

The Six Faces of a Socially Responsible Architect

Koon-Chung Chan

1. architects as urbanists -- More than half of the world's population now live in urbanized areas and high density living is the common fate of most people, the irony is that only with reasonably high-density urban living can humankind still hope to preserve agricultural land and real countryside. Here HK may have a lesson or two that the world could learn from, along with our fair share of mistakes to avoid. I ask all local architects to aspire to achieving decent high-density living for all our ranks, and providing it with good public space that create a sense of place in urban living. I put forward the motion that an architect must first and foremost be an urbanist, one who cares for the city.

2. architects as communitarians – Architecture and public spaces are the anchors of communities. Architects should be builders of convivial communities, not their spoilers. Architects should build to encourage inclusiveness, not segregation. In other words, architects should be communitarians at heart.

3. architects as environmentalists -- Conserve energy yet keep the house warm in winter and cool in summer. Help us to leave a smaller carbon footprint. We should stop blindly adoring some big-name architects such as Frank Gehry, whose Los Angeles Disney Concert Hall, which sits under the Southern California sun, was wrapped in twenty-two million pounds of steel and thus heating up surrounding buildings by as much as fifteen degrees. Also, dear architects, you cannot leave environmental inputs to the structural engineers or building contractors, or the developers -- even if they want to, they may not know how to do it. It is you, architects, who must insist. Therefore I implore you, architects, to be environmentalists and to insist on building environmentally friendly architecture.

4. architects as contextualists – In the late 19th century and early 20th century a few very smart Austrian architect-urbanists such as Camillo Sitte and Otto Wagner had advocated contextualism – that architectural design in urban areas should take into consideration its neighboring buildings and pedestrians on the street level. Their ideas inspired many architects to build some of the most beautiful European cities such as Vienna and Amsterdam. Architecture does not stand alone. Architecture is not an installation art. It has externalities. Knowing how compact Hong Kong is, we cannot afford the beggar-thy-neighbor mentality of some developments. Please don't build anything that is pedestrian unfriendly, and don't do any building that hurts the neighborhood. As much as you can, be a contextualist.

5. architects as occasional whistle blowers -- In the mid-19th century, high-minded Victorian critics of Britain from Sir Henry Wotton to John Ruskin largely agreed that “well buildings hath three conditions: commodity, firmness, and delight”; commodity meaning it suits its purpose, it is the proper envelope for the activity that will take place in it; firmness meaning it stands up without cracks or stains, pieces don't fall off, parts fit together, it looks solid, and delight meaning delightful to be looked at from without and delightful to be within. I think to most people, these criteria still stand, partly because many buildings in our age may not even pass these 19th century tests. Bad buildings are everywhere, dysfunctional, shoddy and ugly. And behind every bad building is a bad architect. Well, maybe it is the developers' greed or the contractors' negligence or the government supervisors' incompetence that makes a bad building. The bad guys cheat the consumers and deliver an inferior product. But it takes an architect who looks the other way, who does not care about the end product, for that to happen. In my younger days, there was a common view in HK that the three professions people really looked up to were, physicians, lawyers and accountants at times or physician, lawyers and architects at other times. Among other reasons, it shows local citizenry's trust in these professions. I don't know whether local architects as a discipline have ethical codes as physicians, a Hippocratic Oath of architects. If not, peer-pressure and self-discipline are all you have, and I can understand keeping the profession's integrity could be an uphill battle, even in HK. Still, I ask all local architects to live up to the best of your discipline and don't betray the trust of the local citizenry, and occasionally when all corrective efforts fail and something pricks your conscience, try blow the whistle.

6. architects as archivists -- I could have used the word historicists, but historicism may have had a bad name for a few brief decades of the last century among coteries of high modernists and I am sure it still puts some architects among us today in a defensive mode. I am not dictating a style or a form to you. All I am saying is, on home ground and for my home town, I would ask all architects in Hong Kong to do your history home works. Respect what has come before you. Be innovative, but conserve our tangible and intangible past and preserve our diversity before you leave your signature or simply carry out the wishes of your employers. Be like an archivist. In short, handle HK with care.

