FILIPINO ARCHI-TECTURE AT THE CROSS-CURRENTS

sulog

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How Do You Exhibit Contemporary Architecture from the Philippines?

BY PETER CACHOLA SCHMAL

The Philippines has finally become the Guest of Honor country at the Frankfurt Book Fair. As a German-Filipino, I have been waiting for this for a very long time. It has already been ten years since neighboring Indonesia was the Guest of Honor in 2015–a country with the same tropical climate, but a completely different colonial past and an architectural scene that is just as exciting as it is unknown to us. The exhibition "Tropicality Revisited" was curated by young scholars Avianti Armand and Setiadi Sopardi, who had previously presented their country at the Venice Biennale, where I met them. Today, they work at the museum Arsitektur Indonesia, which is currently being established.

Since I began working as Director of the Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) in 2006, I have gained extensive experience with the exciting format of Guest of Honor exhibitions. I set myself the goal of finding local partners to serve as guest curators. Sometimes architecture museums, institutes, or archives offered their services, sometimes architecture publishers, or freelance curators, if neither of the former was available.

Examples of this include Catalonia with the exhibition ("Patent Solutions," 2007) in collaboration with Actar Publishers, Turkey ("Becoming Istanbul," 2008) with the architecture-specialized Garanti Galeri, Finland ("Suomi Seven," 2014) with the Finnish Museum of Architecture, the Netherlands & Flanders ("Maatwerk," 2016) with the Flemish Architecture Institute VAi, Georgia ("Hybrid Tbilisi," 2018) with independent curator Irina Kurtishvili, and Norway ("Hunting High and Low," 2019) with independent curator Nina Berre. Iceland was an exception: for the exhibition ("Iceland and Architecture?", 2011), there was no longer an institution, as the only architecture department in the museum had been closed due to the current economic crisis. I had the opportunity to work twice with countries from South America: Argentina ("German Influences in Architecture," 2010) with the Latin American Archive for Architecture CEDODAL and Brazil ("Nove Novos," 2012) with the Instituto Tomie Othake. There were also two guest countries in Asia: China ("M8 in China," 2009) with Liaoning Publishers, and South Korea ("Megacity Network," 2007) with the Korean Architecture Institute, whose curator Sung Hong Kim is currently founding the Korean Museum of Urbanism and Architecture.

Such country presentations can therefore have far-reaching consequences for curators. While searching for Philippine partners–there is no architecture museum or archive (yet)–I received a tip from DOM Publishers Berlin that the young architect Bianca Weeko Martin from Toronto was currently working on the first Architecture Guide Manila. She wanted to present the finished work in Manila in May 2024 and invited me to join a panel with the well-known historian Gerard Lico and the young Patrick Kasingsing, editor-in-chief of the Kanto.ph platform. The presentation in the packed and newly renovated Manila Metropolitan Theater was a great success. The Architecture Guide is now sold out and can only be found online at high prices (but a few copies are still available at DAM). Representatives from the Philippine Arts in Venice Biennale (PAVB), responsible for the guest country at the book fair, were also present. The next day, Patrick Kasingsing took Bianca and me to see exciting buildings in Metro Manila, such as the Corner House by the Department of Architecture in Bangkok and the Comuna by Estudio Arkipelago, and introduced us to many people in the scene. I was impressed by his extensive network and knowledge, which is why I suggested him as curator to the PAVB during my next working visit. After some time, the experienced curator Edson Cabalfin from the USA joined us, who had curated the Philippine Pavilion at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018.

Both are responsible for the current project "SULOG – Filipino Architecture at the Crosscurrents," which was developed in long Zoom sessions between New Orleans, Metro Manila, and Frankfurt, and realized at the last minute. In order to present not only Filipino projects but also the global networking of the diaspora communities that are typical, they divided it into three parts. Finally, the country and its materials should also be emphasized. All of this is contained in "SULOG" (Cebuano for "streams" or "water currents").

I would like to thank the PAVB, Riya Lopez, Mapee Singson, and artistic director Patrick Flores for placing their trust in our team. I hope the exhibition in Frankfurt will be a great success and that it will subsequently travel to Metro Manila.

The Vitality of Crosscurrents and Exchanges

BY HON. LOREN LEGARDA, SENATOR, REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES AND PROJECT VISIONARY

I am excited to welcome everyone to the launch of the exhibit "**Sulog: Filipino Architecture at the Crosscurrents**" at the Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) in Frankfurt, Germany. Inspired by the archipelagic nature of the Philippines and the interconnected networks of global exchanges within which the country is immersed, the exhibit draws its title from the Cebuano word "*sulog*", which translates to "water currents" or "streams", to imagine contemporary Filipino architecture as a dynamic and ever-changing phenomenon. This exhibition marks an important milestone for showcasing Filipino architecture, as it will be the first time that the Philippines is featured at the DAM, one of Europe's most prominent cultural institutions dedicated to promoting contemporary architecture and urbanism. Additionally, "Sulog" forms part of the extensive cultural program of the Philippines as Guest of Honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2025, a significant event that promotes Philippine literature and publishing at one of the world's most prestigious and largest book fairs.

The arrival of this exhibition at DAM is not an accident but is part of a larger ecosystem that advocates for a more visible representation of the Philippines in important international venues of art and architecture. This exhibition marks the culmination of my decades-long effort, in collaboration with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), National Book Development Board (NBDB) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), to present Philippine arts and culture at prominent international events. These types of events and programming will not be successful if it weren't for the collaborative effort between public and private institutions in the Philippines and abroad. Cross-cultural linkages and partnerships are crucial in creating venues for transnational dialogue, the same idea that is at the crux of the conceptualization and implementation of this architecture exhibition.

We would like to thank the curators of the exhibit, Edson Cabalfin and Patrick Kasingsing, together with Peter Cachola Schmal, Director of Deutsches Architekturmuseum, and all the exhibitors and contributors, in bringing this important exhibition to fruition. We hope that with cultural programs such as this, the Philippines will continue to be an active participant and contributor to the global discourse of architecture and the built environment.

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Curatorial Note

Filipino Architecture at the Crosscurrents
Philippinische Architektur im Spannungsfeld
Arkitekturang Filipino sa Agusan

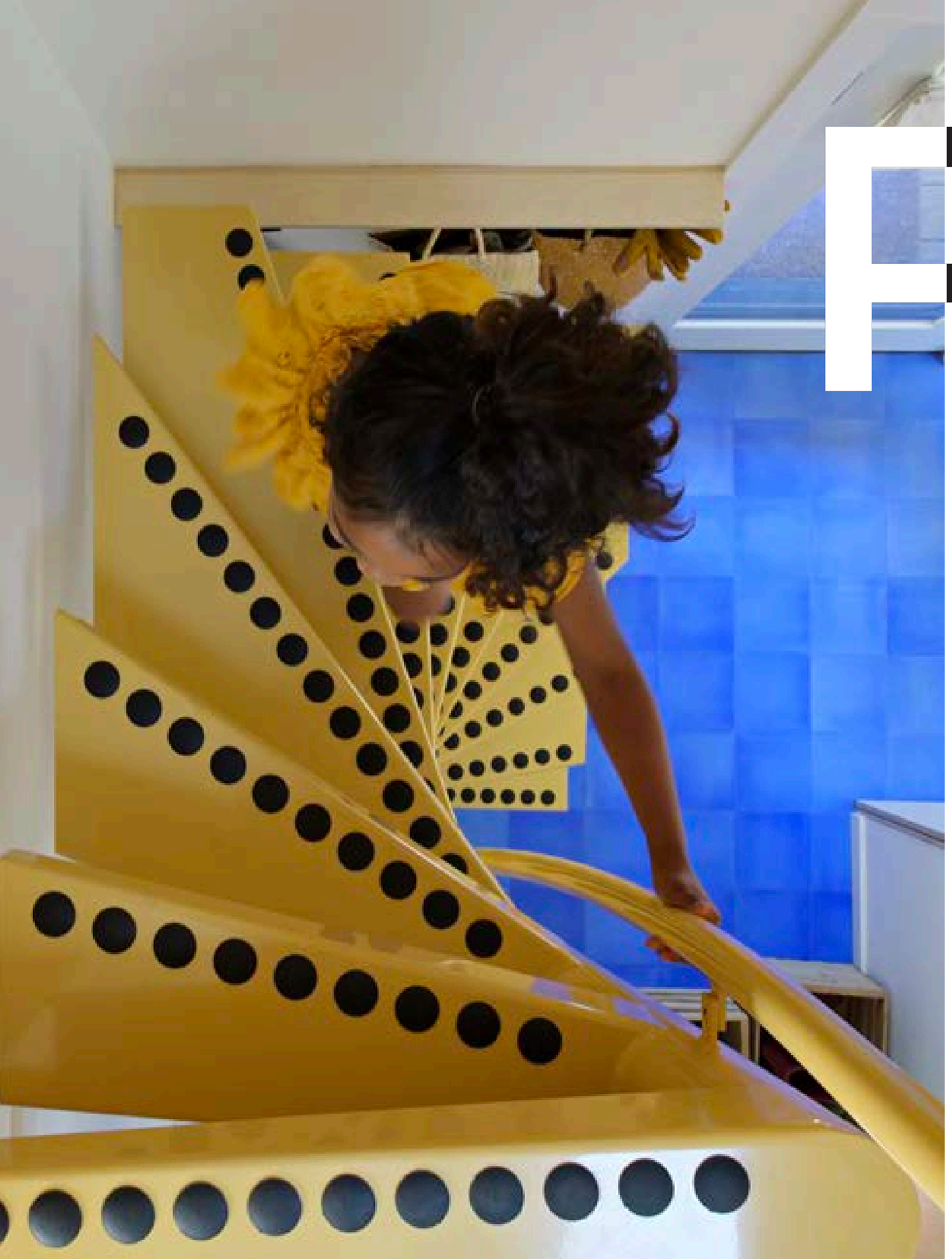
Contemporary Filipino Architecture is at the nexus of interconnected and intersecting forces. Once imagined as limited within the confines of the Philippines as a geographical setting, Filipino Architecture is recast as the continuous flow of people, places, and processes.

"Sulog", a Cebuano term that refers to "water currents", encapsulates the dynamic ebbs and flows of Filipino Architecture that is born of an archipelagic setting and whose sense of becoming is enmeshed within crosscurrents of multiple flows and network exchanges.

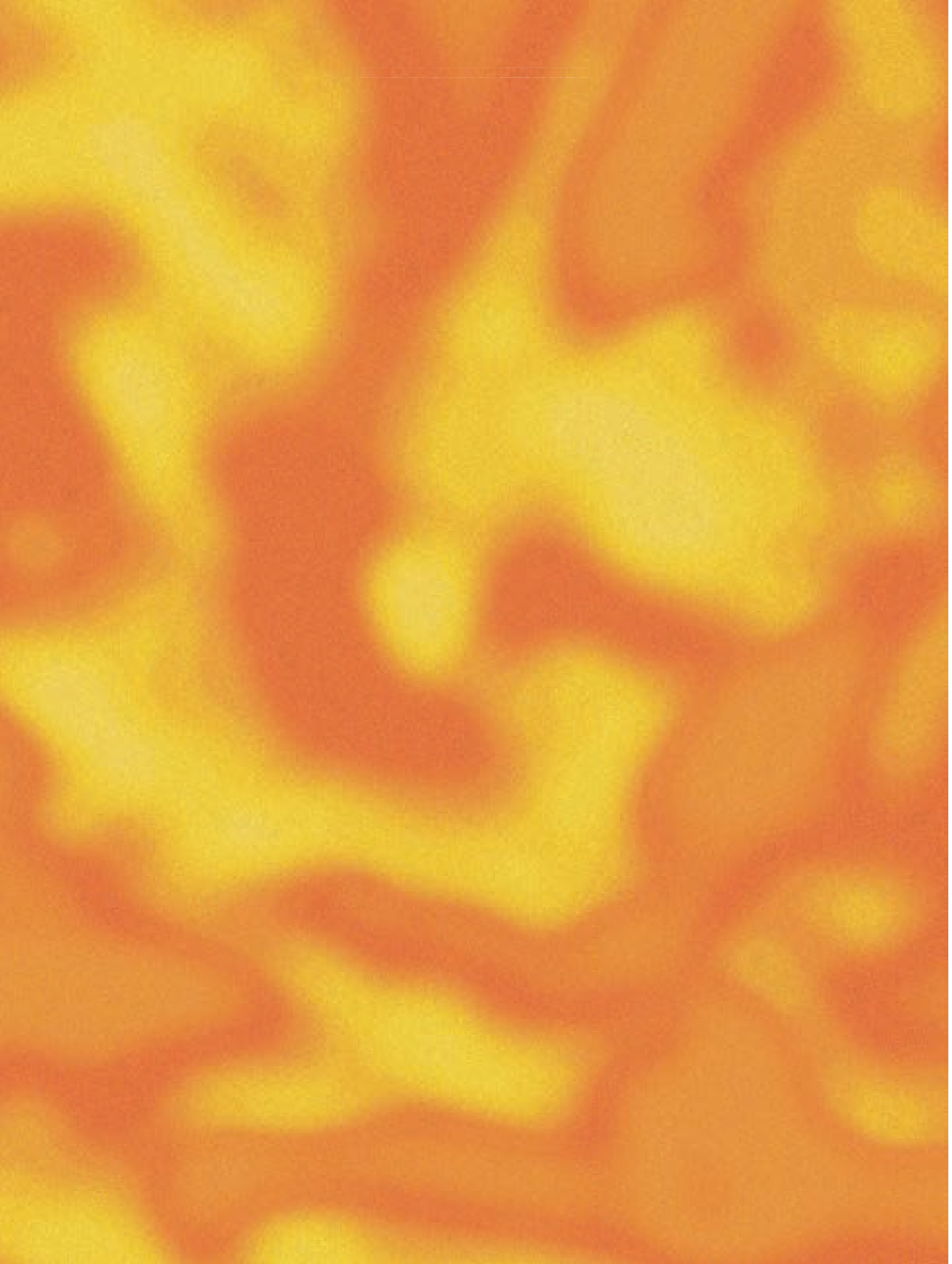
The exhibit is inspired by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's conception of **"Global Cultural Flow"** (1990) as an intersecting transnational network of exchange between people, goods, economics, politics, and ideas. He suggests that we need to understand these cultural flows across geo-political boundaries through the five dimensions of ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. Following this framework, we can then also understand that the production, consumption, and mediation of architecture are embedded within the ever-dynamic currents of movement that could never be limited to just one idea of territory. Thus, we can think of architecture as not simply emerging from a single nation or country but instead as a confluence of cultural exchanges occurring across time and space.

Three interlocking themes emerge from this reconceptualization of Filipino Architecture. First, **"People as Network"** presents architecture and the built environment as emerging from the imagination, experience, and engagement with people. In this sense, we understand architecture through the Filipino architects, collaborators, clients, communities, mentors, educational lineages, and the diaspora of the Filipino people across the world. Second, **"Places as Flux"** highlights the built environment as fundamentally grounded in places. Under such conception, an idea of place can cover a multitude of aspects of architecture, such as the site context, tropical climate, geological, geography, culture, history, and placemaking.Third, **"Process as Flows"** acknowledges the decision-making processes involved in the production and consumption of architecture through materials, construction, participatory methods, community engagement, heritage conservation, and the socio-political context.

As contemporary Filipino architecture emerges from the dynamic crosscurrents and interplay between people, places, and processes, it would also need to transform dynamically in the future. What kind of changes will have to occur between these networks and flows of people, places, and processes in the future? It is only by accepting that change is inevitable in Filipino Architecture that we can achieve its potential as a contributor to the global discourse and production of the built environment.



People as Network



What is the impact of the Filipino diaspora on contemporary architecture?

What kind of collaborations occur across multiple disciplines and fields?

How do you maintain Filipino identity while engaging with other cultures?

Filipino contemporary architecture, often thought of as being confined within the national boundaries of the Philippines, extends beyond the country's shores. Filipinos have contributed to the production of architecture, whether within or outside Philippine soil, through the vast network they have created. These fluid linkages have been established through their architectural education, work experiences, and professional and social connections.

Featured in this section are eight architects and designers who represent the transnational exchanges between the Philippines and the rest of the world. For some of them, the education they received both within and outside the Philippines enabled them to experience different cultural contexts. For others, working in another country provided an opportunity to learn a wide array of ideas, approaches, and technologies that differed from those in the Philippines. They bring their Filipino sensibilities into their practices, creating a highly hybridized and deeply complex architecture. Working across the globe also led to collaborations among professionals and consultants from diverse fields and locations. In most cases, their experiences are dynamically influenced by the multitude of people that they encounter, including their professors, mentors, colleagues, clients, and acquaintances.

As members of the Filipino diaspora, their work, lives, and experiences illustrate the mobility that globalization brings. While the movement between different countries and places might seem effortless and free-flowing during this era of globalization, in reality, Filipino professionals still face many challenges. Among the trials that they encounter are the stiff competition among professionals, the emotional toll of being away from family and friends, and the ever-changing nature of architectural practice, among others. The architects and designers navigate these challenges with grace and sensitivity, while conscious of their identities as Filipinos and global citizens.

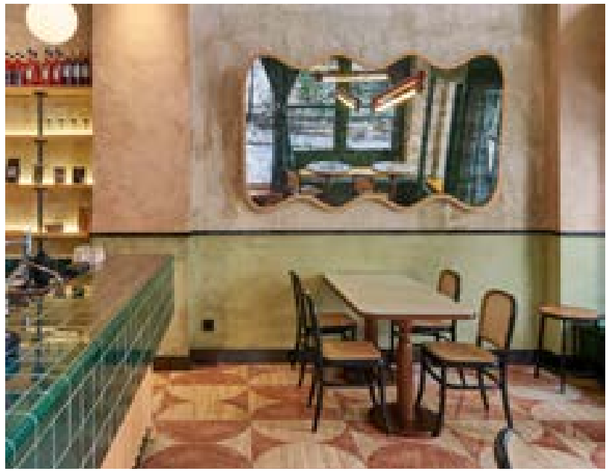
JJ Acuña

ACUÑA DESIGNS AT THE HUMAN SCALE, ALWAYS IN SERVICE TO COMMUNITY

JJ Acuña with
JJA Bespoke team

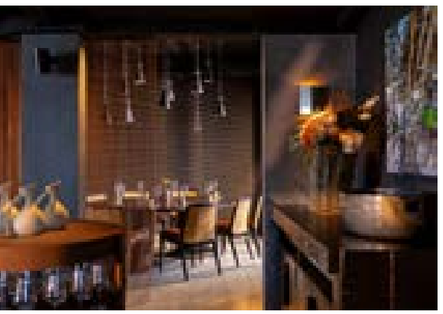
I've never been to Hong Kong, but JJ Acuña—who splits his time between there and Manila—paints a delightfully rich image of it for me. He retells the story of his very first project, a small café on Star Street in Wan Chai commissioned by a bullish sneakerhead entrepreneur with a new coffee concept. The project is now complete, and Acuña goes in and gets a coffee. He takes a seat and looks around, at the space he has just singlehandedly taken from concept design to construction.

"There were businessmen, kids, people with dogs, women chatting, bros after a rugby game, people in suits," Acuña describes. I imagine the hustle and bustle, the chatter of many languages. "Deals are made here. People propose here. People break up here. And that, to me, is more meaningful than anything else. It was a magical moment, looking around and seeing all of that happening in a space I created."



For Acuña, it's the human scale that matters. This is the scale at which he can be of service to the communities he collaborates with. An interior designer who once worked on towers and shopping malls in China ("Things I will never show anybody," he jokes), Acuña now leads his own practice in Hong Kong, Bespoke Studio.

A trailblazer in spirit, he has spent his life maneuvering around expectations, and thinking outside the box. Within 10 years at a corporate architecture firm in Hong Kong, Acuña rose through the ranks from intern to director, at last reaching the top within a system where none of his then-peers seemed to reflect the kind of life that he wanted. "Here I am—Filipino, queer, American-coded—at that level," Acuña says. For this kind of a trajectory, there are no mentors. But in its place: a community of creatives and



Celera by Nicco Santos, Manila, 2025, photographed by Scott Woodward

PEOPLE AS NETWORK JJ Acuña

Honbo, Macau, SAR China, 2022, photographed by Natalie Dunn

entrepreneurs innovating and "just trying to be themselves, support their industries, and support Hong Kong."

"What really struck me was that they had this autonomy and sovereignty. I just wanted to live that kind of life. I didn't know what it was going to look like—my entire practice was unplanned. So I wouldn't say there was a particular architect, interior designer, or professor. I was mentored by my friends and my creative community."

Where or what is home to you?

Acuña: *That's a really good question. I know it may be very saccharine or whatever to say that home is where the heart is. But I really learned that—I was born and I grew up in Manila in Quezon City, until I was eight, and for a lot of reasons, I moved to Texas. So I grew up in Texas and then I did my undergrad in New York and upstate and then grad school in New York City, both in architecture. And I've lived in Hong Kong for 20 years. The longest home I've ever had is Hong Kong. But I'm still an outsider there in a lot of ways. And now that I'm living in Manila—it's nice to be back because I am Filipino, but I'm also an outsider here. So home really just has to be where I am present at the moment.*

Working between Hong Kong and the Philippines

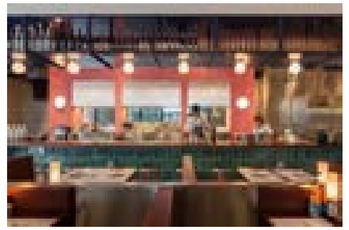
Acuña: *I'm always being asked, "What you do in Hong Kong—can you do it for us in Manila?" And I'm like, what does that even mean? But they're talking about the detail work, the planning, the expertise: doing things bespoke, custom. Not a copy-and-paste job, but something aligned with what they want for their lives, their brand, their chefs, their menus, their vibe.*

In Hong Kong, there's a very bespoke culture. People don't build cookie-cutter spaces. Everyone wants something unique to their story. There are so many craftsmen in Hong Kong who can build anything you imagine. And we have that in the Philippines too. I work with craftsmen in Pampanga and Cebu for bespoke, custom items. It's all here as well. It's just that they haven't been tapped in the same way.

In Hong Kong, when you do something, you finish it, fully and exactly how it was conceptualized. It's perfect. In Manila, there's this concept of puwede na—like, "This is good enough." But it's not enough. It's not done.

Carlo's Italian Restaurant, interiors, Manila, Philippines, 2024, photographed by Scott Woodward

Little Bao Thonglor, Bangkok, Thailand, 2016, photographed by Ketsiree Wongwan



What I'm trying to do in Manila now, with the craftsmen, with the trades, with my clients, is push things further. No, puwede na isn't enough. We're going to take it to the level of refinement, finishing, elevation, and detail. We want your dream to come to life. What you aspire for, we're going to optimize it and really make it happen.

What are your hopes and dreams for this future generation of architects and designers in the Philippines and across the Filipino diaspora?

Acuña: *My hope for Filipinos is that we really push ourselves—to challenge what we think we can do and to look inward, to our own stories and perspectives, as a way to generate new concepts and ideas. A lot of what dominates architecture and interior design are paradigms from the West, or from people coming from different cultural contexts. It's time to move beyond that colonial mentality, especially in how we generate, process, and create design.*
A huge part of that shift will come from embracing the Filipino worldview.

In our work—because of my background in Texas, New York, Hong Kong, and Manila—I'd say we are authentically all those things. So my advice is: be authentic to who you are and your story, and find a way to bring that into your process. Question what you've learned, how you've learned it, and then move beyond it.

Words
Bianca Weeko Martin

Laurence Angeles

ANGELES BUILDS SPACES SHAPED BY DAILY RITUAL

Creating an architecture growing from the life and context surrounding it is a lifelong commitment for Laurence Angeles. His *Highlands* project, set in the highlands of Mindanao, debuted at the World Architecture Festival in 2023 as part of an iterative series with a simple and clear manifesto: to build with minimal irreversible damage to the environment.

Angeles is based in Davao City, on the southern Filipino island of Mindanao. Here, he leads a small architectural studio, MLA at Home, which was founded in 2020. The studio is composed of four staff, including himself and his wife, and aims to straddle the spheres of design and daily ritual through largely residential projects. Angeles' studio works with the same construction team from concept to completion across these projects, with skills and techniques passed down from one project to the next.

There's also a tea house, &Matcha, which Angeles and his partner opened and grew in tandem with their architectural practice at the tail end of the pandemic. "We design and build in the same space where we serve tea and hold meetings for architecture," Angeles says. "Our first client meetings took place in empty cafés during lockdown. That habit remains. Our reception desk is still behind the tea counter. We continue to work in public, using everyday spaces as our workspace. This keeps the practice open and somehow feels more connected to how people actually live."

I've never been to Davao, and I ask Angeles to describe it. "Davao sits between mountain and sea," he says. "Mount Apo rises nearby, with rivers reaching the coast in only a few kilometers. This closeness creates a sense of fragility. Extraction is visible here. Limestone is quarried near villages and turned into cement, roads, and plantation soil conditioners." This same limestone is used in his slabs, panels, and walls, imbued with new meaning. For Angeles, working in Davao means engaging with the fragile and the enduring simultaneously.

Where or what is home?

Angeles: *Home is now. We chose to base our practice in Davao City. The decision felt natural. The city is large in land area yet remains approachable. It allows ambition without overwhelming scale. Its growth is young and its form still flexible. This creates space for the architecture that we do to take part in shaping its direction.*

PEOPLE AS NETWORK Laurence Angeles

Furtive House, Davao City, Philippines, photographed by Janius Lee

&Matcha Tea House,
Davao City, Philippines

The community here feels open. Collaboration is easier to find. Perhaps this comes from the uneven distribution of resources compared to the country's capital city. There is room for ideas to begin without being eagerly overshadowed.

This sense of belonging is familiar. I grew up in a small agricultural town in the far north of the Philippines. The forest, river, rice fields, and sea were part of daily life. Foraging in these landscapes taught me the beauty of moving through open, undefined spaces. That experience stays with me.

Later, at the University of the Philippines Diliman, I found another kind of home. The tree-shaded campus offered freedom and constant learning. It also revealed the challenges of society in a concentrated form.

In Davao, I feel these threads come together. The vast landscape meets a willing community. The city's built environment is still young. "Home is now" is not only about comfort. It is a readiness to shape and adapt. It is a choice to grow alongside a place that's still forming.

As a young designer, where in the world did you feel most supported and empowered in your growth as an architect?

Angeles: *I think this is a question on the Agency of Architecture. In Singapore, I experienced a system where architecture was fully supported. While working on Esplanade's Singtel Waterfront Theatre, I saw how clients, consultants, and public agencies shared a clear artistic language. Every decision was shaped by the project's cultural role. Architecture was a central part of civic life.*

The Philippines is very different, and in my personal opinion, immature. Architectural practice is less connected to national frameworks. It often exists on the margins, accessible mainly to the politically enabled. Public value is still very much often measured through immediately measurable financial returns. Cultural and emotional foundations are hardly ever discussed.

Switzerland offered another perspective. The landscape there feels resolved, almost final. Urban fabric is complete. Architecture's role is to add meaning rather than reshape the stage. For me, as someone who is shaped by scarcity and urgency, this stability felt almost too fixed. Growth is just through refinement, not a transition.

Top: House Reno
Bottom: Highlands
Micro Housing

These contrasts inform my work. It attempts to show where architecture thrives and where it is restricted. Sometimes with luck, it reveals how a place shapes the agency of a designer.

In Davao, the city is still forming. The built environment is unfinished. This creates a rare opening for architecture to influence its direction.

The challenge is to act with intent, with extremely high tolerance and patience, respect for the conditions that make the city what it is.

Who were some of your mentors and inspirations?

Angeles: *Some of my most important lessons came from Bronne Dytoc's classes at the University of the Philippines. Over four semesters, he taught Building Science with precision. He paired technical rigour with an acceptance of Art's ambiguity. Those lessons instilled discipline, completeness, and self-critique. They continue to guide my practice.*

Another turning point was a single presentation led by Thomas Heatherwick in a Singapore board room. I had a small contribution to the design being shown. It was not the scale of the project that mattered but the clarity of its creative vision. Before this, I had worked on the Esplanade with the same precast façade specialist contractor that Heatherwick worked with for Nanyang Technological University. Concrete became a link between these experiences.

Concrete also connects to my childhood. I learned to mix it before entering school. I remember watching national roads being laid near our home.

The work of Jean Nouvel has also shaped me. His buildings speak to me in ways I do not try to explain. I accept that not all architecture needs to be fully understood. Some works invite us to enter their world without question. Architecture can be both method and mystery.

Words
Bianca Weeko Martin

Christian Tenefrancia Illi

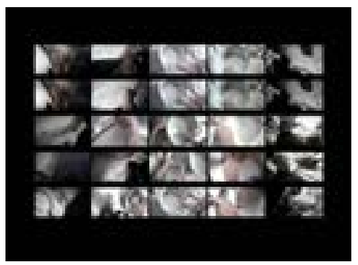
BASED IN BERLIN AND BACOLOD, ILLI WORKS ACROSS GEOGRAPHIES AND DIASPORIC CONTEXTS

I meet with Christian Tenefrancia Illi with a group of artist friends at a cafe by the Spree River, on a chilly summer evening in Neukölln, Berlin. A mutual friend at our table has been doing *I Ching* readings, with three one-euro coins and a *Book of Changes*. Illi—who shows up with his dog, Carla—is assigned the hexagram 'The Wanderer'. Of the six horizontal lines in his hexagram, three are broken. Above, fire. Below, mountain.

A self-described transdisciplinary artist, Illi works at the intersections of architecture, installation, and time-based media. He co-runs the multidisciplinary Studio KIM/ILLI, where he and his partner Seulbi Kim create works that move between exhibitions, spatial design, public space, and research-based collaboration. Based between Berlin and Bacolod, Philippines, Illi's work "frequently holistically unfolds in dialogue with geographies and diasporic contexts."

On the walk from the cafe to the Kottbusser Tor U-Bahn, we describe how it feels, how it *really feels in one's body*, to be in the Philippines. These kinds of visceral descriptions interest Illi. The humidity, the sweat, the rhythmic question of "what we're eating next." Like me, Illi has spent six-month stretches of time in the Philippines, navigating two poles of identity. In contrast with

"In Perpetuum: The Myth of Sisyph(o)us, Competition Art in Architecture, Berlin, Germany, 2024"

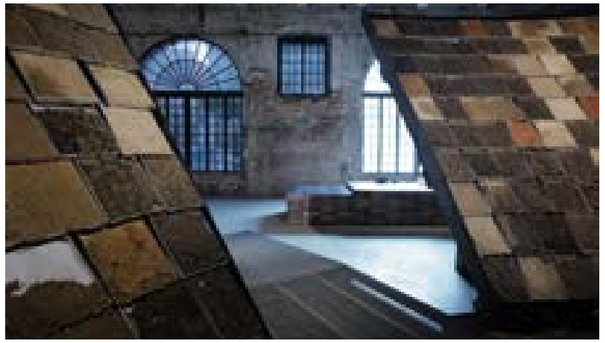


Renegotiations in Self-Determination, Being In-Between," 2020

the lively storefronts and terraces we pass (which Illi calls a *kiez*, German for a neighborhood or district; similarly, in the Philippines, a *barangay* is the smallest administrative and political unit, often with a strong sense of local identity and community)—our days in the Philippines are full of self-reflection.

Illi has just returned to Berlin from the Venice Architecture Biennale, where he inaugurated the Philippine Pavilion with an opening ceremony with the Philippine Madrigal Singers. The singers moved across the platform of the Terrarium while singing words toward the panels of soil. "It was as if the soil, which had resisted us in so many ways throughout the process, had finally settled, accepted, and allowed us to arrive," Illi shares in an interview with Kanto. I remark that the moment must have felt "full circle," as he has a background in music and once considered studying to be a composer.

Before the group disperses, we read out Illi's hexagram, 'The Wanderer,' struck by its undiscerning words of counsel: "A person who travels as a stranger in a strange land is wise to display an attitude free of arrogance and belligerence… With this hexagram the *I Ching* reminds us that we are all strangers in a strange land, wanderers in a vast and unknowable universe, obliged to act accordingly."



Christian Tenefrancia Illi at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2025, photographed by Andrea D'Altoe

"Soil-beings (Lamanlupa)", Philippine Pavilion, 19th Venice Architecture Biennale, 2025

Where or what is home?

Illi: *Home, for me, is not fixed. It's more a choreography of places, gestures, and relationships that sustain me over time. It lives in the smell of soil after rain in Negros, or in the ritual of flâneuring through my barangay or kiez. I often feel at home in movement—in the "in-between" spaces that arise from working across cultures, languages, and temporalities. In my work, I try to hold space for this shifting idea of home—not as a single point of return, butas something continually made and remade.*

In Soil-beings (Lamánlupa), you propose a shift in how architects relate to soil, not just as a resource or substrate, but as a living presence. How do you imagine this might transform ways of building in the Philippines and beyond?

Illi: *In Lamánlupa, I try to reclaim soil from its colonial framing as extractable matter and reposition it as archive, witness, and collaborator. When we begin to see soil as a living being—with its own rhythms, histories, and agency—it changes how we build. It's no longer just about stability or productivity, but about reciprocity and listening. In the Philippines, this could mean moving beyond imported construction norms and re-engaging with indigenous ecological knowledge, vernacular building practices, and embodied ways of knowing. Globally, it might offer a way to reimagine architecture as less about imposition and more about situated care—learning to dwell with, rather than build over.*

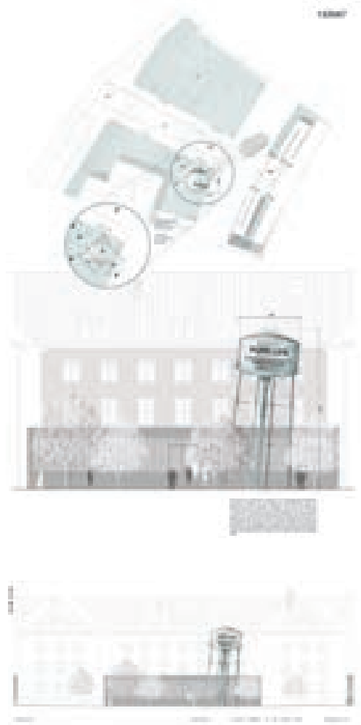
How has living and working across cultures shaped your understanding of Filipino spatial and artistic identity?

