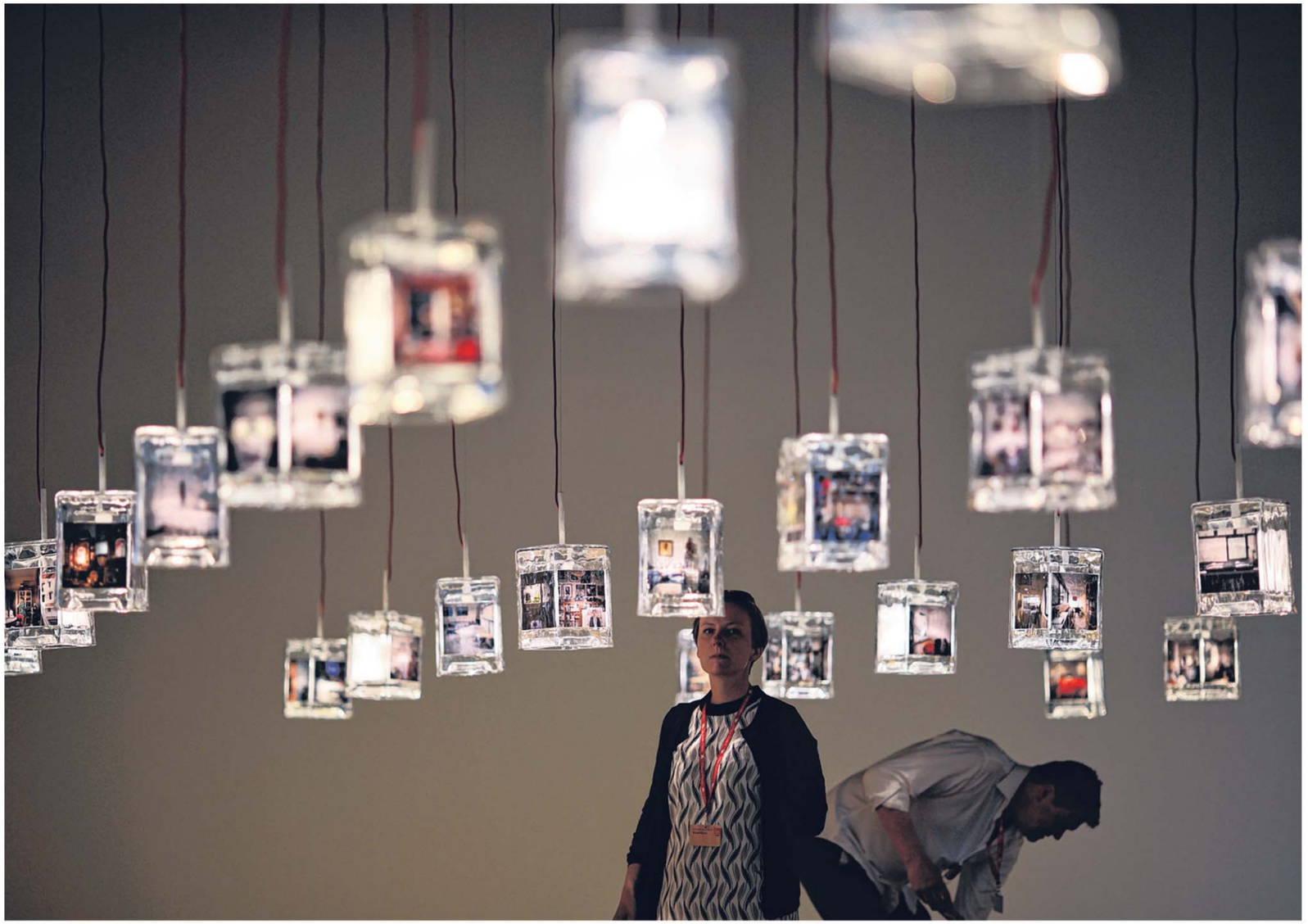
Source: *The Straits Times,* pD1 & pD6-D7
Date: 4 June 2016

SPOTLIGHT SINGAPORE

At the Venice Architecture Biennale, visitors get to see how ordinary Singaporeans have a hand in shaping their living environment. **Ankita Varma** reports. D6&7



The centrepiece of the Singapore Pavilion, HDB: Homes Of Singapore.

