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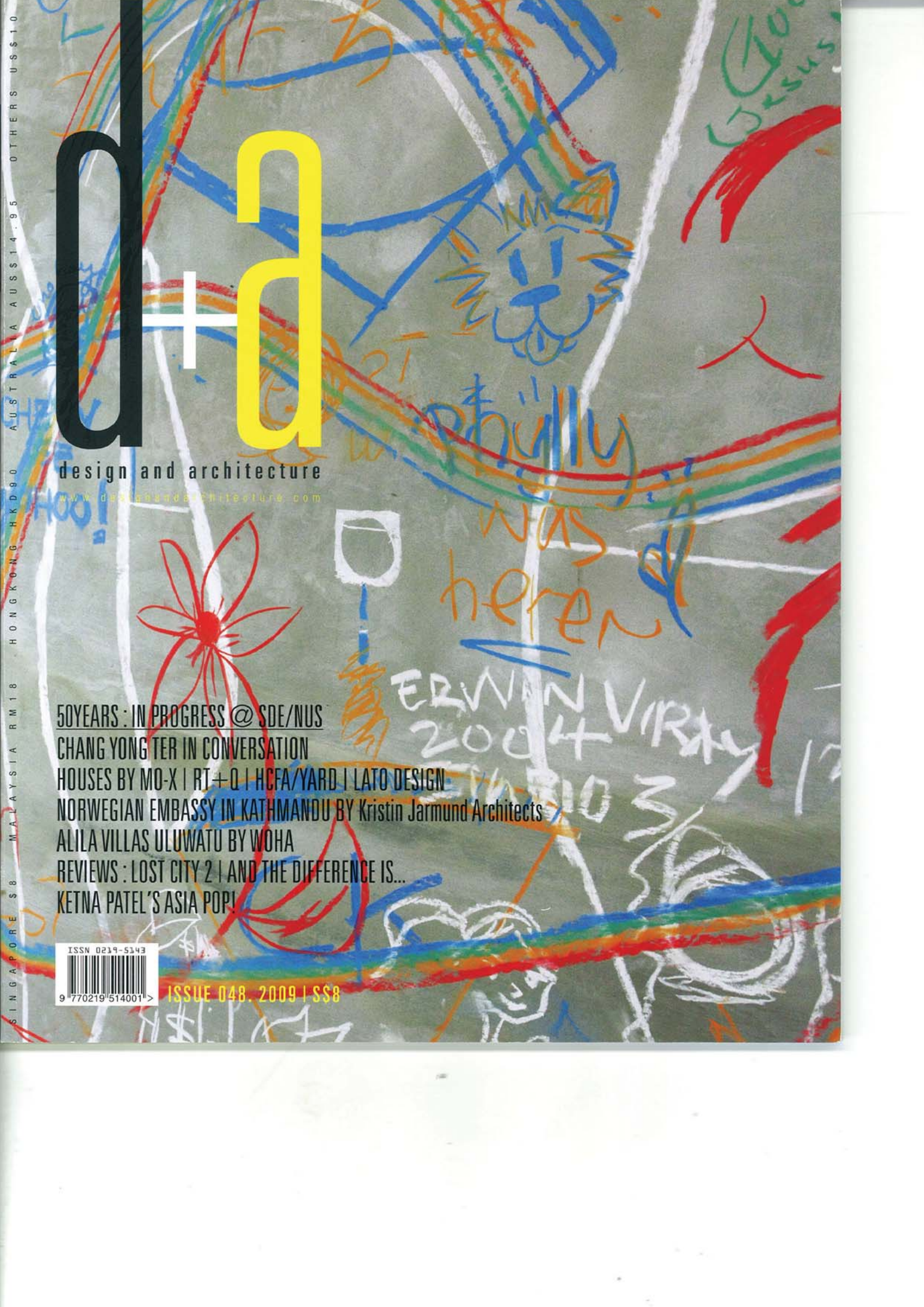
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Firmly establishing its roots for being a lifestyle destination along the famed Orchard Road, the conceptually organic architecture of Orchard Central quickly transports shoppers upwards, offering lofty views of its lush environs.

eye on central

BY MADHAVI TUMKUR | IMAGES AND SKETCHES COURTESY DP ARCHITECTS



The origins of Orchard Road lie in its spice plantations and fruit orchards that flanked either side of the 2.5km stretch. The crops have since manifested as high-end shopping malls that continue to maintain the road's commercial precedence. Thus, when it comes to designing a new shopping mall or for that matter, developing an entirely new shopping precinct, it is critical to sow the seeds of long-term success.

This was precisely what Far East Organization had in mind when it bid and won a 36,045m² land parcel on the junction of Orchard and Killiney Roads. With the majority of the shopping attractions located on the western end of the road, the developer commissioned D P Architects Pte Ltd to design a retail lifestyle that would not only draw the shoppers towards the central Somerset area, but also set the tone for a new form of retail therapy.