Illi: *Being a hybrid—being in-between—is both a constructive and destructive vector. In a sense, it means being porous, staying in flux, and moving between two extreme poles; but it can also create trauma and struggle in one's sense of belonging. Always in transition and never arriving.*

It's made me acutely aware of fragmentation and simultaneity. Filipino identity—especially from a diasporic lens—is often about holding multiple realities at once. Working across Germany and the Philippines has taught me to navigate spatial tensions: between opacity and visibility, centrality and marginality, silence and spectacle. It's also deepened my appreciation for informal architectures—how Filipino spaces often arise through improvisation, labor, and community rather than fixed design. These qualities have become central to how I approach form, material, and narrative in my own work.

Words
Bianca Weeko Martin

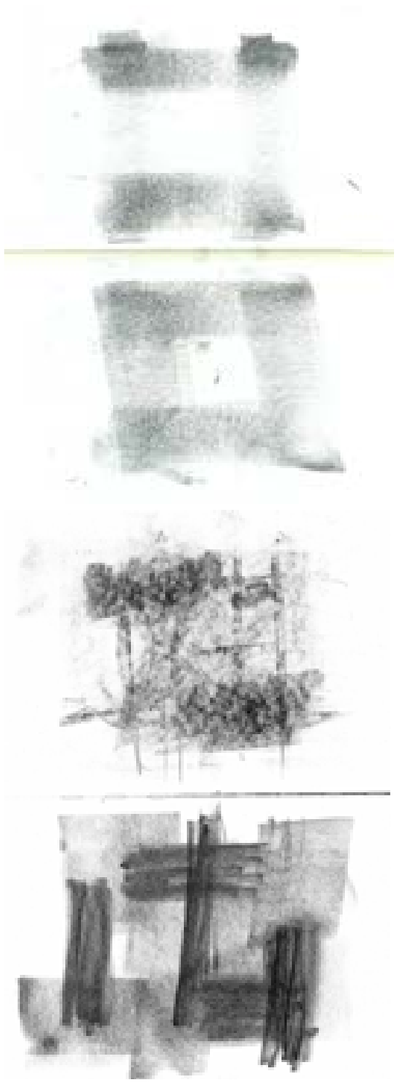
Pure Life, Art in Architecture Competition, Berlin, Germany, 2022



"Reversed Dunk," public art installation, Allianz/Amazon Tower, Warschauer Brücke, Berlin, Germany, 2023

Sudarshan V. Khadka Jr.

FROM MANILA, KHADKA SHAPES ARCHITECTURE WITH A GLOBAL IMAGINATION



One call with Sudarshan V. Khadka Jr. (Sudar, for short) and it's clear that the Manila-based, halfie architect and Managing Partner at Leandro V. Locsin Partners, leads an interesting life. I'm in Finland and it's 7 AM, my camera is off. For all his wide-ranging accomplishments, Khadka is friendly and disarming, speaking with an eclectic knowledge that flows and unravels itself with ease even when confined to audio bites. From his base in the Philippines—where he has spent practically all his life—Khadka draws inspiration from seemingly every corner of the world: vernacular construction, Italian cuisine, books on art, philosophy, technical processes.

He references an ongoing project, *The Modern Vernacular*, that lives somewhere between documentation and personal archive. For years Khadka has been taking photographs of buildings and objects that appear to carry the mark of an "unknown hand." He describes it as an attempt to capture a new architectural language that isn't necessarily authored by formally trained architects. "Someone built them simply because they wanted or needed to," he remarks.

Khadka was co-curator of *Muhon: Traces of an Adolescent City*, the inaugural Philippine Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2016. Reflecting back on this time, he muses, "What role do architects have in this situation, where we're also the ones replacing

PEOPLE AS NETWORK Sudarshan V. Khadka Jr.

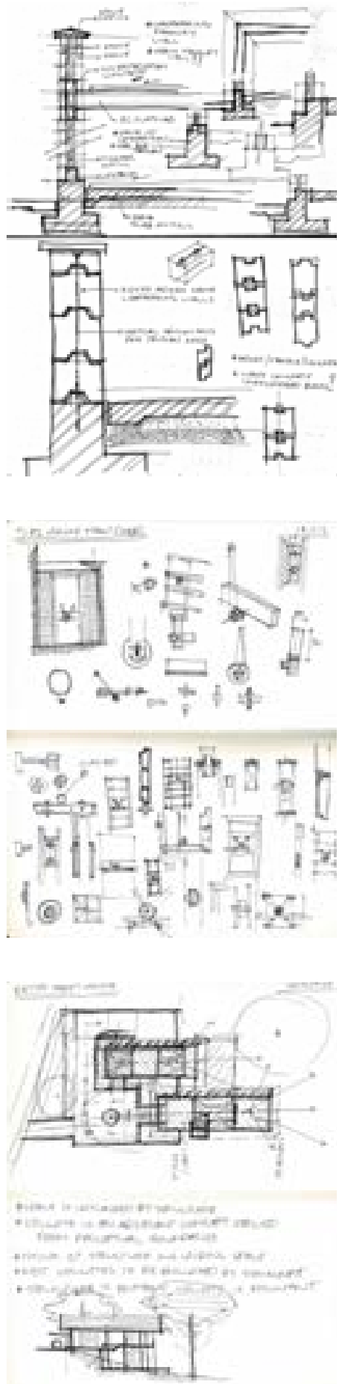
Sudarshan V. Khadka, Jr.

the buildings that we have destroyed?... The idea of it being shown as the Philippine Pavilion in some ways was secondary to the opportunity for us to be able to create this space for reflection, this space for exploration—about the topic of our identity. I think what's more important for us is the search for this identity, the search is more important than actually finding it."

It should be common knowledge now that taking on the responsibility of representing all of Philippine architecture is impossible and presumptuous. Sometimes it takes being physically in the country to remember, viscerally, its vastness and variety. Khadka's community engagement processes operate within a similar framework, guided by regionalism, empathy, and passionate pragmatism. He shares stories of collaboration—with headhunting tattoo artists in the Kalinga region, the T'boli Dream Weavers of Lake Sebu, and the Hmong community in Vietnam, who speak a unique language that even local Vietnamese architects couldn't understand.

"Our broader goal is to make co-design a meaningful part of every project. That's easier at the small, community scale, where we're working directly with people. But we're also exploring how to apply that approach in larger, more institutional contexts. Even if you're designing for a broader public or an unknown audience, you can still find ways to involve different communities—museum staff, craftspeople, builders, artists—in shaping the outcome.

I guess it also depends on what your definition of the community is. We're expanding that to include the people who are building the building, as well as the craftspeople who might be involved. Artist groups and people around the site of the project could also be engaged through the design. The stakeholder management is clear, but maybe it's about expanding who the stakeholders are."



Right: Shear Wall House,photographed by Bien Alvarez

At the end of the one hour call, I feel that I've made a new friend. Khadka signs off to make dinner for the evening, and we make plans to meet for coffee the next time I'm in Manila.

Where or what is home?

Khadka: *That's what I'm interested in, a feeling after a journey: You want to go home. I think maybe it just captures that idea of wherever that is, that is home. You know, wherever you want to be after you've gone through the day, gone through a kind of trip, whatever that place is—that's home, I think. And it captures that feeling of, you know, being secure, being safe, being where your heart is, I guess really that's the cheesy answer. But I really feel strongly that it's more a feeling of home that I'm trying to capture. Even when I create houses, you know, I ask myself, what do you want to achieve? It's the feeling of home.*

How has public recognition of Filipino architecture evolved in the decade since Muhon?

Khadka: *I feel like we're on an upward trajectory. I appreciate the efforts of institutions, including the government, in helping bring visibility to Philippine architecture through platforms like the Frankfurt Book Fair and the Biennales. These initiatives do make a difference.*

There's also a lot happening locally. The architecture scene in the Philippines feels more active than ever—sometimes there are multiple events happening at once. There are lectures, festivals, and efforts like Anthology, which contribute to this growing appreciation. We're also becoming more engaged regionally and globally, which I think is a positive sign.

Shear Wall House, Philippines, photographed by Bien Alvarez, 2022

10 Milan House, Parañaque, Philippines, 2025, photographed by ES.PH

Architecture in the Philippines seems to be trending upward, and I'm hopeful that continues.

One thing I still wish for is an improvement in the overall quality of our work.
Many architects are now trying to find their voice and figure out what they can contribute to the broader architectural conversation. But I think a lot of us are still looking outward—adapting models and ideas from places like Japan, Indonesia, or Vietnam—and trying to apply them locally.

What are the biggest influences in your creative practice today?

Khadka: *I'm inspired by how people build naturally, using whatever materials they have on hand. There's a kind of raw creativity there, problem-solving born out of necessity, that I find deeply moving. I try to channel that feeling into my own work: this instinctual, almost emotional desire to make or build something.*

I'm inspired a lot by chefs; it's a recent passion for me as well. I'm inspired by how chefs take something from their context and create something that is art out of it. And it's something that's very practical too. It goes into our bodies but it's a very practical art, and I find that there's a similarity between cuisine and architecture. I spent quite a bit of time in Italy for the Biennales, trying to understand how to cook Italian food in the proper way. I realized that their architecture is the same, the way that they deal with their ingredients and food is very similar to how they deal with their architecture. So I find it very inspiring, how they take the best, the purest ingredients and process them minimally to create the form and shape of things. So that inspires me as well, you know. Learning about a culture through their food, trying to understand. Architecture, food, culture, and this whole blend of ideas really excites me.

Words
Bianca Weeko Martin

Aya Maceda

MACEDA'S ARCHITECTURE EXTENDS THE LITERARY
AND CULTURAL LEGACY OF HER MATERNAL FOREBEARS

Aya Maceda answers my call with a portrait of lush trees and dappled sunlight in the background. She's in her upstate New York home. We have been internet friends since I reached out years earlier soliciting a guest essay for my architectural guidebook, and though we haven't met in person yet (we live just across the US-Canada border), it's nice to feel like we are catching up on a summer's day.

Aya Maceda
at her studio

Maceda is an architect, academic, and community advocate, raised in Manila and now based in Brooklyn, New York. Maceda's resume is expansive, folding in the kind of community work that often falls between the cracks of more concrete architectural projects. And yet, this work—spanning early design education and workshops, to board membership at the Gowanus Canal Conservancy and previously, Westbeth Housing—has been key to her forming roots in New York, after a childhood in the Philippines and 10 years in Australia.

"I have a different immigrant story," Maceda says. "I was really taking home with me, and thinking about our culture as something I was so proud of when I left."

She is referencing a home in Manila, a childhood home of over 40 years she left behind. It's a house so influential to Maceda's identity, that she speaks about her work as an effort to recreate the feeling of going inside it. She screen-shares and shows me images. A 1970s house situated on a corner lot, guests are greeted with an abundance of light as they enter through the front door and walk into an open courtyard bounded by sliding doors. A garden is distributed across individual living and sleeping spaces, so that nature always exists, at the end of a sequence of framed spaces.

This spatial narrative is the work of Maceda's mother, who designed the house collaboratively with an architect. Maceda paints an image for me of her mother: lingering in her garden early in the morning, reading, smoking a cigarette in the comfort of her contemplation before joining the rest of the family. It is, after all, a multigenerational house.

"My mom somehow figured out a seven-layer screen so that when there was a storm outside, it would just drizzle in the house. When I was a kid, there was one moment in my life that I would describe our house as unfinished because there was a hole in the middle of our house!" Maceda reminisces. I thought of the essay "*Maaliwalas*" that Maceda had written for Architectural Guide Manila.

PEOPLE AS NETWORK Aya Maceda

Right: Brooklyn Loft,
New York City, NY,
USA, 2020

Callicoon House, Sullivan County, NY, USA, 2024

I had a distinct image of this rain drizzling in the house, but I didn't know the image was so real. "The pop song '*Pumapatak Ang Ulan*' (Raindrops are Falling) by Apo Hiking Society describes the sound of rain pounding on the roof in rhythm," she had penned in the essay. "Feeling the environment is like a symphony that gives a distinct sense of pleasure and wellbeing."

Maceda's endeavours feel like an ode to her mother—an academic who had transcribed the songs of the Philippines' Communist Party for her PhD, since they lacked a written history. And it was Maceda's grandmother who had originally been studying to be an architect. That is, until war broke out in Cebu, and she had to go into hiding. Maceda grew up with her during summers in Baguio, marking her life with her grandmother's influence.

"I'm the first architect in the family, but not the first one who wanted to become one." Maceda's work is first and foremost collective work, growing out of and extending a rich lineage of matriarchs.

Where or what is home?

Maceda: *This is a very complex question to answer. I live in New York and have now been living overseas longer than I have from Manila. I have always intuitively associated Manila as my home, perhaps because my roots and core values stem from there, and because I have always had a deep longing to live there again in the future. But, home is also here in New York now that I have also planted new roots here and have been raising my children in a home I've built, one that echoes my childhood home. Psychologically, my definition of home was always intertwined with where my mother was.*

Sharon Carriage House, Sharon, CT, USA

Can you talk about your practice ALAO? How have multiculturalism and collaboration played a role in its formation?

Maceda: *ALAO is a design and research-based practice working at the intersection of architecture, urban planning and social advocacy. We nurture a humanist approach in design that aims to create spaces that make people feel joyful and connected to a place.*

Cebu Institute of Contemporary Art and Design (CICAD) Museum, Cebu, Philippines, 2020

PEOPLE AS NETWORK Aya Maceda

Top: Pasig Riverfront Parks, Pasig City, Philippines, 2022

My exploration of humanism is one that I've both learned through the practice of modernism but one that focused on the delight of materials in space, free from decoration; and creating an architecture that is experienced through spatial design. Maaliwalas, a Filipino-rooted concept of spaces that breathe; a felt quality of generous flow of light and air, and connection to nature that creates a sense of wellbeing is inherent in all our work. This concept, while Filipino, is expressed through contemporary architectural design.

My practice is multicultural and collaborative. My partner James Carse is an urban planner and an architect, and I am an architect and interior designer. The two of us work in practice from two different scales and we meet in architecture. His focus is on architecture as systems, and I focus on architecture from the scale of a human body. We are both educators as well as practicing architects, and we have an international design team who support our work. Our process involves heavily on research and understanding the context in which our work will co-exist in. We believe architecture is a tool for placemaking, and we would like to think that our work roots people to a place. In recent years, I've realized that the core value in Filipino psychology "Kapwa" ("self-in-the-other") that is integral in all our relationships suits ALAO's research-based and empathy-based process. Being in community with our clients means giving a deep level of care, listening to develop designs collaboratively (not imposing) and being passionate advocates.

Another that feeds into my practice as it relates to our advocacy and public work is my academic work. I predominantly question the role that play has in cities to create new typologies in architecture through design studios I teach at The New School.

Words
Bianca Weeko Martin

Right & Bottom:
Sharon Carriage House, Sharon, CT, USA

Bianca Weeko Martin

MARTIN'S WORK CARRIES THE IMPRINT OF MANY CULTURES

Bianca Weeko Martin is a Toronto-based Filipino, Indonesian, and Canadian writer and researcher with a background in architecture. Her heritage connects her with the subjects she has chosen to write about. Her distance enables her to view buildings and places with a fascination that escapes those who have already considered these as mundane elements of urban life. Working at the intersection of design and theory, Martin's practice involves crafting narratives that promote Philippine architecture and contribute to its body of knowledge.

In 2017, during her term abroad in Berlin, she picked up the city guidebook by DOM Publishers. "I loved the photographs and how I was experiencing Berlin and learning about its history through its architecture. I had the thought: oh, it'd be cool if one day I got to do my own," she shares. Two years later, she received a message while she was on holiday in the Philippines for a family reunion.It was an opportunity to produce a similar guidebook for Manila as the publisher did not have one yet.

From 2019 to 2024, Martin wrote *Architectural Guide Manila* as she reacquainted herself with the city, walking the streets and meeting the residents who observed it with a passion similar to her own. The publication process may have ended last year, culminating with a book launch at the restored Metropolitan Theater, but her collaboration with those she met and exposé on Filipino architecture continues through this exhibit.

An architecture practice can take on so many forms beyond design and construction. Can you describe your own practice?

Martin: *My practice is quite young, but what I do know is I'm trying to combine both practice and theory, which I think can be lacking sometimes. Often I see, or I'm surrounded by, a lot of*

journalists or writers who might not know what it's like to open up CAD. At the same time, I'm working with a lot of architects and engineers who don't know how to zoom out for the strategic view or the humanistic view of what they're doing.

What that looks like for my theory? I tap into writing, of course. So, the Architectural Guide Manila book was a big milestone for me. I also do a lot of writing for exhibitions in Toronto. Luckily, I've been writing a lot for Filipino artists such as Leeroy New and Patrick Cruz, who are my friends as well. So, I've been really grateful for that. Often I write for artists who are interested in space and architecture, and need the language. I bring a lot of personal experiences from working in offices to writing. I like to do more creative and narrative writing.

For the practice side of things, I'm still consulting with architects, mainly in experience design and public art. The projects are larger infrastructure. Recently, I've been working on the airport, some transit stations, and hospitals. Within these public projects, there's just enough scope to have someone dealing with small-scale design elements like screens, public art, and other interfaces.

What drew you to this profession?

Martin: *I don't have an architectural lineage. My parents and my grandparents were not in the industry, but I do have an older cousin in the United States, my kuya Mikey, who became an architect. I always knew him as my cool older cousin. He was an artist and photographer, but he was studying architecture. So, that was kind of my initial view into it. We weren't always seeing each other, but I looked up to him.*

In terms of coming to architecture myself, I think it happened by chance. When I finished high school, I was in a period of feeling lost. I had only applied to two schools: a liberal arts program and an architecture school, mostly because I, again, didn't know what it meant. It seemed challenging. I had a strong arts background, but I wanted to do something that was challenging and mysterious to me at that time. So, it kind of just happened. I've now adapted and found my niche again.

You moved to Canada at what age? How often did you visit your countries of birth and heritage (Indonesia and Philippines)? How does your experience as an immigrant inform your interactions with these places?

Martin: *I was four years old when we moved from Jakarta to Toronto. I can't remember that much. I was pretty lucky because for the first few years of my life there my parents, if they had a chance to go on summer vacation, would immediately take us to the Philippines every two or three years. But, after I was 10, it got expensive.*

I made this big trip in 2019 as an adult. That was the beginning of the Architectural Guide project. Since then, I've been trying to visit more frequently. Obviously, it's a completely different experience as an adult.

Architecture Guide
Manila Symposium
at the Manila Metropolitan

Growing up I alternated between feeling alienation and desire towards my background. When you're immigrating to a country like Canada, a lot of assimilation happens, not just with whiteness but with the dominant culture in the suburbs you grow up in. I grew up speaking Indonesian as well. So, on top of feeling alienation and desire, I also moved back and forth between affinity towards my dad's side and my mom's side. There were a lot of Filipino-Canadians around me. When I was younger, I didn't feel like there was much in common between us, but now I found my professional community of Filipinos.

At the moment, I have to say that my Filipino culture has opened up many opportunities for me to write and to educate about the diaspora in Canada. Not everyone has had the chance to spend a lot of time back home, more so spend time researching and learning about it. It has given me a sense of purpose now.

Words
Angel Yulo

Pages from
Architecture of Manila
Guide Book (DOM
Publishers, 2024)

Charlotte Lao Schmidt

SCHMIDT EXPERIMENTS WITH COLLABORATIVE FORMS OF MAKING ON BOHOL'S FRAGILE PERIPHERY

Charlotte Lao Schmidt is a spatial designer, educator, and researcher working at the intersections of community engagement, ecological design, and critical spatial practice. Born and raised in Germany while spending parts of her childhood in the Philippines, she is now based in Bohol, where she experiments with collaborative forms of building and learning on the island's fragile periphery.

Charlotte Lao Schimdt

Bohol is an island province located in the Central Visayas Region, near the south of the Philippines. Lao Schmidt was drawn into the island's orbit after spending years working on urban transformation projects in European cities, when she began questioning the pace and extractive nature of practice. Bohol offered a life that was slower—and the potential to explore a kind of design not always geared toward growth or spectacle. Her mother was also living there at the time and she decided to join her, partly from a desire to become closer with her.

Lao Schmidt shows me photographs of Bohol: the land; the water; the boat she built with local craftsmen; a sustainable building material made locally in Bohol from limestone, *IHICS*, which her Swiss stepfather invented after the Bohol earthquake. (She is involved in the project within a research and development role.) The material features throughout the platform of the home and studio that she is building in Bohol, a slab that curves and retreats in response to the bulk of existing trees and stones at the site.

The platform forms one of the tenets of Lao Schmidt's experimental project Soft Spot: *laboratory, sanctuary*, and *network*. "It experiments with methods that combine design, research, care, and everyday making," she says of Soft Spot. At the moment, the physical platform built into her mother's land stands proud and full of possibility. It's tangible proof of the dream she is building in the Philippines, rooted in both family history and speculative futures—a soft place to land while searching.

Where or what is home?

Lao Schmidt: *Home, for me, has always been a process rather than a fixed location. I feel at home in settings that are open to change—where you can shift things, leave traces, or reimagine what is already there. Garages, studios, gardens, tables that can be rearranged: spaces like these carry a potential for transformation that makes me feel most alive. Over time, I've realized it's not only about inhabiting such spaces myself, but also about creating the conditions for others to experience that same openness—to feel safe enough to use, disrupt, and reshape their surroundings. Bohol has taught me to extend this further, to see how home can emerge through reciprocity—by working with what is present, listening, and allowing the place to shape me as much as I shape it.*

Across Germany, Brussels, and here, what ties it together is not permanence but possibility: the sense that space is never finished, only always becoming.

Can you talk about your project Soft Spot and how it came to be?

Lao Schmidt: *My first attempt to reconnect with the Philippines was a small experiment called Laboratory Bohol, which I initiated with friends during short visits. At the time, I was naive—designing for communities without a real network or deeper understanding of the context—and it quickly faded. When I returned in 2019, I slowed down and stayed longer. I built a boat with a local craftsman, and that act changed everything: it showed me how people here build, improvise, and inhabit spaces in ways that unsettled what I thought I knew about design. It mademe*

want to look closer, listen longer, and create a framework for learning together.

From that impulse came Soft Spot. It began with a garden and a raised platform—deliberately not a permanent building—so I could experience the site and its rhythms before adding anything permanent. Over time, it has grown into a practice, a place, and a network: a platform for critical spatial practice where design, research, and dialogue come together. The first years of on-site testing and teaching were, in many ways, a phase of inquiry: learning how spatial production unfolds here, while also slowly building a network of collaborators. Soft Spot was never meant to be a solitary project; it began as a way for me to connect to others. What excites me most is being immersed in perspectives that challenge my assumptions and stretch the way I think and work, yet it took time to find people who were open to this kind of experimental, collective process. Over time, those encounters have been transformative—the people who joined are no longer just collaborators, but central to what Soft Spot has become.

To sustain this role, I want to give Soft Spot a nonprofit structure. This will allow us to gather people depending on the needs of each project, to connect local knowledge with global networks, and to strengthen practices at the periphery that often go unseen. The Philippines is full of talent; what is often missing are the conditions and spaces in the province that allow people

to meet, exchange, and work collectively across differences. Soft Spot can help fill that gap: not by competing with existing practices, but by providing connective tissue—frameworks that make collaboration possible and durable. Even the place itself reflects this role: it is not a finished institution, but something continuously built by those who come. In this way, the site grows layer by layer—not as a monument, but as a living record of collaboration.

How has your family history, or your personal relationship to the Philippines, shaped your research and practice?

Lao Schmidt: *Being the daughter of a Filipina mother and a German father, my relationship with the Philippines was for a long time fragmented—shaped by distance, curiosity, and a sense of incompleteness. Coming back as an adult was both an act of repair and of discovery. Living here has sharpened my attention to how people create spaces with limited means but with immense ingenuity, resilience, and care. This made me rethink what "design" means: not a matter of imposing forms, but of recognizing and amplifying what is already practiced on the ground.*

What I carry from this is less a fixed cultural identity than a sensitivity to in-between states—to spaces that are open, shifting, and alive with potential for change. That resonates deeply with how I try to practice: creating conditions where people can intervene, disrupt, and remake space for themselves.

In that sense, Soft Spot is also my way of reconnecting—a place where personal history and collective futures overlap.

Words
Bianca Weeko Martin

Anna Sy

SY SHOWS WHAT CAN BE BUILT BY ADAPTING TO SETBACKS AND EMBRACING THE WORLD'S POSSIBILITIES

For an architect with a practice split between two continents, Anna Maria Sy shows no hesitation when I ask her to name what is "home": the Philippines. With her US-based partner, Jason Chai, Sy leads the boutique architecture firm CS Architecture, where she is primarily involved with the firm's projects in the Philippines. These include various residences that break down the traditional delineation between public and private spaces in ways that are uniquely Filipino.

The origins of her practice in the region, however, are mainly a product of chance. These are Sy's words. On our Zoom call, she sits in front of a painting of what appears to be an office or studio space; our first moments on camera blur the lines between the real and virtual.

Sy's architectural career started in Los Angeles, where she worked for architectural giant SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill). Then came the fateful call ("or was it an email?") from a successful Filipino businessman in Singapore, looking to build a place for each of his children. This led to a commission for four houses, and the prompt for a satellite office in Manila, where much of Sy's family is based. The plans for the houses were drawn and developed, with beautiful scale models.

Then, the 2008 financial crisis shook the world—squashing their plans, freezing the project, and rendering the new Manila-based office an open question mark. But Sy rolled with the punches. And as for the Manila office, new projects were already rolling in.

"The Philippines has a way of pulling you in…there's something about this place," she says, and I find that I resonated deeply with the sentiment.

Seaside Residence 5,
Nasugbu, Batangas,
Philippines, 2016

"It can be chaotic and unstructured, but you kind of make your own life here. Eventually, I just ended up staying. It wasn't a deliberate full-time move, it happened very gradually."

Shifting from practicing in the US to the Philippines did not come without its challenges. Construction technology, and building processes varied, not to mention the environment, culture, and lifestyle. But with challenge often comes opportunity, and Sy saw with excitement the potential in rethinking what it meant to design in the Philippines: "You're

designing homes not just for nuclear families but for extended families, and often for a full household staff as well, which is a whole other layer that you don't usually deal with in North America. That was the exciting part—rethinking that."

Gendered expectations likewise cannot be overlooked. Sy recounts to me stories of her early years in the Philippines, almost humorous to me now, of being refused handshakes during introductory meetings set up by her father, of being told that a construction site was too dirty and messy for a woman to be walking around on. "It's for your safety," she was told.

But architectural practice for women in the Philippines has evolved. Of course, pragmatic considerations remain, with women in the Philippines often still carrying the expectations of being the caretakers at home raising their children, and this having implications on hiring and employee retention.
But Sy says she's seen a shift, both in how companies view women and in how womensee themselves—in what they can do and what they accomplish. And for women in architecture like me, Anna Sy is proof of the kind of rich career someone can build if they're ready to adapt to setbacks, and open themselves to the possibilities of the world.

Where or what is home?

Sy: *The Philippines is home, definitely, even though I did spend some years of my life in Hong Kong, Japan, and then schooling in the US for about eight years. I also worked in the US for an additional three or four years. The Philippines is my home, specifically Manila.*

Anna Sy

Mentors and inspirations

Sy: *You know, I don't want to sound corny, but in graduate school we went through a very modernist program. We analyzed and studied theories from the modernist masters, and even when I started working, I would still go back to that.*

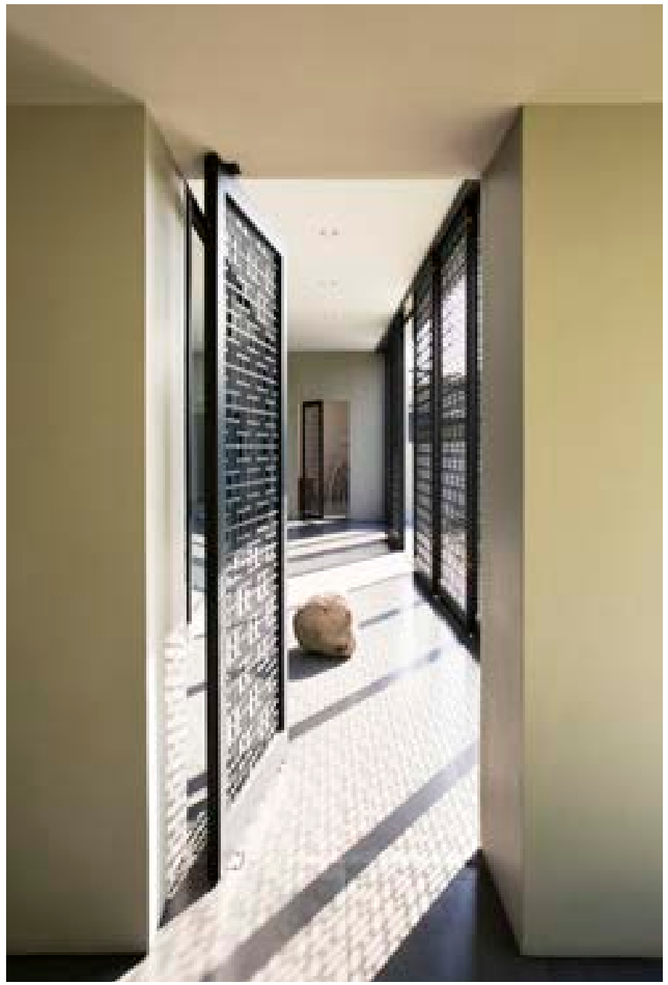
I think the projects, or the architects, that inspired me the most were Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier, just for his three-dimensional ability, the layering he does, and the whole language he created.

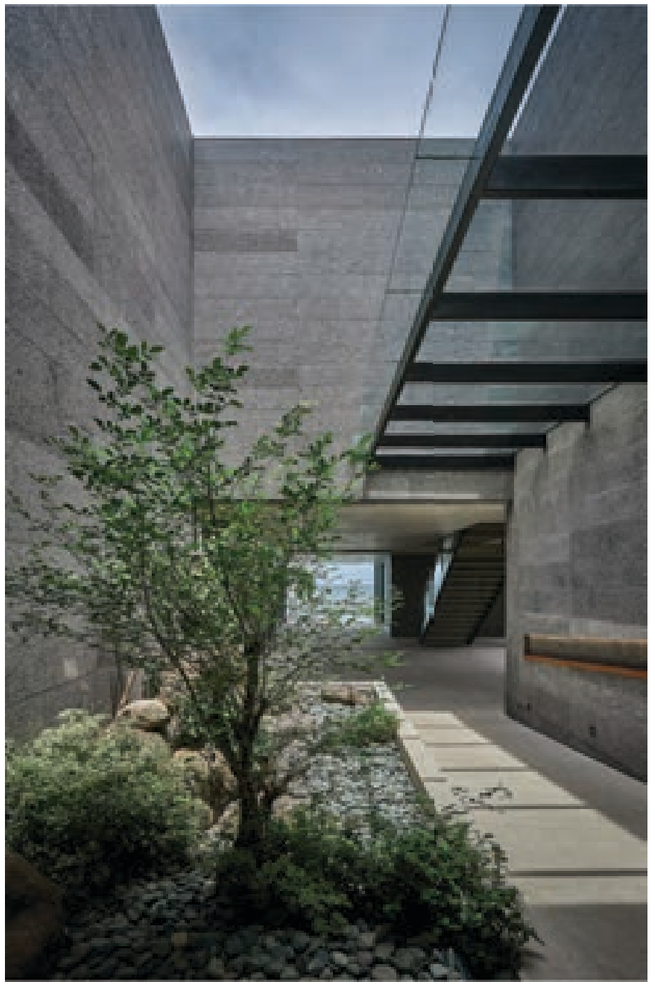
So I guess it sounds corny, but they still inspire me today. Sometimes, when I need to take a breather, I'll open up a book on Mies van der Rohe and still, even now, get completely floored and inspired by the amount of restraint and control—and yet, the ability to come up with the most amazing projects.

Hopes and dreams for the future generation of Filipino architects

Sy: *Well, I think just from a practical point of view, culturally, the Philippines—and maybe it's not just the Philippines, probably also the US nowadays—because of the abundance of information you can gather online, the abundance of images, etc—everyone thinks they can be an architect. Everyone thinks they can design. Everyone kind of feels they know what they want.*

Right: Urban Residence 12, Philippines





Left to Right:
Urban Residence 26, Philippines
Urban Residence 12, Philippines
Seaside Residence 9, Philippines

And I feel that, as a profession in general, I wish, especially in the Philippines, that people would place more value on what we bring to the table.

Because everyone thinks they can do design. It's not like going to a doctor, right? People feel, "Oh no, this is very specialized," and you're talking about people's lives and health. Most people don't think they can self-diagnose or self-medicate in a healthy way.

But with the architecture profession here, many feel, "Oh, I know what I want. I'll just hire a drafts person; he can draw something up for me." And unfortunately, you see the product of that mentality all around you.

So I hope our profession gets to a level where it's as respected, or at least seen as equally valuable as hiring a doctor or a lawyer. Because we're creating people's future environments—for their kids, for their families. We're shaping future communities.

People don't always see the immediate value in that, but they have to start seeing the long-term value.

Words:
Bianca Weeko Martin

Servants and Masters: Philippine Architecture Education in the Asian Century

THE FUTURE DEMANDS IMPROVISERS AND HYBRIDS,
BUT PHILIPPINE ARCHITECTURE SCHOOLS ARE STILL PRODUCING MIMICS

BY JOSEPH ADG JAVIER

"The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled." – John Berger, Ways of Seeing (1972), Chapter 1

ALWAYS THE BRIDESMAID, NEVER THE BRIDE

Who is the Filipino architect today? She is not the devil who wore Prada, but the diligent assistant making sure Miranda Priestly got her names right. Her design voice, no matter how sophisticated, is often tempered by the firm's rubric. She thrives as staff, not as principal; as support, rarely author. The Filipino architect succeeds, but too often only as an employee of multinational practices. The Philippine curriculum, since the 1970s, has instilled this servitude; training developers of someone else's narrative rather than authors of their own. We have raised architects as bridesmaids, never as the bride.