DESIGN: CAROL GAN PHOTOS: DON WONG, LIM YAOHUI

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People in the spotlight

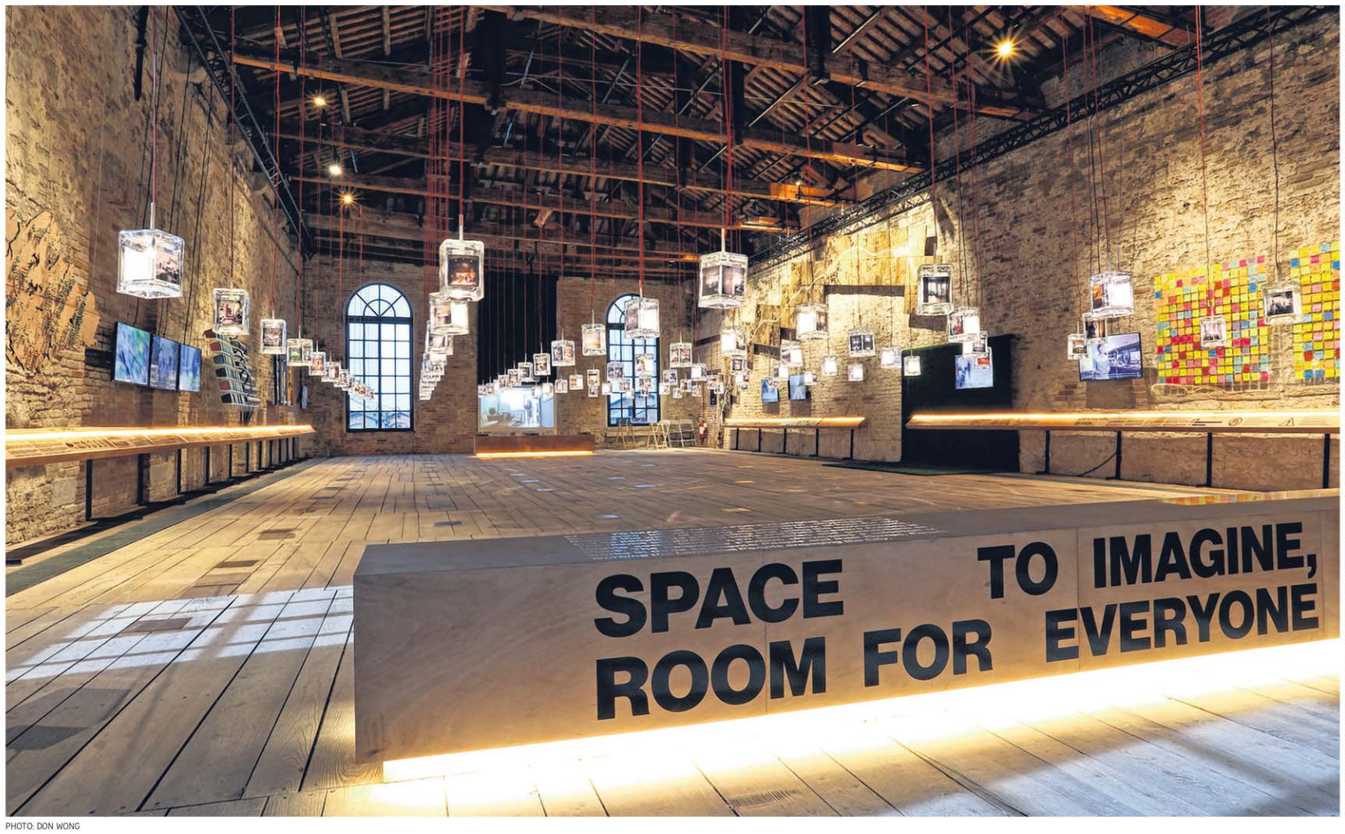


PHOTO: DON WONG

From discussions on land use to gardening initiatives, the efforts of Singaporeans in shaping their living environment are showcased at the Venice Architecture Biennale



Ankita Varma
In Venice

Not a building model in sight, nor a picture of the Singapore skyline.

