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INTERVIEWS

BYOUNG CHO

ZHANG KE

SOU FUJIMOTO

ARCHIDEA

COLOPHON

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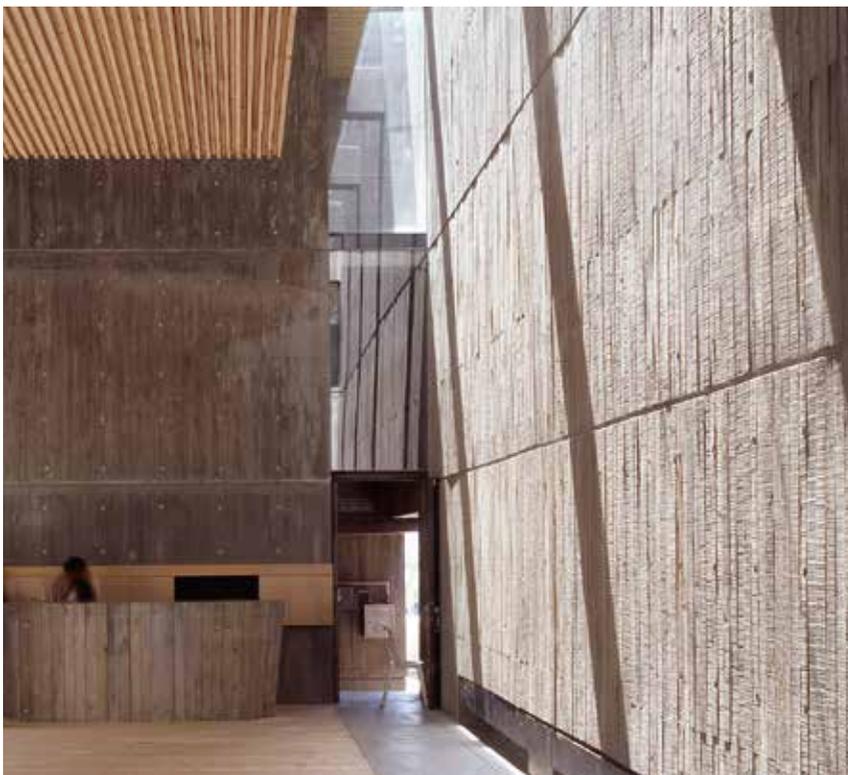
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FRONTCOVER: SOU FUJIMOTO, PROJECT THE WHITE TREE, MONTPELLIER, FRANCE

Image: SFA + NLA + OXO + RSI

ArchIdea is a bi-annual magazine that features profiles well known and upcoming architects from all over the world. Connected to the architect presented ArchIdea covers a typical architectural feature that is linked to the architects' work. The magazine is published by Forbo Flooring and also contains some of the latest projects in which our floor covering has been installed.

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INTRODUCTION

As in other parts of the world, modernity has spread across Asia in an unstoppable flood. The pace of change, and the form in which it manifests itself, has differed from one region to another. But no country has escaped all the radical processes of modernization such as mushrooming cities, advances in technology and an increasingly globalized economy. It has been a challenge for architects to decide what stance to take towards the modern paradigm. A specific question has been whether architecture should aim to be international in style, should hark back to regional archetypes in reaction to the loss of identity, or should aspire to a blend of Occidental and Oriental traits.

Although the developments in Japan, Korea and China have each followed a different course, it is striking how the present generation of architects in all three countries seem to be converging onto the same track. The architects Zhang Ke (China), Byoung Cho (South Korea) and Sou Fujimoto (Japan) are seen as pioneers, their work setting a trend in their respective homelands. It is clear from the

interviews with them that they share an open-minded, inquisitive attitude. None of them is constrained by a dogma; in each case they seek the most satisfying and interesting solution in the given context. The result in all three cases is an unostentatious but exciting, individual and rich architecture.