Aptly named Orchard Central, the 160m road frontage, with the currently being refurbished Phoenix Hotel on one side and Lend Lease site on the other, is the longest along Orchard Road. For this reason, the three properties decided to synergistically develop the entire stretch and connecting it by means of 'Discovery Walk' – a pathway located on the back side of the mall to enable pedestrians to discover a different perspective to the area.

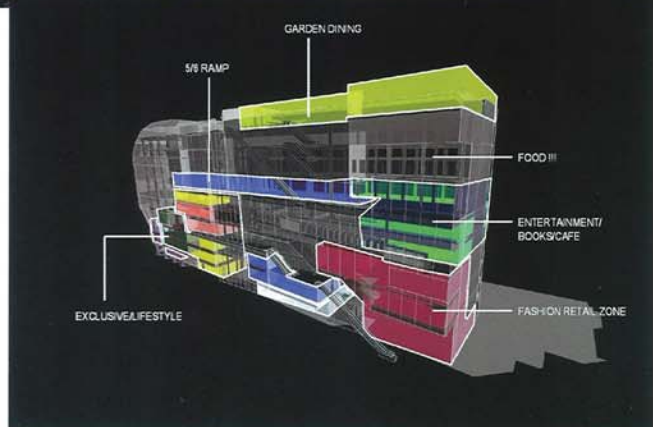
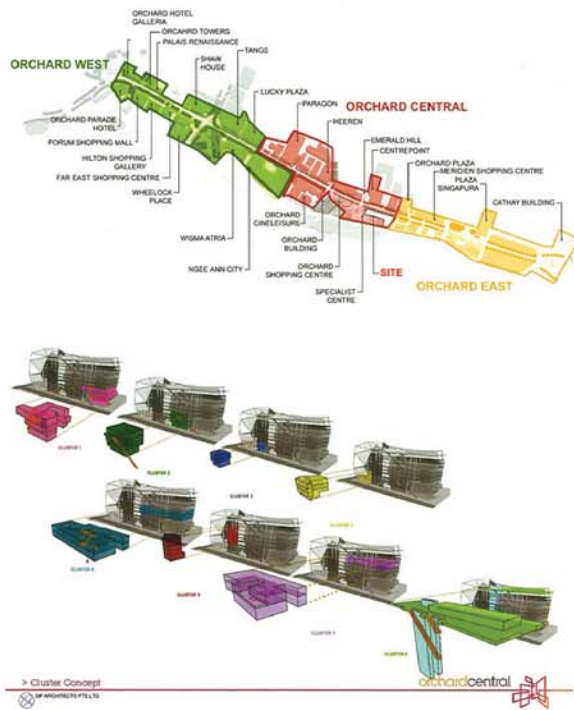
Among its other claims to superlatives, Orchard Central is also the highest vertical mall, standing head and shoulders above its low-rise contemporaries. 'The Urban Redevelopment Authority encouraged this concept by auctioning a high plot ratio and a storey cap of 16 storeys,' explains Ng San Son, Associate, D P Architects Pte Ltd. 'Aside from drawing visitors to Orchard Central, we also wanted to quickly draw them upwards to get a bird's eye view of Orchard Road area.'

For a shopping mall that started construction in 2006, to be ready by early 2009 and which had set its vision for

becoming a lifestyle landmark for years to come, a thorough understanding of shoppers' needs and expectations was very critical. 'We recognised that retailers don't just sell products; they sell a lifestyle. We therefore did not want a shopping mall like others – inward looking, with an atrium lobby and a monotonous stack of retail outlets exhibiting a conventional buy-and-go sort of a shopping experience,' Ng says. 'Instead, we proposed creating eight niche clusters and interlocking them to encourage interplay and a visual connection between them.'

For instance, there is a youth cluster which consists of a ramp for fashion shows, an entertainment, books and café cluster for leisure activities, a centre-court area for alfresco dining, with a four-volume high 'Ferrata wall' to watch rock climbers going at it as you enjoy a meal. Each cluster is also given its own distinguishing identity starting with a name, décor, outlets and experiences, and fully connected through escalators, lifts and staircases to promote interactivity.