That was the thought that crossed Spanish architect Louiza Aberquero's mind as she entered the Singapore Pavilion at the prestigious 15th International Architecture Exhibition (Biennale Architettura 2016) in Venice last Saturday.

Instead, she saw glowing rows of glass lanterns suspended from the ceiling. In them were illuminated photographs of the interiors of Housing Board (HDB) homes – living rooms, bedrooms and kitchens.

At the base of each lantern, there was a tiny 3D model of the HDB block where these intimate spaces are found.

Ms Aberquero, 39, says she has always known Singapore as a "perfectly planned cityscape" and this idiosyncractic showcase surprised her.

"Seeing a presentation that puts citizens in the forefront was not only unique and unexpected, but also very poignant," she adds.

The organic and creative ways in which citizens shape their physical environment is a big part of the Singapore booth this year, which is titled Space To Imagine, Room For Everyone.

"Co-creation" is the buzzword at the Singapore Pavilion this year – that is, Singaporeans working alongside the state in collaborative urban planning. So there is an emphasis on ground-up, grassroots activities instead of top-down government masterplans.

That is why initiatives by civic groups such as Friends of the Rail Corridor, Goldhill Gardening Club and Participate in Design are exhibited in three segments – People And Their Homes, People Working The Land and People Engaging The City (see other stories).

Through physical artefacts, video interviews and pictures, the stories of these groups are represented, such as Ground-Up Initiative's low carbon footprint 5G village campus and Edible Garden City's urban food garden spaces.

At the opening ceremony, which was attended by Singapore President Tony Tan Keng Yam, Minister for Communications and Information Yaacob Ibrahim said: "The last 50 years have been, for lack of a better word, top down.

"But this is the era of co-creating solutions. We want Singaporeans to have a sense of ownership and the only way that can happen is if they feel they have a stake in the country."

The pavilion was commissioned by DesignSingapore Council and curated by a team from the National University of Singapore (NUS) Department of Architecture. They declined to reveal the cost.

The theme for the biennale this year was Reporting From The Front.

In response, Singapore's lead curator and associate professor at NUS Department of Architecture, Dr Wong Yunn Chii, decided to veer away from representing Singapore's prosperous external facade and, instead, focus on the people who are pushing for change from the ground up – often by championing new uses of land amid top-down urban planning.

The projects chosen all demonstrate "participatory design, which is softening Singapore's hardened edges", he tells The Straits Times.

He adds: "These projects might often fall through the cracks, but they are perfect examples of co-creation at work – where you can see entrepreneurial design happening between people of different races, ages and backgrounds."

Singapore's pavilion is among 64 national presentations at the biennale that highlighted a spectrum of moral and social issues.

Its fifth showing since 2004 comes hot on the heels of its designation as a Unesco Creative City of Design in December last year.

The 240 sq ft space at the Sale d'Armi building in the Arsenale region used to house the exhibition is also Singapore's for the next 20 years – ahead of the country signing a lease last year which allows for the space to be used for both art and architecture biennales in alternate years.

Besides the main event of the biennale, there are a number of satellite exhibitions.

One of them is the European Cultural Centre's Time – Space – Existence architecture exhibition, where Singaporean firms MKPL Architects, Woha, Wy-To and POD Structures are also presenting a selection of their work.

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• The Singapore Pavilion at the Venice Biennale is open for public viewing till Nov 27. For details about opening hours and ticketing prices, go to www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/tickets/

People And Their Homes

This segment showcases the challenges and commonalities found in the heartland of Singapore's new towns, where 85 per cent of the population resides.

What: HDB: Homes Of Singapore (above) by Keyakismos and Tomohisa Miyauchi

Forming the centrepiece of the Singapore Pavilion, this presentation features intimate images of the interiors of HDB homes shot over three years by architect and senior lecturer Miyauchi of National University of Singapore's Department of Architecture.

The project, which is the brainchild of artist duo Eitaro Ogawa and Tamae Iwasaki of Keyakismos, togther with Miyauchi, saw more than 240 images presented on 81 glass lanterns created by renowned Italian light fitting designers Viabizzuno. A 3D model of a HDB building is also represented within each lantern.