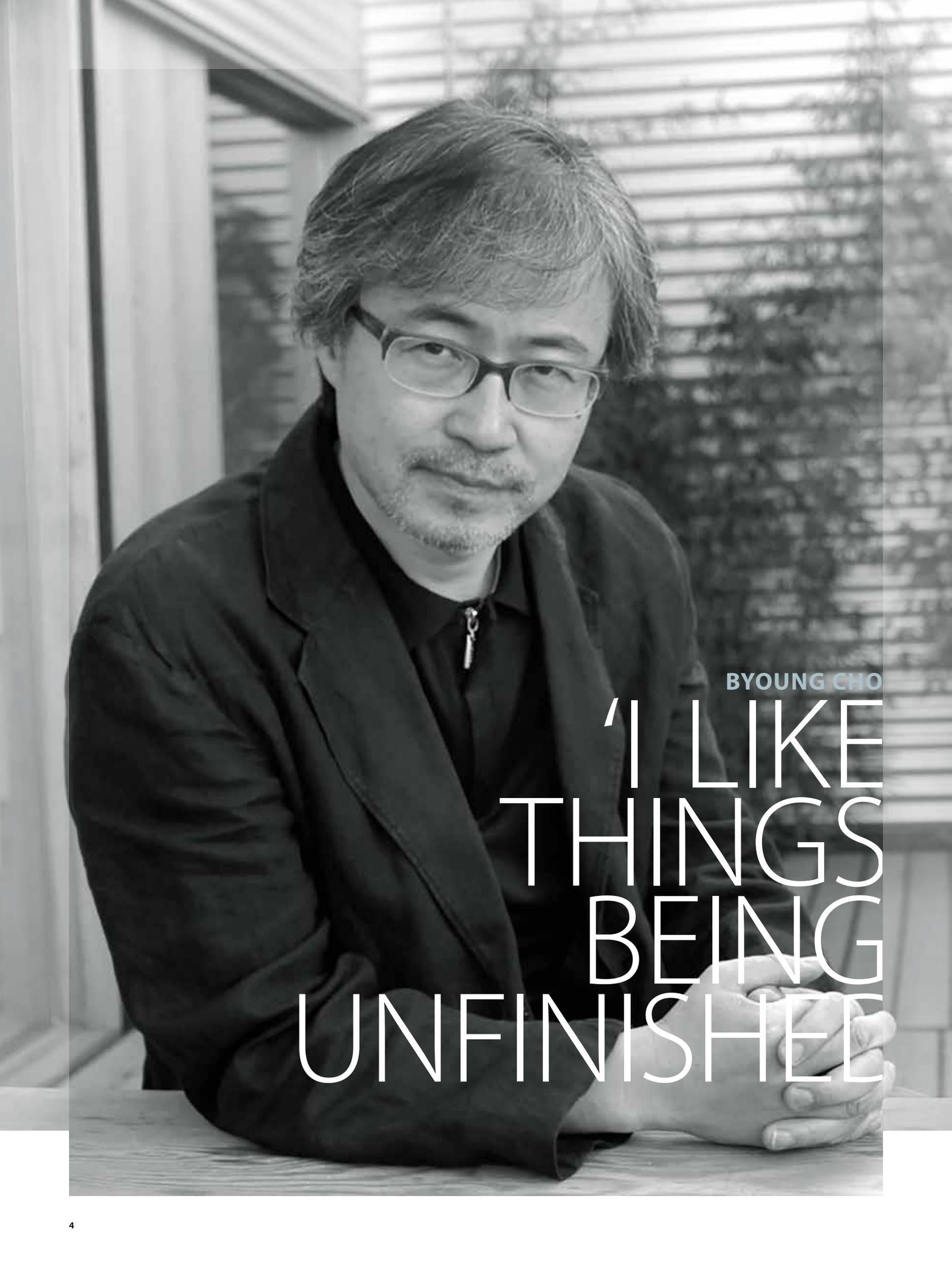


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The interiors of several projects involving the use of floors and furniture surfacing from Forbo Flooring are included as a form of inspiration. The projects are located in various parts of the world and show the many possibilities provided by Forbo's products.



BYOUNG CHO

'I LIKE
THINGS
BEING
UNFINISHED

THE ARCHITECT BYOUNG CHO ACCEPTS THAT ARCHITECTURE IS A MAN-MADE PHENOMENON BUT HE ENDEAVOURS IN HIS WORK TO RESTORE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE. "I WANT USERS TO BE AWARE OF THE SUNRISE AND THE SUNSET AND OF HOW THE COLOUR OF THE SKY CHANGES THROUGHOUT THE DAY."



EARTH HOUSE, YANGPYEONG-GUN, GYEONGGI-DO, SOUTH KOREA (2009)
Photos: Wooseop Hwang

Boxes and arrangements of boxes – the architecture of the Korean architect Byoung Cho, founder and director of BCHO Architects Associates, seems to celebrate the virtues of the box. To mention a couple of examples, his Earth House is a box which is completely sunken into the ground except for a courtyard opening to the sky, and his own house outside Seoul consists of four boxes with a courtyard in the middle.

In his house on the outskirts of Seoul, seated at a dining table looking out over the hills, Cho explained what the box means to him. "Complex building shapes can be beautiful, but never as beautiful as simple ones. The box is a shape which is easy to draw and to make. The simplicity and effortlessness of the box has almost the force of a moral imperative to me. However, my architecture does not revolve around the box itself, but around the relationships a box forms with the surroundings and with other boxes. It's a question of the flow or energy created by the box or arrangement of boxes."

- Straight horizontal and vertical lines rarely appear in nature, apart perhaps from the horizon itself. Is your fondness for the box shape a way of emphasizing that architecture is a man-made thing which is separate from nature?

"I never thought about it that way, but it could be true. The straight line is the simplest way to say 'I am a human being and this is where I dwell'. My main aim is to stimulate people to experience the place. Architecture is for me about seeking a relationship with nature by making the building frame the surroundings."

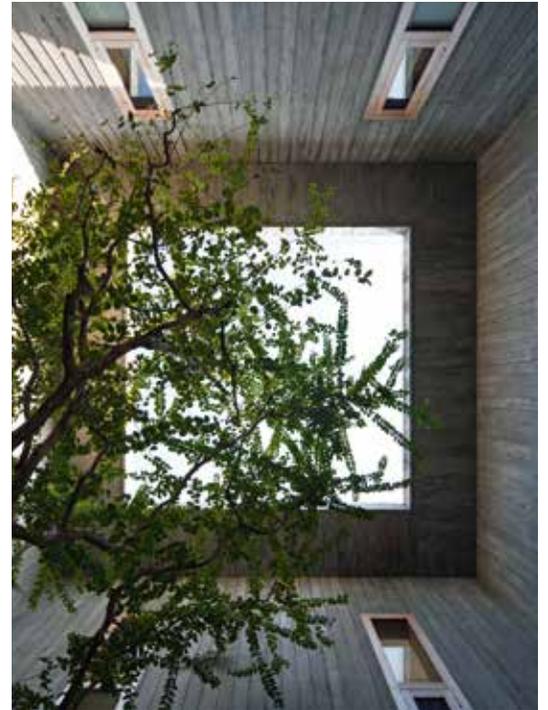
- A box is usually regarded as utilitarian, as a device for containing things. But you seem to treat it as having an almost spiritual value. Can you explain why?

"An empty box can be very beautiful. It is a beauty which has occasionally had a strong impact on me, for instance when I visited a church near Lake Konstanz, on the border of Austria and Switzerland. The church was a simple, stretched box, and inside it was very serene. That space was the inspiration for the Camerata Music Studio and Café. I am also fascinated by empty utilitarian buildings such as disused barns or warehouses. Perhaps the honesty and minimalism of farm and industrial buildings appeals to me because I was raised with a Confucian ethic that advocates sobriety and honesty."

"When I returned to Korea after years of study in the USA, I visited the dwelling of one of Korea's most famous scholars, Yi Hwang (1501~1570, ed.). It was a shock to see his tiny, simple, almost empty room. All it contained was a small desk and a small closet, the lower part filled with books and the upper part with his clothes. It was all he possessed and all he wanted to possess. I was deeply moved by his frugality. It demonstrated that life can be simple and you don't need many things around you. When you are in an empty room, your mind has a chance to shake off the fuzziness and to clarify itself. You can think and concentrate better."

- Are you implying that it would be better for us to live in a space like a monk's cell?

"An empty box does have something of that atmos-



FOUR BOX HOUSE, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (2007)
Photos: Wooseop Hwang

phere doesn't it? But it also has to have materiality and the empty box gains beauty when its materiality is an honest one – like an old wooden apple box. I am not saying that a pure white box is bad, because I have experienced some very beautiful 'white boxes' like the Danish pavilion at the 2014 Venice Biennale. But I have a deep love for materials like wood, steel and concrete, for their character and tactility."

- Some of your more recent projects, like the Twin Trees towers in Seoul, have curves. Are you abandoning your fidelity to the straight line?

"Computers and software make it a lot easier to design with curves nowadays. Curves are easy to draw and easily converted into detailed specifications for construction. So I have nothing in principle against curves when it comes to designing and building a project. Making a curved shape has become as simple as using a hammer and nails to make an apple box. Curves are nowadays more widely accepted too. It used to be hard to justify curves because they were not functional and didn't fit well into their surroundings; they were

considered art-for-art's-sake. But now people are used to curves and they have become part of our common design language. So I am no longer an adversary of curves, as you can see in the Twin Trees. In this case the site was one that cried out for non-rectangular shapes. Besides, I have never been dogmatic about my use of straight lines. I like to experiment, and I am not afraid of trying something new."