It is no accident. Philippine education, architectural or otherwise, has long been an apprenticeship in obedience. The syllabus is colonial in origin, the andragogy, *Beaux Arts* by way of Pax Americana. The exams, a memorization of rules rather than an investigation of thought. To succeed is to execute well what others have imagined. The yield is a workforce of loyal and resilient employees, highly employable abroad, but rarely in command. Praised for their diligence, our architects populate the backrooms of Dubai, Singapore, and Hong Kong firms. They are seldom credited for direction and authorship. It is a silent triumph, but also a silent tragedy.

This invisibility has come to a head, beyond practice, and into discourse. In Visionary Architects of Monsoon Asia (2024), by Robert Powell, who made an inventory of the tropical ingenuity of the best Southeast Asian designers, Filipino architects are absent despite the shared monsoon heritage and cultural experience.

The Filipino architect thrives globally, true, but thrive they do as footnote, not headline. Education has prepared her to acquire the license to practice, but not the license to be listened to. And, like in the movie, this Filipino Andy Sachs dissolves into obscurity, but minus the smile and contentment of self-discovery that emboldens her to walk away. Sadly, this Filipino Andy cannot afford to walk away.

Until Philippine schools evolve, their architects will remain uncredited. Invisible and voiceless.

PEOPLE AS NETWORK Thinkpiece

PLAY CATCH-UP WITH THE LEAPING FROG

The chorus has been the same for decades: catch up. Catch up with Japan, which adopted the 4+2 system in 2000 to align with the UNESCO-UIA recommendations. Catch up with Singapore, which, in 2001, retired their five-year Bachelor in Architecture degree in favor of a bachelor-plus-master track. Catch up with the EU, which embraced the Bologna Declaration in 1999, unifying higher education in 29 European countries to a 3+2 degree structure. Catch up with accreditation, catch up with standards, catch up with recognitions.

Always behind. Always running. Always belated.

To catch up is to concede someone already took the lead. To catch up is to accept that the road has already been laid. To catch up is to smell the aroma of high octane exhaust as the Philippine diesel jalopy chugs desperately. Catching up, though, produces competent employees. I have yet to meet a boss who became one by mastering the catch-up life.

What if, instead, the Filipinos leaped, like the frogs they are trying to run after? This lateness can be an advantage. While others are bound by now-aging reforms made decades ago, they are free to imagine anew. Leapfrogging means having the audacity to design an educational model not beholden to Western templates, but rooted in Philippine realities: studios that draw factory standardized bamboo modulars for typhoon beaten Leyte and Bicol, not just glass towers for Clark; curricula that braid anthropology, climate science and sociology with architectural design, more than the tired greenwashed building with solar panels; research theses that confront housing and schoolroom flood risk rather than mimicking sinewy Zaha Hadid monuments.

Catching up teaches us to be bridesmaids forever arriving late to the wedding. Leapfrogging dares us to be the bride—to own the stage, to be the deity of the ritual.

SMALL FROG, OLD POND - BIG FROG, NEW POND

This "old pond" is stagnant. Its waters are murked by board exams syllabi, by design class rituals of sleeplessness and suffering, by narrow taxonomy of codes and ordinances. In this pond, the Pinoy architect is a small frog, darting for survival, rewarded for obedience, and measured by how well one conforms. Success here for this Pinoy Kermit means being the best mimic, the most disciplined drafter, the most efficient servant. It truly isn't easy being green.

But! Beyond the levee lies a new pond, brackish with potential. This pond is not defined by geographic boundaries but is paradigmatic. There, city life is not a safe, repeating, predictable scale-dexterity exercise, but a living, daily, even hourly, oido improvisation. Informal settlements abound, climate aberration redraws riverbanks, and resilience becomes a high-order virtue, next to love and hope. In this pond, architecture is not about the perfection of form, but the mastery of adaptation. Asia sits at the deepest center of this pond. The 21st century is humid, equatorial, monsoonal, which requires an equal response that is as stickily and grimily improvisatory. The materials—bamboo, wood, soil, tin, PET, husk—are no longer symbols of poverty but blueprints of resilience. Hybridized with glass, steel, concrete via digital fabrication, he can articulate a design ethos the West can never replicate. His informal urbanisms, once dismissed as chaos, may in fact, be the grammar of resilience—flexible, responsive, alive.

In this new pond, the Filipino architect could be the big frog. His lived conditions are not liabilities but laboratories.

But.

His design academies still train for the old pond, still prize mimicry over imagination, still drone on to pupils to serve a colonial curriculum rather than thrive in an Asian century. Unless education shifts, the Filipino architect shall remain a green, same-as-leaves invisible, small Kermit in shrinkingwaters while the new pond swells with opportunity.

HERD RATS AND THE PIED PIPER

The Filipino design class (the real design studio does not exist, even in the most progressive colleges), is often a rehearsal of

the herd. The canon is taught as immutable, from Vitruvius to Corbu, perhaps Locsin as token local. Students compete not in invention but in imitation. The reward is belonging, not authorship; familiarity, not discomfort; agreeability, not dissent. But this new pond has no need for herd rats. It craves pied pipers—architects who dare to lead, write new scores, draw new maps. Pied peppers do not repeat the canon, they compose the alternatives.

Imagine an education that trains pied pipers. One that reframes the sari-sari store (village mom-and-pop) as micro-urbanism, the decommissioned jeepney (local city commuter shuttle) as adaptive reuse, the street vendor colonies as studies in design-in-flux. These are not quaint localisms, but radical theories of architecture. The herd repeats what is already taught; the pied piper authors what is yet to be imagined. The danger is clear: if Philippine design education continues to reward conformity, it will graduate only herd rats, globally employable but never globally significant. The challenge is equally clear: to nurture pied pipers who can re-score the music of architecture, and redirect global industry currents rather than merely swim in them.

LACUS ASIATICUS

The new pond is not far. It is here, in Asia, in the tropics, in the equatorial belt, where seas heave and storms howl. Its waters are warm, turbulent, abundant but unforgiving. To swim here is to design for climate volatility, to build for resilience, not tomorrow, but today. This pond is not orderly. It is messy, hybrid,and alive.

Its waters are also digital. The mediascape circulates at the speed of fiber optics. A Filipino render can be judged in Singapore today, published in Berlin tomorrow, debated in New York next week. Ideas churn faster than hurricanes, swifter than a surge. In this pond, the Pinoy architect must be amphibian. Bamboo and BIM, nipa and parametricism, earth and AR: the capability to hybridize, to oscillate between tradition and technology, is what thriving demands.

And yet, Filipino schools seldom teach amphibians. They teach swimmers—narrowly trained, conditioned to pass the board exam. They produce architects who can tread water but not walk on land. If the Filipino continue this way, the new pond will be hostile and alien. If he reforms, it will be his for the taking. The waters are briny, mixed, and unpredictable, but therein lies its richness. If Philippine design education retools, this pond can be not their drowning but their dominion.

GROW A SPINE! AND A LEG OR TWO

Tadpoles cannot leap from pond to pond without transformation. To cross requires legs, a new anatomy, a new curriculum (you see what I did there?), Philippine architecture education must evolve, or it will perish in its own stagnant pond. Evolution begins with dethroning the board exams as the curriculum's compass. The professional regulations must remain but it cannot be the North Star. Competence, not compliance, must be the horizon: technical, cultural, ecological, global. Evolution means integration. Architecture cannot be taught as form alone. It must weave anthropology into its sinews. Real design studios must be opened, and output should not end with glossy renders or impeccable 3D printed models, but extend into participatory projects. Evolution means decolonizing the canon. To teach the German Farnsworth House without deciphering Filipino *horror vacui*, the Japanese Church of the Light without dismembering Philippine folk Catholicism, the Mexican Casa Barragán without understanding the wretched Filipino phlegm green, is to perpetuate invisibility.

Evolution means embracing hybridity: bamboo and concrete, informality and order, tradition and digitalization. Only by training architects in this hybridity can the Filipino amphibian emerge, with limbs fit for this century's terrain. If he evolves, the Filipino architect will grow legs, striding across ponds; no longer bridesmaids, but brides; no longer Andys, but Mirandas; no longer servants, but masters.

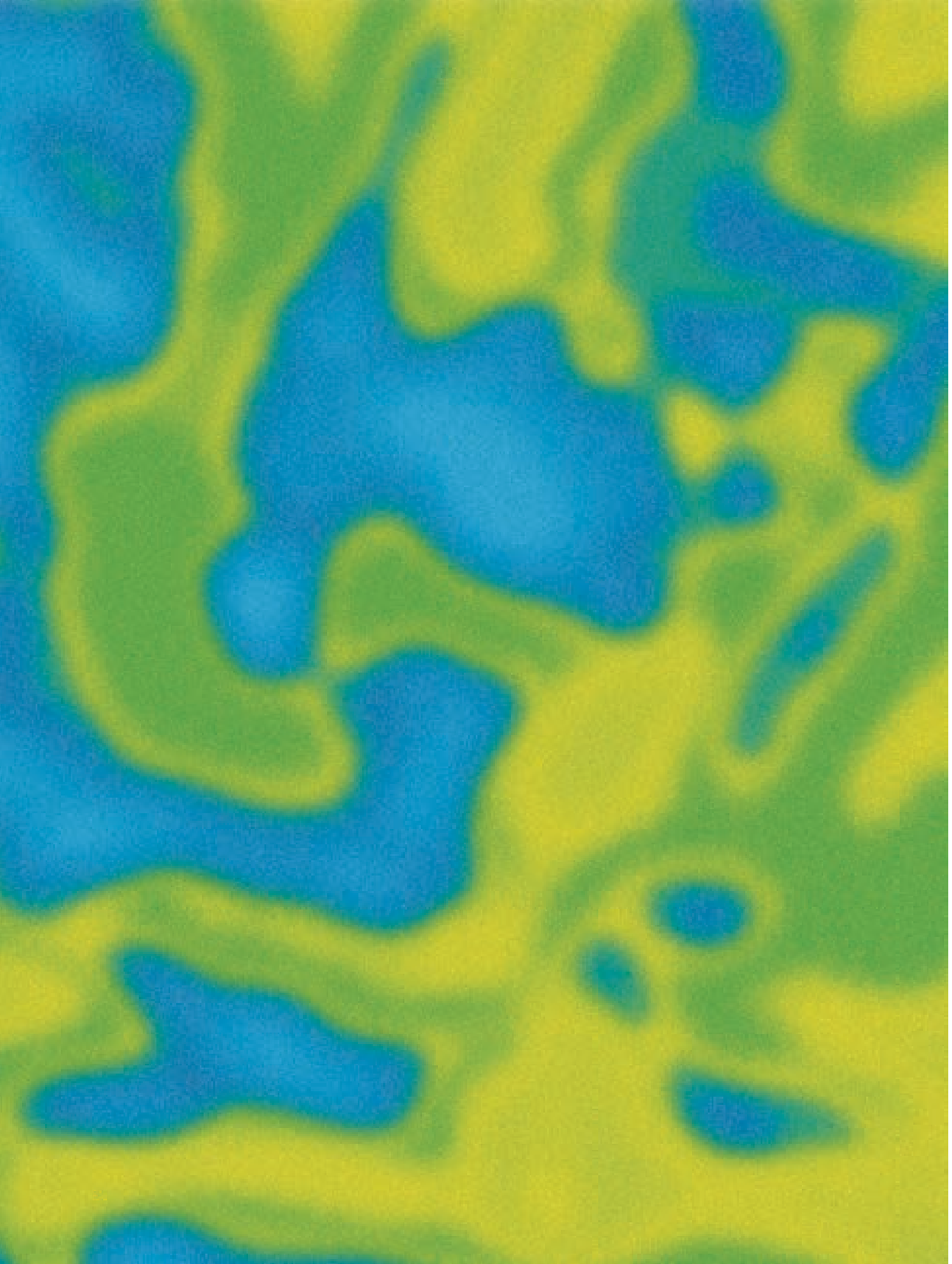
SULOG

So, is Philippine architecture education preparing designers for global practice? No. Not yet. It wants to, but seems to not know how. They, the academies, remain tethered to the old pond. The nostalgia is just too overpowering—and debilitating. I am fully aware of an official and empowered effort to revamp curriculum which will conclude by 2026. I have seen the preliminary designs. It is a catch-up plan. They should do far better. And reaching for my inner Miranda, no, no. That wasn't a question.

The *sulog* of architecture—its current, its flow—carries our architects outward, regardless. The danger is, that education becomes an undertow, pulling them back. The opportunity is that education evolves into a tide that propels them forward. The choice is stark.

Will Philippine architecture education remain a factory of servants, or will it reform to breed masters—architects who author, who lead, who stride confidently into the Asian century, not as echoes of others, but as voices of their own?

Places as Flux



How do you engage with what is existing on the site?

How do you respond to the tropical climate?

What does it mean to design private and public spaces today?

As the Philippines lies within the "Ring of Fire" at the edge of the Pacific, Filipino architects and designers contend with the ever-present realities of earthquakes, typhoons, and volcanic eruptions set within a tropical climate. They also need to respond sensitively and respectfully to the various topographies and landscapes found in the country. The fifteen examples featured in this section highlight Filipino architecture's response to various contexts, including climatological, geographical, geological, cultural, and socio-political factors. Focusing on the "spirit of the place", these architectural responses celebrate what is existing and present, while reimagining new possibilities of what it means to be in constant dialogue with conditions that are in flux.

Some of the case studies highlight the variety of geographical locations in the Philippines that architects need to respond to and adapt to. Hilly and steep settings require careful maneuvering of structure and form while choreographing circulation and views. Some of the featured buildings take advantage of the beachside and forested locations. In other cases, the architecture carefully adapts to the dense urban or the sprawling rural setting.

Sensitivity to place context also means celebrating what already exists on site, including both tangible elements (such as existing structures, natural features, and materials) and intangible aspects (such as social structures, values, and culture). Architects often employ strategies such as adaptive reuse to reconfigure existing buildings for new functions or programs, such as converting old poultry houses into an eco-resort or transforming a 1950s house into a headquarters for a religious congregation. With a plethora of choices, including bamboo, rattan, wood, clay, and stone, Filipino architects and designers utilize materials that are abundant in the local region. In other instances, new public spaces emerge from existing neighborhoods, conjuring a sense of home and community. Throughout these examples, Filipino contemporary architecture acknowledges and respects the sense of place as a central aspect of its ethos.

Kilyawan Farm Resort

A DISUSED CHICKEN COOP FINDS APOTHEOSIS AS RESORT LODGING

Named after the black-naped oriole whose call echoes through the farm, Kilyawan Farm Resort is an orchestration of light, memory and place. Located in the forests of Ibaan, Batangas, where its namesake finds sanctuary, the 8.5-hectare eco-resort complex was once home to another avian companion: the chicken. Eight long, narrow poultry sheds, set on stilts across the sloping terrain, once housed as many as 50,000 of these birds. Through the vision of Dominic Galicia Architects, two of these derelict coops have been transformed into a reception hall and a guest cabin complex, retaining their original footprints. The farm remains active, with bamboo, narra (Philippine hardwood), and fruit trees under cultivation, while chickens now roam freely in the surroundings of these structures alongside their new human residents.

"No opportunity is too humble," Dominic Galicia remarks.

Kilyawan Farm Resort's ceilings find lightness and light with bamboo mats and poles.

What was once a derelict chicken coop finds reuse as guest accommodations.

Kilyawan thus emerged as a project with a unique proposition: an architecture rooted in the preservation of memory and drawn from local materiality. The clients' deep sentiment for these avian structures formed the guidelines for the design process, which sought to honor and reference their agro-industrial heritage.

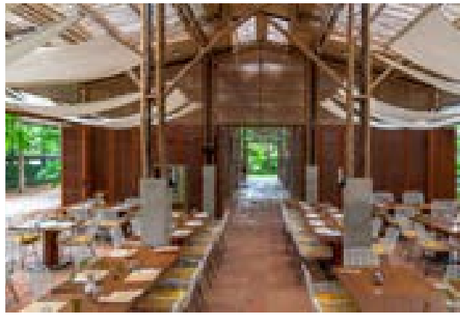
This began with an attentiveness to what remained. Instead of imposing a new form, the architecture responded to what was already present; the 690-square-meter Cabins Building and the 580-square-meter Reception Building use the original footprint and column locations of the chicken coops, maintaining the spatial rhythm of their grids. Triangular steel trusses that once spanned the roof were reconfigured as vertical supports, with spaceframe constructions clad in bamboo, referencing their former industrial use.

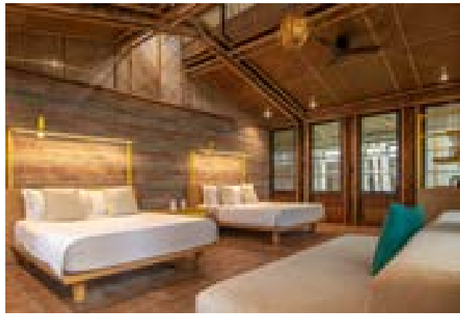
In Galicia's first visit to the site, what defined his experience of the sheds was the way they engaged with light. The roofs had a central ridge vent, a break that allowed hot air to escape and daylight to enter. "It created this glow, and I was struck by it. That impact became the foundation of our response," he recalls, manifesting in a roof following the original profile with a "spine of light [that] became the narrative chord that runs through the project."

In retaining this atmosphere, a careful selection of material choices emerged. The ceilings are lined with mats woven on an island off the coast of Batangas, made from finer buri palm for the cabins, and amakan split bamboo for the reception, respectively, casting warm sunlight into the interiors. The Reception Building makes use of bamboo, reclaimed narra, and handmade clay bricks from neighboring San Juan, arranged in a woven bond, echoing the ceiling. The Cabin Building, meanwhile, traded clay for ecobricks—modular blocks made from plastic waste—arranged in layered striations inspired by rammed earth construction and with the presence to match. Throughout, the intention was to avoid surface treatment: no paint was used; finishes were expressed through natural texture and craft, a tactile surface brought to life by the light.

The Kilyawan Farm Resort stands as an architecture that listens to the site's history, to the spirit of place, and to the materials beneath its soil. Galicia's method is reflective. "Every project has a kernel of opportunity waiting to be harnessed," he says. "The simplest things often have the greatest impact. In Kilyawan, it was the spine of light. Moments like that take you by surprise—and they often lead to what becomes most resonant in the work." He continues, "This is essential to the story—how that spine of light connects history to the present, and how it is now filtered as a response to climate. It became the armature of our response, an honest vision of light, of this site and its story."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong





The resort's Courtyard Restaurant serves farm-to-table fare.

Designer: Dominic Galicia Architects
Location: Ibaan, Batangas
Use: Hospitality

GK Community Library The Biennale

A LIBRARY SHAPED BY COLLECTIVE CARE AND KINSHIP

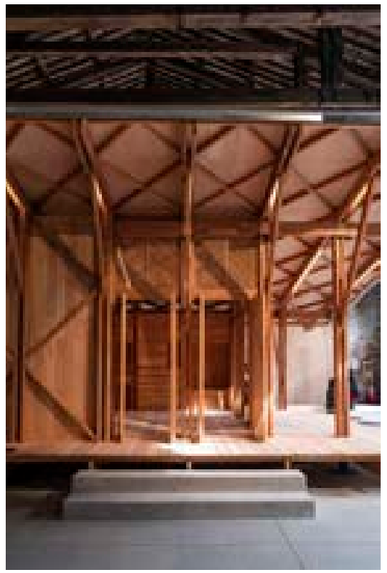
"Just do it."

Architect Sudarshan Khadka Jr. defines meaningful community engagement in those three words. "There's no lack of opportunity," he says. "You go to a community, you ask what they need, and if you take that seriously and your intentions are clear, solutions will appear." This ethic shaped the development of the GK Community Library in Angat, Bulacan. Co-created with the residents of the Gawad Kalinga Enchanted Farm, the timber structure presented an opportunity for the Framework Collaborative duo of Khadka and Eriksson Furunes to apply a processual approach to architecture, derived from the Filipino ethic of *bayanihan* (spirit of cooperation). "*Bayanihan* is not an institution," says Furunes. "It is something people do because they feel it is necessary." Selected as the Philippine Pavilion for the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale, *Structures of Mutual Support* embodied a plural vision of community-building, framing architectural practice as a tradition grounded in empathy and collective effort.

Rather than presenting a complete design for the Biennale jury, the architects submitted a structure that would only take form through workshops with the GK community. A six-step participatory approach that Khadka and Furunes have continually refined across their projects in Tacloban, Vietnam, and Norway, formed the basis for this effort in a pedagogical process that starts with learning, questioning, and making: "We didn't arrive with a proposal," Khadka recalls. "We began with a process that we would go through with the community with the hope of finding something meaningful to them." Through immersion with the community in site visits, drawing exercises, and prototyping at varied scales, the community's voice emerged: "a space after school for the children to study; a place critical for the community to have conversation, and resolve conflict."

The Biennale, as the resulting structure is known in the community, is an elevated, single-volume library built from locally sourced wood. Utilizing a modular approach made the process of its iteration

The community library as pavilion at La Biennale; photographed by Andrea D'Altoe, photographed by Alex Furunes, photographed by Andrea D'Altoe, photographed by Federico Vespignani



democratic and accessible. Khadka summarizes it as architecture lite: a simplification of the tools and language typically used in architecture, so that more people could participate. Instead of precise measurements, the "low-resolution framework" of blocks on a grid shifted the conversation away from technical minutiae and toward a format in which the community could readily engage.

The project presented logistical and environmental conditions critical to the design as it operated on two contexts: the everyday life at the GK Farm, and the gallery setting of the Arsenale. It needed to be assembled, dismantled, shipped to Venice, and eventually returned to be rebuilt on site. Timber met these requirements while aligning with the community's material preferences. The feeling of *aliwalas*, evoking

an airy spaciousness open to the outdoors, shaped the form of the library as slatted walls, operable windows, and generous overhangs created this shaded openness responsive to its tropical setting. Following its return from the exhibition, the Biennale was reassembled in its permanent location, an act of bayanihan by the very same community that had helped to construct it.

Now in regular use for over a year, the library has become a place of community within the GK Enchanted Farm. The community has since established a robust library program, with around ten volunteer librarians spearheading reading classes, literacy sessions, and after-school programs for children. Using the same modular system, an adjacent tambayan (hangout) pavilion has since been built by the community. "They have a full program," says Khadka. "There are people there who were part of the design, and now they're managing the space. It's their library." Together, the two structures provide shaded spaces for study, gathering, and community events. The Philippine Arts in Venice Biennale (PAVB) supported librarian training to help the community develop a sustainable system for cataloging, access, and stewardship. "I'm impressed," says Furunes. "It's so professional with the incredible community that is taking initiative. The books are so well-arranged, and the system is so well-run."

Crucially, a collective sense of ownership has taken hold; the residents who took part in the design process now speak about this project with a sense of pride and ownership. This is what Khadka had hoped:

"We don't see the limit of the profession as the limit of architectural knowledge; our role [here] is to create a framework for sharing ideas." The GK Community Library stands as a record of that continuing success, of architecture that emerges from communities building together in mutual support.

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Framework Collaborative
Location: Angat, Bulacan, and Arsenale, Venice
Use: Civic/Meanwhile use

New Provincialate House

THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF A RESIDENCE REBORN AS A SPIRITUAL SEAT

"So, the house had to die."

With this declaration, Studio Fuerzo defined the architectural and spiritual resurrection of a decaying 1950s Mission Revival-style domicile in New Manila into the headquarters for the Fathers and Brothers of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

Originally designed as a private residence, 70 years of service with the congregation has taken its toll on the building, rendering it structurally unsound and programmatically outdated. The congregation of today needed spaces for worship, retreat, and daily life that the old house could no longer accommodate. Rather than a total teardown, however, Studio Fuerzo decided to retain the original masonry and reinforced concrete walls of the house. From these remains, they composed a palimpsest upon which to frame a new vision of community life that references the character of the original structure on site. "We had to gut [almost] the entire house; it had to die; and rebuilding it became a process of resurrection," recalls principal architect Daryl Refuerzo.

This project is Studio Fuerzo's first foray into heritage conservation. Accustomed to mid-scale residential work, Refuerzo describes the experience as a "baptism by fire" that required both technical improvisation and philosophical orientation in approaching adaptive reuse. Despite the pressure, the approach remained grounded in Studio Fuerzo's commitment to spatial clarity and tropical responsiveness. "Our first instinct is always to make the building *maaliwalas* (airy and bright)," he explains. "The house was dark, very loom [stuffy], so everything followed from opening it up to light and air."

The resulting complex builds on the original structure's footprint, extending its spatial logic to support the growing ministry. At its heart, a tranquil courtyard invites moments of pause, around which a chapel and a multi-purpose hall seating 200 are arranged on the ground floor. Dormitories for up to 23 members of the order inhabit the upper levels within a steel addition that also houses balconies, auxiliary rooms, and a roof garden. Refuerzo delighted in defining "unusual connections" that encouraged movement and discovery: bridges connecting platforms, hallways leading to gardens, and underutilized balconies opened into spaces for pause and prayer. "There are more than five ways to go around the house, and we feel that by introducing these circulation spaces, [and] making literal platforms for [users] to explore, their [daily] experience and perspective are enriched." The architecture prioritizes flexibility and invitation. "We wanted

Old and new cohere and contrast throughout Studio Fuerzo's New Provincialate House.

Left: Straight-veined marble laid in an X-formation draws the parishioner's eye toward the altar and the suspended crucifix.

the house to feel welcoming," Refuerzo notes. "Something open, something shared."

Central to the architectural motif is the veil: a terracotta-colored composite screen that envelops the composition in an array of cruciforms. While this screen filters around 30 percent of sunlight, its presence is primarily symbolic: "We treated the veil not just as a functional element but as something that evokes spiritual beauty," Refuerzo explains. "In the interplay of light and shadow, we elicit feelings [of] connection with the divine; it is beauty for the Divine's sake." This symbolic materiality informs Studio Fuerzo's sensibility across the palette of the building.

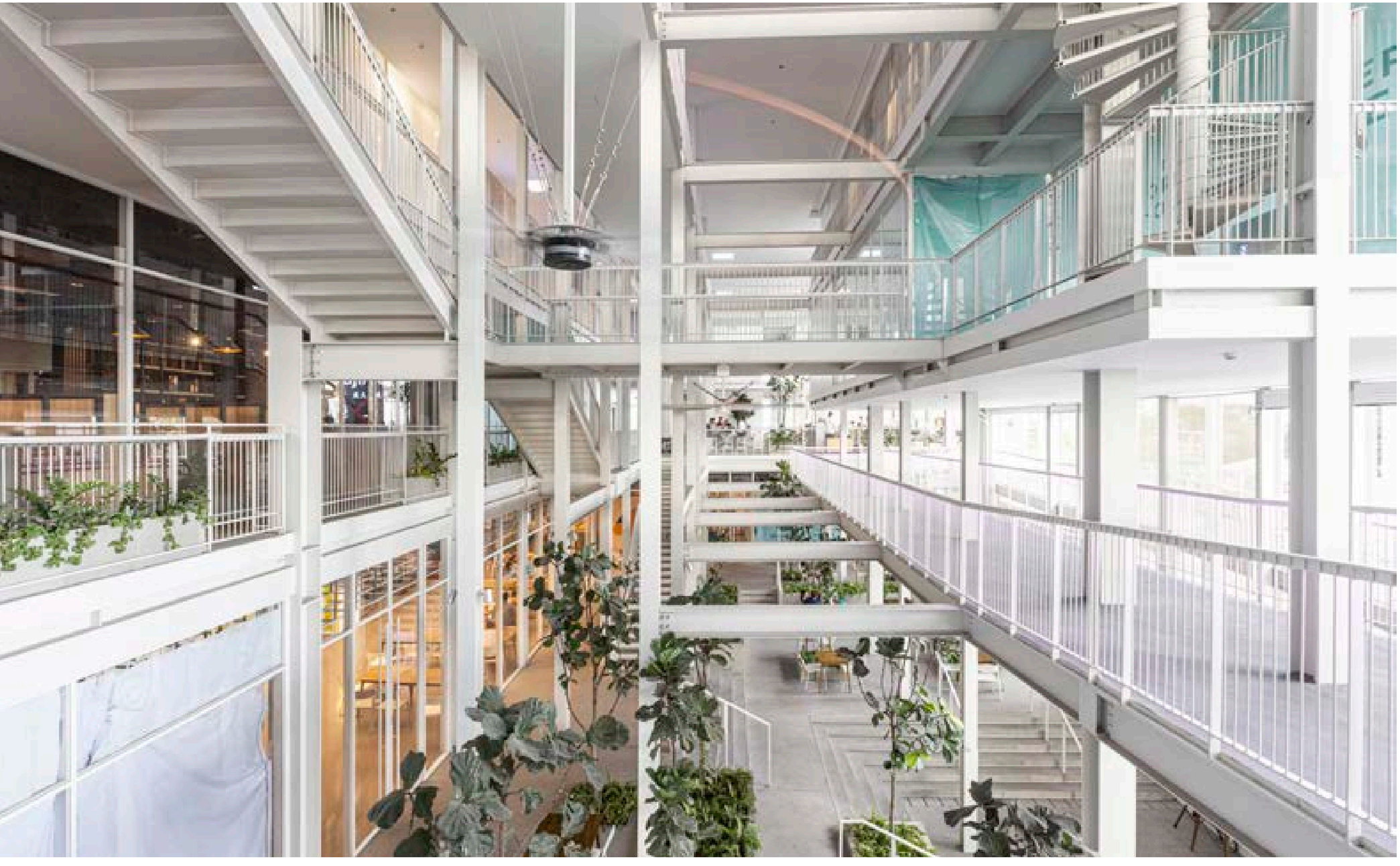
Original adobe walls were re-clad in matching local stone; salvaged terracotta roof tiles were reinterpreted as wall accents evoking Christian symbolism, and hand-cast Machuca tiles were introduced where original patterns once existed. Iron window grilles found new life as balustrades and gates, while an old marble table was transformed into the tabernacle. "We always start with the materials," Refuerzo shares. "When we manipulate them, we feel we're creating more authentic spaces, and that process helps us ask what the space wants to be."

Three years on, the New Provincialate House remains an active space of faith, hosting retreats, daily prayers, and even gardening within the central courtyard courtesy of the resident nuns. "They've really made it their own," Refuerzo says. "And I'm glad to see they've respected the design—it's evolving, but still faithful."

While the complex is not formally listed as a heritage site, Studio Fuerzo approached it with the contextual sensitivity the storied residence deserves. Refuerzo reflects, "Adaptive reuse gives us a platform, not a blank slate, to be creative while respecting what came before," that his team achieved in a processual design-by-dialogue with its religious occupants. The project remains their magnum opus and their contribution to the emergent conversation around conservation in the country; a strong argument for adaptive reuse grounded in Filipino sensibilities of place, and the value of everyday spaces. "There are so many ways to work with existing buildings," Refuerzo notes. "Even when they aren't historically noteworthy, the interventions we make can still be meaningful—or at the very least, interesting."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Designer: Daryl Refuerzo, Studio Fuerzo
Location: New Manila, Quezon City
Use: Institutional



The city's living room. A large atrial space open to the outdoors greets visitors, a refreshing shift from the boxed-in malls that dominate the city.

PLACES AS FLUX Corner House

Corner House

BREAKING THE COMMUNITY MALL OUT OF THE BOX

For Amata Luphaiboon, principal of Bangkok-based Department of ARCHITECTURE Co., each commission begins with a provocation. "It's neither the size nor the importance of the project, but whether the question is interesting [and] inspiring enough."

In the gridlocked Asian metropolis that is Metro Manila, where pedestrianization remains a suggestion and the buildings retreat onto themselves, the query of the Corner House suggests a different reality: "How do we bring the neighborhood in both visually and experientially?"

The completed project weaves a retail commercial program into the fabric of San Juan, forming a continuous pedestrian path that pulls the neighborhood in and extends urban life upward. The Corner House builds on the studio's earlier works in Bangkok, the Commons duo of Thonglor and Saladaeng, where solutions of airflow, thermal comfort, and the feasibility of open-air gathering within an Asian setting were validated, laying the groundwork for the complex's contemporary tropical vocabulary. "We proved that we can do it," Luphaiboon says. "So that is no longer the biggest question here. It becomes knowledge and skill that we contribute to this project."

Taking over a corner lot at the intersection of P. Guevarra and Recto streets in San Juan, the four-story complex spans over 16,000 square meters of commercial space wrapped around a central atrium framed in white-painted steel. Early in the design process, the team made a deliberate effort to preserve several decade-old trees on-site, integrating these mature specimens into the Corner House's composition of terraces and open-air landings.

Luphaiboon had assumed Manila's climate would resemble Bangkok's, both being tropical locales. But he soon encountered the sharp intensity of the *habagat* (southwest monsoon): rain arrived almost sideways, and monsoon winds pressed hard against the façade, with the typhoon in particular demanding more than typical tropical solutions sufficient elsewhere. "That led to one of the main features of the building: most of the envelope is able to open and close during the monsoon," he says. "I think of the building as breathing, it inhales the wind on good days and holds its breath in heavy rain [through] the use of these [rolling fabric] screens." In typhoons, the approach reverses. "[As] we are only human, we cannot withstand nature completely. In the storm, we are [but a part] of nature. So, we open up and allow wind to pass through and not destroy the building."

Porosity likewise shapes how the building engages the city. In the Philippines, "everyone drives, and codes demand hundreds of parking spaces," Luphaiboon observes. "I wanted to give back space for people" through the Corner House's main gesture:

a 500-meter jogging ramp that weaves through and around the building, punctuating the volume at various elevations, in an act that reclaims the edge and interstitial space as public domain. Connecting food, retail, and leisure venues in a continuous pedestrian path that expands into shaded landings and tree-lined decks, the ramp affords visitors the experience of alternating vistas in both the vibrant life within the atrium and the unfolding streetscape beyond. "Jogging is part of urban life in Bangkok, but here you cannot jog. So, we built it into the architecture," he notes. "It's a safe route and a way to connect with the neighborhood's wind, trees, and views." The track culminates in a rooftop garden overlooking the skyline, while skylight cubes in dichroic glass scatter light into the atrium, animating the interior with iridescent hues throughout the day.