有社會責任的建築師的六種面貌

陳冠中

1. **建築師為城市規劃者**——超過一半的世界人口現居於城市區域。人口稠密的生活已是大部份人的共同命運。諷刺的是只有靠合理的高密度城市生活，人類才有希望保存農地與真正的鄉村。香港或許可讓世界上一兩課，避免犯上同樣錯誤。我希望所有本地建築師爭取為所有階層建立高密度生活，提供良好公共空間，創造城市生活的地位。我建議建築師須首先成為城市規劃者，關心城市。

2. **建築師為社區主義者**——建築與公共空間是社區的支柱。建築師應建立而不是搞砸歡樂社區。建築師應鼓勵包容而不是分離。也就是說，建築師的內心得是社區主義者。

3. **建築師為環境保護者**——節約能源之餘，保持家居冬暖夏涼，替我們減少用碳。我們不應再盲從知名建築師如法蘭克·蓋瑞。他的三藩市迪士尼演奏廳座落於陽光充沛的南加州，用2200萬磅的鋼鐵包裹而成，因而令四周的建築物升溫15度。還有，建築師，你們可能把環境保護的工作掉給建築工程師或建築承包商或發展商。即使他們想，也未必知道如何實行。你們建築師才該堅持。我懇求建築師成為環境保護者，堅持建造環保建築。

4. **建築師為脈絡主義者**——在19世紀末、20世紀初，幾名相當精明的奧地利城市規劃建築師例如 Camillo Sitte 與 Otto Wagner 提倡脈絡主義，指出城市地區的建築設計應顧及四周建築及路人。他們的意念啟發許多建築師建造一些最美麗的歐洲城市如維也納與阿姆斯特丹。建築不是獨立存在的。建築不是裝置藝術，而是受外在因素影響的。看到香港那麼擁擠，我們實在不能容忍一些損人利己的發展計劃。請不要建造任何不方便路人的建築物，或任何損害社區的建築物。盡量成為脈絡主義者吧。

5. **建築師為響哨者**——在19世紀中期，Sir Henry Wotton 至 John Ruskin 等英國高尚維多利亞評論家都同意：「建築物有三種狀況：有用、穩固及賞心悅目。」有用指建築物達到目的，成為舉行活動的合適地方。穩固指建築物沒有裂痕或污跡，沒有東西掉落，所有部份組合妥當，看來堅固。賞心悅目指從外面看令人快樂，待在裡頭令人愉悅。我想許多人仍覺得這些條件成立，因為現今許多建築可能都通過不了19世紀的測試。差勁的建築到處可見，機能不良，粗製濫做，外型醜陋。差勁建築背後必定有差勁的建築師。呀，也可能是發展商貪婪或承包商疏忽或政府監督人員無能造成的吧。差勁的人欺騙消費者，交出劣貨。只有看向別處，不在乎成品的建築師才會容許這種事發生。在我年輕的時候，香港有種普遍看法，當時最為人敬仰的職業是醫生、律師和會計師；在別的時代可能是醫生、律師及建築師。這證明本地市民信任這些專業人才。我不知道本地建築師有沒有像醫生般有職業道德誓言。如果沒有，只有靠同輩壓力及自律。我可以理解，即使在香港，維持職業廉潔也是一場漫長艱難的戰爭。但我始終希望本地建築師可以跟隨自己的紀律，不要背叛市民的信任。如果偶而所有矯正方法都失敗了，你又受到良心譴責，試試吹響哨子吧。

6. **建築師為檔案保管員**——我原本用「歷史主義者」，但在上世紀約數十年，歷史主義在現代主義的學者圈子早得惡名。我肯定這個詞仍會令現今一些建築師懷有戒心。我不是要決定你的風格或形式。在故土為故鄉，我希望所有香港建築師做自家歷史工作，尊重前人的建築。是要創新，但在你簽名或執行僱主要求的時候，也要保存有形無形的過去，保護我們的多元文化。要像檔案管理員，簡單來說，就是要謹慎對待香港。