The fixtures – made and designed by Viabizzuno in partnership with the NUS' Department of Architecture – are now part of the Viabizzuno catalogue and may be sold in the future.

What: 03-Flats by Lei Yuan Bin and Lilian Chee

The sophomore film essay by film-maker Lei and conceptualised by Chee, an assistant professor at NUS' Department of Architecture, follows the domestic lives of three women living alone in HDB estates. The movie explores themes of domesticity and identity and was screened at the pavilion.



PHOTO: CREATURES STUDIOS

People Engaging The City

This segment focuses on initiatives that are being introduced to create more responsive, accessible and creative public spaces within the confines of a meticulously planned city.

What: Rail Corridor Project (above) by Friends of the Rail Corridor, Nature Society (Singapore), Singapore Heritage Society and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA)

The Rail Corridor project headed by URA is responsible for coming up with plans for the 26km stretch of railway land that used to serve trains between Singapore and Malaysia in consultation with the interest groups listed above.

The exhibition features a video presentation with the various parties discussing their ideas as well as a 10m-long topographical model of the corridor, made by students from the Department of Architecture at the National University of Singapore.

What: Our Favourite Place by URA

This URA initiative aims to offer more opportunities for the community to be involved in enlivening public spaces to transform them into meaningful and accessible areas.

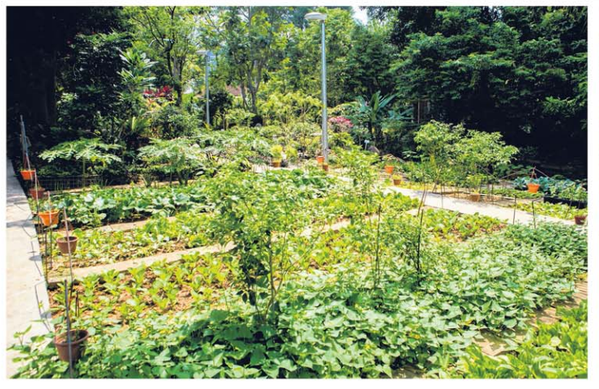
Some of these projects include pop-up installations, such as Chairs In Squares (movable chairs), Picnic In The Park (picnic tables and swings) and Play Space (3D play set) that were placed in areas such as Raffles Place, to encourage a more lively public atmosphere.

At the Singapore Pavilion, video footage and images showcase these events and the people behind them.

What: Empowering Design by Participate in Design (P!D)

P!D is a non-profit organisation that creates awareness of participatory design. The group helps neighbourhoods and public institutions in Singapore design creative spaces by engaging with the communities that reside in these spaces.

P!D's work at the Singapore Pavilion is presented through a colourful wall of Post-it notes, each displaying hand-written notes or feedback given by participants during their engagement sessions.





The Community In Bloom project (left) by Moulmein Goldhill Neighbourhood Committee; and Urban Farming initiative (above).
PHOTOS: CREATURES STUDIOS

People Working The Land

Projects in this segment feature a new wave of groups that are going back to working with the earth, despite Singapore being a land-scarce city state. Their efforts are showcased in pictures and video interviews.

What: Community In Bloom by Goldhill Gardening Club

Community In Bloom is a nationwide gardening movement started by the National Parks Board to encourage community farming in public and private housing estates as well as organisations such as schools, hospitals and welfare homes. The exhibition at the Singapore Pavilion features an award-winning garden and vegetable farm on a 465 sq m plot of land, maintained by a group of 50 residents from the Moulmein Goldhill Neighbourhood Committee.

What: Urban Farming by Edible Garden City and Comcrop

Edible Garden City is behind the Grow Your Own Food movement in Singapore while Comcrop is a farming enterprise that employs innovative agriculture technology on rooftop spaces in the city. Both projects champion local produce and push forth initiatives that turn under-utilised metropolitan spaces into arable plots to grow produce.

What: Rootedness And Resilience by Ground-Up Initiative

Ground-Up Initiative is a non-profit group that in September 2014 secured a land area of 26,000 sq m in Khatib to build Kampung Kampus, a testbed for sustainability ideas. Kampung Kampus is being constructed with the help of volunteers and the exhibition showcases some of the handmade bricks that were made to build their eco-campus.

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