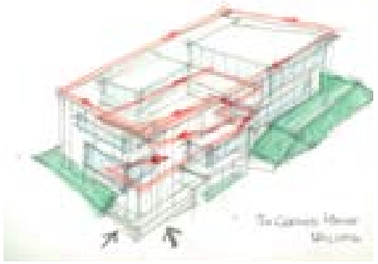
Having visited the works of the Department of ARCHITECTURE Co., the developer trusted the firm with the vision of bringing a similarly climate-responsive and socially engaged model of development to Manila, a proposition not entirely common in the Philippine context. "They hunted me down," Luphaiboon recalls. "They expected the uniqueness we bring. Many clients dilute the strength of the design, but this one didn't at all. Our conceptual design and the end product are about 85 percent the same, with only minor adjustments for [structural considerations]," adapting the steel to meet local seismic codes, enlarging some profiles, and introducing additional flying beams. "It's not easy to design and build a steel structure here, especially with this slimness," Luphaiboon says. "But if you allow some movement, like nature, like trees, it [doesn't have to be] as large. That becomes a new kind of structural system."

The realization of this vision was made possible not only through the trust of the developer but also the support of local collaborators BAAD Studio, whose understanding of the project's conceptual framework and knowledge of local steel construction helped translate its spatial ambitions into built form. "They understand completely our vision, our aesthetic, how we make [the steel structure]. They assisted us in [translating the design for] the local engineers. That was a big help."

Corner House offers a counterpoint to the enclosed, centripetal nature of retail infrastructure in the region. "Here, we welcome the neighborhood to see, to feel, and to enjoy life inside the building," Luphaiboon says. For Metro Manila, the Corner House suggests a radical possibility: that architecture can be generous, open to its neighbors and its environment.

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Designer: Amata Luphaiboon, Department of Architecture with BAAD Studio
Location: San Juan, Metro Manila
Use: Commercial



Intsia House

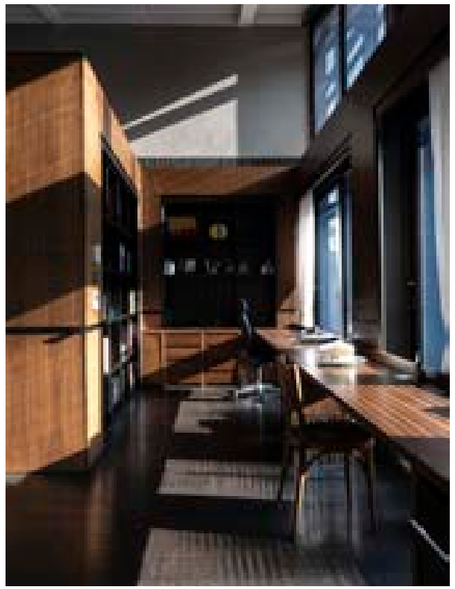
A FAMILIAL NEST THAT ECHOES AND EVOLVES THE FILIPINO VERNACULAR HOME

How does one negotiate the precision of Western exactitude with the handmade quality of tropical craft?

For Filipino-Swiss architectural designer Gabriel Schmid, this question formed the ethos behind the Intsia House, a 1,000-square-meter residence for his parents and the first built work of his firm, Studio Barcho, in the Philippines. Shaped by Schmid's American-European training, its form builds on the typological *floating volume* of the Philippine vernacular, tracing a millennium of historic progression in form and material as reinterpreted through Filipino artisanship in this contemporary urban home.

Set on a 2,400-square-meter funnel-shaped lot, a brick-clad base surrounded by tropical flora frames the approach to the home. Flared corners and a procession of arches give the ground floor mass a tectonic solidity softened by curvature, while above a five-meter-tall orthogonal volume is veiled in handwoven copper screens. Local craft is expressed in the tactile irregularity and evolving surface of these materials. The *lahar*-infused (volcanic mudflow) bricks carry a subtle gradient, with lighter tones used indoors to offset the dimming effect of shade; each block is split by hand, affording the installation a unique, organic irregularity. The copper screen, first of its kind in local construction, is woven with slight variations using hand-powered machinery, its density shifting to balance privacy and outward views. Over time, the metal will trade its red luster for a patina of greens.

Tuned to the tropical context, continuous clerestory windows along the ridge of its split roof remain open year-round, releasing warm air and drawing in fresh breezes through the stack-effect process. Below, the lanai acts as a shaded, ventilated threshold to the garden and the main living space above, effectively



a second living room, an expansive gesture of *kapwa* (fellow) hospitality that welcomes guests in 'their own house' even before they are invited upstairs. This prolonged approach softens the transition from street to home, while the interplay of brick and timber prepares the senses for the lightness of the spaces above.

Ascending to the upper floor, the house meets the canopy, fulfilling Schmid's father's wish to "live among the trees" and capture the gentle morning breeze. Private rooms are deliberately modest to allow for a generous *bulwagan*, a traditional Filipino reception space for gathering and ceremony, that Schmid describes as "simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal"—large enough to host and congregate in yet spaciously arranged so that each person can inhabit their corner, pursuing quiet moments without withdrawing from the shared life of the room.

Schmid's approach to material strategy unfolded through trial and error. Initially envisioning a cast-in-place concrete base inspired by late 1960s brutalism, he shifted to concrete brick after on-site trials fell short and the logistics of large-scale pours proved unworkable. "Can two people do this procedure?" Schmid asks. Thus, he developed a system that forgoes the use of large machinery impossible to bring into the village, and impractical for the labor and infrastructure locally. He anchored the build instead in local craft that balanced precision with the natural variation of handwork. This is a reflection, a reaction that the world here [in the Philippines] is not perfect, standards are different but by all means also valid, [what is crucial is therefore to] allow for the flaws of the hand and [accept that] things will change in this context."

For Schmid, the home's sensibility lies not in visual imitation but in lived experience, a Filipino home, not in mimicry of the past, but in finding consonance with its Philippine context, shaped by the landscape, climate, cultural sensibilities, and patterns of daily life.

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Studio Barcho
Location: Makati City, Metro Manila
Use: Residential

Mendoza Farmhouse

A RURAL RETREAT WITH NATURE AS PROTAGONIST

Set within the rolling pineapple plantations of Alfonso, Cavite, the Mendoza Farmhouse is home to architects Benjee Mendoza and An Bermejo of BAAD Studio. Designed as a deliberate retreat from the city, the Farmhouse is BAAD's process of distilling life down to its essentials. Following the loss of their previous site to the 2020 Taal Volcano eruption, and in the stillness of the pandemic, the project became an exercise in simplicity shaped by the expectation of their newborn daughter. It pared back form and finish in favor of flexibility, sustainability, and a close relationship with nature.

They found their site on a sloped 4,000-square-meter farm. Before building could begin, however, they reached an agreement with the caretaker to clear one of the lots, helping harvest, transport, and sell more than 3,000 pineapples to support local farmers. The cleared soil was redistributed across the remaining crop, which continues to provide the family with a steady supply. From the plantation, the land descends to the southeast, where the Farmhouse stands and where they began cultivating a small garden of tropical plants, vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Bermejo describes the planting as largely intuitive, adding or replanting "organically by the day, as and where needed."

While the house's clean lines and crisp spatial articulations may suggest otherwise, its construction was brisk and experimental; the exoskeleton was raised in just seven days.

With the land prepared, attention turned to the structure that would anchor the site, the Farmhouse itself. Completed in seven months, the 15-by-9-meter structure utilized prefabricated steel, 90 percent of which was built from standard commercial sections to minimize waste and simplify assembly. Twenty-foot-long trusses and 10-foot-tall columns formed a bolted modular frame, which was erected in just seven days. The build was an experiment in disciplined modularity aimed at sustainable steel construction. For Mendoza, the sharp triangular roof is the home's defining gesture—a sharp peak that recalls "a child's sketch of what a home should look like," yet echoes the rooflines of vernacular houses in the surrounding agrarian community. At its apex, a continuous ridge skylight and ventilation louver flood the interior with daylight and promote natural stack-effect ventilation.

The all-white finish of the steel assembly highlights its rhythm, allowing the house to blend seamlessly into the surrounding plantation. This structural rigidity is tempered by wood cladding and paneling both inside and out, as well as opaque wall panels and angled louvers that maintain privacy for the loft from street-level view. Inside, the plan is organized into two clear halves: bedrooms and baths on one side, an open kitchen-dining-living space on the other, with a loft above. Windows are set low to frame views of the pineapple fields, even from a child's height. After dark, an outdoor pool serves as a lantern, its reflections subtly shifting across the wood-clad ceiling and filtering through the curtain partitions.

While the house displays rhythm in its beams and connections, it resists a sanitized minimalism in favor of an organic sensibility shaped by time, use, and climate, what Mendoza calls an "intersection of imperfection and structure." Floors incorporate leftover material experiments from other projects, while details such as the bathhouse, lit from above by an oculus now partially claimed by a vine, reveal a willingness to let nature in. Indeed, the home extends outdoors into a decked pavilion, pool, and lawn that serve as primary spaces for gathering, play, and leisure.

Over time, the maturing canopy has turned into what Mendoza describes as "a giant forest" that makes the home feel smaller, humbler, and more deeply connected to its setting. The *dita* trees (Alstonia scholaris) now shade the pool from the afternoon sun, while birds, dragonflies, and the surrounding rainbow eucalyptus have become everyday companions.

This living habitat has become a place their daughter delights in exploring, turning the property into an active landscape for discovery. For the family, the outdoors forms the core of their everyday experience at the Farmhouse, where sports, gardening, and relaxation with both family and friends are in sync with the seasons of nature, the occasional pineapple harvest included. The project transcends process and form, as Mendoza reflects, "In the end, [our practice] really is about flora, fauna, and people creating an ecosystem together."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Benjamin Mendoza and An Bermejo
Location: Alfonso, Cavite
Use: Residential

PLACES AS FLUX Mendoza Farmhouse

The interiors of the Mendoza Farmhouse lay bare the architectural simplicity and pragmatism that shaped the space, a necessity during the dark days of the pandemic.

Hacienda Sta. Elena Community House

ARCHITECTURE AS GALVANIZER
OF NATURE AND COMMUNITY

"You won't get a look at the entire Hacienda through a photograph…the space is meant for you to wander in. Pause, absorb every detail," says architect Jorge Yulo of his design for the Community House in Hacienda Sta. Elena, a 17,863-square-meter residential enclave once part of a 7,000-hectare sugar estate in Laguna. Conceived as an inclusive extension of the estate, the complex encourages shared use of space and a connection to the surrounding landscape for the village residents. "Architecture is all about listening," Yulo explains of his approach to the project. "When I first saw this site, I roamed around and put myself in the shoes of the user: What would I want to see in such a space? What would I wish to experience in such a site?"

Cavernous roof planes are seemingly held aloft by spindle-thin poles in Pavilion A, the complex's social core.

The Community House is organized around five mature mango trees that once marked a clearing in the cane fields. "I designed everything based on those five mango trees behind you," Yulo recalls. "They gave the space its sense of place." The three rectilinear pavilions—Rooms A, B, and C—are linked by perpendicular corridors and form the primary social venues of the Community House. The configuration recalls Spanish towns of yore, with an adjacent, preexisting chapel completing the rectilinear composition around this newly formed plaza.

On arrival, the circulation offers a set of choices that organize the experience of the Community House. The entire sequence is oriented to the nearby chapel, as Yulo explains: "I took the orientation of the whole complex from that chapel. After church, you would walk by the road and ascend through this walkway," flanked by staggered steps that rise beneath a level roofline of closely spaced timber slats, creating a measured compression that heightens anticipation before meeting to intersect the two main corridors at a 45-degree angle. "When you stand at the entrance, you're given a choice to turn left or right. You get a sense of order, but also the implication that you can explore the space as you see fit and embrace the peace." To the left, visitors are led into Room A, the dining pavilion he described as the "belly" of the development. Turning to the right, the path crosses Room B and C, terminating at the gym.

Each pavilion channels the atmosphere of the Community House as a social space configured as an "extension of homes." Room A, the social core due south of the courtyard, opens to gardens on three sides. Its layered roof planes modulate heat and light, aided by a band of clerestory windows tucked under the eaves, its overall form appropriately evoking the *sibi*, a thatched shed used by farmers as a reprieve strategically oriented against the intense tropical sun. Yulo shares: "The roofs slant from north to south and the clerestory opens to the north, protecting the structure from southern exposure." A long counter carved from a typhoon-felled acacia completes the arrangement, bringing tactile warmth, while the floor is finished in large, rusticated stone tiles that delineate the perimetral walkway, grounding the space in the context of the plan. Glass walls and broad roof planes frame the surrounding landscape. In contrast, a series of vertical brise-soleil whose configuration is drawn from the venation of leaves cast dappled light that references the shifting shade of the ancient trees nearby.

A Scarpa-esque staircase leads to a second-floor lounge

Room B offers a quiet shift in tone, with a library on the ground floor surrounded by operable windows that place it among the trees. Its timber details lend warmth, while deep overhangs keep the surrounding terraces shaded. Central to its composition is a staircase whose staggered treads and corrugated risers create a rhythmic sequence, drawing movement upward from the organizing path, activating the angled sidewall with an elemental interplay of raw concrete and timber in a gesture leading towards the more secluded lounge above.

The path continues northward, bisecting Room C into its component zones: the meditative changing rooms, and the recreational game room pavilion that appears to float atop a shallow children's pool, itself nestled within the larger lapping pool. This composition in water breaks from the rigidity of the angular plan in the semi-oval shape of the former. Nearby, the gym forms the terminus of the path, opening fully to the outdoors, with floor and roof grids rotated 45 degrees to break the site's orthogonal symmetry.

Yulo approached materiality as an extension of the site's quiet character, favoring textures and finishes that would age with dignity and deepen the architecture's connection to place. Unpainted steel was left to weather and rust, its surfaces

Room C's louvered volume appears to hover above the placid waters of the center's nested pools.

gradually softened by moss growth that marks the passage of time. In Room B, wood and timber bring warmth to the interior flooring, structural and screen elements, while exterior and tile underfoot provide a tactile counterpoint to the precision of steel. For Yulo, the challenge was making "something that the people, the families in the community, will [care] about," a pressure he translated into a design that fosters calm and belonging.

The Community House merges architectural clarity with ecological sensitivity, elevating a clubhouse into a spatial narrative of coexistence, where built form shapes an enduring sense of place. In the Hacienda Sta. Elena, this approach is distilled in Yulo's philosophy: "To find something from before, build on it, create a new but fitting feel, and leave it changed for it to become a memory for tomorrow—that's the whole point of design."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Jorge Yulo Architects and Associates
Location: Santa Rosa, Laguna
Use: Civic

Quarry House

THE HUMBLE SOIL BRICK CASCADES, SOARS AND, SPOUTS WATER IN A HOUSE BY THE SEA

Perched atop soft limestone 70 meters above the shore, Quarry House cascades along the cliffside's natural slope to minimize impact and sink the structure below the treeline.

"Our design goal was to sit as lightly as possible in this nature-blessed site."

Perched atop a limestone cliffside rising 70 meters above the coast, the Quarry House by SLIC Architecture, is a cascade of brick-faced volumes embedded amidst a dense tropical jungle. Occupying a steep 40-degree incline, and accessed only by narrow, unpaved roads, the discreet locale conceals a pristine beachfront and an escape from the mundanity and routine of urban life. The 2,000-square-meter complex supports six residential villas, descending from a central two-story communal block at the crest, each oriented to capture private views of the rising sun.

Commissioned by a brick manufacturer, the Quarry House began as a request for a large family vacation home. Seeing the opportunity that

SLIC took the client's humble soil brick and spun out a multitude of uses across the house, pushing its modular and formal potential to the fullest.

the sloping site provided, SLIC opted for a lower, fragmented profile that was more sensitive to the ecological impact of the development, and negating the necessity for costly, deep foundations in the soft limestone substrate. The stepped composition produces alternating zones of exposure and enclosure; with circulation stairwells embedded between pavilions, becoming contemplative spaces of transition.

Materially, Quarry House centers on the compressed soil brick. Originally produced by the client for commercial purposes, SLIC saw in its largely unexplored potential the opportunity to anchor the house in a myriad of permutations of this single adaptable material. The brick's distinctive ridged ends and twin vertical perforations allowed the architects to experiment with structural and functional applications. It appears not only in load-bearing walls but also in custom details such as integrated shelving, lighting mounts, stair tread inlays, and the outdoor shower. "We've lost count of how many iterations and executions we've done involving this brick," says architect Clarisse Gono. "But as you can see, we've really tested all the possibilities! We saw the versatility and flexibility it offered when the owner shared it with us, and we are happy to have actualized its potential in his own space," she adds. The team refined the brick's finish and color, settling on a sandy tone that echoes both the property's beach frontage and the warm light cast across the site. Beige-colored stucco, book-matched limestone flooring, and the use of a cream-toned lime plaster reference the geological character of the cliff and allow the beauty and raw tactility of the brick to be foregrounded in the architecture. Gono reflects, "When you encounter nature, there is so much asymmetry, tactility, roughness, and entropy; there is beauty in that, a beauty we cannot hope to achieve and only emulate. We're closest to this by embracing the raw materiality or reflecting the natural beauty of our context."

Environmental strategies befitting the verdant setting were given much attention within the Quarry House. In encouraging occupants to engage further with the tropical outdoors, ceiling heights were kept deliberately low, 2.55 meters in villas and 2.8 meters in communal areas. Air wells present atop the residential villas, and the narrow canyons that result from the mosaic configuration draw on passive cooling to reduce reliance on air conditioning. Automation in the form of smart home technologies further reduces the energy footprint of the complex.

Outdoor lighting is minimized to avoid disturbing the nocturnal wildlife, and the dechlorinated swimming pool doubles as a water source for birds and other animals. Gardens on terraces and rooftops weave the built form into the surrounding vegetation, reinforcing the sense of a retreat contextually embedded in its setting.

SLIC's Quarry House is an exercise that demonstrates the potential of focused and disciplined material exploration in creating an architecture of interest and sensitivity to its verdant setting. Through fragmented massing, it realizes a complex program with ecological restraint, creating a functional, multigenerational home that embodies reverence for nature and remains firmly rooted in context.

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Designer: SLIC Architecture
Location: Philippines
Use: Residential

Top: The living area is clad in brick, but with organically shaped, brightly colored pieces that break the rule of linearity across the home.

Bottom: The poolside area fronting the main communal block. An outdoor shower with a brick water spout stands prominently in the background.

The minimal geometry of Lanai House reflects the spatial clarity Benedicto pursues across her body of work.

PLACES AS FLUX Lanai House

Lanai House

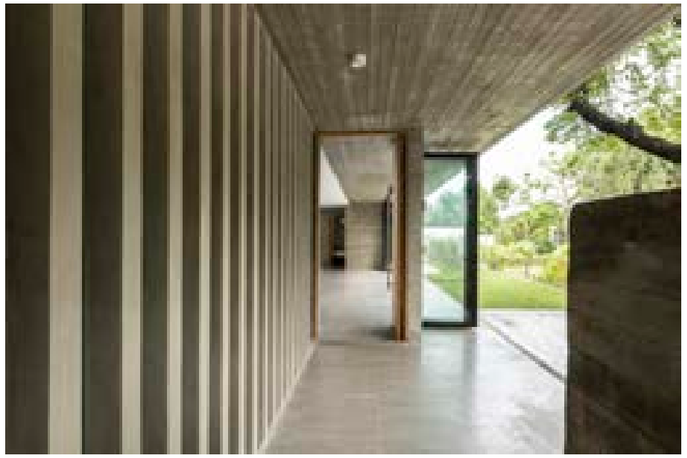
A BRUTALIST APERTURE TO THE SEA

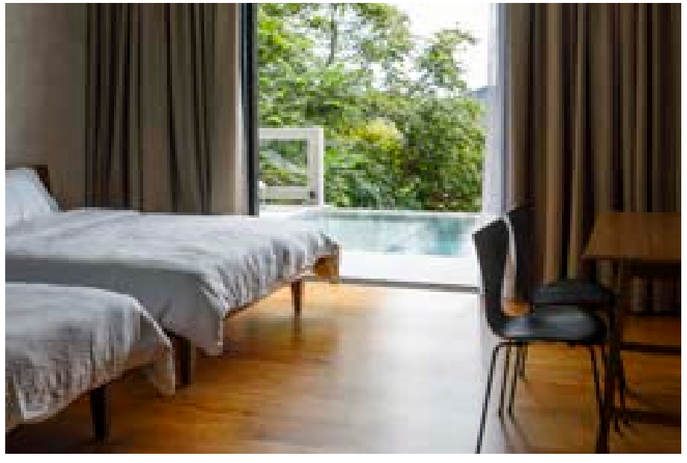
The Lanai House, designed by Micaela Benedicto of MB Architecture Studio, is a minimalist concrete pavilion in quiet dialogue with the West Philippine Sea. Perched atop a cliff, the Lanai House stretches across its crown, offering uninterrupted views of the sea from every room. Sensitive to the innate beauty of its cliffside setting, the Lanai House maintains a light footprint and minimizes excavation, settling into the site's natural contours. First conceived as a multi-level retreat, the timely acquisition of the adjacent property allowed the form to be distilled into a singular gesture that respects its terrain. As Benedicto remarks, "The initial thing for me is always the site and trying to build something within that context; this one had a steeply sloped lot, a cliff, and an incredible view behind it."

This refined attitude is central to how the house takes shape. Minimalism is not only Benedicto's stylistic preference but a practical response to constraints. "I try to approach things smartly," Benedicto explains. "There's an economy to it, a kind of discipline in knowing when to stop…and also a responsibility to the client to provide only what is essential." The simplicity of the plan, an elongated rectilinear mass, aligns with her preference for slim volumes that admit cross-ventilation and daylight.

Lanai House is configured as an open, linear, single-level plan with a central living-dining space, anchored on both ends by the bedrooms, all with equal access to sea views. An additional lower level is tucked beneath the pavilion, housing utility spaces and caretaker quarters. The resulting architecture is more akin to a covered terrace than a conventional home, referencing its namesake lanai. In this project, that meant treating the entire roof as usable space, creating another terrace overlooking the ocean, and fulfilling the client's desire for maximum utility in a compact form.

Material choices reinforce the house's commitment to permanence, tactility, and practicality, with an emphasis on ease of upkeep. Reinforced board-formed concrete served as both structure and architectural finish. "I wanted to try just doing formed concrete and sealing it, that's it," Benedicto says, forgoing cladding, painted surfaces, and excess detailing. With fewer applied surfaces, the house avoids weathering issues common in corrosive coastal environments,





Left: Benedicto cites the site's picturesque views as the primary shaper of the house's frame-like form.

while expressing an honesty in construction. Even the grain of the formwork timber remains visible on the surface of the walls. "There's something genuine about that. You don't have to cover things up so much," she adds.

Stone, wood, and minimal steel were selected for their durability, comfort, and contrast to concrete. Stone provided a cool surface underfoot that extends into the pool deck. Wood was reserved for the bedrooms to add a touch of warmth, and steel was used sparingly to prevent corrosion. This limited palette reflects the studio's belief in minimalism as a practice in editing with care:

"The house is not about ornament at all. [It's] about the shape of space, the texture of things, and the experience of being in it."

Despite its concrete mass, the architecture of the Lanai House is a conundrum, reading as a light frame transparent to the environment, anchored to its cliffside context, and curated for the panorama of the coast. For Benedicto, the project marks a step closer to her design ethos, as a space neither rustic nor opulent, simply "edited down to the purest possible form it can be."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Lanai House is defined by its radical openness. Facing floor-to-ceiling window walls allows the structure to open fully on two sides, dissolving boundaries between interior and landscape.

Design: MB Architecture Studio
Location: Nasugbu, Batangas
Use: Residential

El Nido House

AN ELEMENTAL PALAWAN ABODE
ATTUNED TO THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE

On a summer's day in El Nido, a caterpillar inched its way across the earth, bathing in the glow of the morning light. Nearby, a young boy, his curiosity piqued by the small insect, collected the specimen and gently placed it in a jar filled with leaves. He watched intently as the insect moved and fed until, in an instant, it was gone. In Northern Palawan, nature enters daily life without invitation, and the boy's quiet fascination mirrored the way his father, architect Justin Guiab, had come to build here, in the Philippines' last frontier.

The El Nido house that the young family calls home was conceived as a gift from father to son, completed just two days before the boy's birth, in a basin of rock carved by Guiab himself. Guiab had spent two years in El Nido before erecting a single post, living among its cliffs, coves, and beaches. He learned to read the amihan (northeast monsoon) and habagat (southeast monsoon), how winds blow the rain nearly horizontal in the tempest, and how these trade winds dictated daily life. "The site has to call you," he says, "and it took time before it told me what it wanted to be."

Palawan's remoteness and protected status present challenges to contemporary construction; basic materials like cement or gravel must be imported from nearby Mindoro, doubling or even tripling their cost beyond the realm of practicality. For Guiab, his deep reflection on the land led him to build instead with bamboo, ipil (merbau) hardwood, and cogongrass—materials native to millennia-old collective memories and knowledge of El Nido's seafaring and foresting traditions.

The local community, forced to return home amid the pandemic; farmers, fishermen, and artisans formed the core of his workforce. Most skilled of these craftsmen were the *mangtitistis*, woodcutters who demanded precise cutting plans, before any tree felled, an act of reverence for these living beings that ensures no wood goes to waste; and the boatbuilders, generous with their knowledge of construction in the saline environment; which timbers could resist the salt air, which woods could be bent into the roof frame without splitting; the knowledge of combining cogon's insulative properties, with *pawid* (nipa palm), resistant to insect attack as roofing materials; and how to bind roof rafters with rattan instead of nails that the structure could flex under typhoon winds.

PLACES AS FLUX El Nido House

Nature is both supporter and protagonist in the lives of the young family that resides at El Nido House.

The resulting residence emerged from the meeting of Guiab's design, shaped by two years of direct immersion in the site, and the generational knowledge of his local collaborators. A steeply pitched thatched roof defines the volume, insulating in the dry season, while shedding monsoon rains with ease. Beneath it, a single untreated concrete slab forms the floor, its cool surface anchoring a loosely defined living, dining, and kitchen space where thresholds between indoors and out are deliberately blurred. Between, slender *ipil* columns and partitions resist rot and termites, forgoing the need for chemicals harmful to the land. Oriented to capture prevailing winds, the house remains pleasant in the summer with its minimal use of walls, save for those enclosing an air-conditioned study-bedroom offering reprieve on the hottest of days. For the most part, the family spends their time in open-air living, sleeping on the loft beneath the thatch, and watching their son range from forest to beach. Fatherhood has sharpened Guiab's awareness of the architecture in small, personal ways. He recalls when his son was too short to reach the sharp edge of the concrete dining table he had made, and how he now takes care to avoid it. The house has also been a classroom for understanding nature's presence: rats in the early months, cats that chased them away, chickens nesting in the roof, and snakes

drawn to their eggs. Over two and a half years, Guiab has come to know the house as an architect, and as a father, adapting and changing with the growth of his son.

Days after the caterpillar vanished, Guiab's wife found it again, attached to one of the leaves in the jar, mid-transformation. It was another lesson for their son; an understanding that change is the nature of life, and that patience allows one to see it happen. Guiab recalls the words of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche: "In order to create an enlightened society, you have to change the culture, and in order to change the culture you have to change the art." He adds, "Architecture affects you most of all, because it's the art you live in."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Justin Guiab
Location: El Nido, Palawan
Use: Residential

Cor Jesu Oratory

BAMBOO UNITES A FAITHFUL COMMUNITY
AND TWO OF CEBU'S BRIGHTEST DESIGNERS

The resulting tessellated pattern formed by the bamboo-metal grid recalls the intricate beauty of Islamic geometry.

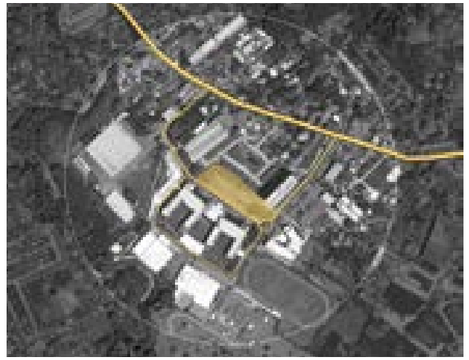
A sinuous wave of bamboo poles appears to roil above the congregation.

At the Sacred Heart School–Ateneo de Cebu, the Cor Jesu Oratory is a creative homecoming that reimagines the role of sacred architecture through material presence and collaborative authorship. A project by Zubu Design Associates, headed by Buck Richnold Sia, with conceptual input from renowned industrial designer Kenneth Cobonpue, the oratory is a concerted effort by the practices of these two distinguished alumni of the school.

The project began with the reality of a growing Atenean community and the need for more spaces of faith and contemplation on campus. A 5,500-square-meter plot, across the Ateneo's grand lobby, sets the stage for this habitable sculpture. Though Cobonpue is best known for his work in craft-based furniture design, he was approached by the Jesuits to create a concept for a new oratory that would unify the school's scattered chapels into one central place for collective worship. Taking its name from the Latin for Heart of Jesus, the oratory evokes the spirit of Cor Jesu, its form evolving as a series of sketches by Cobonpue that arrived at a stylistic gesture of abstracted hearts—two masses united in Christ's compassion.

To transform this vision into buildable form, Sia was invited to develop and execute the architecture, and the two co-alumni began a three-year process of design iteration, refining and reconciling their distinct sensibilities as they balanced imagination and structure. "We were butting heads in a good way," Sia recalls, noting how their collaboration negotiated between sculptural

intuition and architectonic reason. The resulting twin heart-shaped structures yielded a 360-seat oratory and a smaller auxiliary building embedded within a forest of decade-old mango trees. Rising above the greenery, a pair of sweeping butterfly roofs is held aloft by slender pilotis that reach for the heavens. A rhythmic bamboo veil frames the entrance, a portal that winds its way through the two structures in a gradual transition from the secular to the sacred. Within, the rectilinear arrangement of bamboo unfolds in a calibrated sequence of compression and release, guiding the body inward from the nave to the altar at the heart of the oratory as a sculptural motif in motion. "Architecture is a narrative," Sia explains, "of relating space with light and form to influence feeling."



Beyond its form, one of the project's most significant contributions lies in its early architectural use of bamboo at scale. At the time, bamboo was not widely adopted in civic buildings and had few precedents in religious architecture. The team sourced wild bamboo from Cebu and Negros, forming one of the largest recorded post-harvest uses of the material in the region before plantation systems were common. Bamboo was the medium by which the oratory as sculpture is realized, and the experience of the space is multisensory. "There's this scent of green bamboo in the space," Sia recalls, "and even now, it's aged to this brown patina that still holds up. The smell is part of the architecture." In lieu of nonexistent commercial connectors, the construction team developed a zip-tie anchoring system that allowed individual poles to be maintained or replaced with ease, dispelling early skepticism around the longevity and resilience of this novel material.

Equally considered was the treatment of the site. Mature mango trees were preserved and integrated into the plan, shading the oratory's perimeter. Accessed from voids in the veiled bamboo portal, pocket gardens under the shade of these trees formed moments of prayerful reflection. At the altar, boulders of pink marble, local to Cebu, were embedded into the ground, referencing the Garden of Gethsemane and the oratory's connection to the land.

Completed in under a year for the school's sesquicentennial, Cor Jesu has since become a landmark of institutional pride and a space for calm and creativity in daily campus life. For Sia, the project serves as a kind of thesis: a practice of dualisms between symmetry and asymmetry, restraint and expression, familiarity and otherness that shaped this experimental space of reflection. While contemporary architecture in Cebu often leans toward expressive forms, Zubu's approach here was deliberately rationalized, grounded in method and iteration. Sia reflects: "It is a gift to offer a unique architectural experience, one that inspires creativity and excellence through a different way of building."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Zubu DA and Kenneth Cobonpue
Location: Mandaue, Cebu
Use: Religious

The oratory is noted for its large-scale use of bamboo sourced from Cebu and Negros.

House Y

AUSTERITY MEETS BEAUTY
BY THE VISAYAN SEA

"A typological box."

Keshia Lim, the founder of San Studio, was presented with a brief almost too austere. Approached by a couple with their three grown children seeking to make use of a seaside property as a weekend retreat, the clients brought with them a pragmatic vision: a single-level structure with basic partitions for privacy, "without ornamentation, easy to build, resistant to corrosion, and durable enough to endure frequent typhoons."

A visit to the site, a 144-meter stretch of pristine beachfront in the coastal town of San Remigio, Northern Cebu, belied the straightforward program, with the undulating contours of the local topography suggesting possibility beyond a static box. San Studio realized the potential of this dynamic terrain in a layered dwelling of raw concrete, made active by the shifting light of the tropical sun against the waters of the Visayan Sea.

Lim recalls as she was iterating the structure that would become House Y: "They imagined partitions, but we thought, what if the boundaries were not walls, but levels?" The final design staggers the program across elevation: children's suites on the lowest floor, and the parents' bedroom on the topmost level. Communal spaces are held in between and stitched across the slope for gathering and pause,

PLACES AS FLUX House Y

House Y's prized 144-meter stretch of beach facing the Visayan Sea

with a kitchen-dining-living nucleus as a venue shared between generations and their distinct social circles.

Concrete was both a tactical and contextual decision. Exposed to salt air and fierce winds, the coastal site required resilience in construction. Its durability and capacity to age gracefully against the elements formed the foundation of the house's expression. Lim, who has long appreciated concrete in its raw form, notes: "I remember stepping into the house for the first time; just the concrete shell—no glass, no wood. Seeing the light enter was moving."

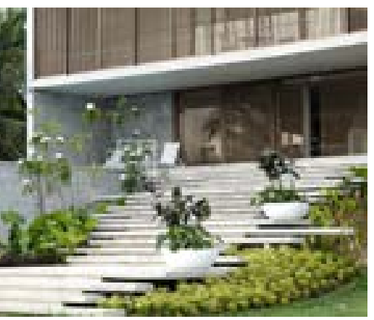
The diverse aesthetic and physical potential of the material was articulated through cast-in-place construction. This produced a varied range of finishes from board-formed textures to flat concrete animated by the shifting tropical light throughout the day. To temper this rawness, strategically placed wooden elements introduce warmth and a tactile softness while preserving the home's deliberate, functional restraint in material use.

Outside, House Y engages its coastal frontage with a panoramic horizontality that frames the surrounding seascape, its slender rectangular form encouraging natural cross-ventilation,

Louvers provide both privacy and protection from excess sun and rain

channeling the *amihan* (northeast monsoon) and *habagat* (southwest monsoon) trade winds through every living space. Operable aluminum slats integrated into the west-facing facade function as a brise-soleil filtering the harsh afternoon sun into patterns of light and shadow across the concrete surface. This array also shields the residence from wind-driven debris during the Pacific's unforgiving typhoon season.

