

LAUD Architects – Eyeing the world stage

The home-grown architectural firm is set for the next phase as it ramps up overseas projects while staying rooted in design excellence

LAUD Architects has come into its own with almost 12 years of practice, starting from a small outfit of five staff in 2004 to a mid-sized firm of 35. Attributing its success to the grace of God at work, the architectural firm is setting its eyes on the next stage of growth by expanding its footprint and garnering new project types. Managing Director, Joseph Lau, noted that many Singapore architectural firms have learned much from internationally reputed consultants over the past few decades through joint ventures and Singapore has come of age as a world city with world-class architecture.

"With our experience in an array of project types, we would like to export and share our experience with other countries, especially through Singapore's journey from third-world to first," he says. "Being a home-grown company, we continue to do more international projects to bring our ideas to the world and share that with other countries."

Currently, about 10-15 per cent of LAUD's projects are in overseas markets spanning Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, India, Cambodia and New Zealand. "In China, we were involved in the design concept for a few mixed-use projects. Recently, a developer, from Hebei, saw one of our condominium projects in Singapore. They liked the design and thus appointed us to design a pair of residential twin towers in Hebei," Mr Lau says.

"Apart from the large mixed-use development in Hangzhou, we were also involved in the master-planning of a medical township in Zhengzhou." Elsewhere, LAUD has also been invited to compete in international competitions including in the Philippines and Qatar – a sign that its reputation is gaining traction overseas.

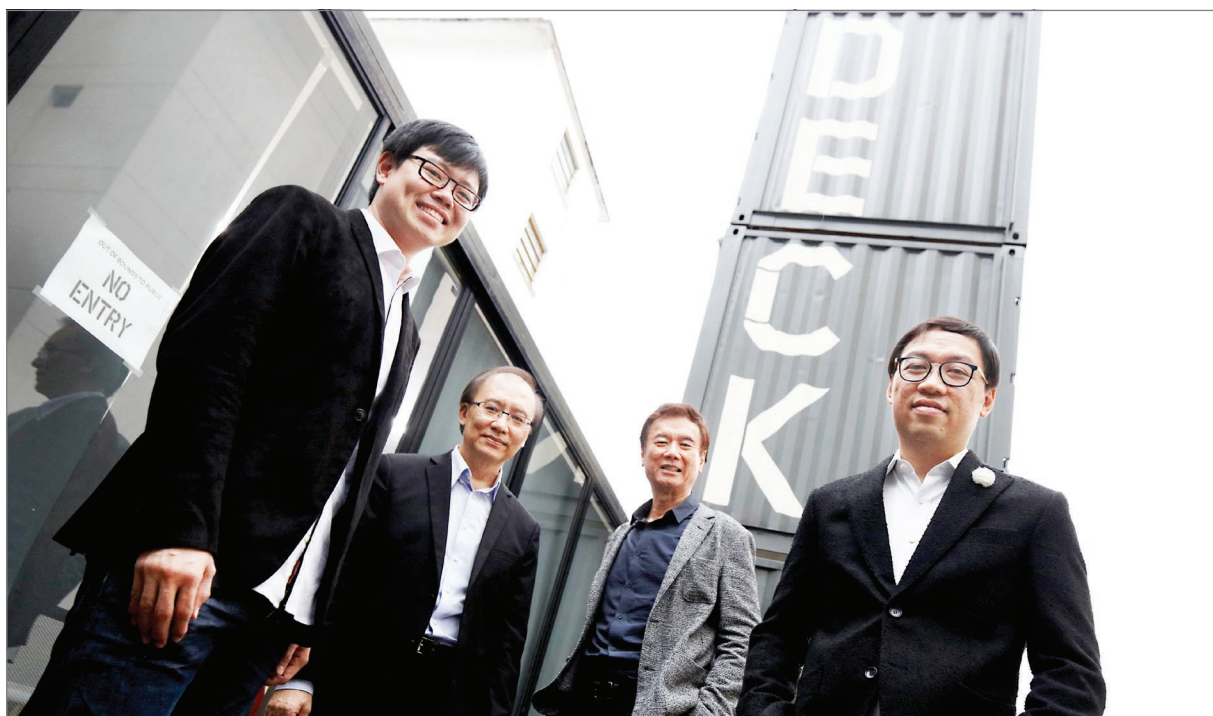
Retaining its sweet spot

LAUD has undertaken a wide range of projects including churches, condominiums, commercial complexes, community and civic institutions, hotels, office and industrial buildings.

Besides churches, LAUD also designed several major residential projects, including the 659-unit The Parc condominium in West Coast for CEL Development. The firm also designed Eight Court-yards Condominium for Frasers Centrepoint Homes and Far East Organisation in 2010 and subsequently the Philips APAC Center, a corporate/industrial building housing the business units of Philips Electronics Singapore.

"We believe we sit squarely in the sweet spot between large commercial firms and small design firms whereby we have the capabilities, experience and personal touch to service large projects yet still retain the small boutique feel as directors personally attend to each project," says LAUD director Melvin Tan.