- A least your passion for boxes seems to be undiminished. Most of your projects have more than one box. The excitement seems to be in the arrangement of boxes. Is that your aim?

"Once there are two boxes, a relationship arises between them. They are separate and they are connected at the same time. But I am just as fond of the single, isolated box. A few of my houses consist of one box. In that case I try to design the house in a way that intensifies its relationship with the natural surroundings. A relationship with nature has traditionally been very important in Korean architecture, more so than in Chinese or Western architecture. Of course some

modern architects have explored that relationship thoroughly; I am thinking here of Frank Lloyd Wright and Alvar Aalto.”

“The climate of the Korean peninsula is a harsh one, with icy winters, hot summers and frequent typhoons. Despite this the architecture here is often open to the natural surroundings, sometimes in a dramatic way. For example an entire wall may be removed so that the interior becomes one with the exterior.”

- You have designed almost all of your buildings with courtyards, sometimes with an opening to the outside world. Is the purpose to let nature penetrate into your buildings?

“Yes. It comes partly from my early experiences of architecture. I grew up in a large family in a traditional house. There was only one toilet in the courtyard and we used to knock on the door and shout hurry up, I need to go! In the courtyard, we played in the rain, felt the cold of the winter and enjoyed the gradually warmth of spring as the sun rose higher in the sky. All those elementary

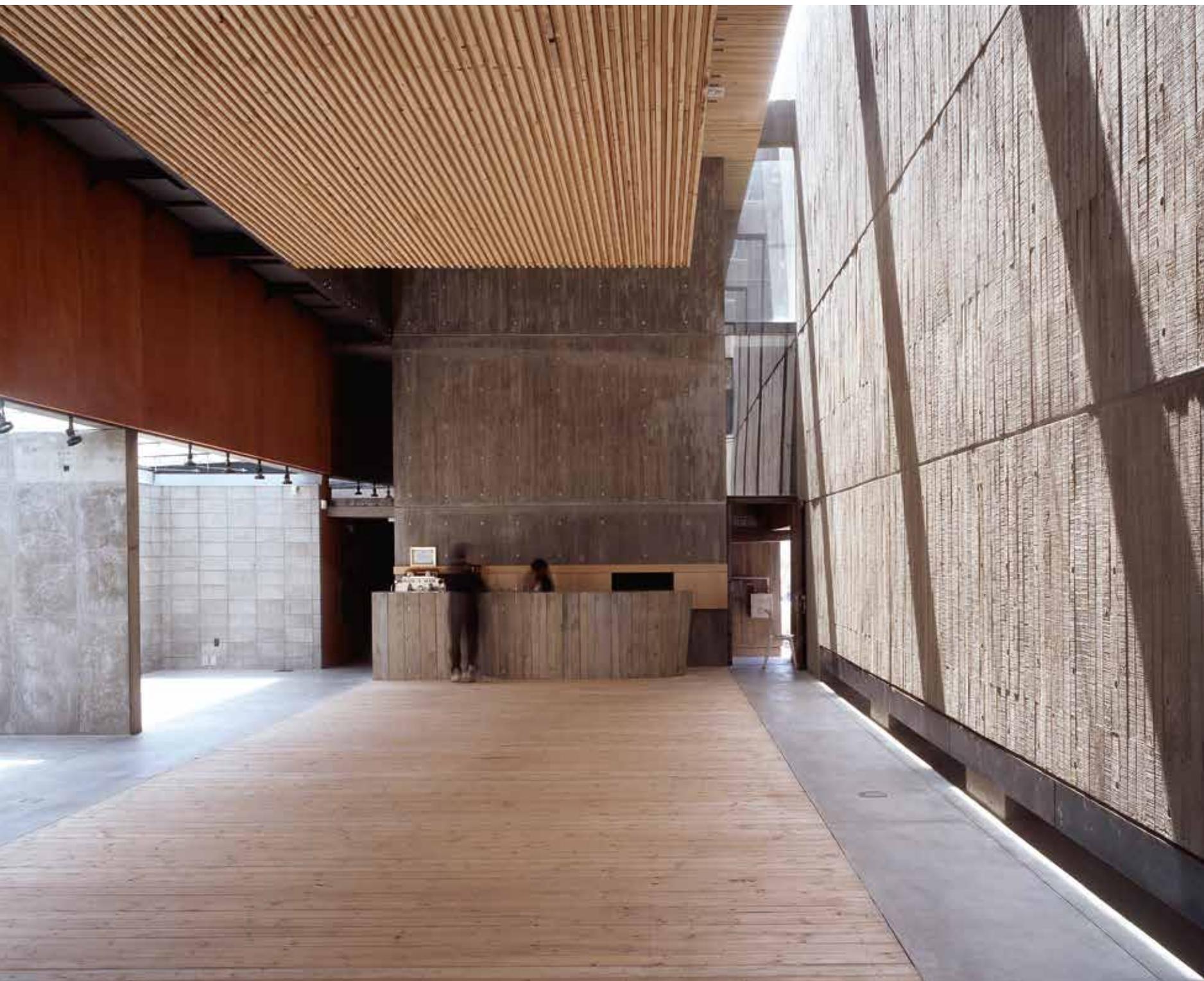
experiences happened in the courtyard. Now when I design a house, I try to offer the inhabitants the same experiences. Architecture can be a medium that connects people to nature.”

- Nature often plays a visible part in your architecture. It's not just in the way you frame the landscape, but in details like the visible grain of plywood in the concrete, the slices of tree trunk embedded in a wall, or columns clad in polished stainless steel which mirrors the surrounding hills. The Twin Trees towers here in Seoul are utterly urban, yet even they recall the twisted shapes of old tree trunks. Why?

“It isn't a conscious strategy. For example, I wasn't thinking of tree trunks in my design of the Twin Trees building. The shape arose from the line of the street and the need to create a passage through the building. It wasn't until I presented my proposal to the review board that the resemblance to tree trunks became clear, and they loved it.”

CAMERATA MUSIC STUDIO AND CAFÉ, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (2004)

Photo: Jongoh Kim





NAMHAE SOUTHCAPE LINEAR SUITE HOTEL, NAMHAE PENINSULA, SOUTH KOREA

There could not have been a better location for BCHO Architects Associates to demonstrate how their architecture relates to nature than the Namhae peninsula at the southernmost tip of South Korea. Capriciously shaped hills descend into the sea, rocks thrust a way between the trees, and the sunlight and wind can be fabulous but sometimes merciless. Byoung Cho decided to design the hotel not as a single, massive block but as seven elongated two-storey pavilions, containing the 49 guest rooms. This was possible because another architect designed the separate clubhouse with communal facilities such as the lobby and the restaurant. Golf carts are available for those guests who are disinclined to walk; as we might expect, for the hotel is part of a golf resort.