The horizontality of House Y is playfully disrupted by the infinity pool thrusting out of the structure to meet the horizon, its mass lifted lightly off the ground. A monumental external concrete stairway cascades toward the sand, creating a direct connection from the elevated ground floor to the beach and anchoring the dwelling within the rolling coastal landscape. Their irregular rhythm and width invite the garden to weave between treads, allowing the landscape to soften the building's edge.



Left: The entry stairway's irregular rhythm forms the transition between the natural and the man-made

Right: The house's spacious and monochromatic interiors

House Y's rectilinear volumes glow lantern-like at night

For Lim, this connection is essential: "It puts the focus back on nature. You have the blue of the sea and sky, and the green of the grass—a palette that draws the eye outward. The point is not to linger on the elements inside the house, but to be pulled toward the landscape beyond."

Two years on, House Y occupies a more central role in family life, as what was once a weekend escape has become a routine, with half the week spent by the beach. Over time it has grown more lived-in and layered with touches of the family's own personalities; artwork, colors, and accessories. Around House Y, trees planted at completion have taken root, the *talisay* (tropical almond) softening the concrete and drawing the house deeper into its coastal landscape.

For San Studio, the project embodies their philosophy. "We always say architecture starts and ends with people," Lim reflects. "Clients bring their pragmatism; we bring what excites us: the textures, the play of space, the light. The best designs are where these come together naturally." Once imagined as a modest box, House Y has unfolded into a dwelling that responds honestly to its inhabitants' desire for practicable functionality, connection to place, and the quiet pleasures of seaside living.

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: San Studio
Location: San Remigio, Cebu
Use: Residential

House No. 17

LIVING ON THE EDGE OF FIRE AND SEA

House No. 17's midcentury-modern lines on full display from the compound's driveway

House No. 17 is set between the Bohol Sea and the slopes of Vulcan Daan, the oldest of the seven volcanoes that have shaped both the topography and cultural memory of Camiguin. Known as the Island Born of Fire, this compact province claims more volcanic peaks than towns, its terrain sculpted by tectonic action and millennia-old lava flows. The drive along the circumferential Bulkang Daan road toward the property reveals a landscape of tropical abundance nourished by its fiery geological past. It is within the bounty of this spectacle that Edwin Uy of EUDO conceived the design of House No. 17. "We have to be critical about where we build," he reflects. "That means asking what the site offers now, what happened in the past, and what it can become."

The client, a businessman well-versed in California's midcentury bungalows and case study houses, had lived in Camiguin for decades before deciding to build.

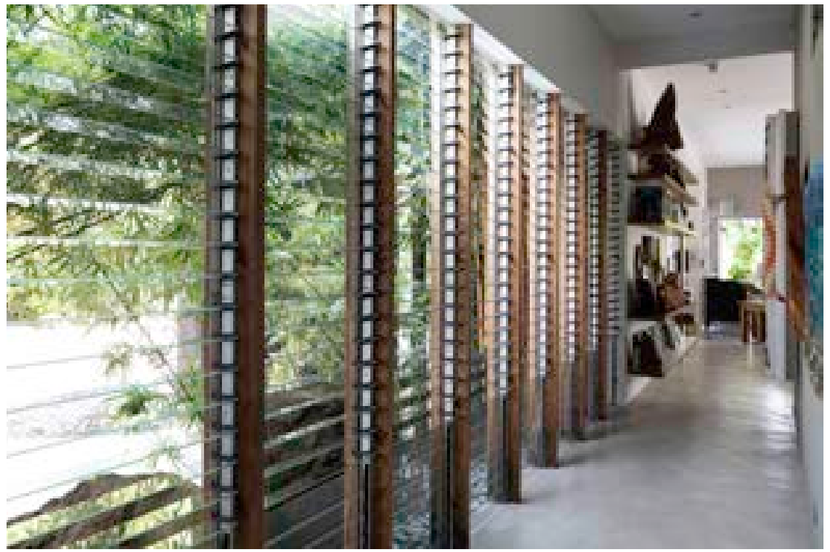
"It was a good collaboration from the beginning, because he respects me as a designer, and his [background] in modernism meant he didn't need convincing," Uy recalls. "He likes the tropical modern feel of architecture, which is suitable for the island." The brief for the home was modest: two bedrooms, a gym, a three-car garage, and wide open-air spaces for entertaining, inspired by his previous cottage on the island. The resulting home occupies only a small portion, around 12 percent of the 2,820-square-meter lot.

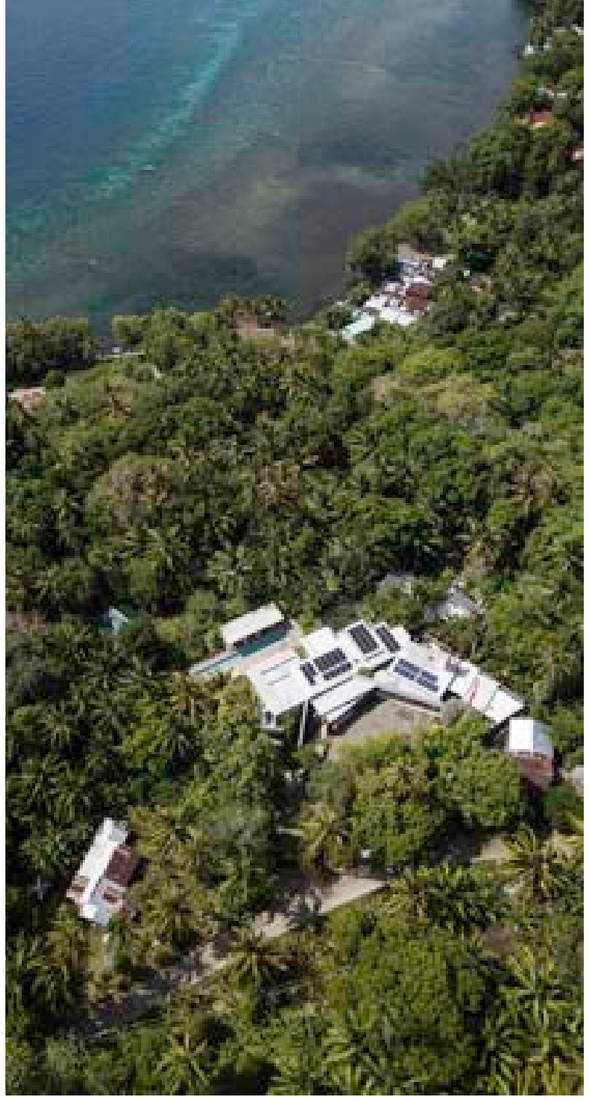
The house is configured as a fragmented horizontal volume open to Camiguin's coastal environment, its massing broken up to follow the ridge of a volcanic outcrop. In EUDO's design, the "topography dictated everything." Oriented southeast to capture sea breezes, the home's expansive terraces and full-length jalousie windows draw air and light throughout the residence. The garage, located to the west, together with the existing trees conserved on site, serves as a buffer against the torrid afternoon heat. The home extends outward onto a long, covered lanai, the highlight of the development. Uy points out: "[The client] loves the outdoors, that's why the lanai is even bigger than the living room." To accommodate the slope, a stairwell descends into the lounge on the lower floor, partly carved into the ground, and leads towards the garden, cabana, and pool.

Arrays of floor-to-ceiling jalousie windows line the house's walls, a window type Edwin Uy often utilizes in projects.

A compost area finds itself at the bottom of the property, where the site naturally rolls towards, collecting leaves and soil washed down by the rain. "Everything really just works," Uy explains. "So, you can see how we respected the terrain of the site; we kept the topography as is."

EUDO's practice is grounded in an authenticity shaped by the material truths of each site. In House No. 17, this emerged during the excavation for the foundations, when centuries-old volcanic rock revealed itself as both context and resource. Rather than remove them, he proposed quarrying the stones on site. "I even told the client, let's consider this part of the landscape design," he recalls. "But later, I thought: why not cut them, use them as cladding for the façade?" Here, the house found its material identity. A stone cutting machine was purchased, and the resulting sawn stone, a gray-black polygonal mosaic, found itself used throughout the home, for the entrance, pool deck, driveway, and fencing. Boulders too large to move were left where they stood, anchoring the house to its volcanic context.
Magkuno, or Philippine ironwood sourced from nearby mainland Mindanao, tempers





this gray cladding, while both concrete and steel, left bare, allow for patina to take hold in marking the time-bound narrative of these modern materials.

From an intuitive and site-driven process of questioning emerged an architecture that builds with what the island gives, and in doing so, it offers a quietly enduring model of tropical architecture that is as much learned from context as it is designed for it. Uy reflects: “You have to be critical about the location. Not just design for the sake of designing, but ask: what can the site do to your architecture?”

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Edwin Uy Design Office (EUDO)
Location: Camiguin Island
Use: Residential

Banwag Pharos

A BAMBOO AGORA FOR A COMMUNITY IN HEALING

Named after the Visayan word for beacon, Banwag Pharos rises from the contested landscape of Parang, Maguindanao, as a symbol of unity in the Bangsamoro. Designed by artist Jasper Niens and engineer Rick Atienza, the duo behind Dutch-Filipino studio Impossible Projects, and commissioned by the Pablo Sarmiento Group, the dome is envisioned as a neutral space where Muslim, Christian, and Lumad communities could gather in dialogue, offering a resolute invitation towards peace in a region shaped by centuries of division.

The pavilion spans 16 meters in diameter and rises to a height of nine meters, its geometry a lamella grid of kawayang *tinik* (Bambusa blumeana) joined by custom-fabricated steel nodes. A tensile-fabric oculus crowns the structure, employing stack-effect ventilation suitable for the tropical climate. The grid's configuration is driven by structural efficiency and the direct expression of forces, its tessellating triangular pattern recalling Islamic geometric motifs.

The decision to work with bamboo came by happenstance. When the pandemic brought the world to a standstill, Jasper Niens found himself stranded on Bantayan Island, off the coast of Cebu. It was there, in the hometown of longtime collaborator Atienza, that their structural explorations with bamboo began. An unexpected cache of leftover treated bamboo poles, some 200 in total, provided the medium, and the lockdown gave them the time to work.

Before turning to bamboo, the studio had primarily worked with steel pipe and dimensional lumber for parametric structures. Niens, accustomed to tight tolerances in steel, was initially unsure about this new material. It was Atienza's persistence that reshaped his thinking. "I always worked with bamboo here on the island [with] our boats, the outriggers, [and] the huts, [so] I always thought there was something there," says Atienza.

Adapting techniques from their earlier steel structures, the duo built a node that joined metal to bamboo. "When we tested the connection, and it held, this was a pivotal moment; I thought this was something we could explore further," Niens recalls. Bamboo, being organic, posed new challenges as no two poles were the same.

The resulting tessellated pattern formed by the bamboo-metal grid recalls the intricate beauty of Islamic geometry

This required the development of a "build-by-numbers" system where each pole was measured, cut, and drilled according to the instructions on a coded sticker found on each piece. "This sticker travels with the bamboo from selection to installation. It's simple, and it means almost anybody can build with it," Niens explains. In this way, this hybrid digital-manual workflow made this organic material compatible with the parametrically driven design of Impossible Projects. On-site, the system provided welcome accessibility that encouraged participation. "In Banwag, even the driver and the cook [eventually] joined in [the construction]; it's a joyous way of building," Atienza recalls. As the instructions for assembly were built into every component, there was almost no building plan necessary, and the

Bamboo joiner structure

PLACES AS FLUX Banwag Pharos

Banwag under construction

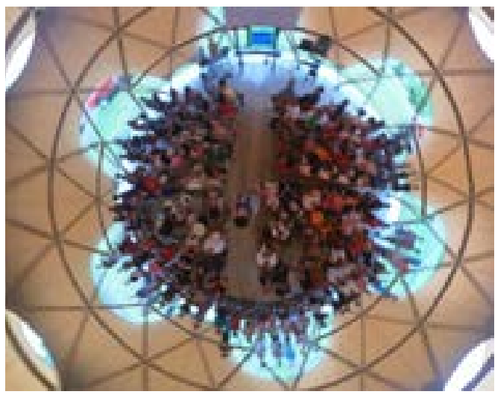
entire pavilion was completed in just two and a half weeks. Building in the Philippines also meant addressing the inevitability of the tropical typhoon.
Banwag Pharos was therefore engineered to meet Philippine and European wind-load standards, achieving resilience up to Category 4 storms and winds of up to 280 kilometers per hour, affirming bamboo as a capable construction material in high-risk climates. “We were all amazed,” says Niens. “It’s light, but it holds.”

The Banwag Pharos pavilion has resonated far beyond its structure, inspiring confidence that peace is not only possible in the area, but already taking form. “Some ex-MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) members told me they were proud we built it there,” says Atienza, “not just in the Philippines, [they said], you built it in the BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao)!” Atienza and Niens regard this reception as the project’s most profound success. “We’re not architects,” says Atienza. “We’re builders. We design by imagining how it’s carried, how it’s lifted, how it’s lived with, because in the end, it’s about people and the structure.”

For Studio Impossible Projects, Banwag continues their structural experimentation drawn from Filipino resourcefulness. “In the Philippines, we’re masters of *technological disobedience*. We improvise, adapt, and make things work in ways others wouldn’t imagine,” says Atienza. It is this local creativity that the studio seeks to harness: “We want to create a knowledge bridge, stimulate this local wisdom and knowledge of bamboo here with global research and engineering,” adds Niens. “The Philippines should be at the forefront of material science, of environmental science, of all these problems that we need to tackle. There is a huge opportunity for the Philippines to take the lead [here].” Banwag Pharos, in its name and its making, is thus a signal for new collaborations and shared futures shaped by innovation, improvisation, and craft.

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Studio Impossible Projects
Location: Parang, Maguindanao
Use: Civic



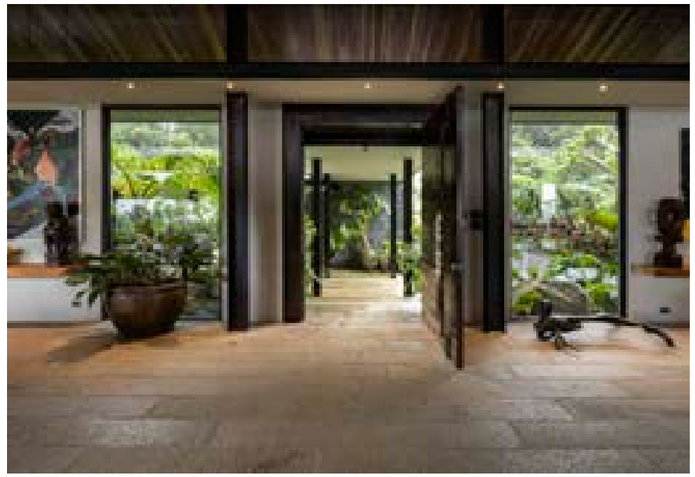
Banwag in use by Parang community

Hill House

NATURE TAKES THE LEAD IN A CASCADING HILLTOP HOME

Atop a hidden plateau in Nagcarlan, Laguna, is Hill House, designed by Barchan + Architecture's Jason Buensalido, a 1,200-square-meter domestic-horticultural complex for longtime collaborator and fellow design professional, landscape architect Bobby Gopiao. Completed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hill House affords a tranquil isolation in an ensemble of spaces embedded into the hillside. A central living pavilion houses the living, dining, kitchen, and hobby loft areas; a space where the whole family can converge for meaningful moments. A separate master's sleeping villa is connected by open-air walkways, stairs, and pathways that hover above the slope and Gopiao's vast tropical nursery.

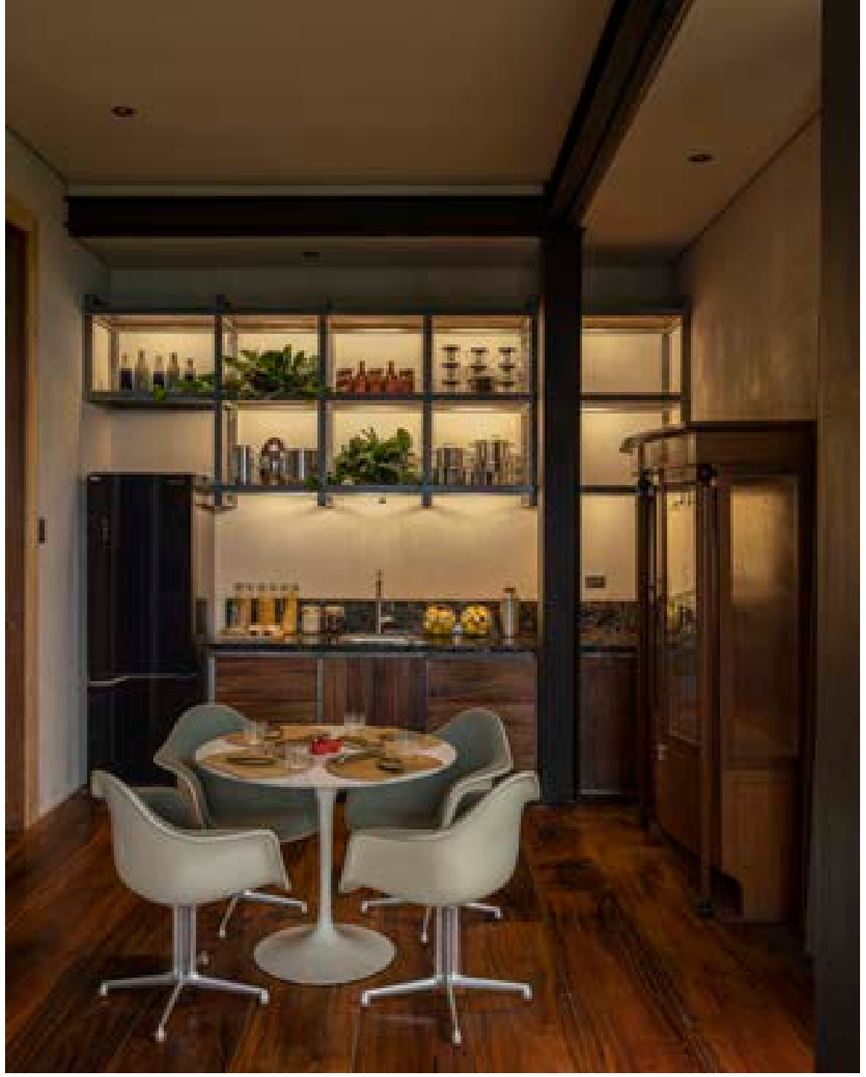
What began as a residence on flat ground was transformed when an unmarked hilltop within Gopiao's property was revealed to Buensalido. "It was unexplored, even by Bobby," he recalls, "but [we were] so surprised, we found a plateau with views of the sea, the surrounding mountainscape, and of course, the sky that dictated the central pavilion, right on the spot." The project thus developed as a response to the prevailing winds, hilly terrain, dense vegetation, and



the desire to embed into rather than impose onto the terrain. "It is about sensitivity to forces seen and unseen and allowing those forces to lead you in your decision-making about the design of a house," Buensalido continues. "Everything you need to know, nature will give you, if you listen." The Filipino concept of *aliwalas*, an atmospheric quality associated with openness, ventilation, and a diaphaneity between shelter and exposure, is central to the experience of the Hill House. "From the very onset, we let nature take control," Buensalido says.

Materiality became an exercise on improvisation in context. The house is framed in steel, a decision driven by the need for speed and modularity due to the pandemic and the site's complex logistics. Prefabricated segments were easier to transport up narrow, rain-washed access roads, which sometimes required hauling materials via tractor. Natural materials contrast this industrial logic: *piedra china* (Chinese granite cobblestone), a rustic landscaping stone, was drawn from the antique collections of the owner, and forms the flooring of the main pavilion, challenging notions of indoor and outdoor space.

Right: Hill House's cluster of pavilions linked by walkways on a hilltop plateau



The central pavilion's double-height living and dining space

At the same time, porous lava stone and reclaimed *narra* (Philippine hardwood) ceilings introduce a textural quality that balances the rigid orthogonality of modern construction. The outdoors is treated as one of the house's materials as well; landscape, light, rain, and water shape the atmosphere within and without.

Continuing the theme of elegant workarounds, the team confronted site erosion during foundation work for the central pavilion leading to a portion of the hill collapsing. Rather than fight nature or enforce the will of the plan however, the team adjusted their program to this opportunity, embedding new guest rooms into the resulting slope. Likewise, when pandemic shortages made long-span steel scarce, Buensalido's team turned to Gopiao's cache of garden slate, reconfiguring them as roof shingles with an organic character no metal cladding could match.

Hill House reveals a deeper logic of responsiveness to climate, to landscape, and to cultural memory. Its plan unfolds not in a singular gesture, but in dispersed "micro-moments" that respond to the terrain, flora, and view, adapting to the contour and context of the land. In the Hill House, Barchan + Architecture advances a practice that does not overwrite context but listens to it: "Architecture must not be about will," Buensalido says. "If we let the place lead, something more honest emerges."

Words
Timothy Augustus Ong

Design: Barchan + Architecture
Location: Nagcarlan, Laguna
Use: Residential

Permanence in Impermanence: The Paradox of Filipino Architecture

FINDING STRENGTH AND IDENTITY IN THE PARADOXICAL NATURE OF FILIPINO ARCHITECTURE: BALANCING FLUIDITY AND SOLIDITY, TRANSIENCE AND PERMANENCE

BY CARYN PAREDES-SANTILLAN

Imagine yourself standing on an ordinary street in Manila.

At first, it feels familiar, almost mundane: an old woman in a faded duster bends over her potted plants, gently sprinkling water on wilting leaves; a man tosses a handful of rice to a stray cat lingering near his gate. Children laugh as they chase each other across the pavement, playing tag, while a small circle of others hunch over a glowing phone screen, watching a friend duel a digital enemy. A few old men in *sandos* (undershirt), some shirtless, lean against doorframes, their cigarettes glowing like tiny embers as they trade stories or tinker with their motorcycles.

This is the street in its most unassuming state—quiet, intimate, unhurried.

But then, as dusk settles like a slow curtain, the street begins to transform. The first signs are subtle: the hum and slight feedback of a speaker being turned up, the faint clang of metal legs unfolding. Then, suddenly, everything shifts. Food carts appear as if summoned by twilight; plastic tables and chairs spill into the open, staking claims on the asphalt. The aroma of frying garlic and grilling meat floats through the air, mingling with the sweet caramel waffles and cotton candy cooking in the next booth. Someone cranks up the sound system, and the street throbs with music. The beat is lively and unapologetic, causing some people to break into verse or shake their hips to the beat. From the main street, people emerge: families, *barkadas* (cliques), strangers drawn by the same irresistible pull.
By the time night fully takes hold, this once-sleepy street has reinvented itself into a bustling food haven. Priests from Intramuros share tables with BGC executives; bloggers from Quezon City hover with their cameras, framing perfect shots of skewered meat and sizzling plates. The street pulses with energy, with life, as if it were always meant to be this way. And yet, I know that by dawn, it will all be gone—the chairs folded away, the carts wheeled back into storage, the scent of smoke dissipating like a dream.

It is in these moments that I see the soul of Filipino urban culture. Not in concrete monuments or glass towers, but in these temporal landscapes that bloom and vanish in rhythm with our lives. This is impermanence—not as loss, but as transformation. It is a reminder that architecture, at its core, is not merely about walls and roofs, but about the rituals, desires, and negotiations that shape space—if only for a fleeting moment.

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PERMANENCE AND PARADOX

There is an old Filipino saying that lingers in my mind: "*Walang permanente sa mundo kundi pagbabago.*" This translates to: "Nothing is permanent in this world except change." The more I reflect on this truth, the more I see its resonance in the spaces we inhabit.

Architecture has long carried the weight of permanence—a cultural aspiration to build something that endures beyond our lifetimes. Western architectural traditions even codified this desire in theory. For centuries, this idea shaped the Western notion of architecture as a lasting monument, designed to outlive its makers (Chabrowe, 1974). Formal architectural ideas in the Philippines were deeply rooted in Western philosophies. This was in part due to the academic training *pensionado* architects received in Europe and the United States, which heavily influenced their design principles and approaches. In fact, Vitruvius' concept of firmitas, which asserts that architecture must embody strength, durability, and stability, is one of the first lessons we teach students of architecture to this day.

Yet the world has changed. The rhythms of life have accelerated, and permanence has become an illusion we can scarcely afford. Shifts in socio-political and economic landscapes, alongside technological progress, have cultivated a culture of impermanence in architecture (Pantzar, 2010). We now design in an era where creative destruction—the tearing down of the old to make way for the new—forms the foundation of modern development (Soylu, 2019).

But if this phenomenon feels modern and unsettling, I cannot help but think: hasn't impermanence always been part of who we are as Filipinos?

Panandalian lamang ang lahat. Dapat marunong tayong sumabay sa agos.

Everything is only temporary. We must learn to go with the flow.

These sentiments reflect deeply rooted Filipino ideas of impermanence and adaptability. Traditional Filipino architecture is inherently shaped by an intimate relationship with nature, time, and the cyclical rhythms of the environment. The Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—exemplify this sensibility. Their form and construction are guided by ancestral rituals, seasonal patterns, and a profound understanding of the land's contours, climate shifts, and weather conditions. The result is a living landscape that evolves in harmony with its environment, embodying a worldview attuned to continuous transformation.

The Filipino way of life, likewise, is grounded in a culture that embraces change—whether brought about by nature, history, or circumstance. As I reflect on the notions of the ephemeral and the temporal within the context of Filipino architecture, I am struck by how impermanence is not a limitation but a defining principle. From vernacular dwellings that respond to climate and terrain, to modernist structures that are reinterpreted across generations, Filipino architecture resists rigidity. It is a living language, shaped by shifting social landscapes, economic conditions, and cultural aspirations. In rethinking permanence, we uncover an architecture that does not merely endure through static form but thrives in its capacity

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architecture resists rigidity. It is a living language, shaped by shifting social landscapes, economic conditions, and cultural aspirations. In rethinking permanence, we uncover an architecture that does not merely endure through static form but thrives in its capacity to adapt—an architecture that reflects the resilience, ingenuity, and fluidity of the Filipino spirit.

EPHEMERAL FOUNDATIONS: THE BAHAY KUBO AND THE FLUIDITY OF PLACE

To understand impermanence in Filipino architecture, I return to the archetype of the *bahay kubo* (traditional Filipino stilt house). Built with bamboo, nipa, rattan—materials drawn from the immediate landscape—the *bahay kubo* is light, modular, and infinitely repairable. It can be dismantled, relocated, and rebuilt with ease, accommodating the rhythms of nature and the tides of life. This dwelling reflects the logic of maritime cultures across Southeast Asia: a way of building that acknowledges fluid boundaries, where spaces adapt to seasons, storms, and migration.

I find poetry in this relationship between house and habitat.

The *bahay kubo* does not fight the environment. Rather, it moves with it. It allows water to pass beneath, air to circulate through, and light to filter in. In coastal communities, similar principles persist, and the *bahay kubo* transforms. Light structures perched on stilts and connected by narrow bridges are arranged along the shoreline. *Bancas* (boats) tied to the posts sway rhythmically to the waves lapping at the base of the houses. In some areas, lean-tos dot the landscape, serving as temporary shelters for fishermen. These examples of ephemeral architecture are a testament to our historical mobility as an archipelagic people. We have always built lightly because we have always lived in motion.

COLONIAL INTERVENTIONS: STONE, MONUMENTALITY, AND THE ILLUSION OF PERMANENCE

This indigenous intimacy with impermanence shifted dramatically during the colonial periods. The Spanish introduced stone, brick, and lime mortar—materials alien to our landscape but symbolic of permanence and power. The *bahay na bato* (stone house) emerged as a hybrid: a stone base anchoring the house to the ground, paired with a wooden upper floor that retained some flexibility. It was an architectural compromise—a structure that sought permanence while quietly remembering movement.

But beyond materiality, colonial rule brought with it an ideological imposition of stability and control. Churches, government buildings, and town plazas embodied the Western ideal of order and permanence, reinforced by urban planning practices rooted in rigidity and zoning. During the American period, this aspiration intensified. Monumental government structures and wide boulevards

PLACES AS FLUX Thinkpiece

declared a new colonial order, inscribing immobility into the city's fabric.

Permanence became synonymous with authority. It became symbolic of hierarchy and dominance.

Even today, this thinking endures. We measure progress in hectares of concrete and steel—malls sprawling across the landscape, skyscrapers punctuating city skylines. The scale of our structures has become a proxy for power. Yet most Filipinos still live in small, mutable spaces—urban apartments, informal settlements, boarding houses—where adaptability isa necessity. The tension between monumental permanence and lived impermanence defines much of our contemporary urban condition.

POWER, HIERARCHY, AND SIZE

I often think about how size has always determined permanence in our built environment. Traditionally, the homes of chieftains or *datus* were constructed with hardwood posts and heavier materials, signaling durability and status. Meanwhile, smaller dwellings—fragile, lightweight—shifted with the family's fortunes and needs. Colonial society magnified this disparity. The grand stone houses of *hacienderos* (plantation owners) and friars asserted power through permanence, while ordinary Filipinos remained tied to vernacular architectures of impermanence.

The American colonial era scaled this logic up to the national level. Government buildings swelled in size, projecting benevolence and stability. This was apparent in government buildings of the late American period. The stately Neoclassical character of the Manila Central Post Office Building, as well as the Legislative and Agriculture buildings are examples of this. They were designed to narrate a story: that the Philippines was part of a modern, orderly world under American stewardship.

Today, the narrative persists in new forms—shopping malls, convention centers, and business parks. Commercehas become the new colonizer, and permanence remains its preferred language.

RITUAL, FESTIVAL, AND THE TEMPORALITY OF LIFE AND EXISTENCE

But permanence of form is not the whole story.

In our everyday lives, space is constantly reimagined, reshaped, and repurposed. Traditional Filipino houses were rarely specialized; they were elastic environments that shifted with the time of day. A single room could be a dining area at noon, a sleeping area at night, and a social space in between. With a *banig* (handwoven mat) rolled out or tucked away,the same space transformed without effort.

This logic of temporality extends beyond domestic life. Our cultural landscapes pulse with rhythms of change. During fiestas, streets morph into festive corridors framed by bamboo arches and makeshift altars. During the procession of the Black Nazarene, Manila's streets surrender to ritual, temporarily reordered into sacred pathways. These ephemeral interventions leave no permanent mark, yet they etch deep grooves in collective memory.

In these moments, I see how architecture—broadly understood—can be as much about time as it is about space.

CLIMATE, CALAMITY, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONTINGENCY

Impermanence is not just cultural; it is ecological. Living in a country visited by more than 20 typhoons a year, where earthquakes and volcanic eruptions punctuate history, permanence can be perilous. In times of disaster, we improvise. Basketball courts become evacuation centers, tents sprout in open fields, and mats delineate temporary domestic territories. These emergency shelters echo deeper traditions of adaptability, reminding us that space is a social contract more than a fixed form.

I think back to a few years ago, when the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing. Lockdowns were enforced to contain the virus, and the confines of our homes became our whole world: office, classroom, gym, and sanctuary. In tiny apartments and cramped dwellings, we carved out temporary niches

for the "new normal." A windowsill became a garden; a corner transformed into a workspace. Constrained by immobility, we rediscovered an old wisdom: that architecture is less about walls and more about our relationships with people, objects, and time.

CHANGING PEOPLE, CHANGING SPACES

Impermanence, then, is not failure. It is a philosophy, a worldview shaped by mobility, migration, and memory. Our indigenous ancestors understood land as something to steward, not to own. Dwellings were temporary because life was in motion, tied to cycles of planting, fishing, and trading. Today, this mobility persists in different forms. Millions of Filipinos live as migrant workers; their lives stretched across geographies. When they return home, they seek spaces that anchor identity, but often these spaces have vanished, erased by development or decay. What does permanence mean when memory itself is uprooted?

This question haunts me. It suggests that architecture's permanence lies not in its material endurance but in its capacity to hold meaning—to adapt, to renew, to remain relevant even as its form evolves. In a culture of flux and flow, permanence may be found not in immobility but in resilience.

ADVOCATING IMPERMANENCE: A DESIGN STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

As Agbay (2024) so powerfully wrote, "We, Filipinos, are resilient, yes, but we are built so because of necessity, not because we chose it. Our strength is our weakness." These words serve as both a critique and a mirror—revealing how resilience, though admirable, often arises from systems that leave us with little choice but to endure. We are thus reminded that what we often celebrate as strength is rooted in a history of adaptation born from hardship, displacement, and impermanence.

But weakness can also be a strength. That is, if we are humble enough to accept and respond to it. As architects, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: the pursuit of permanence, as traditionally defined, is unsustainable. In an era of climate crisis, rapid urbanization, and social volatility, designing for permanence can be an act of hubris. Instead, we can learn from the vernacular wisdom embedded in our past—lightweight, modular, repairable structures that respect the temporality of life and landscape. To clarify, this does not mean abandoning durability altogether. Rather, it means reconciling durability with adaptability. It means designing buildings that can be disassembled, reused, or repurposed; creating spaces that evolve with shifting needs. It means embracing adaptive reuse as a default strategy in cities, where interventions can be temporary yet transformative. Impermanence is not a weakness. It is intelligence—an architecture attuned to context, ecology, and community. It is an architecture that values process over product, narrative over monument, time over timelessness.

If permanence was once about resisting change, perhaps today it must mean something else: enduring through change.

PERMANENCE IN IMPERMANENCE

When I look back at the *bahay kubo*, I don't see a fragile relic of the past but a blueprint for the future. This humble structure teaches us that architecture does not need to be monumental to be meaningful; it needs only to respond, to adapt, to live with the rhythms of its place and people. In a world defined by uncertainty and change, our role is not to resist impermanence but to design in dialogue with it. True permanence lies not in unyielding materials, but in the enduring spirit of a culture that has weathered every storm by learning how to bend, rebuild, and begin again.

