

## President's Design Award 2020



### Award recipients were feted for their designs which aim to empower and uplift lives



**Chantal Sajan**  
Senior Correspondent

When Ms Kelley Cheng was told she would be Designer of the Year at the President's Design Award (PDA) 2020, she cried.

"It has been 22 years since I started iSh magazine and it has been a long journey," says the 49-year-old, who is the founder of home-grown visual communications studio The Press Room, specialising in content creation and content interpretation.

She started iSh in 1999, a pioneering independent design magazine in Singapore that set out to educate and inspire as well as promote and support all things design.

"In the early days, I had no money, so I did everything myself," says Ms Cheng, who graduated from the National University of Singapore's school of architecture in 1997. "Sometimes, after paying the printing company, I would have to live on instant noodles for the rest of the month."

She received Singapore's highest design honour from President Halimah Yacob at the Istana on Wednesday.

Also awarded Designer of the Year were Mr Khoo Peng Beng and Ms Belinda Huang, the husband-and-wife architect team behind Pinnacle@Duxton, Singapore's first

50-storey public housing development.

There were also nine Design of the Year award recipients for contributing to economic, cultural and community transformation, raising the quality of life and making ground-breaking achievements in design.

Madam Halimah, who was the guest of honour, said the common thread that runs through good design is the improvement it brings to the quality of life. "Each award-winning project is a unique testimony to how design can be used to empower lives, uplift communities and propel innovation."

The awards are jointly handed out by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and DesignSingapore Council (DSG). Established in 2006, the PDA was an annual affair, but was relaunched as a biennial award in 2017.

The Designer of the Year awards are for those who have spent their careers focused on making a difference to their industry, community and country. The recipients are selected by a panel of prominent Singapore and international leaders in design, business and architecture.

This year, seven of the jurors in the Design and Architecture Panels were past PDA recipients, such as Designers of the Year Dr Hossein Rezai (2016), Mr Chris Lee (2009) and architect Tan Kok Hiang (2014).

Ms Cheng says she started iSh magazine to give young creatives a platform to develop a portfolio because she knows the difficulties in working in design and the arts.

"It was to get noticed," she says. "Without documentation, Singapore's design scene will have no history without which we cannot have a strong design culture."

"As a recipient of the PDA, I hope to continue to advocate for the design industry and champion the use of design to serve communities in Singapore and beyond."

Her parents were sceptical when she told them of her plans in 1999.

"As an idealistic young designer, I wanted to start my own design magazine. But my parents didn't believe in it and they tried to discourage me," says Ms Cheng, who went on to open a successful design practice in 2009.

Over the two decades, she has created a body of work spanning visual communications, exhibition design and publishing. She is also an educator who has worked with many young designers and helped nurture the next generation of talents.

It is, however, not the first PDA triumph for Mr Khoo, 52, and Ms Huang, 53.

The Arc Studio founders were recipients of Design of the Year awards for the much-lauded "sky-rise" Pinnacle@Duxton in 2010 and The Tembusu condominium in Tampines in 2018.

They say the key to good design is empathy. Design should go beyond the physical space to also include the psychological impact of the built environment on urban communities.

"Understanding how design impacts emotions is very important to ensure not only the physical well-being, but also the social-emotional well-being of a person," says Ms Huang. Her practice has explored new ideas in high-rise, high-density residential design that emphasise vertical connectivity and community living.

"I would go so far as to say that the source of many of our challenges today is the emotional void, the loneliness that is felt within. This causes us to respond out of fear and a need to keep consuming and looking for something to fill the void."

"Creating healing spaces that are calming and help people to connect with nature and with others, and, most of all, with themselves, is critical for resilience," adds Ms Huang.

Mr Khoo says the duo's architectural practice is "really about how we can do more with less".

"How can we be high intensity, compact and still be green and be



Singapore-based social enterprise BillionBricks' architect Praseon Kumar (left, in a 2019 photograph) is a co-winner for a Design of the Year award for Etania Green School (above) in Sabah, which used shipping containers to create a school. PHOTOS: BILLIONBRICKS, LIM YAOHUI



(Above from left) Arc Studio founders Belinda Huang and Khoo Peng Beng and The Press Room founder Kelley Cheng were recipients of Designer of the Year. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE, YONG LI XUAN



close to nature?" asks Mr Khoo, who, together with his wife, tries to be a role model for the next generation of architects through active engagement in education and advocacy.

He is an adjunct associate professor at NUS, while Ms Huang participates in NUS' external design critiques.

"In our projects, we try to create community spaces in as varied a manner as possible," he says.

For example, in The Tembusu condo project, they created sky gardens that wrapped around the three blocks of the residential complex, bringing greenery and activity to the surface of the building.

"Buildings, more than just glass monoliths, become hosts for greenery and communal activities. The identity of our buildings arises from making that connection between the intangible and tangible. It is about giving an expression to architecture that integrates all of these complex needs in as simple a way as possible."