Externally, an escalator from podium level takes you up to the 3rd, 4th, 7th, 11th,

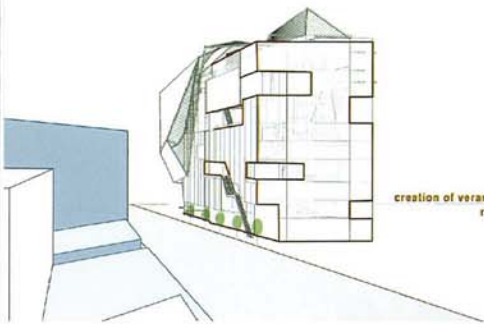


all the way up to the roof-top dining on the 12th storey without having to go inside the shopping mall. 'These destination zones are intermediate exchange floors within the tall structure, offering a fast-track to the desired experience,' Ng says. 'Being a high vertical mall, accessibility is very important. Why would people go up unless it is accessible, convenient and interesting,' he comments.

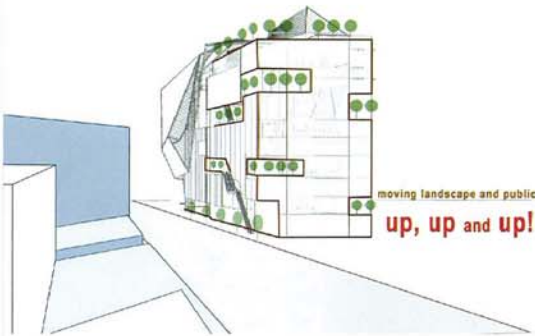
The exterior architecture makes use of innovative construction methods,

new digital technologies coupled with the development of new materials, while continuing to foster an ongoing dialogue between art and architecture. 'Instead of just creating a structure to install art within, we want the building to be a work of art in itself. Our aim was to blend art within the architecture,' Ng says.

To achieve this, the traditional form of shopping mall façade: opaque, monotonous and dormant, was done away with. In its



creation of verandahs and roof decks



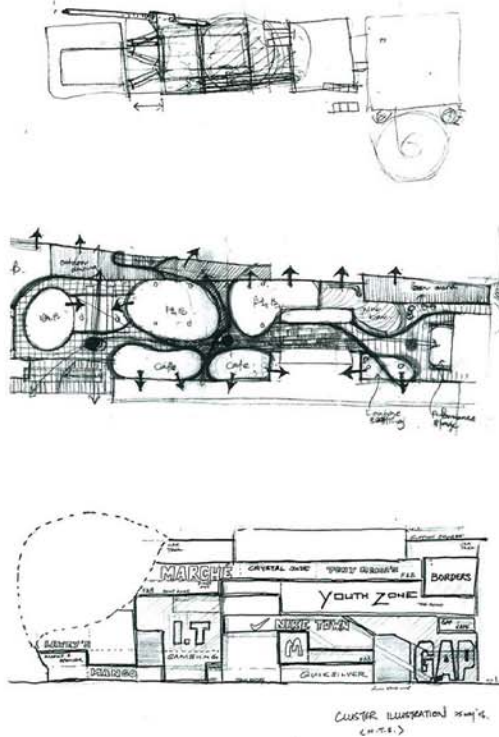
moving landscape and public
up, up and up!



place, the structure was given an animated and active outer shell through the use of LED lights and pop-in and pop-out grids in various dimensions. 'Only the pop-out grids will be illuminated. At night they will animate and create a colourful spectrum of lights,' Ng informs. 'The lighting effect can also be used during festivals to create an interesting festive flair.'

A 'jewel box' retail space in a diamond faceted enclosure is cantilevered on the 2nd level; its sculptural form immediately visible to the shoppers from the ground. On the eastern end of the building, an architectural web structure made from aluminium tubes and fitted with LED lights was designed to cover the building's carpark. 'Instead of covering the carpark with a concrete façade, we wanted to do something iconic to firmly position Orchard Central not only along the Road, but also in the minds of the people.'

Based on an organic concept, the 60m web structure evolved naturally to its present shape and acts as a breathing skin to enable ventilation. It also acts as a 3D canvas for a sound and light animation developed by digital artist Matthew Ngui. 'Instead of just attracting people from Orchard Road, the digital animation is intended to also attract people from



the Istana, Plaza Singapura and Cathay Building,' Ng says. Even the entranceway is being conceptualised by artist Gary Carsley to give it a distinct identity and interplay art with architecture.

And while the innovative external architecture lures the visitors to its dynamic interiors, the intermittent verandah spaces and landscaped roof-decks look out onto the scenic environs of Orchard Road. 'We came up with this form of a reverse concept because we found no one was looking into Orchard Road and its lush surroundings and appreciate the efforts made by the National Parks Board for creating a picturesque streetscape,' Ng says. In addition, there are also two subterranean level retail floors called 'The Med' that borrow their design from the Mediterranean. 'These basement levels will link Centrepoint and Somerset MRT,' Ng informs.

The design of Orchard Central is almost organic just like a plant, taking root under ground, sprouting above ground and branching out higher up. With its construction, it appears that the symbolic urban seed of success has been sown. +

Log on to www.orchardcentral.net for more on Orchard Central by Far East Organization