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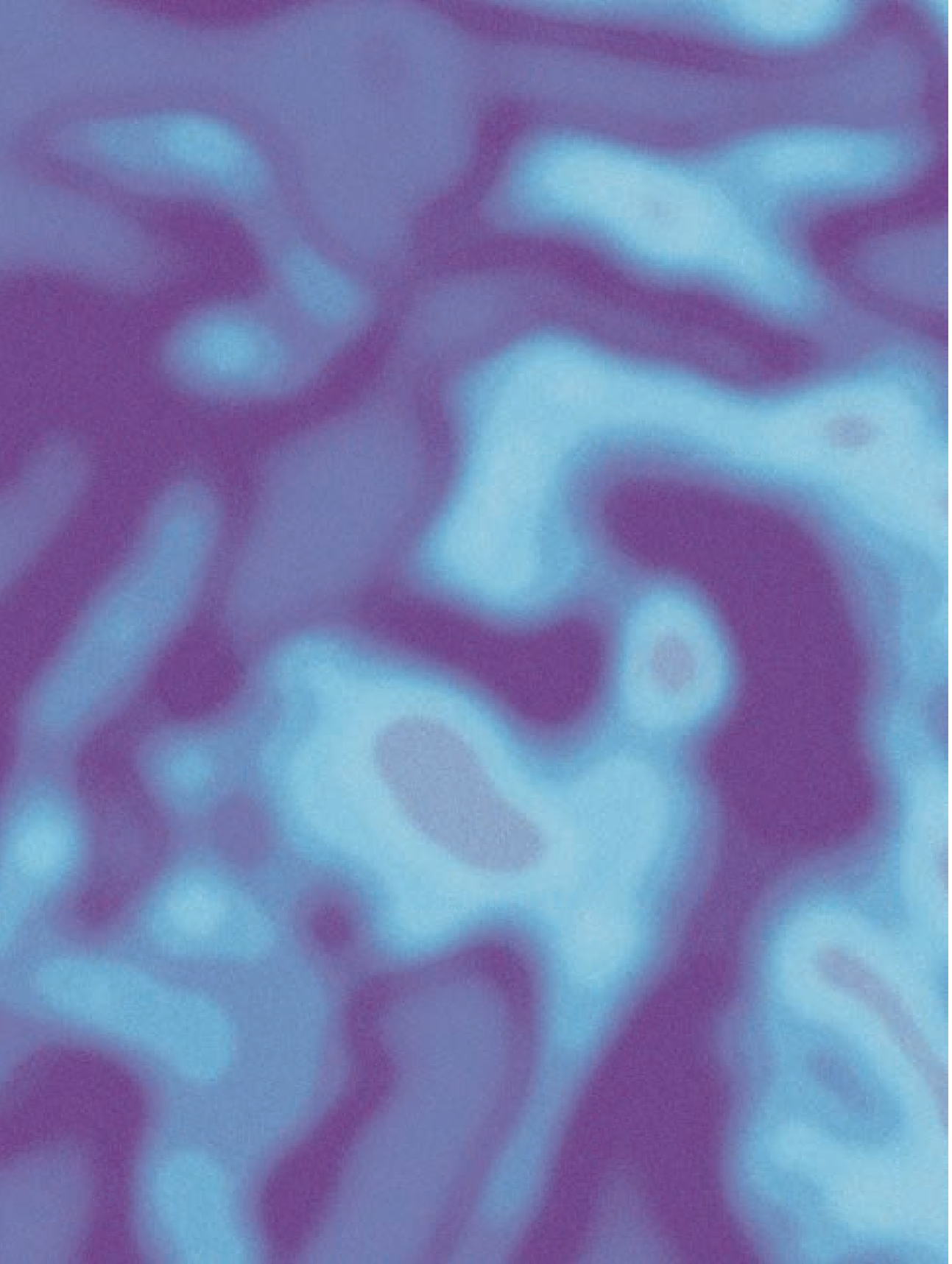
Process

as Flow



How does architecture engage with the old and the new?

How do materials impact the way architecture is designed and imagined?

What are the opportunities when you engage with the community?

To create architecture means thinking about how to build and make it. This involves an iterative process of imagining, testing, and building, considering what methods to use. In the production of architecture, various techniques are explored through a continuous flow of experimentation and problem-solving. Featured in this section are seven case studies of assorted methods employed by architects, designers, consultants, craftsmen, and communities in crafting architecture.

Some architectural methods may employ both old and new perspectives. For some Filipino architects and designers, this involves rediscovering building techniques and materials used by their ancestors. By reclaiming indigenous knowledge in making, Filipino contemporary architecture is imbued with a renewed sense of connection with local traditions and artisans. Still others might creatively re-use historic structures, breathing new life into underutilized or forgotten buildings. Another approach is to explore processes that incorporate new technology, such as construction techniques, hybrid materials, and digital tools, to address contemporary needs and/or anticipate future conditions.

Other examples in this section underscore the importance of engaging with communities to make Filipino architecture responsive to the needs of society and nature. This might involve training and empowering community members to design their own architecture. Communities can also organize themselves and transform the built environment according to their own needs. Through participatory and democratic design methods, designing architecture does not only rest with professionals, but also integrates the voices and ideas of the communities that architects serve. Whether drawn from local traditions or foreign ideas, the goal remains the same in employing processes and methods: to make contemporary Filipino architecture relevant, sustainable, and impactful.

The Chapel of the Holy Sacrifice

RECASTING CONCRETE TOWARDS A VISION OF MODERNITY

In 1954, Leandro Locsin received an invitation from Fr. John Delaney, S.J., the Roman Catholic chaplain of the University of the Philippines (UP). Delaney was planning to build a new chapel in the Diliman campus in Quezon City, to accommodate the growing community and one that was expressive of their youth. He wanted a modern and dramatic setting for the daily performance of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Locsin resurrected ideas from an earlier commissioned, yet unbuilt, work for the Don Bosco Chapel in Victorias, Negros Occidental. He concocted the design for a circular chapel right after his graduation from the University of Santo Tomas in 1953, with the hope of achieving his first built work. It fell through as the client Frederic Ossorio was called abroad for business. With permission from Ossorio, the architect presented the chaplain with a similar round plan—a central altar with a concentric arrangement of pews. This layout allowed for a closeness to the priest presider and egalitarian views towards the altar. There is no segregation of choir from congregation, which complemented the students' habit of singing the Mass together. The entire space is covered by a dome, which earned it the moniker of "the flying saucer."

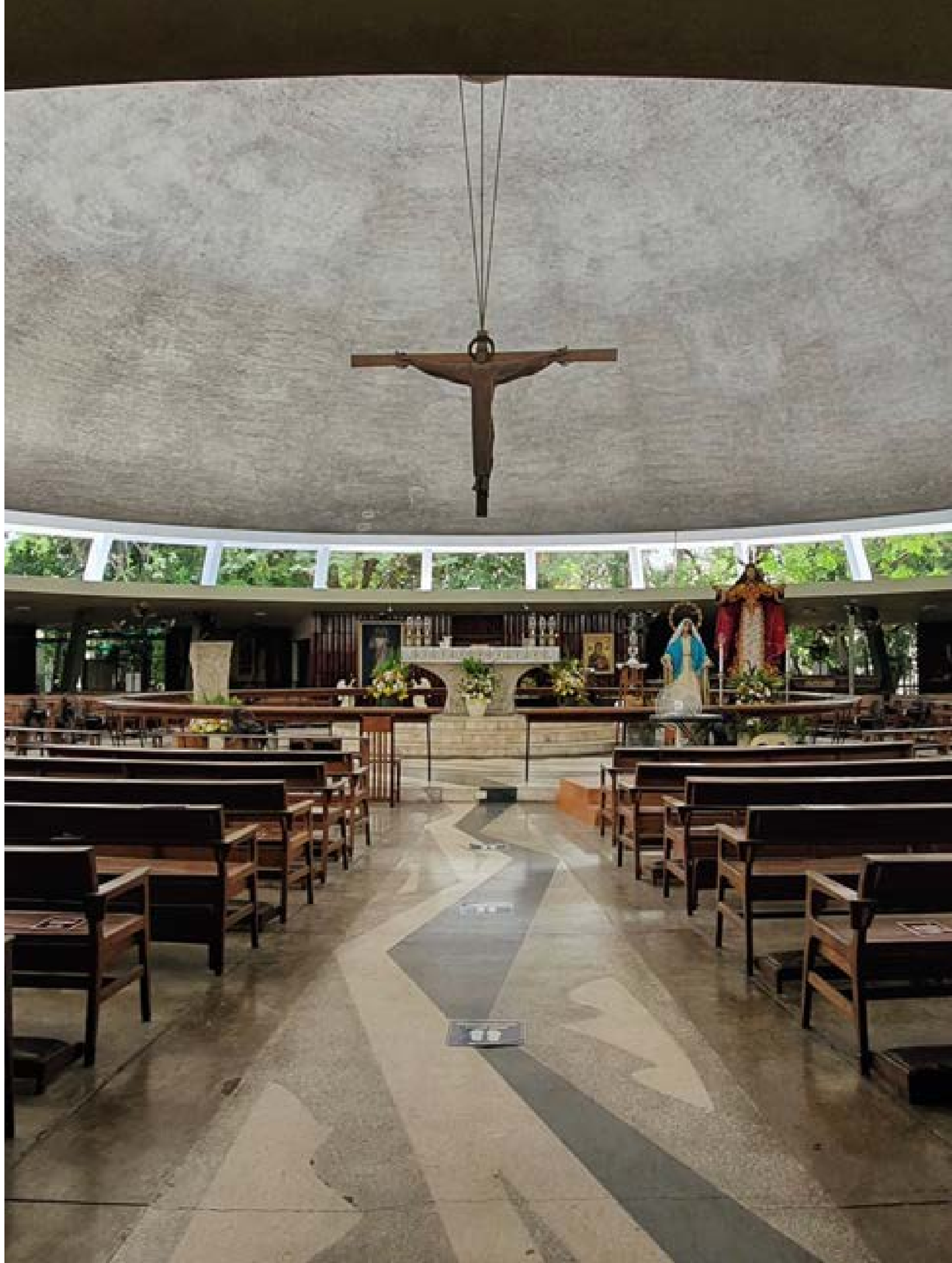
The Chapel of the Holy Sacrifice project team was completed most fittingly by engineers from the university's department of civil engineering: Alfredo Junio for structure; Jose Segovia and Agapito Pineda for the electrical system; and Lamberto Un Ocampo for the water system. Construction was done by Felisberto Reyes and David Consunji.

This church-in-the-round was a visionary proposition, especially when the celebration of Mass facing the people was not yet the norm. Instead of a main door, the church has multiple entrances distributed evenly and sheltered by a canopy along its annular periphery. As stated in the parish's published account of its history, Delaney envisioned a Church open to anyone, anytime. The circumferential openings would also provide the much-needed ventilation in a tropical climate.

When capital city status was passed to Quezon City, while Manila was reeling from the World War II bombing, the new university campus provided a canvas for designers and builders to explore an architecture style that was "expressive of the culture, characteristics, and ideals of the Philippine Nation". Locsin has penned his thoughts on contemporary religious architecture in an unfinished text entitled Directions for the building of a church. Here we sense his challenge of the basilica form inherited from the Spanish colonial period, the prevailing standard, especially in the old capital of Manila:

> *The church of today is intended for the people of our times. Hence, it must be fashioned in such a way that the people of our times may recognize and feel that it is addressed to them. The most significant and the most worthy needs of modern mankind must here find their fulfillment: the urge toward community life, the desire for what is true and genuine, the wish to advance from what is peripheral to what is central and essential.*

The budget was modest, a result of Delaney's fundraising efforts alongside students and faculty. Knowing that the proposed design aligned with his own vision, Fr. Delaney gave the project team creative freedom to execute the design. Collaboration was smooth and even the contractor was highly participative in planning the solutions.



Right: Interior of the chapel with contributions from other artists, including Napoleon Abueva (wooden crucifix and marble altar), Arturo Luz (terrazzo floor), Vicente Manansala, and Ang Kiukok (Stations of the Cross).

Central altar of the Chapel of Holy Sacrifice, radical at that time for the round-shaped church plan designed by Leandro Locsin.

Besides being the first circular chapel, the building also became the first to utilize a thin-shelled dome in the country. While the plans for the previous Don Bosco Chapel indicated a 76-centimeter-thick metal dome, the limited funds called for a different choice of material, one that would dominate Locsin's oeuvre—reinforced concrete. This shift effected a thinner profile, 20 centimeters at the outer circumference tapering to 8 centimeters closer to the apex. The 30-meter span is supported by a ring beam propped up by 32 curved columns. Another ring beam frames the 5-meter-wide central oculus 10 meters above the altar. Construction was scheduled from May to December 1955.

Consunji, who had just founded his company DMCI, was trusted by Junio to manifest the design. The thin shell across such a span required a stronger concrete than what was commonly used in the country at that time. They were able to resolve this through aggregates and a skillful workforce. The concrete had to be placed manually, as close as possible to the formwork, and continually. As Consunji recounts in his memoir, the 18-hour operation was scheduled on an August day when dark clouds loomed. Rain posed a risk to the quality of the dome and the young Consunji brought up this concern with Delaney. The priest gave the go signal: "You do the pouring. I will do the praying." So, at 5 AM, the concreting commenced. The engineer recounts:

> *It seemed to us that the entire campus was experiencing a storm. But, miracle of miracles, not a single drop of rain fell on the spot where we were working! The entire jobsite was dry… At 12 midnight, a rain shower began to fall on the dome, as if on cue, curing the concrete in the process. By then, all our anxieties had vanished. The dome had been built.*

Artist Fernando Zobel de Ayala, a friend of Locsin, documented the efforts that were put into the chapel soon after it was inaugurated. He writes that the architect was able to commission progressive artists despite the limited financial resources. As the artists were not able to work full time on the project, the pieces were completed after the chapel's opening.

> *This usually delicate problem of contact between architect and artist was handled with utmost simplicity. Mr. Locsin explained what he needed and the artists picked out those projects that seemed best suited to their own talents. Father Delaney interviewed each artist and, once convinced of their skill and sincerity, gave them a completely free hand.*

Napoleon Abueva sculpted the marble altar and the two-sided neorealist wooden crucifix depicting the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This hangs from the skylight, which provides natural illumination, and serves as a terminus for the triangular-frame bell tower that pierces the oculus. Arturo Luz took on the terrazzo floor depicting a river radiating from the altar and flowing to the edges of the chapel. Meanwhile, Vicente Manansala and Ang Kiukok painted the 15 Stations of the Cross which cover the walls by the entrances. All four artists as well as Locsin were bestowed National Artist Awards later on in their careers.

This collaboration among the group of friends was an open dialogue during the golden age of Philippine Modern art as they searched for roots and expression. As most of them were in the infancy of their careers, unaware of the accolades they would receive later in life, the burden of reputation or criticism did not hinder the creative process. Andy Locsin, son of the late architect, describes the period that shaped the chapel in our interview:

> *All these creatives were talking to each other intently. Architects were talking to painters, sculptors, writers, playwrights, movie-makers and more, cross-pollinating ideas for expressive work. I don't think there's a place or structure in the Philippines that's a better expression of that gestalt.*
>
> *They had no clue at the time that their society was going to consider them as important. They were in birthing mode, bearing their souls in their work. That, to me, is the remarkable thing about the chapel. It is the result of all these people putting their unfiltered, nonetheless refined, ideas of what their craft should be. The end result is this building that sings on so many levels.*

The Chapel of the Holy Sacrifice was inaugurated on December 20, 1955 through a candlelight procession and midnight mass presided by Archbishop of Manila Rufino J. Santos who praised the structure as it was built in the idiom of our age, an affirmation of the design intent. The celebration ended with students carrying Father Delaney on their shoulders back to his quarters.

Locsin's first built project announced his arrival to the architectural scene, a pivot of Filipino architecture to the Modern age. The Chapel of the Holy Sacrifice was elevated from chaplaincy to parish status in 1977. Then, it was gazetted as an important cultural property and national historical landmark in December 2005. It stands as the only building in the country that fuses the works of five National Artists. The building now approaches its 70th anniversary and remains open to all.

The younger Locsin, who now runs his father's design office, shares that the most important compliments on the chapel are those from UP graduates who visited the chapel regularly for safe harbor and contemplation. The thread from that first project continues to this day:

> *We have a slew of UP architects who have come through this office who are so struck by that space. And they look at this years later, after many other acrobatic buildings have been built. Yet, there is something about the chapel being open, welcoming, and democratic. That remains to be our contention here in the office: architecture is always for and about people.*

Words
Angel Yulo

Design: Leandro V. Locsin Partners
Location: Diliman, Quezon City
Completion: 1955

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First United Building

IMBUING NEW LIFE INTO A HISTORIC ART DECO BUILDING

It is a ubiquitous scene in any growing nation, as in Binondo in Downtown Manila, built heritage is so often lost to decay or flattened in the name of progress. In the 19th century, Escolta Street was once among the most posh and polished addresses in the country, but war has since roughened the place into a gritty locale, and an expanding metropolitan city decentralized what was once the heart of trade and commerce in Manila.
The First United Building then known as the Perez-Samanillo Building flanks the eastern end of Escolta and is a gateway to the erstwhile "Queen of Manila Streets." The five-story building, tallest at its time in 1928, boasts an esteemed pedigree, designed in the Art Deco style by Andres Luna de San Pedro, son of renowned Filipino painter, Juan Luna. In its heyday, the First United Building was synonymous with "Bergs" or the Berg Department Store, its ground floor tenant, a retailer of clothing, toys, and finery.

Architect Arts Serrano's introduction to Escolta and the First United Building were casual, recounting short visits to sketch the buildings along the street for his school projects. Speaking of Downtown Manila, he contemplates: "I never really see that much character or that much porousness in cities as what was apparent in Binondo. People naturally walk, the streets are very human scale."

Years later, Serrano would find himself back in Escolta. "I wanted to collaborate with

Arts Serrano
in his studio

an art collective in the [First United Building] called 98B Collaboratory, a group of artists, for a design competition."
The group would not win the commission, but working on the project would introduce Serrano better to the First United Building. In one of his visits, a pop-up flea market was held at the ground floor, with young artists and creatives selling their wares. The juxtaposition was not lost on the architect–seeing the young in commerce with the backdrop of the old First United Building. The contrast would make a lasting impression on the architect. Fortune followed, and Serrano under his studio name One/Zero, returned to Escolta as a tenant of the First United Building. And so began work in earnest at and within it.

The pop-up at the ground floor would become a permanent staple in the form of the Hub:Make Lab, an incubator for artists and start-ups envisioned by 98Collaboratory and the First United Building. "The architecture that we proposed for the hub was intended to be non-intrusive to the built heritage. It shouldn't be attached in any fixed way to the building. We imagined the space [First United Building] as a physical entity…it takes highest priority and the keeping of the heritage alive."

The resulting intervention was a series of black tubular frames that snake across the ground floor. The framework delineates rentable areas of six to nine

square meters and creates a bare volume that invites the individuality of the tenant.

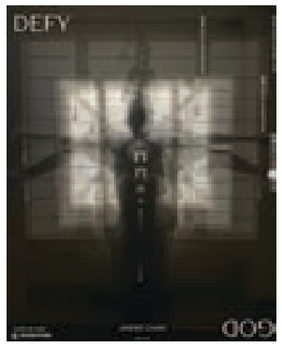
Where one tenant might continue and add to the network of black frames hanging merchandise on smaller iterations of the framework, the other may use it as an exoskeleton and contrast with internal planes and volumes of wood. A volume to fill as you please.

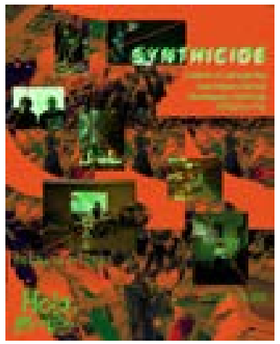
The condition of the Art Deco elements were mostly intact and the walls of the ground floor were left as is to be a storied backdrop to the tubular booths. A pattern of crack and patch bears the story of repair. The imperfection is approachable. Thoughtful pockets supporting the users also followed suit: a bar, a coffee shop, a co-working space. The building's domed attic, since relegated as a stock room, found a new lease on life as an event space. "I'd like to say that that also translates to how I approach different projects in the building. It's always the community first. It's always people-first." For the building, it is tenant-first, which means tenancy is also contracted every quarter and results in a system of renting that is low-risk. The design language is the system in place that allows for young creatives to thrive.

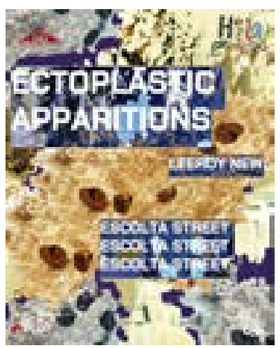
Every so often, the energy spills out to the streets through community events, block parties and pop-ups. "It is not perfect," Serrano admits as he recounts

Top to Bottom:
Grace Marcellana, Stickercon's Ruby and Seb De Jesus, 1372 Designs' Belg Belgica, Espacio Creativo Escolta

A group of artists called 98B Collaboratory organized pop-up events held at First United Building, attracting a younger generation of artists, designers, architects, and creatives.







Left: Various posters for events organized by 98B Collaboratory. The events reinvigorated the use of the Art Deco building in the former historic downtown area of Manila.

one of the street vendors asking "*Kailan next party niyo* (When is your next party)?" a choice pronoun assigning possession of the events for the tenants and customers exclusively of the First United Building. The exchange is a challenge to create more meaningful events that are truly inclusive.

Change is gradual–a building security guard sketching along in an event, vendors looking forward to the next event, neighborhood children contributing to street art. The block parties and events held on the street are attempts towards eventual pedestrianization of the entire Escolta Street and soon perhaps the greater Binondo area.

New construction is idealized, but adaptive reuse allows the character of the building and its surroundings to become part of the story. This iteration, adaptive reuse of the First United Building, is a return to a department store of sorts. Its history provides meaningful symmetry that would otherwise be absent in a new build. The next iteration, whatever it may be will add to the wealth of memory and story, an inheritance for the next user.

The work started at the First United Building dispels stigma beneath the grime of built heritage. It may not be the glossy discerning crowd developers aim for but as Serrano concludes, "We saw life in its own terms. A lot of the informality that makes up Manila breathes life into it."

Words
Steffi Sioux Go

Proponents: Arts Serrano of One/Zero, and 98B COLLABoratory
Location: Escolta, Manila
Original Architect: Andres Luna de San Pedro

Streetlight Tagpuro

EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan ripped through the Philippines and left millions devastated. In Tacloban City, in the Eastern Visayas Region of the Philippines, the settlement of Seawall, a beneficiary of the NGO Streetlight, saw their community center flooded by the storm surge. Residents eventually broke through the roof at the second floor to escape drowning from the rising tide. Their story is one among thousands of others.

When it was time to rebuild, the city government relocated the settlement to Tagpuro, a rural area north of the city without necessary facilities for the existing and the growing relocated population. Architects Alexander 'Alex' Eriksson Furunes, who had previously worked on Streetlight's Seawall location, and Sudarshan Khadka of Leandro V. Locsin Partners were called to design the new Streetlight community center of the settlement.

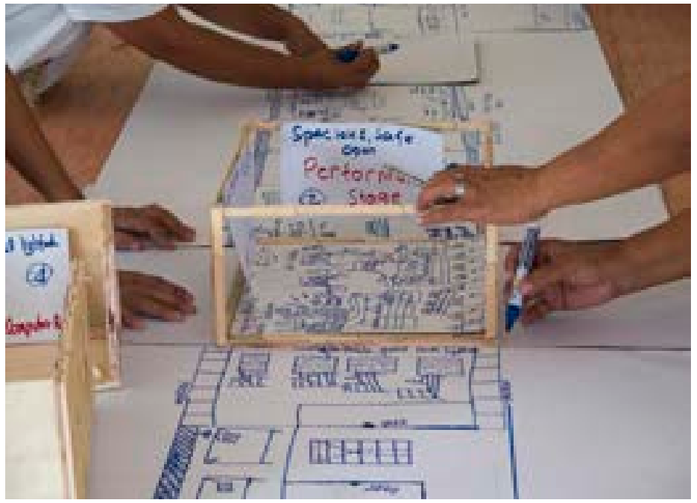
Displaced from their homes, disconnected from their livelihoods, and still wired from a traumatic typhoon, the relocated community felt disjointed. "There was a really strong spirit of building back together, but then of course there were also reports…[that] there were strategies where they separated families in different communities, rather than bringing the same community to the new place. There were all these different [problems] that contributed to broken ties that were necessary for *bayanihan* to happen," reveals Furunes.

Bayanihan is the concept of mutual support in Filipino culture, where members of the community volunteer towards a common goal without the expectation of reciprocity. The most popular depiction of bayanihan is a group of villagers carrying a house of bamboo and thatch on their backs to a new site, perhaps towards greener pastures.

"We had the opportunity to work really closely with the community, and this time organized a Bayanhihan committee, so there was a group of mothers that was always part of planning and preparing for each session. And every Sunday we'd have a gathering and we'd move through the different phases of reasoning, thinking, reflecting, but not just with words, we do it through drawing, performance, and dancing. We try to communicate also what is not always immediately explicitly said. To try to bring out those real reflections between the community, not to us (designers)," Furunes shares as he introduces the process.

The Sunday workshops defined the required functions and programs of the community. For instance, Khadka recounts a drawing activity about windows, exploring how the windows of the facility would look like. The residents took to mapping the various windows and door designs around the village and city beyond that they found beautiful. One child in particular wrote a poem about windows enabling one to look out at the stars or as frames of the beloved during courtship. The activity allowed the community to feel the importance of a window beyond just an opening.

Streetlight Tagpuro consists of a study center, an orphanage, and offices, located in Tagpuro, Tacloban, Leyte. Framework Collaborative designed the buildings together with the community of Tagpuro.



Community members of Tagpuro in Tacloban, Leyte participated in workshops to conceptualize and design the structures for the relocation site after the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

After mapping, the group would nominate variations of the windows to be made into prototypes. The opportunity for prototyping encouraged a select few more inclined to construction—a construction group that organically emerged from the *bayanihan* sessions. Later these specializations could transform into livelihood opportunities beyond the project.

"The methods do allow us to reveal certain things which are not necessarily so easy to reveal by words or by story so it's a way to get different feelings and different ideas as well. For some people it might be easier to participate by acting rather than by drawing. For others, it might be easier to participate by singing. So it allows more voices to be heard in different formats," shares Khadka.

Over a year's worth of these workshops would yield two emerging concepts of "open and light" and "close and safe" that would inform the tectonics of the building. "It wasn't one workshop, but a series of workshops and reviews would reveal the concept.

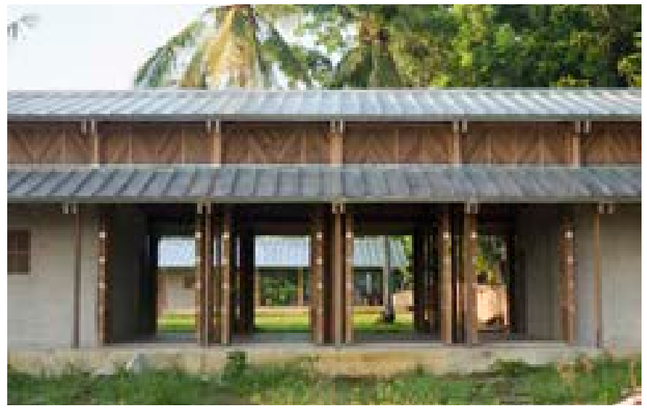
Above: The structure under construction.

We look back, and we see that throughout the process these words were constantly being important, or they've been coming back, or they've been reflected on, or they've been discussed," Furunes points out.

In another workshop, the community was asked to remember what was good at Seawall, and what they wanted to bring forward. In turn, the group expressed the need for structural stability, citing examples of classical buildings. Prodding revealed the reference of the conclusion was a playground castle made of concrete that withstood the water and wind during the onslaught of the typhoon. The following workshops would build on the idea, eventually arriving at a locally rooted and more vernacularly informed form. The participatory process allowed the group to break down a feeling, abstract it, and interpret it to what context could relate to and what the collective truly needed.

"The moment we were involved, we were at the phase where we didn't know what we would do and how we would do it, but it was a strong intention by Streetlight, the organization, to build using the process that they'd developed also. It might take us 20 percent longer or 30 percent more difficult, but the result will be 10x better. They understood that there was value in going through a process of working together."

The work at Streetlight would later help define a framework, outlining the following



The structures featured concepts of “open and light” and “closed and safe,” translated as contrasting elements of heavy concrete volumes juxtaposed with ventilated light timber structures

phases: Learning – getting to know values and world views important to the community; Questioning – characterizing the strength and weaknesses of those values; Making – problem-solving the program of the building; Concept – establishes a common language for the design; Design – uses the Concept to articulate elements of the structure; Build – allowed prototyping of the Design elements; and finally Construction – realizes the Design in full.

In 2021, the architects would become curators of the Venice Biennale where Streetlight Tagpuro is featured among other structures borne out of mutual support. *Bayanihan* is on occasion an urgent and chance response to calamity—a burst of volunteerism. The framework prescribes a possibility for a lasting spirit of *bayanihan*, carrying the community to better places still.

Words
Steffi Sioux Go

Proponents: Sudarshan V. Khadka Jr. and Alex Eriksson Furunes, Framework Collaborative
Location: Tagpuro, Tacloban

Kawayan Collective

CELEBRATING BAMBOO FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND BUILDING

Southeast Asia is rich in bamboo lore. Whether in fable or folktale, each Southeast Asian country has its own beloved story to tell. In the Philippines, a folktale recounts the creation of the first Filipino man and woman, emerging from a pole split in two. Our history and tradition are intricately rooted in and connected to the plant. A quick study of Philippine history reveals an archive of bamboo construction, with perhaps the most prominent being the Bahay Kubo, a bamboo house on stilts. In recent times, bamboo has been largely abandoned and Philippine building has since been disconnected from this once celebrated material.

Over time, as metropolises rose clad in glass and concrete, bamboo became associated with rural surroundings—earning a reputation as a "low-cost" material. Today, if not for its novelty in reinforcing a "tropical aesthetic", structures that celebrate bamboo to a full extent are few and far between, and those that use bamboo structurally are even fewer still.

Challenging the perspective is Kawayan Collective, founded by spouses Ray and Amy Villanueva. "Bamboo is part of everyday life, especially in the province, especially more so in the mountainous areas. I was really inspired by this material, [it's] so Filipino, and is part of basically the fabric of people's lives…I always thought it was an amazing opportunity to work with the material, and to see its potential in the world" shares Ray.

In its inception, Kawayan Collective was solely producing treated bamboo poles for Base Bahay, a non-profit organization building socialized housing. After a year, their mission would grow to offer bamboo to the mass market. Rhalf Abne, an early adopter of the treated bamboo Kawayan Collective was producing, later joined the collective. Kawayan Collective established themselves in Dauin, a municipality in Negros Oriental, a strategic location close to backyard farmers of the plant. As Dauin is also a popular dive spot, some of their first customers were the resorts that incorporated the material into their build.

Above and Right:
Dumaguete Bamboo Pavilion by Kawayan Design Studio in collaboration with Kawayan Collective, located in Dumaguete, Negros Oriental

Connection details of bamboo joinery

When the COVID-19 Pandemic hit, and sales hit a slump, they took the opportunity for research and development, expanding their product line to incorporate waste from the treatment process. Using *retaso* (offcuts) from the harvesting and treatment process, pieces were glued and engineered together into a variation of panels. Patterns emerged from different orientations and sections of the culm, node, and wall of a pole.

Kawayan tinik (Bambusa blumeana) and giant bamboo (*Dendrocalamus asper*) are most abundant in Dauin and are the primary species used at Kawayan Collective. The former has a three to five-year harvest cycle, and five to seven years for the latter. Once harvested, the poles are graded for their maturity and application. The straightest portions of the pole are valued for structural application while other parts get processed into mats or slats.

The bamboo pole is measured from node to node. A bamboo pole is cut to its effective length 5 centimeters from a node. The outermost nodes are then removed and the inner nodes are punctured to allow the treatment solution to penetrate well within the inner wall of the pole.

Bamboo is washed for three days, now done at the workshop. Traditionally, bamboo was washed in the ocean to rid it of starch, which pests like *bukbok*

Right: Interior view of the pavilion with the clustered treated bamboo serving as main structural element

(wood borers) are attracted to. Washing also clears away any surface mold and moss.

After washing, the bamboo poles get cured in a non-toxic solution to preserve the poles from decay and pests. The boron solution also adds fire resistance. Finally, the bamboo poles are left to season for 20 days to reduce moisture content.

"That's the one thing with Kawayan Collective, our mission and vision is to elevate bamboo, making it accessible and affordable for all Filipinos. At the architect-level, it means providing a reliable, graded, structurally sound supply of Bamboo which hasn't really been available before," adds Villanueva.

Abne shares that the rest of the process was refined through trial and over time. Attending workshops in neighboring Southeast Asia, and picking what was applicable in the Philippines, with Negros Oriental's fishing and boat building heritage uniquely influencing the process.

"So really what we've applied here is the way we build some boats, like how you tie a *katig* (outriggers). So those are vernacular techniques that we have in the Philippines. Since we are along the shoreline, we actually have some *pandays* (carpenters) who are actually also fishermen who [build] small boats. So we've been able to maximize the tying techniques they have already." He adds, "Even the tying of the *lambat* (fishing nets), those kinds of tying can be applied in actual bamboo structures." Villanueva and Abne tap into these rich skills by working in a constant feedback loop with farmers and craftsmen. Problem-solving connection details in the workshop or on-site, often simplifying CAD drawings to rough sketches to connect better and earn participation from the craftsman.

The poles and technique come together to make expressive structures that catch the public's interest, as in the Bamboo Pavilion, Kawayan Collective's expressive reiteration of the torogan, a traditional house typology in the Southern Philippines that can serve as a social hall for the community or tribe. At 16.5 meters tall, the Bamboo Pavilion—constructed with a whopping 3000 poles—is the tallest bamboo structure in the Philippines to date.

The Bamboo Pavilion boasts what a provincial ecosystem can achieve. Grander bamboo structures are in the pipeline, but the grounded vision for an accessible bamboo construction for all is the steady tide that steers the movement forward.

Words:
Steffi Sioux Go

Project: Bamboo Pavilion
Design: Kawayan Design Studio
Location: Dauin, Negros Oriental
Proponents: Ray Villanueva, Amy Villanueva, and Rhalf Abne of Kawayan Collective

Balika Rammed Earth

AN ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE GROUNDED
IN SOIL AND NATURE

Above: Sibol Farm Villa under construction, by Balika Rammed Earth, located in Magallanes, Cavite

It began with earth. Ronnie Yumang delved into the cost of concrete, and not just for his bills of quantities. He traced its extractive supply chain and understood the environmental impacts of using the material. This led him to a book on sand, an investigative piece which rattled his conscience. It takes 200 million years to produce new sand, yet we use this material today in our gadgets and green cities (ironically) like we will never run out of it.