Meanwhile, the Design of the Year awards were given to projects that show design's capacity to transform and touch people from all walks of life, both locally and abroad.

One of the standout designs is Etania Green School in Sabah, Malaysia. Architect Praseon Kumar and chief design officer Robert Verrijt of

Singapore-based BillionBricks, a social enterprise, transformed five shipping containers using recycled timber and adding an iron roof to create a low-cost school. The project has benefited 350 students who are children of a marginalised community of migrant labourers since the school opened in 2018.

Etania features open and flexible classrooms that enable experiential learning across multiple age groups.

Mr Kumar, 44, quit his full-time architect job in 2013 to start a non-profit to build homes for the homeless. It has helped house thousands in poor communities and disaster zones in eight countries.

He says: "If we want to teach children about sustainability, then we need to build schools that use less energy. If we want to teach equality and respect for all, then school buildings have to be less hierarchical. Etania Green School achieves this in many ways."

A constant observer of the PDA over the years is the recipient of its first award, Mr Theseus Chan. He received the Designer of the Year award at the inaugural President's Design Award in 2006.

He notes that today's recipients are at an important crossroads in Singapore's design history.

"Not only do they continue to shape our nation's needs and identity on the one hand, but they are also imprinting their individuality in their work," says Mr Chan, 59, founder of design studio Work.

"There has been an impressive continuum since the inaugural honours in 2006."

chantal@sph.com.sg

• The winning works will be showcased in a travelling exhibition, which will move from the URA Centre to the National Design Centre, library@orchard, Temasek Shophouse and Singapore University of Technology and Design.

MORE STORIES on C2



## President's Design Award 2020



### AIRMESH PAVILION

Perched on a grassy patch at Gardens by the Bay is the AirMesh Pavilion, which is constructed entirely out of 3D-printed stainless-steel components and glows in the dark.

It is the first such structure in the world, created with 54 bespoke nodes and 216 bars of different lengths and sections which demonstrate new possibilities between technology and design.

The precise digital customisation resulted in a shorter construction time and no material wastage. It is created by AirLab or Architectural Intelligence Research Lab, a multidisciplinary research laboratory established at the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD). AirLab's director and founder Carlos Banon is an assistant professor of architecture and sustainable design at SUTD.

"The pavilion reinterprets a traditional Chinese lantern. This small pavilion unlocks immense possibilities for sustainable construction and future architectural designs such as transport hubs, large-span roofs and even skyscrapers," says Prof Banon.



### CLOISTER HOUSE

This single-storey house is a fresh take on the tropical courtyard house by architects Alan Tay and Seetoh Kum Loon of Formwerkz Architects.

Built within a 4,500 sq m plot – about half the size of a football field – in Johor Baru, Cloister House is a large communal living block with a back garden, a pool and a smaller annexe for private bedrooms.

The building is divided into a grid of rectangles punctuated by multiple courtyards. The result is a maze of different spaces for exploration and entertainment. The unifying design is its dramatic timber-clad ceiling formed through a series of inverted pitched roofs.

Mr Tay says its design opens up a new form of luxury living in the tropics.

"Luxury has always been tied to the idea of mansions that are tall, of certain sizes and home to fancy rooms," he says.

"The single-storey house is almost always seen as inferior. But Cloister House shows how you can still live richly and have a wealth of experiences within."



### GOODLIFE! MAKAN

A community kitchen in the void deck of Block 52 Marine Terrace has been drawing elderly residents living alone away from their homes to reintegrate into society, enlivening the idea of ageing in place.

The successful prototype of community reintegration called Goodlife! Makan was conceived by architect Seah Chee Huang of DP Architects in 2015 together with social service agency Montfort Care.

It banks on food to bring seniors together to co-create programmes that serve one another's needs.

This departure from the traditional care model and Senior Activity Centre has transformed the group of seniors from recipients of charity to stewards of their own community.

"We identified a vulnerable community of stay-alone seniors who hardly stepped out of their homes and were isolated from society," says Mr Seah. "The Goodlife! Makan project encouraged some to step out and form social bonds with others, showing that design has the capacity to reframe the way the community sees seniors and the way they see themselves."



### JEWEL CHANGI AIRPORT

Jewel Changi Airport, designed by Mr Moshe Safdie of Safdie Architects and in collaboration with architectural firm RSP, redefines the idea of an aviation transit hub by creating a people-centric facility that is also accessible to transit passengers.

The 10-storey nature and shopping destination brings together Changi Airport's three terminals under a dome covered with over 9,300 glass panels.

There are more than 280 shops

and restaurants in a terraced tropical garden with over 2,000 trees and palms, and about 100,000 shrubs. Its eye-catching oculus in the ceiling features a waterfall 40m high, creating dramatic visual effects and rainbows in a cooling micro-climate.

Jewel represents a new typology which combines retail spaces, passenger conveniences and a garden within a climate-controlled glass enclosure that places Singapore on the world traveller's radar.

