, military parades, celebrations and national gatherings for over one million people at a time. Additionally, a 12-hectare Crescent Park on the waterfront is expected to be the 'great waterfront park' of the city with an extensive landscaped area, contemporary gardens, paths for promenading, kiosks and water taxi stations. The other component of the brief is an iconic bridge that will serve to shuttle pedestrians and motorbikes

between Me Linh Square and Thu Thiem.

Design Methodology

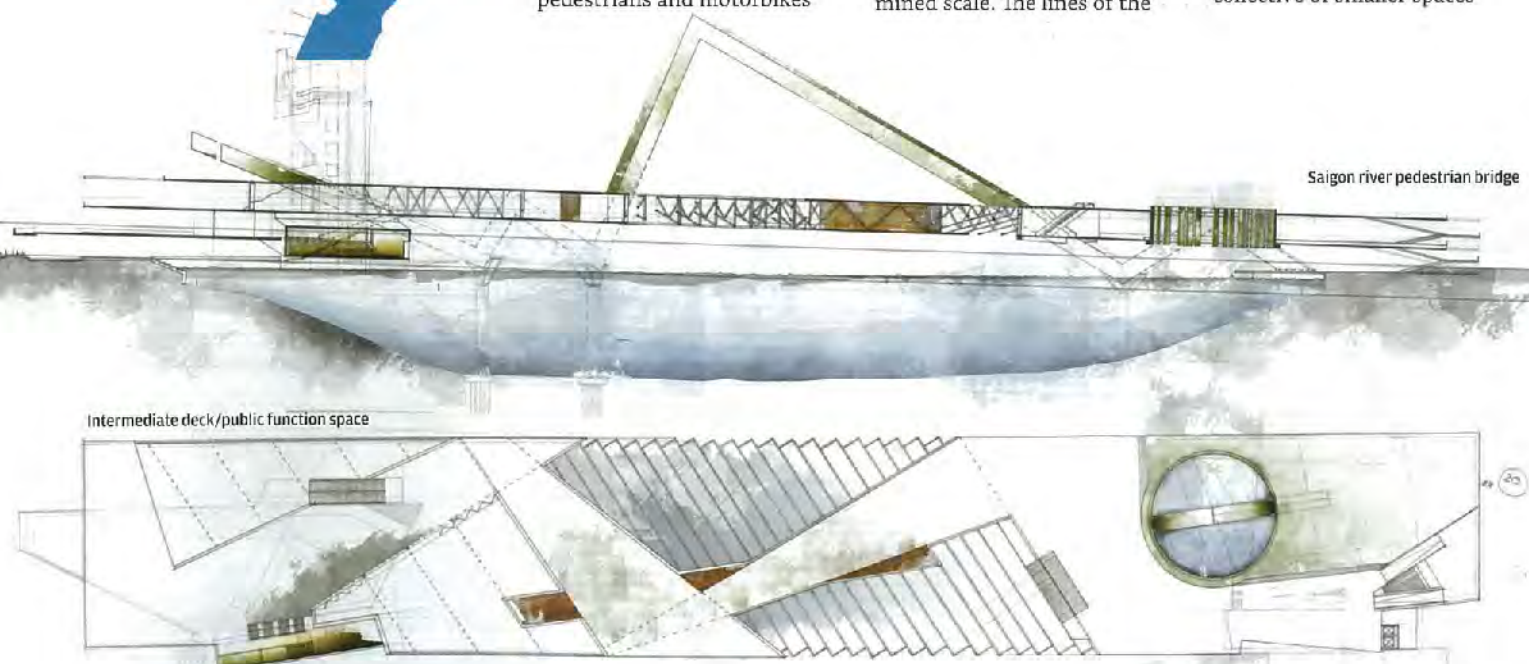
The collaborative grouping of young designers and researchers that make up CHORD Studio worked towards the intention of testing new methods of authoring design and to explore ideas on urbanism, e.g. as to what makes the magic of a great city. They began with the premise that the physical construct of a city has a direct and significant effect on the strength of its culture. By that extension, in any city, a framework would have to be established for people to make their mark on the physical environment around them, thus leading to higher levels of ownership and community.

To the team, a city can be likened to a palimpsest – a parchment where marks are made and scratched over to allow for new marks to be made on top of what was there before. Cities leave traces – urban archaeological sites which give us clues to our history, culture and our place in a continuing timeline. Using this analogy, the design of the masterplan was carried out by all six team-members simultaneously – each creating a version of the masterplan through hand drawings to a predetermined scale. The lines of the

different schemes are then superimposed on top of each other and a design is 'curated' from the cacophony of lines on paper. The final product is an elaborate world of meandering paths traversing a rich variety of spaces, high vantage points alongside new undercrofts.