Guilt was not alone in propelling him towards a different direction. Yumang has an entrepreneurial streak. When his architectural practice initially slowed down, he ventured into selling landscaping materials, finding ways to propagate more native tree species. So, when he was struggling to reframe his practice, he pored over marketing and sustainability books.

Eventually, he crafted his blue ocean strategy. A "blue ocean" is a market space where there are few competitors; in some cases, business mavericks create an entirely new market so there is no competition from the get-go. He identified a gap within the knowledge system of green and sustainable design that remained unaddressed locally. Building on the United Nations' definition of sustainable development, he shares:

> *Whatever we save right now is the same resources that we will use by 2050. If we are scarce in resources right now, especially with natural calamities and climate change, it means we will lack it by 2050. Instead of saving resources, we need to replenish, we need to regenerate. Before we can sustain, we have to regenerate first.*

For several years, he refused any project that involved concrete. In 2019, he relocated his family from the city of Manila to Alfonso, Cavite, a rural upland town to the south of the capital. They reused the remnants of an old poultry farm, transforming it into Maka Forest Villa, which served as a prototype for the regenerative construction technologies he wanted to deploy in his practice, Balika Architecture.

Due to limited sources, he studied what was already available in the area: softwood, bamboo, and clay. He veered away from bamboo as there are already a number of bamboo construction advocates in the market. This led him to pursue clay through rammed earth, an ancient construction method. Nature became his teacher in a trial-and-error process, the learning was by doing. Yumang calls this métis wisdom—an intuitive and adaptive way of knowing.

His first experiment was a small pond, two feet deep. After a few leaks and failures, a successful design was achieved using termitaria, a fine clay from termites' nests. This came from the upper half of the mound, which left the queen untouched and the colony available to rebuild their home. The pond did not use any reinforcement, but relied on geometry and the qualities of the material. When Yumang's young daughter saw this, she requested for a small pool. The result was a heated bath, similar to an onsen, which became a selling point for the bed and breakfast offering of the villa.

They continued constructing Maka Forest Villa using the variations they tested and eventually patented.

Left: Various wall systems used for the Sibol Farm Villa, including rammed earth and the Shear Key Interlocking System

By 2021, Yumang and his team of artisans gained enough confidence to build taller structures using rammed earth. Soil is poured and compacted into formwork by hand, with each layer distinguishable by its color, an effect that allows for polychromatic expression. They developed the Shear Key Interlock System to increase the structural integrity of the method. Their flagship project was a perimeter gate and fire pit for a vacation home. Today, an entire house made of rammed earth is underway; about 90% of the project comprises natural materials.

The Sibol Farm Villa in Magallanes, Cavite, is a residence for IT professionals seeking a shift of lifestyle and change of address inspired by their stay at Maka Forest Villa. The name "sibol", stemming from the Filipino word meaning to sprout or to grow, reflects the couple's desire to start a new chapter living in better connection with nature. Recalling their travels to Bali and India, they wanted a home that exuded the values of grounding, simplicity, and mindfulness, and requested for a space that felt like a gentle embrace similar to the fictional hobbit houses at The Shire.

Close-up view of the wall using rammed earth construction, showing the striated and polychromatic layers of compacted earth.

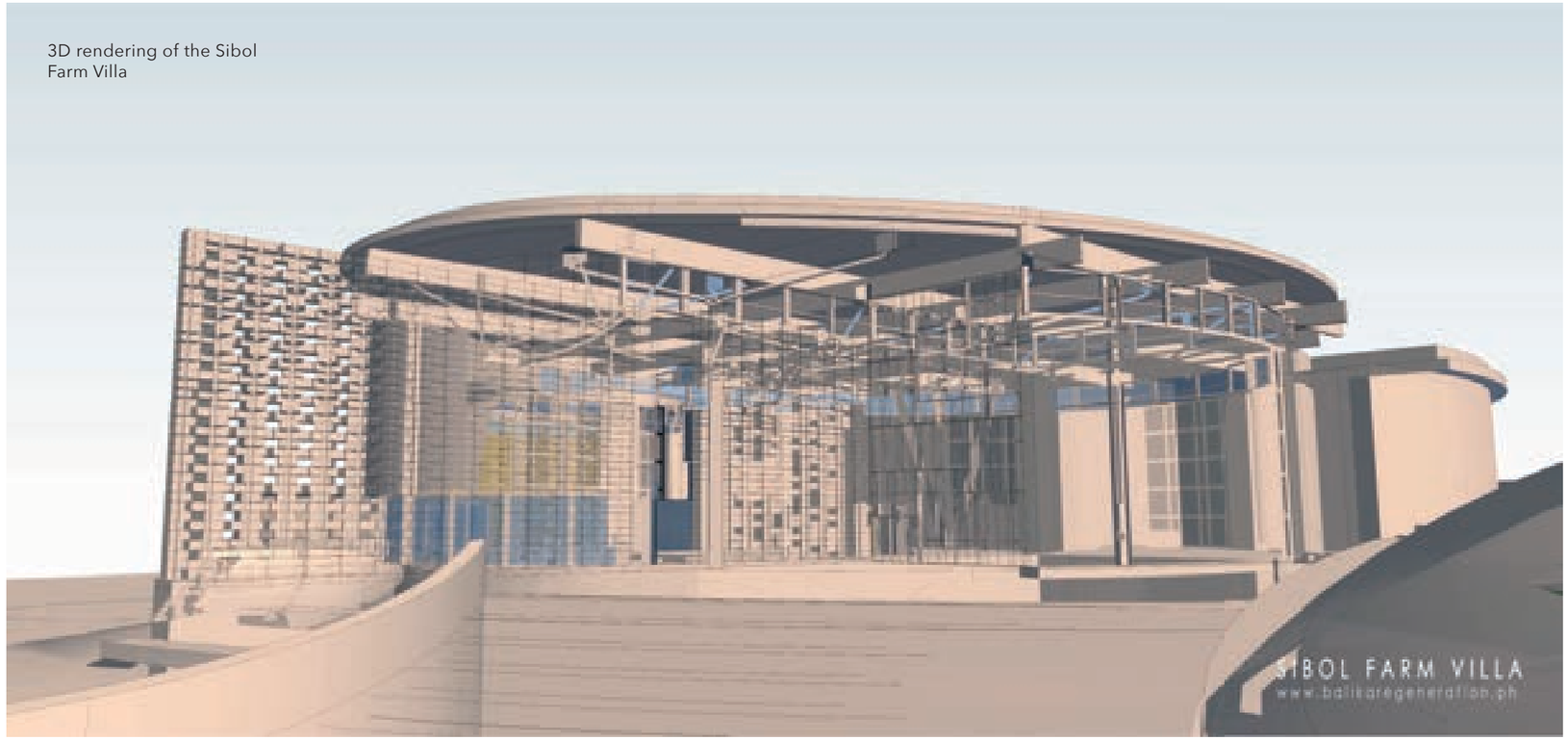
Yumang shares:

> *Ultimately, the design is a shared vision—where client dreams, ancestral knowledge, and innovative craftsmanship converge into a single, meaningful dwelling.*

The building stands on 150 square meters of the one-hectare property as the rest of the land is reserved for reforestation using native tree species, edible plants, and medicinal plants. Clay soil abounds on the site so building directly from the earth was possible—a cornerstone of the regenerative design philosophy. There is also natural spring water which informs the siting of the villa. To minimize earthworks on the sloping site, the building is nestled into the highest area of the property allowing the architecture to feel rooted in the land's contours. This also anticipates a stormwater retention pond planned for the lower area.

The villa's footprint is egg-shaped on an earth-embedded platform, with curved walls displaying the foundational technique of Balika and providing a sense of cradling. It contains two bedrooms, one bathroom, and a great room that contains the living room, dining room, and kitchen. A small auxiliary structure with a one-bedroom layout stands beside the villa. The clients also intend to build a small day care center within the property—offering a space that supports local families.

Since the client specifically asked for the use for natural materials and low-impact systems, the architect lavished the project



3D rendering of the Sibol Farm Villa

with what he calls *jugaad* or "frugal innovations." The external retaining walls utilize compacted clay. Rammed earth is also used to create blocks or *luwad* that is used for brick walls which are faster to assemble. For internal partitions, Balika reinvented an old local wattle-and-daub technique as Neo-tabique Pampango in which bamboo laths are covered in plaster.

Even the woodwork is shaped by traditional knowledge. *Nigas* or wood charring as a means of preservation is used in screen elements. Hand-tooled joinery are used in the ceiling beams which support the roof. The structure is topped by a living roof, which contains a substrate for edible plants and herbs. Between the rammed earth walls and the roof are another Balika innovation, Tensegrity Frames, handcrafted softwood glue-laminated frames that help distribute forces from the roof on the walls.

Given the uniqueness and meticulousness of the methods they are promoting, Yumang has deliberately called his construction team members "artisans". He hires only local workers, avoiding those who are already highly skilled in conventional construction. Rammed earth and natural building require a completely different mindset: more patience, intuition, and rhythm with the land. His goal is not just to build structures, but to restore dignity to the artisanal labor force often overlooked in the industry.

Through repetitive practice and hands-on experience, his nine artisans are now becoming experts in their own right, and many of them can confidently lead tasks, train others, and innovate on the job. The architect understands that Balika has a social mission:

> *The most acute obstacle wasn't technical—it was psychological. Many workers initially didn't believe their work had value. Years of being undervalued in the industry had dulled their sense of pride. But now, their economic status has improved, they're earning well, and what moves me the most is hearing stories from their families—how their children speak proudly of what their fathers and kin are doing. That's my true reward. Not just building walls, but rebuilding pride.*

What began with earth returns to earth. Yumang is compiling the Balika principles and documentation of his work thus far in a self-published book set for release this year. His aims to challenge the dominant narrative around sustainability and green design. The book is an invitation to rethink how we build and who we build for. He puts forward three principles: *métis* wisdom, *jugaad* (frugal innovation), and oikos centrism. The latter means placing all life on Earth at the center of all decisions, systems, and structures.

Words
Angel Yulo

Project: Sibol Farm Villa
Material: Rammed earth
Location: Alfonso, Cavite

Philippine Pavilion, Osaka Expo 2025

EXPRESSING FILIPINO IDENTITY THROUGH WOVEN CULTURES

When the national Department of Tourism and Tourism Promotions Board planned the Philippines' participation in the World Expo 2025 Osaka, they chose the theme of *Nature, Culture & Community: Woven Together for a Better Future* and invited various designers to pitch a concept. Architect Carlo Calma leaned into the word "woven" and the diversity of crafts springing from the country's indigenous cultures. Not one to curtail his acrobatic imagination, he envisioned the pavilion as the largest-ever collaboration of Filipino weavers.

Hand-woven objects, such as clothing and furniture, are ingrained in various Filipino communities. In fact, two cities are designated as UNESCO Creative Cities related to these: Cebu for Design, and Baguio for Crafts and Folk Art. The art of weaving is also integral to our vernacular architecture. The *bahay kubo*, a hut on stilts made of palm and grass, typically employs weaving on wall panels and thatching on roofing. The Philippine pavilion at Osaka is a large-scale exploration of rattan, a type of palm, and local textiles as facade material for a structure meant to command worldwide attention.

Calma describes the architecture "as a testament to the future of handicraft, emphasizing its significance in an evolving digital landscape and celebrating the labor of love inherent in the Filipino brand of craftsmanship." Highlighting rattan and the natural fibers that make up the textiles—such as abaca, pineapple, banana, and more—the design also celebrates the tropical ecosystems that support the abundance of such products. The facade's fusion of textures, colors, and lighting is further animated by live performances by Ballet Philippines. Calma adds:

> *The pavilion celebrates the profound interconnectedness between nature and culture, highlighting the importance of preserving both for future generations.*

The 12-meter-high structure is located in the Empowering Lives zone of the Expo and is one of the first to come into view as visitors enter the grounds. The floor area is nearly 700 square meters and hosts different experience areas designed by Tellart. Guests are taken through a multi-sensory journey that merges threads, nature, and digital media.

The theme of "woven" is expressed on the pavilion structure as the interweaving warp and weft of modular rattan units on the façade. These modular rattan units were produced in Cebu by 70 artisan rattan weavers.

The side of the pavilion showing the weaving of rattan modular units on the façade. Adjacent to the side exit of the pavilion was a café that featured various Filipino foods.

PROCESS AS FLOW Philippine Pavilion at Osaka Expo 2025

Media content is projected on 18 handwoven scrims representing the regions of the Philippines. An interactive wall pulses with the rhythms of a fiesta as dancing guests are reflected on screen wearing costumes of flora and fish. Visitors are able to generate profile photos of themselves in their preferred costume as keepsakes.

The enclosed exhibition space, made of cross-laminated timber, is encased in scaffolding that also supports the steel grids on which the rattan units and textile tiles are fastened. Scaffolding, instead of being temporary reinforcement, is treated as a structural component, thereby reducing waste. The solutions devised by the Japanese engineering team and executive architect Cat Inc. allowed for a habitable space between the façade and timber building, which served as a stage for the live performances.

In the Philippines, weaving techniques are passed down from one generation to another. The traditions are not codified in manuals, but are inherited from one's parents or master artisans in the community.

Prominent weavers, mostly women, have been conferred a special status called *Manlilikha ng Bayan* or National Living Treasure,

Behind the rattan panels are various indigenous textiles and fabrics from the Philippines.

the highest state honor given to a Filipino folk artist. Chuchay Garcia, the pavilion's creative director, provides a glimpse into Calma's research and sourcing:

> *When he won the commission, he really went out of his way to talk to the craftsmen and textile weavers, traveling all over the country to learn and source the fabrics. There is intense passion and drive in Carlo to really get this pavilion right.*

The pavilion's façade appears as a woven box with warp and weft magnified, and small shadows sweeping across the surface. The east elevation splays up and out to mark the entrance flanked by potted plants. A large LED screen that displays a montage of the weaving process hangs above the colorful doors. The north façade contains the exit doors marked by a take-out counter. Parked beside the exit is a pair of large rattan ribbons forming a chain of benches inspired by the *duyan* or swinging cradle. Above this is an amalgamation of materials, with the rattan segments flaring where they adjoin the fabric panels.

Production of the modular rattan units was done in Cebu. A total of 874 units, across 27 design types, were made by 70 artisan rattan weavers. Rattan is a pragmatic, and sustainable, material choice for handicrafts as every part of the plant can be used. It withstands humidity and temperature changes, while remaining lightweight. Calma experimented with weaving transparency to find a suitable pattern for outdoor conditions. They proceeded with a 50 percent density for minimized wind resistance and water retention, and a 1:1 pattern (one unit if rattan is to one unit of spacing) for efficiency and consistency. The rattan units for the Expo were designed to be stackable, making shipping more manageable. Over the span of eight months, 121 weaving communities across the islands worked on the fabrics that would go into the 212 tiles for the pavilion facade. Each fabric is placed inside a weatherproof casing and attached to the steel grids such that they can swivel with the wind. The tiles are arranged on the facade according to island groups—Luzon Visayas, and Mindanao—with a concentration of red-colored weaves at the center serving as a focal point.

Over 2,000 weavers were involved, each imparting stories as their fingers danced with the loom. Depending on the local culture, fabrics serve different purposes: from warding off evil spirits, ornamenting formal attire, to communicating divinely entrusted dreams. Over a thousand pieces of objects comprising rattan units, handwoven textiles, artworks, and pots were consolidated in Cebu then shipped to Osaka—one of the largest mobilizations of Filipino craftsmanship for one project.

As the art of weaving transcended the scale of objects and entered the realm of architecture, the pavilion overflows with the labor of love that characterizes the archipelago's crafting traditions. Fine threads, manipulated by skilled artisans, are able to envelope a multi-story building. This is a counterpoint to the mechanized and automated production lines that are becoming ever more rampant. The Philippine pavilion highlights the work of human hands disciplined by the fruits of the land and preserving the wisdom of communities.

Detail of the façade of the pavilion with exterior lighting at night. The side of the pavilion also featured undulating rattan duyan (hammock) seating for the visitors.

Words
Angel Yulo

Design: Carlo Calma, Carlo Calma Consultancy
Location: Osaka, Kansai, Japan
Key material: Rattan

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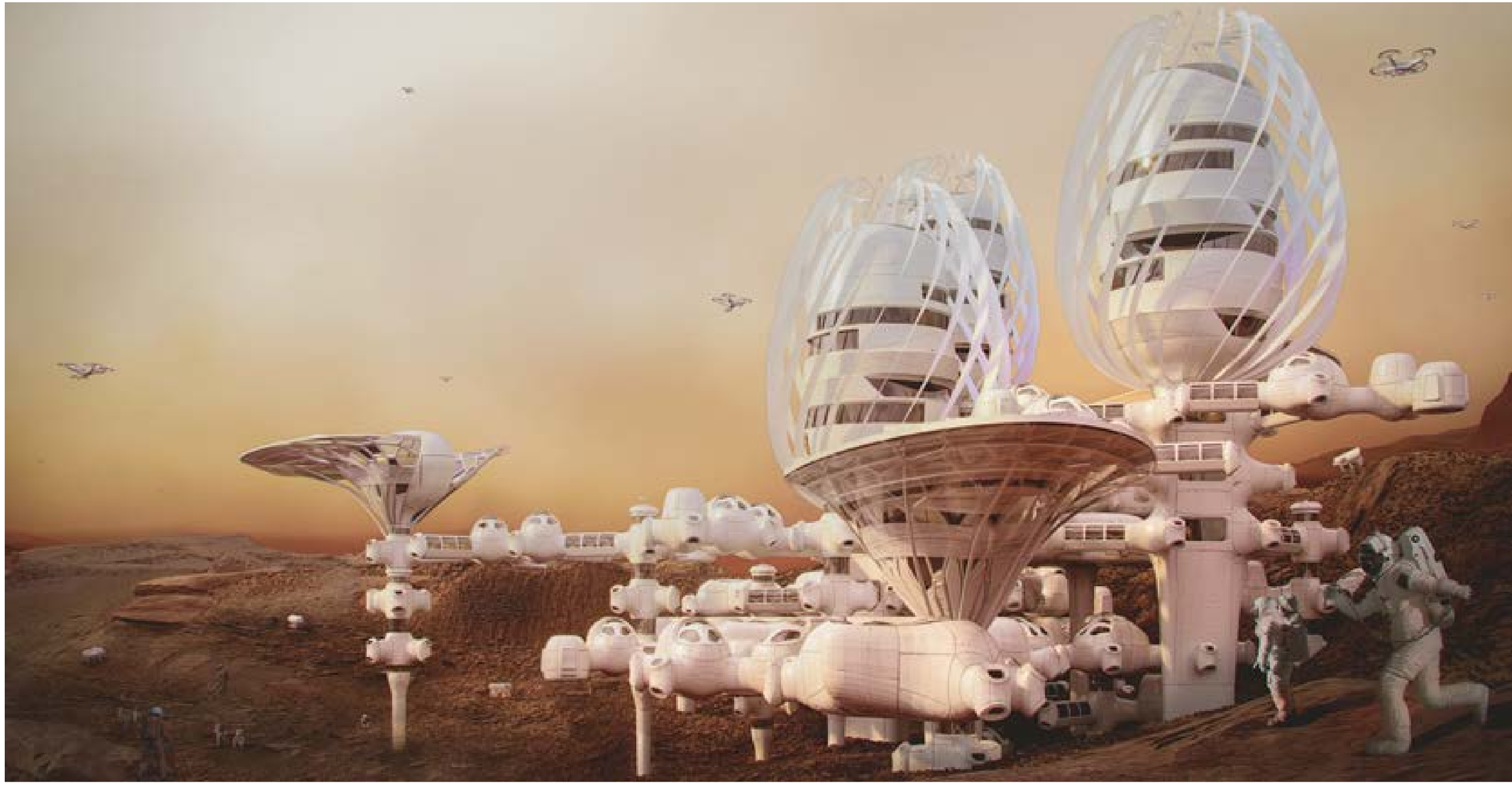
PROCESS AS FLOW Hexarion



"Hexarion: A Martian Colony", submitted by Neil Bersabe of BER SAB ARC to the Jacques Rougerie Foundation architectural competition in Paris, France, 2021

Hexarion

USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO IMAGINE THE FUTURE

Architect Neil Bersabe is the forward-looking principal architect at BER SAB ARC, a studio in Davao City, in the southern part of the Philippines. After the capital Manila, Davao is the third most populous city. Despite a robust construction and design activity in the city, there has been limited adoption of software beyond 2D Drafting or 3D Modeling.

Critical of the traditional approaches that have weighed the industry back, Bersabe was an eager adopter of BIM among his contemporaries when he

set up his practice. He believed in innovation and systems to drive design forward. His growing interest in the technology would lead to early experiments with AI and machine learning.

"I am already an avid fan of computational design. The reason why I learned computational design was because of the process we had, it was very traditional. We were very behind 20-25 years. Naturally, from the occurrence of BIM, I discovered the use of computational design in the workflow. Moving towards further advancement and automation, how processes can improve themselves and workflow, that's when we stumbled upon machine learning and AI."

On the other side of the world, in Paris, the Jacques Rougerie Foundation hosts an annual competition that calls for visionary and architectural responses in the worlds of sea and space. This call to action would lead BER SAB ARC to speculate *Hexarion: A Martian Colony.*

Hexarion supposes a livable colony on Mars. Similar to the modular capsules used in Antarctic expeditions, Bersabe opens, "The infrastructure of the colony needs to minimize the reliance on human labor and must be able to sustainably support life and manage the overall building lifecycle."

The team identified that the colony needed to be: Automated – able to self assemble, Sustainable – able to have a circular economy, Modular – able to be replicated, and Adaptable – able to grow as needed.

Using available maps of Mars, designers mapped the most optimum areas on the planet. A heat map for available resources like silicates, space dust, and the potential of water through electrolysis, were analyzed by AI. Other requirements like ideal elevations and clement thermal conditions were also sifted through. The resultant data yielded the shallow crater of Acidalia Planitia.

The problem of the built colony itself is distilled in data. The mass of basic human needs became the multipliers for the colony: the amount of food (730 kilograms), water (111,398 kilograms), oxygen (200,750 kilograms), and waste (822 kilograms) needed to be generated and stored informed the number of various types of living modules. Materiality of *Hexarion* is imagined to be refined from Martian resources. For instance, ice caps may be harvested, undergo electrolysis to create potable water and a steady source of oxygen, or particles from frequent dust storms might be refined to create alloys used in the architecture itself.

A colony would require 10 basic modules: Life Module – supports healthcare systems of the colony, Factory Module – supports self-assembly and material creation, Food Module – supports farming and food distribution, Docking Module – supports transport outside the colony, Horizontal and Vertical Modules – support circulation within the colony, Power Module – supports energy requirements, Residential Module – are living pods, Support Module – main structural component and supports the expansion of the colony, and the Central Module – supports administrative functions of the colony. The modules are narrowed down from intersections of complex programs and activities. Bersabe shares that when conceptualizing *Hexarion*, he was heavily influenced

The hexagon-based modules are interconnected through walkways, leading to different sections, such as farms, laboratories, residences, and other support facilities.

by the book *Architecture Without Architects* by Bernard Rudofsky. Bersabe ponders "how architecture came to be without architects, how natural systems came [to be] sources of knowledge from nature. [That] was the idea for Hexarion. Can we make a sustainable system technically built by an architect but it can grow by itself, built by machine learning?"

Following natural architecture, the honeycomb sturdy and tightly-packed became a spatial model for sprawl and structural rigidity. Fungal growth patterns informed a logic system for module connection. Each individual module is able to fasten to the other as needed or predicted.

Presuming the conditions are met, the Factory Module builds the colony incrementally using "Connection Rules," sets of data relative to population and operation. The study diagrams how a colony of five may start out and expand to a population 200 onwards, adjusting itself to terrain and random variables for a stochastic growth.

Individuality in mind, the residential pod builds on the hexagon of six triangles, where each slice can be a customizable component. A family may need more sleeping components, while another might need more area for work. The resulting architecture is not unlike the positive mold of ants or wood borers, or mushroom tops on the forest bed.

Machine Learning gives the architect's imagination legs. Vast research and broad groundwork leveraged by machine into organized systems. No longer bogged down by the minutia of numbers and data, we are able to contemplate the humanity of the design or focus on the fidelity of a concept.

"The role of architects now is no longer merely designers. When we say architects before, we relate it to draftsmen. In the 90's, [we would call architects] CAD operator. In the 2000s, a renderer. But now the true essence of the architect is revealed: design thinking, critical thinking, analysis, how we can provide solutions… The role of AI, it would aid you rather than focusing more time in documentation, other 'dirty' jobs, we can focus instead on the original thought, the authenticity of the design idea and solution," says the architect on AI.

The reality of *Hexarion* is lifetimes and light years away. "[AI] can create something for you as a starting point", adds Bersabe. Hexarion is an enthusiastic speculation, a complex idea that gained liftoff because of Artificial Intelligence.

Words
Steffi Sioux Go

Designer: Neil Bersabe, BER SAB ARC
Location: Mars
Status: Competition entry

The Architecture of Policy

UGLINESS IS SPREADING LIKE A PANDEMIC—THE PHILIPPINES NEEDS POLICY AND A CULTURE OF CRITIQUING TO DEFEND ITS CIVILIZATION

WORDS BY DOMINIC GALICIA

Editor's note: This edited piece was originally a speech entitled "No Architect is an Island: the Architecture of Policy," delivered by author, Dominic Galicia at the 2021 International Conference of Architects on October 25, 2021.

When I was a child, we were taught that the Philippines was an archipelago of 7,100 islands. It turns out that we have 7,641 islands, and about five thousand of them are yet unnamed. The sheer number of Philippine islands and our relatively large population make us one of the world's largest archipelago nations, with about 175 ethnic groups and a cultural heritage derived from a mixed ancestry fusing Eastern and Western influences.

This may help explain why we have difficulty articulating a unified vision of our national identity and character, whether in our laws, literature, or architecture.

Our recent history has been messy and noisy, and full of divergent points of view.

There is a growing sense, however, that this very diversity may actually be our greatest source of strength, like the new high-entropy alloys that fuse several metallic elements to create next-generation metals, harder than steel yet more pliable than aluminum. Developing policy to govern a group is like creating a large structure that will shelter a multitude. The more diverse the population, the more complex the structure must be, as it must cater to different needs, values, and circumstances. Unfortunately, there is often the simplistic attitude that what applies to one must necessarily apply to all and the failure to recognize that times change. A policy system that takes into account the diverse and evolving needs of all types of stakeholders is like a well-designed structure that can be adaptively reused.

Evaluating a policy system is much like evaluating a structure—does it benefit and protect its constituents? Does it provide a stable, reliable framework within which they are enabled to live and work happily and productively? Does it inspire noble thoughts and a desire to do well? Does it harmonize with other systems, collectively creating an environment that sustains and supports efforts to improve and grow?

HERITAGE AND LAW

I have had a few opportunities to take part in our effort to shape the country's policy for architecture and design. The first was the Heritage Law. To be sure, I had nothing to do with its actual drafting, but, as a young architect, I participated in demonstrations that brought heritage conservation to the public eye in a way that would help generate policy, the policy we know today as the Heritage Law.

The demonstrations were aimed at saving the Jai Alai building, a significant Art Deco landmark from 1940. This was an important moment in the Philippine conservation movement and for the Heritage Conservation Society, or HCS, which was only a year old then and which, then as now, was the country's leading heritage organization.

We lost the fight. The building was demolished in July 2000, but its demolition helped create the groundswell that placed heritage conservation on the national agenda. As a result, policy was formulated in Congress. Officially known as the Philippine Cultural Heritage Act, Republic Act 10066 was signed by President Gloria Arroyo in 2010.

Despite the Heritage Law, many significant buildings are being lost, with a lot of insignificant buildings replacing them, adding insult to injury, salt to the wound. By significant, I mean buildings of a quality and artistry that capture your eye and reward examination, buildings witness to the growth of our nation, designed by architects like Carlos Arguelles, Leandro Locsin, and Jose Maria Zaragoza. In the wake of these cultural tragedies, the words of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado bring some comfort:
"For the strategists, for the politicians, for the historians, all this will be clear: we lost the war. But at a human level, I am not so sure: perhaps we won."

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Another opportunity came last year, an invitation to be part of a panel of architects and other design professionals to make presentations via Zoom to the Philippine House of Representatives' Arts and Culture and Creative Industries Bloc, led by Pangasinan Congressman Toff de Venecia, which was looking at how the pandemic was affecting the creative industries and looking also at how the Philippines could pivot into a creative power using its creative industries.

One of the outcomes was the Philippine Creative Industries Development Act, with its five billion-peso appropriation, with the goal to consolidate resources and strategy to make the Philippines the leading creative force of ASEAN by 2030. It was filed last November, was just passed in Congress last month, and is now pending in the Senate.

Another outcome of those consultations was a house bill aiming to address the problems that beset architecture as an art and profession. There were difficult questions like "Why do we have the largest number of architects in ASEAN, many of whom have to find opportunities abroad?" "Why are jobs scarce, and why are engineers competing with architects for those scarce jobs?" "Why are architects competing with interior designers?" "How do we provide architects with the opportunities to broaden their vision?"

NEED FOR CRITIQUE

This is not to say that Philippine architecture today is not without its triumphs.

One of the top prizes at this year's prestigious Venice Biennale for Architecture went to the Philippine entry called *Structures of Mutual Support*.

The World Architecture Festival, happening as we speak, has an exceptional number of finalists from the Philippines. May they all be victors.

None of those entries to the World Architecture Festival and the Venice Biennale would have reached as far as they reached were it not for critique. Critique is a bitter pill, but it is necessary in order to be strong. I sat in a couple of practice juries for the World Architecture Festival to help these Philippine entrants anticipate the toughest questions, and they were all thankful for it. We helped them be strong so that they could withstand and even outgun the competition. This would not be happening if we were to coddle them in a comforting and protectionist stance The World Architecture Festival architects are *elite* architects, not in the socio-economic sense of the word "elite." They are elite in the way that this year's Philippine Olympians like Hidilyn Diaz are elite, honored not because they were protected but because they faced the withering challenges of their own critique and competition. We want as many Philippine architects as strong as those elite architects, but they will not get there if a protectionist stance prevails.

This is one of the things the bill is trying to address, but it has so far been met largely with professional uproar. This is understandable because consultation, thorough as it was, could have been more thorough. But these are early days. "House Bill" is another way of saying "draft proposal," and there is still a long road of consultations and technical working groups ahead. In any case, as an architect, this is an exciting time because this could very well be a pivot back to the greatness of Philippine architecture.

ARCHITECTURE POLICY

A return to the greatness of Philippine architecture means that we need to formulate an architecture policy that articulates an overarching vision we can all agree on—one that focuses on the type of place we want our country to be, how it can be created, and how architecture can be an expression of that vision. At its best, legislative policy is formed not to protect one

interest group but society as a whole. Society as a whole benefits when people collaborate. Society does not benefit when people retreat into their foxholes. It is the role of the government to ensure that there is no reason for anyone to retreat into any foxholes and to indeed ensure that there is every reason for people to work together. Our built landscape must be the expression of structures of mutual support.

The architect's role as captain of the building project must remain because we guide all the key elements that make structures architecture. *Utilitas, Venustas, Firmitas*—the Latin words for Utility, Beauty, Strength. Other professions focus only on Firmitas or only on Utilitas. We focus on them all to create architecture. And it is architecture that we need to create, not just building, for our civilization to move forward. The civilization of our nation needs its architecture.

As John Hejduk, the great dean of Cooper Union, described it: "The fundamental issue of architecture is that does it affect the spirit or doesn't it. If it doesn't affect the spirit, it's a building. If it affects the spirit, it's architecture."
Some notes on Venustas, or Beauty, before we head to my conclusion. As the architecture profession, we need to help the government formulate an architecture policy that defends Beauty. Congressman de Venecia's and his congressional colleagues' Creative Industries Act is an important step in the right direction. But we need the more specific measure of an architecture policy to defend our civilization. In the building professions, with the exception of the interior designer, it is the architect who is the guardian of Beauty. Manifestations of Beauty abound, whether in the works of true architecture or in the mountains, rivers, and seas of our archipelago.

The image of the Manila Central Post Office reflecting in the Pasig River is an expression of Venustas, of Beauty. We, as architects, must defend that.

The opposite of Beauty is ugliness, and the Latin word for that is Deformitas. A Latin synonym is *Repulsio*.

Christopher Alexander, the architect, and theorist, said in an interview recently: "One of the very largest problems facing the earth now is rarely mentioned, and that is the spread of ugliness. By the standards of the 20th century, it sounds like a rather trivial and unimportant issue. It's not. It's on the same scale as the alarm that was spread when people began to realize that the Brazilian rainforest was being destroyed."

MUSEUM AS METAPHOR

In conclusion, I would like to share one of our projects that, in my experience, is a narrative of good policy.

The Department of Tourism building was originally the Department of Agriculture building, designed by Antonio Toledo and completed in 1939, when the Philippines was, like Puerto Rico today, a part of the American Commonwealth. The short-listed competition to design its adaptive reuse conversion into the new National Museum of Natural History was won in 2013 by my team, a collaboration among the design disciplines: interior design by Periquet Galicia, engineering by Arup, and architecture by Dominic Galicia Architects.

A Google Earth view of Rizal Park from 2012 shows the red roof of the former Department of Agriculture building, then the Department of Tourism, looking across Agrifina Circle at the Museum of the Filipino People, formerly the Department of Finance. The view from 2021, three years after completion, shows the National Museum of Natural History replacing the Department of Tourism.

After we surveyed and assessed the site, before we had done any design, we established policy, a statement of principles that would guide the adaptive reuse.

A schedule of priorities, a hierarchy of significance, stated that the most important components of the structure were: the exterior façade, the courtyard façade, Marble Hall, and the staircases with their marble and grillwork. The government office spaces were lower in significance and could thus be manipulated to transform into museum galleries. Another policy established by the Board of Trustees and the museum officers was that the project was to be sustainable and use the GREEEN rating system of the Philippine Green Building Initiative, or PGBI, of which the UAP is a key and founding member organization. Early in the project, our museum

consultant insisted on the idea of the black box as the method of display. The design team, on the other hand, found this idea claustrophobic. It was important to us that any interior space needed a sense of connection with the outside, one way or another. The impasse had to be solved by the interior designer and me going abroad, to Paris, New York, Washington, and Sydney, to research museum galleries that let in natural daylight.

