

5 Years in China – Commitment and Performance

1. Introduction

- No magic formula – only some good ideas + a lot of hard work
- Archurban setup office in Shenzhen in 1997. First project was Donghai Gardens Phase 1 and from then on, Archurban has completed 3 more projects with this client alone. They are Donghai Gardens Phase 2, Donghai 33 and Gang Li Gardens. The office also has projects in many cities/provinces, from Hainan in the south to Changchun in the north.
- In the beginning we worked on concepts only.
- Middle-income housing became significant and affordable as the Chinese become more affluent.
- Archurban has very clear ideas about this particular product.

2. Overview

- To establish an office in a foreign country, one needs to know the context.
- Vital statistics

	Singapore	China
GDP Per Capita 2002	181,665.86yuan	6,621.60yuan
Land Area	682.3 km ²	9.6 million km ²
Population	4.13 million	1.17 billion
Economic Status	Developed	Developing
Economic Forecast of 2002	1-2%	8%
Construction Sector Forecast of 2002	-11%	8%

- China, a developing economy – acceptance into WTO, is opening up more.
- Drastic increase in volume of construction especially infrastructural and housing projects.
- Urbanisation policy means more township and cities.
- Singapore Planners and Architects need different mindset to fit in – to perform.
- Strong Competition from America, Europe, Hong Kong, Japan and even South America.

3. Architecture

- Architects need Architecture to motivate them.
- Archurban believes that Housing Architecture is the new focus of the 21st Century.
- Every era had evolved its own architectural focus and building forms/typologies. In ancient times when monarchs controlled societies, palaces and castles were created. When religion held sway, cathedrals, temples and mosques were the architecture of the day. In modern times focus on health care came the birth of hospitals and medical/healthcare buildings. University architecture came forth with the focus on education. When tourism was born Hotels were the new architectural form. Today, the focus in China is Housing Architecture.

- Over the span of last 10 years the city dwellers of China had quickly developed from wanting merely an apartment unit to a strong interest in life-style today. Living in landscaped gardens is a standard practice already.
- We studied the needs and introduced MEHA – Maximum Environment Housing Architecture and UHA – Urban Housing Architecture.
- It is not enough to just design well.
- Many issues had to be considered from design to construction to management and to maintenance.
- We have a 3-Win Theory.

4. Practice

- Like in all other cities, practice is driven by design quality, cost and speed.
- China has a highly developed countrywide system controlling land development and construction. It is different from the US where each state has subtle differences. China is homogenous and monolithic in its regulations. Only the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are adopting new ideas more readily.
- Local practices have been transformed from national comprehensive offices to private firms. Only recently are registered architects allowed to practice individually as we know it here in Singapore.
- The process adopted by Archurban is illustrated in the following diagram.
- Foreign firms are allowed to practice up to schematic design level; working with a local counterpart is compulsory.
- Clientele come in 3 groups: the Government agencies; the Foreign (WFOE) companies; and the local enterprises which are growing very fast.
- We find doing concepts and schematic design insufficient. To do good work one has to do complete detailed design and follow-up work.
- Hence, the importance of a presence. We are growing fast also and we need architects who can commit to working full time in China.
- Coastal cities, 2nd-line cities and inland cities
- The large scale of projects demand not only good and thorough design but sound management too.
- Work is obtained through competition or direct appointment.
- Be very careful about the former as it can exhaust all your resources.
- Many fellow architects had been bitten ending up in disappointment.
- We are lucky to be able to select clients and projects.

5. Future View

- Can we use Singapore cost to earn China fee? No way until 5 years ago.
- 1997 watershed in economies of practicing in these 2 places.
- Today, they can afford US architects and even Norman Foster is working here.
- Presently may use local talents to combine with our own. Local talents can be developed as expected.

How to succeed in building up a practice by relocating overseas
Mr Tan Cheng Siong, Principal, Archurban Architects Planners

- More importantly is a new mindset to see architecture and not merely income as the motivation. There is scope and scale.
- Singaporeans were well-placed since 20 years ago, but we may be losing out now.
- We have to think beyond design of individual buildings. The demand is for a whole range of designs from Planning to Architecture to Landscape to Interior Design.
- Singapore architects should go there in teams and to think and work comprehensively.
- The days of selling a pretty perspective is over. The locals can do it better already.
- Anywhere, architectural practice is highly regulated; but Singapore is more protective than China now.
- Archurban has done relatively much to date; we would like to expand our ideas further.