The team's discussions were mainly centred around observations of life in the city, influenced by the writing of Jane Jacobs and, in part, Christopher Alexander's 'A Pattern Language'. In essence, through CHORD's observation of human habitation, they found that the environment shapes the inhabitants as much as the inhabitants shape their environment. The challenge was to create a 'patterned' language in this new urban area which would be informed by the topography of the site, the architectonics of Vietnam, the culture of its people and the uniqueness of its landscape.

In their report, CHORD Studio wrote that, "The city acquires a depth study through the character of its fine grain places. These places each go through the process of growth, evolution, amalgamation, subdivision, demolition and renewal. The architect perceived the city and its landscape as a living organism that is a collective of smaller spaces



Saigon river pedestrian bridge

Intermediate deck/public function space

shaped by the individuals that utilise and inhabit them over time. Tempered by the hands of individuals, these spaces are imbued with a unique living culture. They become crafted places.”

“The dynamic interwoven nature of the nested scales of landscape, architecture and the city facilitates a behavioural setting that supports a series of day-to-day rituals by the various people that use a space. Human subconsciously map the city through the engagement with a series of places within the city from their daily routine. This study is important to understand how people engage with their environments – the different scales, architectonics and materiality – from the more intimate spaces of conviviality to the larger civic spaces of national significance.”

“The proposition for Thu Thiem presents an opportunity to those who hail from the different districts, regions and countries from various backgrounds. It is our hope that a conducive environment will come about from a framework upon which people may contribute in shaping a new generative landscape – a cornerstone for a distinctly modern Vietnamese city.”

The Generative Landscape

A generative landscape is a holistic process-centred framework for a city to mature naturally over time. CHORD’s

proposal sets a framework for many nested components to form an interconnected network with one another within the competition area and the context of the built and natural environment around it, requiring active engagement between the people and their city. The intention is to have the collective virtues of the people in the city generate intellectual, cultural, social and economic wealth while good governance and management preserves natural ecosystems which will inform a sustainable growth.

An accumulation of specialist individuals only happens in cities with a sustainable work culture that challenges and inspires them. Hence the proposal includes programs that will create new job opportunities to sustain and promote a local work culture while providing for functional and operational needs of the site. This would also encourage a culture where people feel passionate about their work while they maintain a harmonious relationship with the natural environment.

Another aspect that influences the economic wealth of the city is the presence of a strong building culture, developed through the integration of high technology and the existing local trades. Hence, the programs are designed to support local trades while encouraging the advancement of research in building innovation. Local and international universi-

ties were engaged to help provide input into advancing building technology through the testing of ideas through micro-architectures within the generative landscape. The resultant prototype structures have specific programs and will engage in the local discourse on regionalist ideas of site, the landscape, building typology and materiality. Through this engagement, the architecture of the landscape urbanism becomes the landscape in a cohesive way.