Cho is not interested in imitating or wholly blending with the natural context. Avoiding false romanticism, he accepts that architecture and nature are distinct entities that resist unification. He accordingly makes no attempt to camouflage the manmade character of the pavilions, which are more or less rectangular in shape and executed in bare concrete. But they are clearly cherished guests on this splendid peninsula; politely behaved, they sink partly into the ground and follow the topographical contours, wrapping around an imposing rocky outcrop which was left unmolested at the architect's request.

While recognizing the distinction between mankind and nature, Cho does not see it as the end of the matter. His architecture makes a conscious attempt to

bring the user into the closest possible contact with nature, and he adopts various tactics for this purpose. The most obvious of these is giving the rooms large windows on the side facing the sea and narrow slit windows towards the hills. The guest must walk through a rather dark passage before arriving at the hotel room and encountering as in a sudden revelation the sea and the sky. More original measures include the various ways in which the pavilions are made to "echo" the surrounding landscape. With the top floor of each volume somewhat cantilevered and with a modest crease in the smooth facade on one side, the pavilions hint at the granite formations of the peninsula. Oval openings in the end face of the blocks are poised to catch the light of the rising sun and so sound a reveille for the sleeping guests.

But those are not the only inventions that foster bonding with the natural surroundings. A wooded hill is mirrored in the stainless steel cladding of the columns and of a wall of the sheltered passage, at the inside of the rounded inner bend where two pavilions meet, and is thus visible simultaneously as an image and in reality. Other examples include the undulating frontage of the wine bar which recapitulates the shape of the hills, and the placing of the organically designed swimming pool at the outer margin of a terrace, evoking associations with a rice paddy. The hotel thus offers its guests every opportunity to intensify and to contemplate their relationship to nature.

Photo: Kim Youngkwan

"I am not interested in treating the building as sculpture. Compared to the work of other architects my forms are rather subdued, even in the city. The presence of the building comes from its spatial relationships, not from the shapes of the volume. I want people to understand how beautiful the surroundings are. I want them to be aware of the sunrise and the sunset and how the colour of the sky changes throughout the day. I try to go along with what the site offers. If there is a tree on the site, I don't uproot it but I do my best to create a design that adapts to the tree."

- **You also seem concerned with how the inhabitants of a house see one other – for instance in the house you designed for yourself.**

"Yes, that is right. The courtyard in my house creates a certain distance. When you are in the kitchen you can see someone else in the living room through the open space of the courtyard. You then have a choice between keeping your distance or approaching the other person. I aim to provide a balance between distance and intimacy, between privacy and being together."

"Unlike Western or Chinese architecture, Korean architecture tends to preserve distance. It is linear, with one space following another. The sequence is often folded, for example into an L shape. That is because Korea is covered with mountains so you have always to deal with the topography. An L shape may work in one situation, but another part of the house may have to be raised, or the building may be spread out over the site."

- **Would you consider your architecture essentially Korean?**

"Not entirely, because I am influenced by Western architecture; after all, I studied in the USA. But my architecture is also strongly connected to Korean culture and traditions. You can see this in the roughness of the exposed materials. Sometimes I don't want to have this roughness, but in general I love the honest exposure of the material with all its traces and imperfections."

"I like things being unfinished. I see that as a natural aspect of what we are as human beings. Koreans are not perfectionists like the Japanese. In Japan people are more self-controlled, and they feel uncomfortable about making something with imperfections. It is not their aim and they have no affinity with it. Koreans, on the other hand, love things that are unfinished. This is also clear when you compare Western minimal art to Korean minimal art. Western minimalist painters tend to use hard-edged forms, while Korean minimalists prefer ill-defined boundaries: the paint is smeared into the fabric and the colours mingle."

"This is essentially Korean, and it appears in the way we think, feel and speak. We also have a word for it, *jung*, which is hard to translate. You have a *jung* when you have known somebody for a while. You don't have to like or to hate the person, but your feelings towards them aren't cut and dried. Unlike the Japanese, we appreciate things that aren't clear cut. We don't mind fuzzy boundaries."



TWIN TREE TOWERS, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (2012)
Photo: Yongkwan Kim



'THE TRANSITION FROM
RURAL LIFE TO URBAN LIFE
IS A PROBLEM THAT
URGENTLY NEEDS TO BE
ADDRESSED'

ZHANG KE

FAR FROM MIMICKING TRADITIONAL CHINESE ARCHITECTURE, THE BEIJING ARCHITECT ZHANG KE IS TRYING TO DEVELOP A NEW KIND OF CHINESENESS; A CHINESENESS THAT RESIDES IN THE SENSIBILITY RATHER THAN IN THE FORM.



DANCING TRIANGLES, SHANGHAI, CHINA

Freshness and playfulness are the qualities that first come to mind when seeing the work of Zhang's firm Standardarchitecture. The shapes have no specific reference but often play a game with geometry.

"For me, playfulness means that we allow ourselves a certain measure of intuitiveness," says Zhang Ke, founder and director of the Beijing-based architectural office. "We try to incorporate intuition into our designs and to convey something of the same feeling to the people who will use the space and the place. Much new architecture takes itself too seriously, especially in China. It's either too self-important, or it's irrelevant or simply weird. Obviously I belong to a younger generation of architects. We are aware of the main issues, but we are not so naive as to pretend that we can save the world with our work. As a result we feel freer to explore the possibilities of architecture."

- Is that what distinguishes your work from the previous generation?

"For decades there has been a discussion on how to make a new Chinese architecture, with a focus on how to make traditional Chinese architecture more contemporary. I have never taken part in that particular conversation. Contemporizing traditional forms is for me not even a point of discussion. Traditional buildings exist and you can preserve them if you want to, but mimicking them in any way results in a totally fake or even kitsch architecture. The whole discussion in China has been less about contemporariness than about a desire for icons. But there are far too many icons in China. What I am after is to discover a new kind of Chineseness. It is a Chineseness that is not obvious at first sight. It is not consciously Chinese but it should be a quality that arises naturally. So I seek a Chineseness in the sensibility, rather than in the form. It should emerge

of its own accord in the design process. My approach is to go to a place – to the city wall of Beijing, to a hutong*, to the beautiful countryside of Tibet – without any idea in my mind, just to feel the place. The aim is to let ideas grow out of the place, rather than to import a certain preconceived shape or style. You could call it a kind of humility itself might be considered typically Chinese."

