

S'pore's first woman Designer of the Year

A portable shelter and the world's best tall building are among the recipients at this year's President's Design Award

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GIVE it up for woman power. More than a decade after the President's Design Award (P*DA) had been established, a woman has finally been named Designer of the Year. Angelene Chan, chief executive officer of DP Architects, received the honour from President Halimah Yacob on July 17 at a ceremony at the Istana.

The P*DA is the nation's highest accolade for design. As part of a revamp after a decade, the P*DA now places greater emphasis on outcome-based design impact in addition to the long-standing criteria of excellence in design craftsmanship.

Product and industrial designer Hans Tan who runs his eponymous studio also received the Designer of the Year accolade. In addition, another nine projects received Design of the Year awards.

Ms Chan, who has been practising architecture for 26 years, is no stranger to the P*DA. Republic Polytechnic and Sunray Woodcraft Construction Headquarters – which she worked on – received the Design of the Year awards in 2009 and 2015 respectively.

On being the first woman to be named Designer of the Year, Ms Chan said it is a label that she has mixed feelings about.

"For me, design and the creative process is gender-neutral. I have always thought of myself simply as 'an architect'. I see the practice of architecture as an act of design that has the power to improve lives and build communities; and the gender of the architect has no bearing on the power of architecture," she said

"But I do recognise the struggle that women architects inevitably encounter at some point of their lives – to choose between their profession and their personal life. This struggle usually occurs at the stage where they, and their peers, have established themselves and are advancing in their career. I believe this is one of the reasons there are less women architects in prominent positions."

Ms Chan joined DP Architects 28 years ago, designed Suntec City for her first project, and became CEO in 2016.

Like Ms Chan, Mr Tan has also received Design of the Year awards in the past – in 2012 for his Spotted Nyonya Collection of vessels and in 2015 for his Pour table. The jury praised Mr Tan for personifying contemporary Singapore design through a rich and diverse portfolio that is "proudly and poetically Singaporean". Mr Tan is also an assistant professor for industrial design at National University of Singapore, and has won awards for excellence in teaching. The



jury members were impressed by the impact he has made beyond his studio practice.

Prasoon Kumar, co-founder and CEO of billionBricks is an example that not all superheros wear capes. He runs a non-profit design studio which creates shelter solutions with a vision to end homelessness in the world. The company's weatherHYDE is a Design of the Year recipient.

weatherHYDE is a women-friendly, weather-proof, portable and easy to set-up shelter for homeless families. In 2016, weatherHYDE was launched on Kickstarter and currently more than 2,500 homeless and recreational consumers are using it across the world.

Mr Kumar said that getting weatherHYDE made was tough because it took time to find the right manufacturer. On receiving the accolade, he said, "billionBricks has been founded on the core principle to 'never design poorly for the poor'. This is a value that we fight for every



day because it goes against the expectations when working for the poor. We stuck by what we thought was the right thing to do, and what our homeless customers wanted. We persevered through this resistance and this award is an endorsement of our principle and value."

Oasia Hotel Downtown which was named 2018's Best Tall Building Worldwide by the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, is also a Design of the Year recipient. Richard Hassell, co-founder of Woha, the building's architect said: "With the Oasia Hotel Downtown, we wanted to re-

Angelene Chan, CEO of DP Architects, received the nation's highest accolade for design from President Halimah Yacob on July 17. (Left) Industrial designer Hans Tan, also awarded Designer of the Year, impressed the jury with his diverse portfolio that is "proudly and poetically Singaporean". PHOTOS: DP ARCHITECTS, YEN MENG JIIN

think the 'tropical skyscraper' by making it open and airy. The different shades of red and more than 20 species of creeper plants on its facade make it colourful, soft and alive – it attracts butterflies, birds, and even some squirrels, and brings biodiversity back into the city."

The other Design of the Year recipients are Mediacorp Campus, China Fuzhou Jin Niu Shan Trans-urban Connector, The Tembusu condominium, Changi Airport Terminal 4, The Future of Us Pavilion, The Warehouse Hotel and Who Cares? Transforming the Caregiving Experience in Singapore.