To clinch the contract for Philips APAC Center, for instance, LAUD had to compete with the major players in the fraternity.



From left: LAUD Architects' Director Melvin H J Tan, Director Jason Bok, Managing Director Joseph Lau Tse Kit and Deputy Managing Director Ho Tzu Yin at their Award Winning project DECK. PHOTO: DON WONG

Mr Tan believes the firm had trumped its bigger rivals by fielding a strong team of sub-consultants, tying up with the best people it could find and providing a design that was unique. The design introduced an indoor street, similar to an atrium space, not commonly found in industrial buildings nor corporate offices. "We are always excited to be able to deliver a design that brings delight to our clients, as the building is put in use," Mr Tan says.

Design excellence

Indeed, design remains the cornerstone of the firm. Mr Lau notes that design competitions can sometimes go out of bounds as players pit against one another by height or iconic design, and forget the basic objective.

"Despite our wider focus, we never lose sight of our role as an architect. We are not just here for design, innovation or to garner awards but to also uphold our basic role as architects, and that is to raise the quality of living for occupants through our work," he says.

A case in point is the DECK project, a pro bono work that LAUD did for 2902 Gallery, a photographic gallery at Prinsep Street. "We don't say no to interesting and challenging projects, even small ones," Mr Tan quips.

LAUD Deputy Managing Director, Ho Tzu Yin, shares that the firm thought out of the box and designed a gallery that comprises shipping containers. "This transformed the whole way people think of art galleries."

Despite this being their first foray into the art gallery typology, DECK was conferred the President's Design Award, Design of the Year 2015 and shortlisted as a finalist for World Architecture Festival 2015. Last year, DECK was also awarded Honorable Mention (Special Projects) and garnered Best Project of the Year (under S\$2 million) by the Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA). The firm has also garnered special mentions at the SIA Design Awards for Singapore Life Church in 2013 and Good Shepherd Place in 2014.

Since 2013, LAUD projects have consecutively been featured as finalists for World Architecture Festival Design Awards. This year, as the festival moves to Berlin, LAUD has had two projects shortlisted, namely Philips APAC Center and Grace Assembly of God.

Embracing sustainability and technology

LAUD is also riding the sustainability wave in the built environment. For one particular Green Mark Platinum project, it is taking that a

step further to introduce elements into the design that will serve to educate and remind the building users of its green features. Across projects, they adhere to the idea of "contemporary tropicality", which essentially addresses issues such as solar heat gain and building shading through a modern palette of materials to create new aesthetics.

One of LAUD's completed projects, Agape Village, is a social service hub built by Caritas Singapore, the social and community arm of the Catholic Church in Singapore. Mr Ho points to the use of new lightweight materials to create a unique environmental envelope as a modern adaptation to the traditional ventilated blocks, to create naturally ventilated spaces that are also shielded from the direct sun.

Fostering a sense of community

Another key aspect of the LAUD manifesto is the aspect of "Social Interaction and the Sense of Community", in other words, how they design spaces to encourage and support social interactions.

This is very much evident in the array of vegetated terraces that have been introduced at multiple levels of Agape Village, to serve as both spill-out spaces as well as a green relief within the building. The central atrium where the staircases are located also acts as a communal area for the occupants to gather. This idea is also employed, on a larger scale, at Philips APAC Center, where the creation of an internal street has become the collaborative heart of the business.

For church designs in Singapore, the firm is among the first to introduce the concept of "fellowship spaces" by providing sheltered, naturally ventilated areas where church-goers can interact with each other before and after services. These spaces, as seen at Grace Assembly of God Church and Covenant Evangelical Free Church, foster a sense of community among the members and have proved to be very popular.

LAUD has embraced technology early rather than adopted a wait-and-see approach. As a local pioneer in BIM (Building Information Modelling), LAUD's office is fully BIM capable across the various project scales and has received BCA BIM awards at project level for Grace Assembly of God Church and Singa Hills Condominium, as well as being conferred the BCA BIM GoldPlus Award (Organisation) in the inaugural year of this award.

For both public and private projects, there is an increased push by the government for buildability and quality for the industry. Director Jason Bok added that in line with this, LAUD has actively adopted in their current projects new construction technologies and manpower reduction efforts through initiatives such as Prefabricated Bathroom Units (PBU), Prefabricated Pre-finished Volumetric Construction (PPVC), Virtual Design & Construction (VDC) and Design for Manufacturing and Assembly (DfMA). This will ensure that LAUD is not only up-to-date but stays ahead of its peers in the building industry.



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LAUD
ARCHITECTS

*Enhancing Quality of Life
Through Design*

*Fostering Social Interaction
& Sense of Community*

*Design In Harmony
with the Environment*

*Reinterpreting
Contemporary Tropicality*

*Embracing Sustainability
& Technology*

Praise & Glorify the Lord

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