*[*A traditional, generally walled, city neighborhood with small houses – ed.]*

- It sounds like a strategy that involves two things, the person who is experiencing the place and the place itself. Is this where your work gets personal?

"The interaction of the place with the person is exactly what makes architecture interesting. No matter what ideas, concepts or discourses go into it, the architecture always has both a local and personal dimension. But that doesn't necessarily mean having a strong personal signature. I am too young anyway to have anything like a design signature. That is something that may eventually reveal itself. When the time comes the projects may all look different but people will start to realize that they have a certain continuity. Besides, deliberately repeating a particular style would just be boring. For me the essence of architecture is to be found in the location, the spirit, the emotion and in the relationship between the architecture and its surroundings. These ingredients do not necessarily combine to form an obvious style."

- Your buildings have an intriguingly abstract quality. It is often not clear what they contain or what their purpose is. Is that also part of a Chinese approach or sensibility?

"Abstraction is important, and inwardness too. Abstractness matters because it derails people's reading of the building. The building doesn't immediately



NIYANG RIVER VISITOR CENTER, DAZE VILLAGE, LINCHI, TIBET (2009)

give away what it is about, at least not at first sight. The outward appearance does not give everything away immediately, but the nature of the building unfolds inside as a sequence of sophisticated spaces. We are interested in creating a spatial quality which is both fluid and playful. In the Novartis office building in Shanghai, for example, we have been testing the notion of an organic grid system. It develops rather like growing cells. Its geometry is akin to an organic microstructure, with cells splitting and creating space in between. One outcome of this is that we were able to dispense with corridors and we ended up with more usable space. Of course they are more difficult to design. They take more time and effort to perfect."

- **There is also a certain ambivalence in your work: on one hand it is abstract and geometrical, while on the other it has a very concrete materiality.**

"The look and tactility of the building material is crucial to me. It helps root the building in the landscape, in the region and in the urban context. It also contributes a personal, emotional touch to the building. It is like a smell that suddenly reminds you of some moment in the past, like being served a dish you haven't tasted since your childhood. The sensory qualities of a building can give rise to complex feelings."

- **The context in which architects make their architecture has changed considerably. People travel far and wide and are scattered around the globe. What keeps them together are media like the internet and telephone. Is the rooting of your work in the context which you mentioned a way of counteracting the displacement and dispersion?**

"To some extent. The physical connection to the place becomes even more important when everything is virtual. A place is something you have to experience directly. But there are two senses in which our architecture is rooted: one is the physical sense and the other is cultural. By cultural rooting I don't mean imitation, but an active connection with the context, a bond that grows and changes and evolves. I see no conflict between modernity and localism. On the contrary, their alliance opens up a huge potential for creative development. My aim is to explore the deeper significance of a place from a modern perspective."

- **Many of your designs include courtyards and other internal open areas. Is the intention to provide space where people can meet, and perhaps where a sense of community can be restored?**

"I agree that our interest in courtyards has to do with social processes. Our hutong projects are good exam-

MICRO YUAN,
BEIJING, CHINA (2014)





FRENCH-CHINESE ART CENTRE, WUHAN, CHINA

Just how original and ingenious Standardarchitecture can be when playing into the cultural and physical context is apparent from the French-Chinese Art Center in Wuhan. Nothing about the building is a reference to, or a contrived modernization of, traditional Chinese architecture. Yet the design is intimately bound up with the city's location and cultural history, and can be regarded as unequivocally Chinese.

Wuhan lies at the confluence of the Yangtze and Han rivers. Through trade and other factors it has experienced a strong Western influence over the centuries. The cultural cross-fertilization left its strongest mark in the historic Tanhualin district, facing the present Art Center. The district was since time immemorial home to the city's intellectuals. Standardarchitecture has responded to this historic background in its design for the art centre. The inspiration comes not from traditional Chinese architecture but from the ink and water drawings traditionally made by Chinese intellectuals. Both the facade and the structure of the building represent this concept, as is apparent when viewing the project from above as well as from the facade itself. Concrete alternates with transparent or open sections in a way that suggests brushstrokes, a calligraphy in concrete. The shell is punctuated dissolving the mass of the building. It is an architecture that responds to the rhythm of day and night; in daylight the mute concrete dominates, while at night light shines out through the openings so that the whole building exudes a vibrant energy.

The physical infrastructure of the vicinity has also had its influence on the building's design. A 30 metre wide channel had to be kept open for flood relief at times of heavy rainfall and rising river levels. This requirement resulted in a rigorous bisection of the site. The water-filled space can be seen as a gigantic courtyard, an emptiness mirroring the sky, around which the built volumes are grouped. What initially seemed a

serious problem was cleverly transformed into the most intriguing part of the design. Standardarchitecture provided an 80 metre long hollow beam to traverse the flood channel and serve as a bridge between the two halves of the art centre. Like the main volumes, the side walls of the beam are freely perforated with glazed incisions; the brushstroke patterns return to create a lively display of light and shadow – inside in daytime, outside at night.

The French-Chinese Art Center is a venue for exhibitions, performances and lectures. Its thematic content is dominated by cultural exchange together with documentation of the changes the city has undergone. With this in mind, the building has been designed for flexible utilization. The exhibition space can be divided up according to requirements using screens that may be hoisted to the ceiling or anchored in the floor.

Striking though the architecture is, it is far from showy and it is easily comprehensible. Without ostentation, the building has succeeded in becoming an icon for cultural exchange between the local population, foreign guests and other visitors.





CITY EGG, BEIJING, CHINA (2009)
Construction by Dai Haifei



MICRO HUTONG, BEIJING, CHINA (2013)

ples of what we are trying to achieve. The cities of China are undergoing rapid change, probably even faster than the cities of Europe after the Second World War. We don't imagine we can save the world with our architecture, but even our small projects can raise questions and suggest what might be possible. We have often been criticized at first but in the end we get a lot of positive reactions from the neighbourhood."

- **The hutong is widely said to be a phenomenon on the verge of extinction. The few that remain are preserved as historic relics. So what is the relevance of your two self-initiated hutong projects here in Beijing?**

"I don't think the hutong is necessarily a thing of the past. In both our projects the intention was to prove that there are ways to be true to our times as well as to the spirit of the hutong. One project showed us that a house without a courtyard could be transformed into one with courtyard, and could then theoretically house two families. It is satisfying that the courtyard now functions as a public space where neighbors hold exhibitions and watch movies together.

Our other hutong project tells us that all the unregistered extensions built in the hutongs over the last thirty or forty years form part of an interesting history. Each courtyard used to belong to one family. Under communism that became eight families, and each household needed its own small kitchen. The result was a high population density in the hutongs. I am certain that ninety-nine percent of the additions will eventually be removed, although we are not convinced that it is necessary. Our intention is to pose the question whether the additions could be seen as a positive development. We aim to preserve the more recent historical layer, while renovating or remodelling the hutongs to support a programme beneficial to the vitality of the neighborhood - for example, an art school, a children's library, a small exhibition space, a café or a multifunctional studio space for dancing and so on."