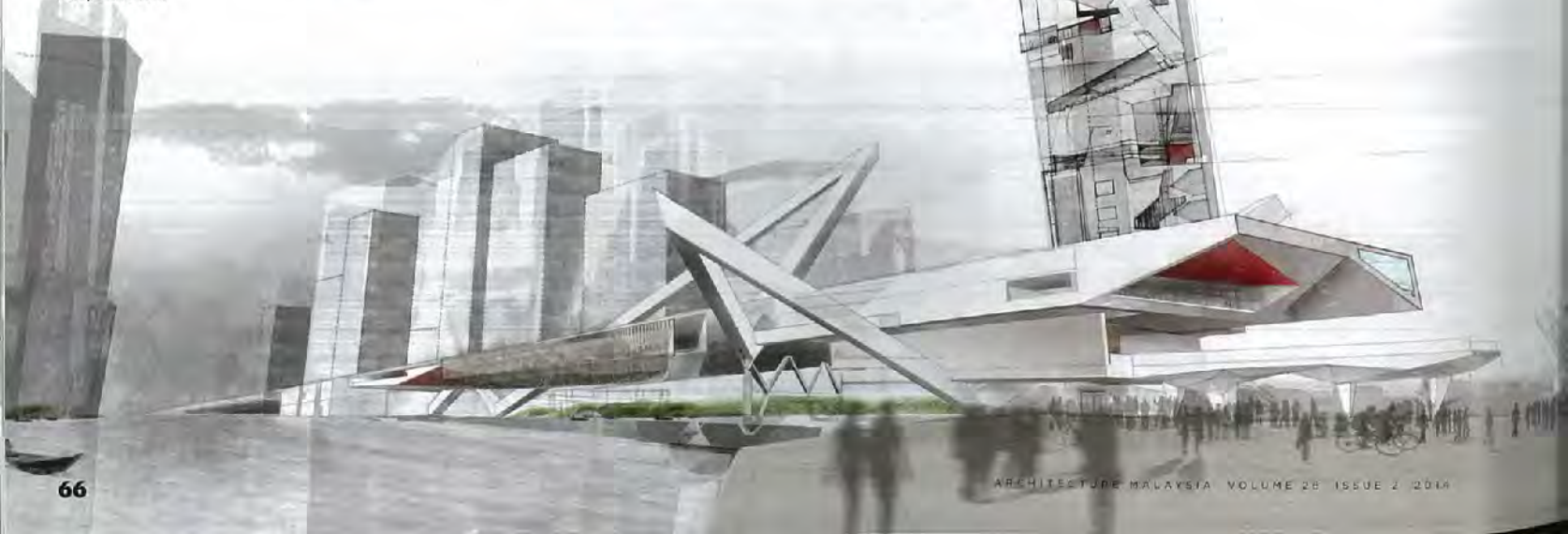
Another element of the proposal is the introduction of artists-in-residence to serve as a key cultural generator for the city. Completed artworks mark the spirit of different periods and to allow people to reflect on themselves and the city in which they inhabit. Through a publicly funded program, commissioned sculptural artwork will adorn the city’s many parks. By locating this facility a short walk away from the future convention centre, it can also provide a greater exposure of local arts to regional and international visitors. A rooftop events platform will be the venue of cultural events thus creating opportunities for the public to engage with the creative intelligentsia of the city.

The Central Plaza and Crescent Park

The interaction between the people with the landscape can promote an attitude of lifelong learning which incul-



Perspective view





Landscape forecourt

CLIENT
INVESTMENT &
CONSTRUCTION
AUTHORITY FOR THU
HIEM NEW URBAN AREA

LOCATION
HO CHI MINH CITY,
VIETNAM

ARCHITECT
CHORD STUDIO IN
COLLABORATION WITH
PEIJUN JING, XIAM HINA
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cates an enlightened society. Programs within the Central Plaza and Crescent Park creates a network of learning that engages people of all age groups to understand the natural environment and the productive landscape of the countryside. For this reason, the architects adopted an agricultural landscape in which elements of the Vietnamese countryside are transposed to an urban environment: the Paddy Fields, the Rubber Tree Garden, the Pepper Garden and Music Bowl, the Community Orchards, the Fishing Wharfs, among others. A year in the life of the city is marked by distinct sensory experiences kindled by changes in the colours of blooming flowers, fruiting plants, the maturing of rice paddies, the arrival of migratory birds – all flourishing within the local ecosystem. A unique sense of place for the Vietnamese people – a city

within the pastoral landscape of their ancestors serves to remind future generations of their roots as they traverse the path towards a dynamic developed state.

The Civic Plaza

Places of different scales within the urban landscape serve as a backdrop for various events to occur. The understanding of gathering places for different crowd intensities – from small gatherings to large city-wide major events for a million people to gather – are vital to the articulation of the civic plaza. The success of major events relies on a crowd management strategy that defines how people arrive for these events and disperse afterwards. The proposed Civic Plaza is designed to serve as the civic heart on a regular day as well as during city-wide celebratory events. The plaza is the ideal focal point for the

National Day parade due to its prominent location and accessibility to the public, as well as the most ideal starting point in exploring the city.

The Saigon River Pedestrian Bridge and The Tower of Many Horizons

For the bridge and tower, an attempt has been made to facilitate social connections through the design – in particular the social interface between the old and the new city through the Saigon River Pedestrian Bridge. As a typology, the bridge is seen as an important symbolic device for Ihu Thiem. It provides a connection between two banks while providing a platform for various events of significance to occur, also as an attenuation of the civic plaza forming a mega-scale continuous landscaped surface. Within and on top of this bridge, smaller scale

spaces are appropriated – an abstraction of the city on the bridge.

Cities require elevated lookout points from where people may ascend to survey their surroundings. While the bridge is a horizontal proposition that emphasises the continuity of the landscape surface, the proposed bridge tower functions as its counterpoint. The idea of the abstracted city is central to the proposed design of the bridge tower. It presents the city with a series of spatial and programmatic experiences on each level. The experience of prospect and refuge, contemplation and conviviality, private and public, secret and revealed, intimate and expansive, high and low, isolation and engagement; all play a role in framing the city as a series of components which make a whole. Hence, the bridge tower becomes the key to the city. 86