Indeed there was a time when black boxes were all the rage in museum exhibition design. Across Agrifina Circle from our project site, the former Department of Finance building, when it was first converted into the Museum of the Filipino People, was a warren of black box spaces. It is now the National Museum of Anthropology and is no longer about black boxes. Our museum consultant for Natural History, who was also a consultant for the Museum of the Filipino People, really believed in the black box and the experience of focusing only on a museum object lit brightly against the darkness, with no views of the outside. We thought that the black box would be brutal. When you visit the Natural History Museum today, you will appreciate the sense of transparency that penetrates the structure.

The visitor appreciates it; whether he or she realizes it, the humane environment enhances the visitor experience.

Policy, like a dark museum, can be brutal. Policy must be a humane space that helps define us but does not confine us. It can help us focus on the matter at hand, but it can also allow us to see what's outside.

The heart of the project is the Tree of Life at the center. It is at the centroid of the polygonal courtyard and contains the glass capsule elevator that takes you to the fifth floor so that you can begin your gallery visit, and after completing each floor, take the ramp to the next floor down.

My original concept for the courtyard was not a single tree but a grove of trees supporting a more amorphous-shaped dome. The interior designer, my partner and collaborator, asked, "Why so many trees? Why not have just one tree? The simpler, the better." She was right.

Policy must be simple and straight to the point. It must be the distillation of many intelligent and well-meaning voices. It must also spring from a sense of confidence in our abilities and the humility to understand when others have a better idea than we do.

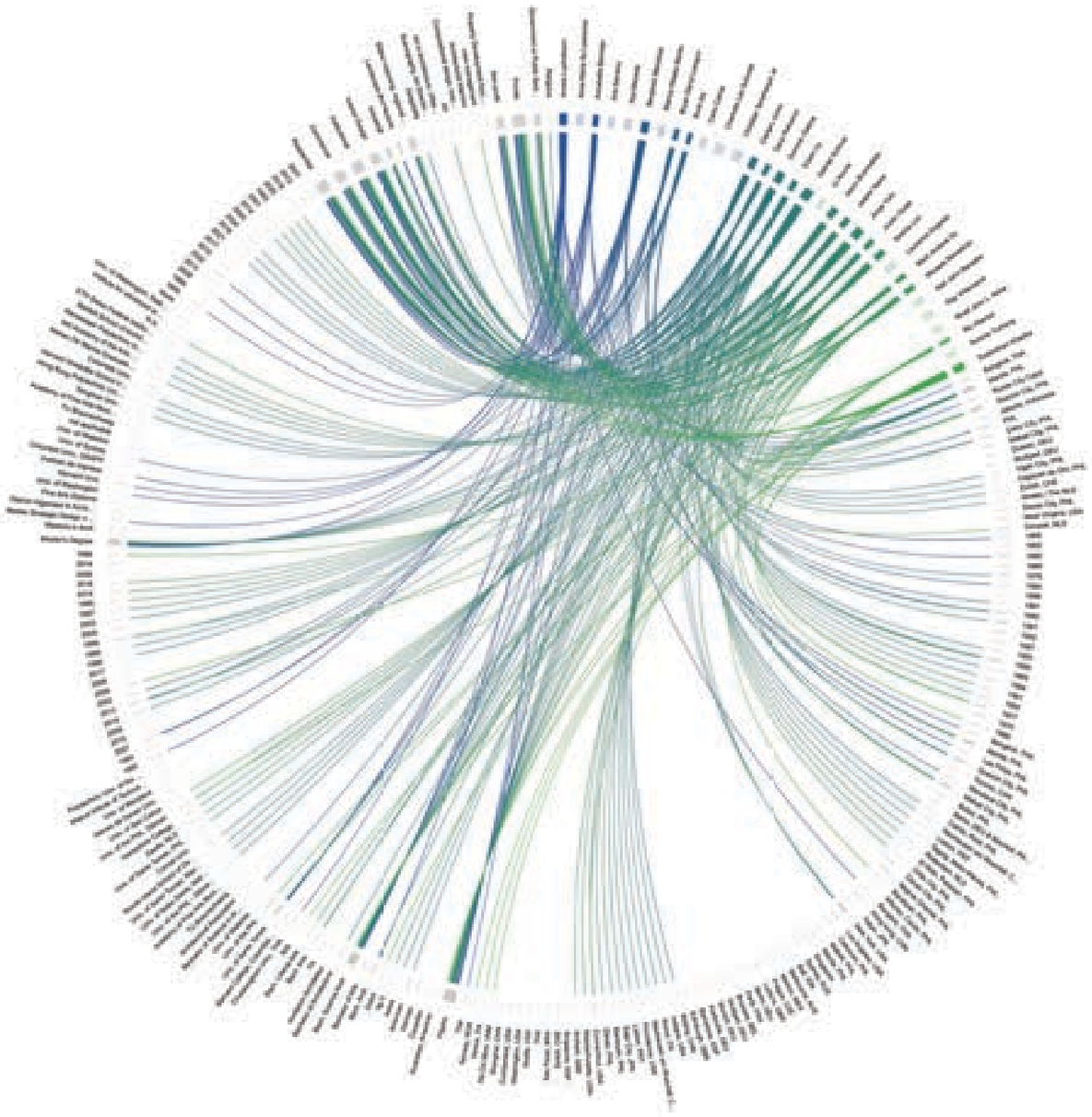
Policy looks at existing realities as well as exciting potential and helps us link the two. The connection creates a space where we can enjoy one another's company in a society of citizens that want a place in this traveling pattern of sun and shade. Policy is democratic. In this way, policy can be an expression of the equality of opportunity.

This project was the product of excellent collaboration between public and private sectors—the officers of the museum, members of the Board of Trustees, and the consultants. I saw this myself on a regular basis, witnessing the sagacious harmony that prevailed at project meetings.

The project expresses a collective aspiration to showcase our country's wealth and heritage through individual and collaborative efforts. It gives us hope that what was done once can be done again and provides us with a glimpse of a brighter future with more room for similar undertakings, demonstrating the significant role architecture plays in building not merely structures but nations.

Developing policy to govern a group is like creating a large structure that will shelter a multitude, a multitude of islands that make up one nation.

Thank you.



Nexus

FILIPINO ARCHITECTURE AS A NETWORK IN CONSTANT REMAKING

People, places, and processes all interrelate and intersect in ever-changing flows. The diagram illustrates how all thirty case studies presented in this exhibit are profoundly interconnected in various ways, highlighting the interlocking network and linkages in contemporary Filipino Architecture. Some data points indicate the commonality among the participants. At the same time, other data points reveal how they also differ from one another. As points converge and diverge, we can begin to understand that contemporary Filipino Architecture is embedded within a complex crosscurrent of perspectives, issues, and contexts. Therefore, we cannot simply reduce Filipino Architecture to a single, static phenomenon. From this visual illustration, we might also ask what other possible ways that Filipino Architecture might interact and transform in the future, given that people, places, and processes will also dynamically evolve.

Design and production by Bien Alvarez and Lyle La Madrid

Curators

Edson Cabalfin

Edson G. Cabalfin, Ph.D., (b.1973, Philippines) is an educator, architect, designer, curator, and historian. He is the inaugural Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and a tenured Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Built Environment at Tulane University (New Orleans, LA, USA).

He received his Ph.D. in History of Architecture and Urban Development from Cornell University (Ithaca, NY, USA) in 2012. Under a Fulbright Fellowship, he obtained his Master of Science in Architecture degree from the University of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, OH, USA) in 2003. Before coming to the U.S., he received his professional Bachelor of Science in Architecture and Master of Architecture degrees from the University of the Philippines in 1996 and 2001, respectively. Prior to Tulane University, he had previously taught in various capacities at the University of Cincinnati, Cornell University, and the University of the Philippines, among others.

Edson's research in the last two and a half decades lies at the transdisciplinary intersections of architecture history and theory, cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, postcolonial theory, Southeast Asian studies, spatial justice, public interest design, and heritage conservation. His research broadly interrogates the politics of design and the built environment, particularly as they impact historically underrepresented and underserved communities, and how they shape national, regional, and local identities. He wrote the books "What Kids Should Know About Filipino Architecture" (Adarna House, 2015/2022) and "Shifting Sands: Visions, Propositions, Reimaginations" (Barchan + Architecture, 2024), and edited "The City Who Had Two Navels: Catalogue of the Philippine Pavilion at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale 2018" (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2018).

Edson curated "The City Who Had Two Navels," Philippine Pavilion at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale (Venice, Italy in 2018 and Manila, Philippines in 2019), "Engage, Speculate, Embed" as part of the inaugural Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale on Contemporary Art (virtual in 2024), and co-curated "Arkitekturang Filipino: Spaces and Places in History" (various sites around the Philippines in 2000-2001).

A licensed and registered architect in the Philippines, Edson also runs his multi-disciplinary empathy-centered design consultancy Talyer Kayumanggi/Brown Workshop, based in New Orleans and Manila, with projects in architecture, interior design, set design, costume design, fashion design, exhibition design, graphic design, and design strategy in North America, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Middle East in the last 30 years.

Patrick Kasingsing

Patrick Kasingsing (b. 1991) is an art director, photographer, writer, and heritage advocate whose work engages with the visual culture and spatial histories of Philippine architectural modernity. He is the founder and co-moderator of Brutalist Pilipinas and Modernist Pilipinas, platforms that critically document the country's postwar architectural heritage. He also established Kanto.PH, an online magazine focused on design and culture in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

His editorial and curatorial work utilizes built heritage to raise questions about cultural memory and civic identity. As Brutalist Pilipinas, he co-curated and contributed imagery for Brutalism as Heritage: Leandro Locsin and the Makati Central Business District (2024), a photographic exhibition on the lives and conditions of Locsin's Brutalist buildings in Makati, presented in partnership with Convenience Coffeehouse. He also contributed photography and appeared as an interviewee in The Poet of Concrete: The Architecture of Leandro Locsin (2024), a landmark exhibition curated by architect-curator Gerry Torres for the College of aint Benilde Center for Campus Art.

Patrick previously served as creative director and contributing writer for BluPrint, the Philippines' longest-running magazine on architecture and interior design, while overseeing the art direction of MyHome, Condo Living, Travel Now, and Appetite under the One Mega Group media umbrella. As art director of adobo magazine, he co-steered its visual redesign in 2012, earning the publication a Philippine Quill Award for excellence in communication.

His writing and photography have been featured in the MASEANa (Modern ASEAN Architecture) Project by Docomomo Japan, and published in books by Birkhäuser Verlag, DOM Publishers, Hoxton Press, Braun, University of San Carlos Press, Ateneo de Manila University Press, and the University of the Philippines Press. He has also contributed to publications including Vogue Philippines, Wallpaper UK, VMAN SEA, Art4D, Rolling Stone Philippines, and PURVEYR.

A Manuel Tan Chua-Chiaco Scholar, Patrick holds a Fine Arts degree in Information Design from Ateneo de Manila University (2012).

Peter Cachola Schmal

(b. 1960, Germany) is the director of Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) in Frankfurt, Germany. He spent his childhood in Multan, Pakistan, and Jakarta, Indonesia, as well as in Mülheim an der Ruhr, Holzminden, and Baden-Baden in Germany. His mother came from Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, Philippines, and his father from Munich, Germany. They met while studying in the USA.

After graduating with a Master of Architecture at the TH Darmstadt in 1989, he joined Behnisch+Partner in Stuttgart and Eisenbach+Partner in Zeppelinheim. From 1992 to 1997, he was an assistant professor at the TU Darmstadt, teaching construction, and from 1997 to 2000, he taught architectural design at the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences. Peter Cachola Schmal became a curator at the DAM in 2000 and the director in 2006.

He was twice the German Commissioner General for architecture biennales: in 2007 for the 7th International Architecture Biennale (BIA) in São Paulo and in 2016 for the 15th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, with "Making Heimat: Germany Arrival Country". At the DAM, he started the DAM Award for German Architecture and the DAM Architectural Book Award and developed the International High-Rise Award. The DAM is exhibiting around 15 shows per year and travels its shows widely. The topic of tropicality has been explored at the DAM several times, with shows concentrating on Geoffrey Bawa from Sri Lanka, Studio Mumbai from India, Vladimir Ossipoff from Hawaii, the group show: "Bengal Stream" from Bangladesh, "Nove Novos" or nine emerging practices from Brazil, and "Revisiting Tropicality", the guest of honor show from Indonesia.

Exhibitors

Aya Maceda

(b. 1978, Quezon City, Philippines) is a Filipino-Australian architect and co-founding principal of **ALAO**. Recognized as one of Architectural Digest's "5 Women in the design world you should know" in 2021, Aya is a thought leader in the built environment, with a career spanning practice, teaching, writing, and curatorship. She is a registered architect in both the US and Australia, holds a master's from Columbia GSAPP, and teaches at Parsons School of Design. Her advocacies include supporting artists, BIPOC youth, and the environment.

Anna Maria V. Sy

(b. 1962, Manila, Philippines) is a US-registered architect who co-founded with Jason Chai the firm **CS Architecture** in 1992 in Connecticut. Formerly a design architect at Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill in Los Angeles, she now heads CS Design Consultancy in Manila, overseeing a diverse range of projects across North America and Southeast Asia. Her expertise spans residential, commercial, corporate, and institutional buildings. With a commitment to honoring local heritage and client needs, her award-winning work has been featured in prominent publications internationally.

Charlotte Lao Schmidt

(b. 1982, Dueren, Germany) is a spatial designer and architect based in Bohol, Philippines. A graduate of Technical University Braunschweig, she has collaborated with 51N4E in Brussels and contributed to projects across Europe. In 2019, she founded **SOFT SPOT**, a cross-cultural creative community. Schmidt is also known for her scenography in major European exhibitions, award-winning editorial work, and academic roles, including Program Chair of Architecture at Foundation University in Dumaguete, Negros Oriental, Philippines.

Bianca Weeko Martin

(b. 1996, Jakarta, Indonesia) is a writer and researcher, bringing together architectural practice with theory and personal narrative. She is the author of the "Architectural Guide of Manila" by DOM Publishers and writes about art, space, and the Filipino diaspora. Bianca currently collaborates with designers, artists, academics, publishers, and business owners in Toronto, Canada.

Christian Tenefrancia Illi

(b. 1987, Stuttgart, Germany) is a German-Filipino multidisciplinary artist and creative director, educated at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich. He has received scholarships from the University of Edinburgh and the University of Arts and Design Karlsruhe. He was the featured artist at the Philippine Pavilion at the 19th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2025. Illi's work spans arts, architecture, and design across Europe and Asia, exploring themes of colonialism, globalization, and identity. He co-founded **KIM/ILLI**, an award-winning, transdisciplinary studio focused on research, collaboration, and expanding knowledge within global and local creative communities.

Laurence Angeles

(b.1985, Quezon City, Philippines) is an award-winning Filipino architect dedicated to revealing Davao's unique character through innovative and context-driven projects. After a decade with Architects61 Singapore, he founded **MLA at Home** in 2020. Laurence holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of the Philippines and a master's degree from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH Zurich. He has contributed to urban housing research and taught at the De la Salle College of Saint Benilde – School of Design and Arts.

Leandro V. Locsin Partners

founded in 1955 by National Artist Leandro V. Locsin (1928-1994), is a leading Philippine architectural firm renowned for shaping Manila's skyline and the country's built environment. Their iconic works include the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the Philippine International Convention Center, the Chapel of the Holy Sacrifice, and Ayala Museum, among others. Over the decades, the firm has completed more than 33 public buildings, 75 commercial structures, and numerous residences, with influence extending to major international commissions.

James "JJ" Acuna

is a multi-awarded architect and interior designer celebrated for his work in hospitality and luxury residential design across Asia. As Founder and Creative Director of **JJ Acuna / Bespoke Studio**, with offices in Hong Kong and Manila, he is known for crafting soulful, meaningful spaces. James graduated from Cornell University in 2005 and Columbia University in 2005. Acuna's clients span from high-profile individuals to major companies, with features in leading design publications. He is dedicated to creating uplifting environments that foster joyful connections.

Framework Collaborative

led by architects **Sudarshan V. Khadka Jr.** and **Alexander Eriksson Furunes**, is known for community-driven design rooted in participatory practice. Their work, including the acclaimed Streetlight Tagpuro post-disaster project in Tacloban, Philippines, reflects a commitment to collaboration and social impact. They curated the Philippine Pavilion at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2021. Recognized for their "quietly radical approach," they have received the Peter Davey Prize and won awards at the World Architecture Festival. Their ongoing research explores the power of collective building and the ethos of bayanihan and dugnad.

Studio of Leading Ideas Corporation

The **Studio of Leading Ideas Corporation (SLIC)** is a Philippine-based architectural consultancy led by partners **Andrew Sy** (b. 1990, Philippines), **Bryan Liangco** (b. 1991, Philippines), and **Clarisse Gono** (b. 1993, Philippines). They all received their undergraduate degree in Architecture from the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. Specializing in context-driven design across multiple scales, SLIC is known for its problem-solving approach and passion for maximizing each site's potential. Rather than imposing a singular style, the studio lets each project's unique character guide its architectural ideas. SLIC's work blurs boundaries between built and natural environments, always balancing client needs with environmental impact.

Studio Barcho

founded by **Gabriel Sarmiento Schmid** (b.1994, Zurich, Switzerland) in 2025, is an architecture and design practice based in Lisbon, Portugal. The firm's approach centers around the interplay of people, place, and process. Their design is anchored in the power of interaction between professionals and clients, site, and culture. Gabriel received his undergraduate degree from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2019, and later obtained his graduate degree from Harvard Graduate School of Design in 2024.

Daryl Refuerzo

(b. 1990, Vigan City, Ilocos Sur, Philippines) is a Manila-based architect and founder of **Studio Fuerzo,** a design practice exploring the intersections of context, materiality, and identity. After early recognition in furniture design, he established his studio in 2019, developing projects from residences to F&B concepts, inspired by cultural contexts and clients' lived experiences. Shortlisted at the 2022 World Architecture Festival, Studio Fuerzo creates thoughtful, functional spaces that resonate beyond the visual. Refuerzo is a 2012 graduate of the architecture program at the University of the Philippines.

Dominic Galicia

(b. 1965, Manila, Philippines) is a highly regarded Filipino architect and principal of **Dominic Galicia Architects**, a design-oriented practice established in 2001. Known for his sensitive concepts and details, his portfolio includes award-winning projects such as the National Museum of Natural History in Manila and Kilyawan Farm Resort in Batangas. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1988. Galicia is an advocate of heritage conservation, representing the Philippines in ICOMOS and serving in key conservation roles. He was elevated to the UAP College of Fellows in 2022.

Jorge Yulo

(b. 1961, Manila, Philippines) is an accomplished architect who began his career at Cabrera/ Barricklo Architects in New York before earning his Master of Architecture from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1993. After working with Leandro V. Locsin and Partners, he founded **Jorge Yulo Architects and Associates (JYAA)** in 1995. The Manila-based firm has completed hundreds of projects, from high rises to luxury residences, and is known for comprehensive design services.

Justin Xavier Dy Guiab

(b. 1990, Quezon City, Philippines) is an architect based in El Nido, Palawan, whose practice explores the intersection of building, landscape, and life. He received his undergraduate degree in Architecture from the University of the Philippines in 2015. Emphasizing patience and listening, Guiab approaches each site as a unique dialogue with land, people, and nature. His work—from an open, wall-less family home in the forest to the sensitive transformation of a Manila house into an independent cinema—reflects a philosophy of coexistence and humility, fostering deeper connections between architecture, environment, and community.

Edwin Uy

(b. 1978, Cagayan de Oro, Philippines) graduated cum laude from the University of Santo Tomas in 1999 and received his Master's degree from the Hong Kong Polytechnic in 2018. A dedicated educator and mentor, Uy combines global influences with a client-focused approach, starting each project by attentively understanding client needs and context. His practice **EUDO**, established in Cagayan de Oro in 2003 and now also in Manila, covers a wide range of building types across the Philippines, reflecting a commitment to thoughtful, responsive architecture.

Department of ARCHITECTURE Co., Ltd.

is a Bangkok-based design studio founded in 2004 by **Amata Luphaiboon** (b. 1969, Bangkok, Thailand) and **Twitee Vajrabhaya Teparkum** (b. 1973, Bangkok, Thailand). The firm specializes in architecture, interior architecture, and landscape design across a diverse range of programmatic scales. Their approach goes beyond tangible spaces, focusing on conceptual frameworks that shape human interaction. Amata graduated from Chulalongkorn University and holds master's degrees from the University of Washington and Harvard University. Twitee received her degrees from Virginia Tech and Princeton University.

BAAD Studio

founded in 2010 in Makati City by co-principal architects **Benjamin Mendoza** (b. 1984, Manila, Philippines) and **Annabelle Mendoza** (b. 1985, Roxas City, Capiz, Philippines), is a multidisciplinary design practice in the Philippines. They both graduated from the University of Santo Tomas in 2007. The studio's diverse portfolio covers residential, corporate, commercial, hospitality, institutional, and civic architecture. Driven by collaboration across disciplines, BAADSTUDIO grounds its evolving philosophies in real-world practice. Central to its ethos is "Atmospheric Architecture", a philosophy balancing human experience and environmental responsibility, producing progressive, responsive, and site-specific works that positively shape urban and rural contexts.

Micaela Benedicto

(b. 1977, Manila, Philippines) is a Manila-based architect, artist, and musician who founded **MB Architecture Studio** in 2007. She received her architecture degree from the University of the Philippines in 1999. Her architectural practice emphasizes thorough planning and form-finding, resulting in spatial qualities that are shaped by tropical contexts and the narratives of her clients. In her art, Benedicto constructs three-dimensional forms and uses diverse media to explore impermanence, memory, and loss. Her architectural and musical backgrounds inform her visual art, which merges geometric form, pattern, and sequence to examine the interplay of truth, imagination, and perception.

Zubu Design Associates

Founded in 2010 by principal architect **Buck Richnold Sia** (b. 1980, Cebu City, Philippines), **Zubu Design Associates (ZUBU DA)** is a Cebu-based progressive architecture and design studio. Buck graduated from the University of San Carlos. The firm values the evolution of architecture, offering innovative solutions while respecting historical lineage. ZUBU DA's diverse portfolio encompasses residential, commercial, hospitality, and recreational projects, consistently aiming for efficient construction and impactful design that both challenges and advances architectural traditions in the Philippines.

Studio Impossible Projects

is a design studio operating in both the Netherlands and the Philippines, dedicated to challenging conventional notions of architecture and construction. Led by **Jasper Niens** (b. 1980, Almelo, The Netherlands), a Dutch artist and researcher, and **Rick Atienza** (b. 1977, Gorssel, the Netherlands), a Filipino-Dutch expert in cross-cultural management, the studio creates functional structures that blend with their surroundings and minimize environmental impact. Their practice emphasizes ongoing research into materials and building methods, resulting in innovative designs that are executed simply and efficiently, bridging art, architecture, and sustainability.

Keshia Stephanie Lim

(b. 1992, Cebu City, Philippines) is an accomplished architect who graduated from the University of San Carlos in 2016 and earned her Master of Architecture with distinction from the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London in 2019. She founded the Cebu-based practice, **San Studio Architecture**. Placing Fourth in the Philippine Architecture Licensure Exam, Keshia is not only known for her academic excellence but also for her gentle, introspective personality and love for music, songwriting, photography, and creative pursuits beyond architecture.

Jason Buensalido

(b. 1981, Manila, Philippines) is Principal Architect and Chief Design Ambassador of **Barchan + Architecture**, a renowned figure in contemporary Filipino architecture. A University of Santo Tomas College of Architecture alumnus and Gold Awardee from the Ateneo Graduate School of Business, he is also an ASEAN Architect. Buensalido founded (now Barchan + Architecture (formerly known as Buensalido + Architects) in 2006. His studio is acclaimed for its creative and progressive design approach, preserving heritage, uplifting communities, and delivering timeless architectural experiences that inspire positive change and a better world.

Ronnie Yumang

Balika Rammed Earth, established in 2018 by **Ronnie Yumang** (b.1970, Quezon City, Philippines), revolutionizes rammed earth construction in the Philippines by combining ancient techniques with patented technology for earthquake resistance. Their skilled team transforms raw earth into durable, artful structures that honor heritage while meeting modern, tropical demands. Driven by innovation and a respect for nature, Balika creates sustainable, meaningful buildings that celebrate craftsmanship and authenticity. Their mission is to redefine construction, making each project a legacy of regenerative design that harmonizes with land and tradition. Ronnie graduated from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in 1992.

Ray Villanueva

Kawayan Collective is a Philippine enterprise co-founded by **Ray Villanueva** (b. 1982, West Virginia, USA) and **Amy Villanueva**, dedicated to promoting bamboo as a sustainable construction material. Ray received his Bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland in 2005 and his graduate degree from the University of Washington – Seattle in 2007, while Amy received a Bachelor's degree from Willamette University in 2002. Based in Dauin, Negros Oriental, in the Philippines, the social enterprise organization aggregates, processes, and distributes high-quality, durable Philippine bamboo, delivering construction-grade products that rival traditional materials. It was recognized with the Presidential Award for Best Small Business in 2024. The affiliated **Kawayan Design Studio**, in collaboration with **Rhalf Abne** (b. 1994, Philippines), specializes in innovative architectural and construction solutions utilizing bamboo. Rhalf graduated from Mapua Institute of Technology in 2014.

Arts Serrano

One/Zero Design Co. is an architecture studio based in Escolta, Manila, led by **Arts Serrano** (b. 1988, Manila, Philippines). Arts graduated from the University of Santo Tomas in 2010. The studio focuses on creating designs rooted in Filipino identity, heritage, and context, with projects ranging from city planning and public space activation to retail and heritage building regeneration. Renowned for innovative approaches and community engagement, One/Zero has received multiple recognitions and is dedicated to revitalizing Manila's historic district through contemporary, contextually relevant design solutions.

Carlo Calma

Carlo Calma Consultancy is an innovative design studio founded by Carlo Calma (b. 1981, Makati City, Philippines) dedicated to pushing the boundaries of architecture, construction, and design thinking in the Philippines. Carlo graduated from the Architectural Association in London, UK, in 2009. Carlo Calma was the designer of the Philippine Pavilion at the 2025 World Expo in Osaka, Japan. Since 2014, the studio has explored nation-building, sustainability, and technology, earning recognition for provocative visions and a commitment to cultural excellence.

BER SAB ARC Design Studio

is a forward-thinking architectural practice based in Davao City, Philippines, known for its innovative approach to design and technology. Founded by **Neil Bersabe** (b. 1992, Philippines) in 2014, the studio excels in research, development, and experimentation, utilizing advanced tools like building information modeling (BIM) for smart, flexible project solutions. Committed to delivering top-tier technical competency, BER SAB ARC offers expertise in 3D visualization, virtual reality, and computational design. Their mission is to provide creative, adaptable, and client-focused architectural solutions for the future. Neil graduated from Ateneo de Davao University in 2014 and the Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia in 2022.

Writers

Bianca Weeko Martin

is a Filipina-Indonesian writer and architecture scholar based in Toronto. Her work fuses architectural practice with theory and personal narrative, as seen in her book "Architectural Guide Manila" (DOM Publishers, 2024) and her acclaimed Master's thesis, "The White House," which explored her ancestral home in Bulacan. An advocate for artists in Toronto and the Filipino diaspora, Bianca led a Canada Council for the Arts-funded research project on alternative publishing and regularly writes for publications including Azure Magazine and Alon Journal. In practice, she specializes in large-scale public infrastructure projects, translating narratives into tangible design, and has held roles with leading artists, institutions, and firms. Her interests also include martial arts, scuba diving, and foodways.

Timothy Augustus Y. Ong

is an architect and cultural heritage worker focusing on the documentation and conservation of the built environment in hot and humid climates. His research and practice explore the intricacies of tropicality and architecture, including their underlying power dynamics and colonial underpinnings. He has worked on Philippine cultural landmarks, including the Manila Metropolitan Theater and Rizal Memorial Coliseum. In 2023, he obtained an Erasmus Mundus joint master's degree in architecture, landscape, and archaeology and was the 2023–24 graduate intern for the Getty Conservation Institute's Conserving Modern Architecture Initiative.

Steffi Sioux Go Negapatan

is an architect based in Cebu City, Philippines. She is the other half of SGMNarchitects, a design team with an intuition for modern and effective spaces which she founded with Miljo Negapatan.

On occasion, she writes for books and features for BluPrint, one of the Philippine's leading architectural publications, and Kanto.PH, a digital magazine featuring Filipino design and creatives.

Angel Yulo

is a writer and editor based in Metro Manila. She previously served as an editor for the Manila and Hong Kong offices of AECOM. Prior to that, she was the managing editor of BluPrint, the leading architecture and design magazine in the Philippines.

Dominic Galicia

is a modernist architect committed to heritage conservation. He earned his professional degree in architecture from the University of Notre Dame in 1988, where he was a Notre Dame Scholar, and pursued graduate studies at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. He established Dominic Galicia Architects in 2001, a design-focused practice recognized for its conceptual clarity and attention to detail. Among the firm's most notable projects are the National Museum of Natural History in Manila, the St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori Parish Church in Makati, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish Church in Antipolo, all featured in the 2024 Architectural Guide to Manila from DOM Publishers of Germany. His Kilyawan Farm Resort in Batangas has received multiple honors, including a Good Design Award (Japan, 2024) and a World Architecture Festival commendation (2023).

A leading voice in heritage conservation, Galicia serves as the Philippines' Voting Member in the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth-century Heritage (ISC20C). He was President of ICOMOS Philippines (2014–2017) and advised the revival of historic Escolta in Manila. He has also served on the Executive Council of the NCCA National Committee on Monuments and Sites.

He is a recipient of the Notre Dame Distinguished Asian Pacific Alumni Award. In 2022, he was elevated to the College of Fellows of the United Architects of the Philippines.

Caryn Paredes-Santillan

is an alumna of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) College of Architecture and Fine Arts. Under the MEXT scholarship, she pursued advanced studies in Japan, completing her Master of Engineering and Doctor of Engineering in Architectural Theory and Design at the University of Tokyo in 2004 and 2007, respectively. Currently, she serves as a Research Associate for cultural heritage projects at the UST Center for Conservation of Cultural Property in the Tropics (UST-CCCPET) and as the International Relations Coordinator of the UST College of Architecture.

Her professional work reflects a strong focus on architectural theory and cultural heritage conservation. She has contributed to several Conservation Management Plan (CMP) studies for significant Philippine landmarks, including the Walled City of Intramuros, the Basilica Minore de San Sebastian, the Manila Central Post Office, the Intendencia, the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), and the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC). She also served as Project Manager for the Delimitation of the Core and Buffer Zones of the Baroque Churches of the Philippines (2012) and for Selected National Cultural Treasures (2015) for the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

In 2021, she was the Overall Coordinator for the mASEANa International Students Workshop 2020+1. Her research interests include modern Asian architecture, architectural morphology, and phenomenology.

Joseph AdG Javier

graduated from the University of the Philippines with honors in 1995 and secured his Philippine license to practice in 1996.

While working for various top architectural and realty firms, Javier established JDSM (formerly Joseph AdG Javier, Architects) in 1996. Javier is also one of the co-founders of the Architecture Program (BENARCH, formerly SDAAR) of the School of Design and Arts of Dela Salle – College of Saint Benilde Manila (DLS-CSB), eventually serving as an adjunct program administrator and industry consultant. He was also the Exterior COO of Benilde Architecture + Design Consortium (BADC). In 2018, Javier was the Head Mentor of the DLS-CSB Hub of Innovation for Inclusion (HIFI), the enterprise incubation laboratory of the college. He was president of the Alabang Chapter of the United Architect of the Philippines in 2008. Javier was also principal of Uttamchandani-Javier Design Studio – HK from 2008 to 2011.

Javier vanguards excellence in transformational and human-cantered design. Through JDSM, he has produced built environments that received acclaim from the local and regional design media. Javier also advocates competitiveness in the design academe. He co-designed the curricula for SDAAR (DLS-CSB) in 2008; and the 2018 and 2028 cycles. He also helmed the Theories and Design Tracks of the program in various continuous periods from 2008 to 2014. Through the SDAAR, Javier led efforts to revolutionize design education in the Philippines to be competitive within the ASEAN and APEC regions.

Danielle Austria

works in marketing, with over a decade of experience in copywriting for consumer brands and a current focus on content strategy.

Her publishing experience includes stints at adobo magazine, where she worked on digital features about the advertising industry, and the creative journal Kanto (now Kanto.PH), where she held various editorial roles. Writing for Kanto opened her eyes to architecture and design beyond utility, teaching her to appreciate the stories and contexts that give spaces and structures meaning.

Manila raised her, and she still thrives in its chaos. Language is her anchor, a way to find meaning and clarity in the everyday.

Nexus Designers

Bien Alvarez

is a multidisciplinary designer based in Manila, Philippines, specializing in digital fabrication, computational design, and craft. His practice bridges technology and materiality, using algorithmic tools and hands-on making to create innovative outcomes—from custom furniture to spatial installations. Bien's work explores the dialogue between digital and handmade, global and local, aiming to expand local craft traditions through emerging technologies. His projects reflect technical rigor and conceptual depth, balancing precision with experimentation. Committed to design as an evolving conversation, Bien seeks to shape meaningful possibilities for objects, spaces, and communities in a rapidly changing world.

Christian Lyle La Madrid

is the co-founder and CEO of LLUID, and a Manila-based architect and designer working at the intersection of architecture, computation, and fabrication. He has led high-end residential, commercial, and bespoke design projects with HFS Builders and Aidea Philippines. A graduate and former lecturer at the University of Santo Tomas, he topped the 2015 national architecture licensure exams. La Madrid explores how vernacular building traditions can be reimagined using algorithmic design and digital fabrication, bridging cultural heritage with innovation. His work has reached international platforms, including the Venice Architecture Biennale.

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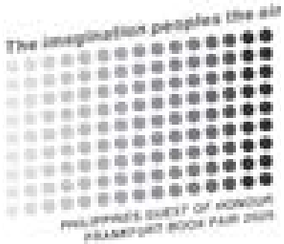

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