- **You have also been responsible for some visionary projects. You proposed turning the highways of Beijing into conveyor belts for cars and you designed sky-high 'Village Mountains' to house migrants from the countryside. Then there are those living-pods for migrant workers, the 'Eggs of**

the City'. Do these works of imagination matter as much to you as the hutong projects?

"They are definitely equally important. They differ in scale but they all address the urbanization process and the living conditions of people migrating to the city. The projects all address real problems like population density, the traffic congestion that afflicts most Chinese cities and the increasingly acute land shortage. On one hand, there are our small scale projects which can be seen as proposals for new ways to use space in an urban context. They illustrate the possibility of restoring and revitalizing a community. On the other hand, there are our visionary designs which react in a more direct way to the large-scale problems of rapid urbanization. For three decades Chinese cities have been expanding without the benefit of a vision. A chronic shortage of building land has developed and now we are worryingly eating into our supply of farmland. For all those years nobody paid serious attention to those problems. The transition from rural life to urban life has created a situation that needs urgent attention."

- **Do you intend to continue making these visionary designs now you are realizing more and more built projects?**

"Certainly. We are not interested in making buildings and nothing else. At last people in China are sensing the urgency of looking beyond our day-to-day needs and thinking about what is happening to our cities. It seems to have reached a critical pitch. Now that the economy is slowing down, people are beginning to reflect on what happened over the recent decades. They are asking themselves what should be happening to make the city more enjoyable and livable in the long term."

- **Do you think that can still be achieved? Or is it already too late?**

"For a city like Beijing, I am not that pessimistic. Beijing is a future-minded city, so it makes sense to lead it strategically in a better direction. The old city has already been practically destroyed with only a few small patches of the historic city left over. And that is by pure chance. Now we need to think as well as build. That's what makes the architect's profession so exciting, especially in these times in China."

SOU FUJIMOTO

'IDEALLY,
ARCHITECTURE
SHOULD
BE
LIKE
A
FOREST'

Photo: David Vintiner

HUMAN LIFE IS AMORPHOUS AND BLURRED. THE JAPANESE ARCHITECT SOU FUJIMOTO BELIEVES THAT WE ENJOY GREATER FREEDOM WHEN THE ARCHITECTURAL SPACE AROUND US SHARES A MEASURE OF AMBIGUITY. "WHAT MATTERS IS TO FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN ORDER AND CHAOS."



SERPENTINE GALLERY PAVILION, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM (2013)

Photo: Iwan Baan

No doors, no walls, no windows, no roof. Conventional architectural elements like these are totally absent from some of the constructions by the Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto. But his aim is certainly not to abolish architecture or to dispense with its elements. In his office in Tokyo he explained about his strategies and intentions.

"I take a different attitude towards the use of architectural elements because I want to expand the possibilities of architecture. When necessary I will use a door in a conventional way, just to separate inside from outside. But if there is no need for a door I will not design one. Those are not the terms in which I think about architecture. Instead I pay attention to the surroundings, the requirements and the cultural background of the client; and then I make something nice."

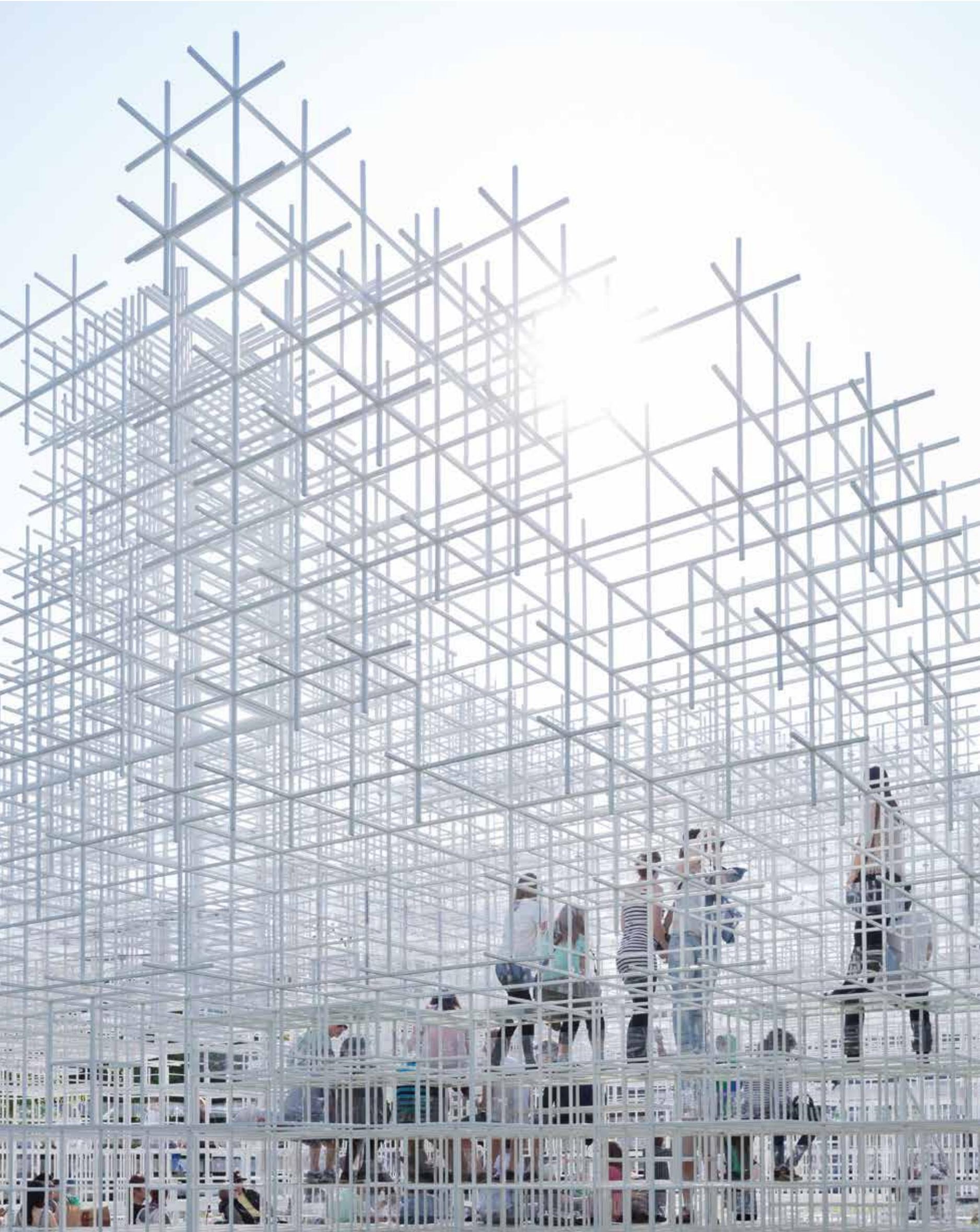
- Still, your work seems very radical at times. You can hardly call it architecture in the usual sense. Is it a rejection of the architecture we know from the past?