## Other winners

Chantal Sajan  
Senior Correspondent

The President's Design Award for Design of the Year projects are evaluated on the creativity and originality of the design ethos, design research, aesthetics and craftsmanship, and impact of design in one or more of four areas.

These include enabling economic transformation; raising quality of life; advancing Singapore's brand, culture and community; and ground-breaking achievements in design.

Of the 129 entries received for the 2020 awards, 38 design and architecture projects were shortlisted for Design of the Year.

The architecture discipline is administered by the Urban Redevelopment Authority, while the other disciplines are administered by the Design-Singapore Council.

chantal@sph.com.sg



### SPARKLETOTS LARGE PRESCHOOL AT PUNGGOL

The school reinvents the notion of a conventional childcare centre in Singapore by providing safety, security and inclusiveness through the inventive use of a circular architectural form.

All its 36 toddler and nursery classrooms, housing potentially 1,000 students, line the outer perimeter of the building.

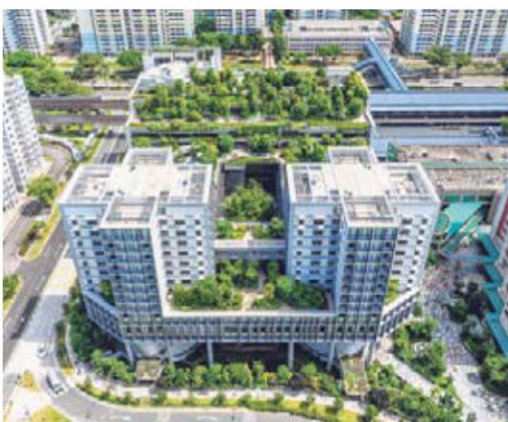
This frees up its centre – sheltered by a lightweight stretched membrane – for activities.

An oculus roof brings in light and promotes airflow and cross ventilation, creating a cheerful space for play and striking up friendships.

Architects Ho Tzu Yin and Matthew Yeo from Laud Architects overcame a tight construction timeframe by using prefabricated elements and modular classroom designs.

"Designing for children lets us become children again, to see the world from their point of view and be inspired by our own childhood experiences," says Mr Ho.

"Interestingly, the school principal has observed her students becoming happier, friendlier and more communicative towards visitors as compared with those in other centres."



### KAMPUNG ADMIRALTY

This is a tropical urban village for seniors that harks back to "kampung" days, when the community bonded together over shared outdoor experiences.

Designed by Woha Architects' Wong Mun Summ and Pearl Chee, Kampung Admiralty is an 11-storey development which houses 104 flats for the elderly, a medical centre, a senior care centre, a childcare centre and a 900-seat hawker centre.

It is also a prototype that explores how communities will live

together in the future and how to age in place in a life-affirming way. The development features senior-friendly residential units, retail, a sheltered public plaza and an urban farm.

It provides the daily necessities for all, regardless of age, as it is not designed solely for seniors.

"This makes it possible to draw people of all ages from the entire neighbourhood to create a vibrant space that allows inter-generational bonds to form," says Ms Chee, director at Woha Architects.



### THE (NOT-SO) CONVENIENCE STORE

Do not be fooled by its fluorescent-lit interiors, catchy jingle and upbeat corporate stripes.

"We like to say The (Not-So) Convenience Store is probably the world's first convenience store to promote inconvenience," says lead designer Astri Nursalim of Kinetic Singapore.

When tasked by Temasek Shop-house to come up with an exhibition to reduce waste and improve sustainability, the team from Kinetic opted for a fresh approach to exhibition design, mindful that most people in Singapore were quite tired of national campaigns.

"Recognising that the culture of

convenience – single-use packaging and disposables – is a big contributor to waste, we thought: What better way to highlight this than to appropriate and subvert the very embodiment of convenience itself? And thus The (Not-So) Convenience Store was born," says Ms Astri.

At the store, price tags display the price of convenience paid by the environment; a cashier dispenses "notes" on living more sustainably; and a freezer is repurposed as a recycling bin.

The project was singled out for its public reach and how it helps raise awareness about sustainability in a fun and engaging manner.



### EYEAH!

This educational platform is created by Singapore-based designers Steve Lawler and Tanya Wilson, who helm EyeYah!

Targeted at young children, it uses various multimedia options ranging from magazines to an iPad app to interactive augmented-reality (AR) experiences.

It was conceived in the category of visual and digital communications and UX/UI (user experience

and user interface) design that uses engaging learning materials and events to help children understand the world around them.

The content is researched in consultation with experts, educators and parents.

EyeYah! is used in various educational set-ups around the world. Numerous schools in Singapore, Britain and the United States include it as part of their teaching toolkit.

PHOTOS: DP ARCHITECTS, EYEAH!, FABIAN ONG, K. KOPTER, KINETIC SINGAPORE, LAUD ARCHITECTS, TIMOTHY HURSELEY