"I value our heritage, but in my view we can't respect the past without creating something new for the future. What I make will some day belong to the past too, after all. But I must say that I tend not to think about the differences between 'regular' architecture and my architecture. Architectural creation doesn't happen like that. For me the point is how to create more possibilities for architecture. I try to research that, especially in

my experimental structures such as the wooden house and the pavilion for the Serpentine Gallery. I wanted to extend the definition of architecture and to blur conventional boundaries in both those projects. In the case of the Serpentine pavilion there was no need to make an enclosed space, so I was free to experiment with gradual transitions. It's harder to do that for a house because you have to maintain a normal level of home comfort."

- Do the results of your architectural explorations filter through to projects of a more pragmatic kind?

"Yes. It happens instinctively when I am making a model. I like to see what happens if I apply an idea from my experiments. Sometimes it's not particularly interesting but sometimes it adds certain richness to the design. People are usually familiar with clear-cut boundaries between inside and outside, like walls and doors. I'm okay with elements like those. It's not that they are bad in some way, but they are not particularly exciting. Nor do they really add that much to user comfort. So I look for ways of creating more gradual transitions. With a window or a door your options are limited: there's inside and outside, with nothing in between. But a building with three or four layers of separation opens up new possibilities. It results in a richer architectural experience. It's a richness that is lacking in the familiar typologies."





SERPENTINE GALLERY
PAVILION, LONDON,
UNITED KINGDOM (2013)
Photo: Iwan Baan



THE FINAL WOODEN HOUSE, KUMAMOTO, JAPAN (2008)

Photos: Daici Ano

- But doesn't the blurring the boundaries make life more complicated? Everyday life is already complicated enough. I thought architecture was supposed to offer us an environment with clear boundaries and well defined functions.

"The functionalism of the twentieth century boosted productivity and efficiency, but those are not the only important aspects of human existence. I try to go beyond functionalism. Defining functions usually implies dividing life into excessively coarse categories. I feel we are not obliged to adhere to those rough categories. Human life is itself amorphous and blurred. We can be freer to do what we want, to live life as we see fit, when architectural space avoids pigeonholing us into preconceived categories. It's practically impossible to predefine or predict people's behavior anyway. On the other hand, an architect cannot avoid making definite choices. Going beyond functionalism means providing new potentials, opening up possibilities and finding a balance."

- In some of your experimental projects you seem to be approaching architecture as a bodily experience, for instance by providing multiple levels and stairways. Is your aim here to play on people's physical self-awareness?

"Yes. I find the excitement of going up and down fascinating. My approach is not of course simply a matter of creating as many levels as possible. If the client wants a flat floor, that's okay; we have other ways of creating a richer spatial experience. Every project involves finding out what kinds of behavior could be interesting and enjoyable. I aim to give my clients a space to play with in a childlike way. To me the ideal architectural experience is like walking through the winding back streets of Tokyo or exploring medieval villages in Europe. It's that sense of excitement, of discovering the unexpected, that I try to achieve in my buildings. A purely experimental structure like the Serpentine can be enjoyed in that way. People can climb up it, walk around in it and choose somewhere to sit down and enjoy the view.

Even old ladies were thrilled to explore the pavilion. It is great when architecture manages to rekindle feelings that seem to get lost in growing up. People should be able to go back to the beginning, to innocence. It should be a liberation of the body and mind."

- You once made an analogy with music when describing what you are trying to do in the experiments. Can you say more about that?

"I was thinking of the difference between Western music and traditional Japanese music. Maybe it is an oversimplification, but Western music is more about time and tempo; it is 'measured' so to speak. Japanese music is less concerned with a rhythmic flow. It is more relative, and about the relationship between notes and the densities that are created. I would like to achieve the same kind of relationships and densities in my architecture, without getting too ambiguous or chaotic. The Serpentine project is as diffuse as a cloud, but it has a strong, organizing grid which manages the chaos. So I created a contradiction in the structure of the pavilion. I don't want to blur the boundaries completely, but it is a big challenge to mix chaos and order and even go beyond that contradiction. For me it is an infinite process of questioning."

- You have often raised the images of a cloud or a forest to explain what you are looking for. What do these concepts have to do with architecture?

"A cloud is a field of different densities that changes all the time. It consists of countless identical droplets which combine in a mathematical, fractal pattern. But the concept is too pure to describe what I want. Something similar happens in a forest but it is less pure: it has more diversity, dynamics and unpredictability. In my architecture, my ideal would be to realize an artificial forest. It should have continually varying densities and dynamics, creating the possibility to move around endlessly in an enjoyable way. It should be comfortable, too, but a little unstable, maybe even a little bit scary. That way it would continue to excite and inspire. I try to integrate many aspects of architecture, but my actions



HOUSE N, OITA, JAPAN

Experimental and practical: those are the poles between which the architecture of Sou Fujimoto ranges. As for his houses, one could speak of a sliding scale on which every possible gradation between the two extremes is represented.

The Final Wooden House in Kumamoto, Japan, is little more than a stack of overlapping and crossing wooden beams. You can sit or lie in the spaces left between them; you have to rediscover your body, become a child again and clamber over the beams to find a spot. A significantly more practical, indeed habitable, design is House NA in Tokyo. The architect himself characterizes it as a hyper-artificial forest, or at least a small wood, on a modest, human scale. Its complex structure of slender columns and small rectangular surfaces, no bigger than a table top or cupboard, yields fine meshed spaces that the user must continually rediscover and appropriate, like different hiding places in a wood. House N in Oita, Japan, presents itself as a highly practical application of Fujimoto's experiments. Any family could live there, and not only a family that likes to make new discoveries daily. House N is sited amid traditional houses with sloping roofs, which are crowded together leaving room only incidentally for a small tree or shrub – the Japanese condition for suburban housing. House N is like a Russian doll, consisting of three shells, each with large rectangular openings, nested one within another. The outer shell occupies the whole site and includes a sheltered garden with

graceful little trees as a transition to the street. The two inner shells similarly bring about a gradual transition from public to private: from outside, you penetrate successively into the most private of domains. The suggestion is that there must be yet smaller volumes nested more deeply inside, one after another, ad infinitum. The occupants of the house are free to organize their domestic interior in accordance with this step by step transition, although the house actually imposes no constraints; the occupants themselves can decide what is most private.

In Fujimoto's view, it is a poor design that implements a separation between home and street solely by an outer wall, for that does meagre justice to the subtle relationship between public and private. A gradual transition, by contrast, offers every opportunity to achieve spatial enrichment. House N therefore has no hard borders, only vague, ambivalent transitions. Fujimoto compares living in this house to living in the clouds – everything is diffuse. Through the nesting of the shells, interior is simultaneously exterior and vice versa. The distinction becomes relative and equivocal; inside and outside are interchangeable, conveying a wider message that there is no real difference between the city and the home. Both consist, in the architect's words, of "an undulation of the primordial space where humans dwell."

Photo: Iwan Baan



MUSASHINO ART UNIVERSITY MUSEUM & LIBRARY, TOKYO, JAPAN (2010)
Photo: Daici Ano

are fairly simple. It is the simplicity that allows me to create new ambiguities and possibilities."

- Japanese society is often described as rule-bound and hierarchical. Is your passion to blur boundaries a reaction against that?

"Japan is hierarchical, certainly, but relationships in Japan have a lot of ambiguity too. So the hierarchy is not a simple one. I don't think my interest in blurring boundaries is a reaction to that aspect of Japanese culture. In fact it's hard to say how I am influenced by Japanese culture, because I am in the middle of it. Influences like those are unconscious. I guess even my understanding of modern Western architecture is coloured by a Japanese viewpoint. Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe were far more than functionalists; it seems to me, because their work has a mysterious aspect. Maybe I don't understand them well, but I respect that mystique of modernism. The Barcelona pavilion, for instance, has an intriguing, slowly flowing space. I feel the same fascination with traditional Japanese architecture. I love its spaces that are half divided and half connected, and I love how it treats architecture and nature as equals."

- Are you trying to create a new kind of architectural space? A non-hierarchical one, perhaps, in which no single perspective is dominant and all positions are equal?

"Architecture is certainly about different perspectives. When you see a chair in a space, that chair is the main thing and the rest becomes its surroundings. But once you sit on that chair, you see something else, the space itself. So your perception is always changing depending on your situation. To me space is never a simple object or phenomenon. I see it more as an experience which offers multiple viewpoints.

In my high school days my hero was Albert Einstein. I didn't understand his theories all that clearly, but his concept of space-time appealed to my intuition. I could relate it to my experience and to my understanding of the world. Since then I have kept up a fascination with theoretical physics, with ideas like superstring theory and chaos theory. These have remained a source of inspiration for creating innovative forms. Half of me is a scientist. I am not really so much an artist because I am more practical, experimenting all the time."



THE WHITE TREE, MONTPELLIER, FRANCE (2014)
Images: SFA + NLA + OXO + RSI



PROJECTS

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SHONAN DAIICHI HOSPITAL

Location Kanagawa, Japan

Architect JGC Corporation

Interior architect Mr. Nobushige Ochi

Interior designer Ms. Yukari, Yaguchi, Mr. Shoji Higuchi

Building contractor Kantou Kensetsu

Flooring contractor Clover Eight

Installation by Takasaki Naiso

Flooring material 3800 m² Marmoleum Marbled

Photos JGC Corporation



Marmoleum Vivace 3405



Marmoleum Fresco 3874



Marmoleum Vivace 3407





YATSUHASHI NURSERY SCHOOL

Location Aomori, Japan
 Architect Numata Design co.ltd
 Floor designer Moe Kudo
 General contractor Maruki co.ltd
 Flooring material 1300 m² Marmoleum Marbled
 Photos Ohashi photo office



Marmoleum Real 3173



Marmoleum Real 3225



Marmoleum Real 3205



Marmoleum Real 3224



Marmoleum Fresco 3828



CHAMSAEM KINDERGARTEN

Location Sejong city, Korea
 Interior architect DMP Partners
 General contractor Sejong Education Bureau
 Installation by KBE
 Flooring material 680 m² Marmoleum Marbled



Marmoleum Real 3038



Marmoleum Real 3205



Marmoleum Real 3226

I-SPONGE ENGLISH INSTITUTE

Location Uijeongbu, Korea
 Architects SangSang
 General contractor Edubox
 Installation by MK
 Flooring material 300 m² Marmoleum Marbled
 Photos Mr. Jun, ByoungMun



Marmoleum Vivace 3405



Marmoleum Real 3030



Marmoleum Real 3055



Marmoleum Real 3126



Marmoleum Real 3163



Marmoleum Real 3164



SINGING ROOM CHANG KARAOKE ROOM

Location Incheon, Korea
 General contractor Jekyoung
 Installation by KBE
 Flooring material 1500 m² Marmoleum Click
 Photos Mr. Jun, ByoungMun



Marmoleum Click 753038



Marmoleum Click 753127



Marmoleum Click 753870





INFINITY FINISHES LIMITED SHOWROOM

Location Quarry Bay, Hong Kong

Architect KplusK Associates

Flooring contractor Infinity Finishes Limited

Flooring material 750 m² Allura Flex and 50 m² Coral Classic and Welcome

Photo Pocky Chan



Allura Flex 1632



Coral Welcome 3210



GOLFZON OFFICE BUILDING

Location Daejeon, Korea

Architect Gansam

Interior architect Kukbo

General contractor Daerim

Installation by INCO B.P.S.

Flooring material 3500 m² Flotex tiles



Flotex Montana 377031



COLOR ME SPACE INTERIOR SHOP

Location Seoul, Korea

Interior designer Color me space

Building contractor Koryo building

Installation by Linoleum Korea

Flooring material 200 m² Marmoleum Marbled



Marmoleum Vivace 3403



DOOWON TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Location Paju, Korea

Architect Prof. Choi, Moonsook

General contractor Seohee/Kyungwon E&C

Installation by MK

Flooring material 3000 m² Marmoleum Marbled

Photos Mr. Jun, ByoungMun



Marmoleum Real 3030



Marmoleum Real 3032



Marmoleum Real 3038



Marmoleum Real 3125



Marmoleum Real 3131



Marmoleum Real 3164

LIAONING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MUSEUM

Location Shenyang, People's Republic of China

Flooring contractor Nomura Construction Shanghai Co., LTD

Flooring consultant Beijing Ogalin

Flooring material 6500 m² Marmoleum Marbled

Photos Vanessa Chen



Marmoleum Real 3055



Marmoleum Real 3030



BEIJING UNIVERSITY OF CIVIL ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURE

Location Beijing, People's Republic of China

Architect & interior designer Xianglei Chen

General contractor Beijing Construction Engineering Group

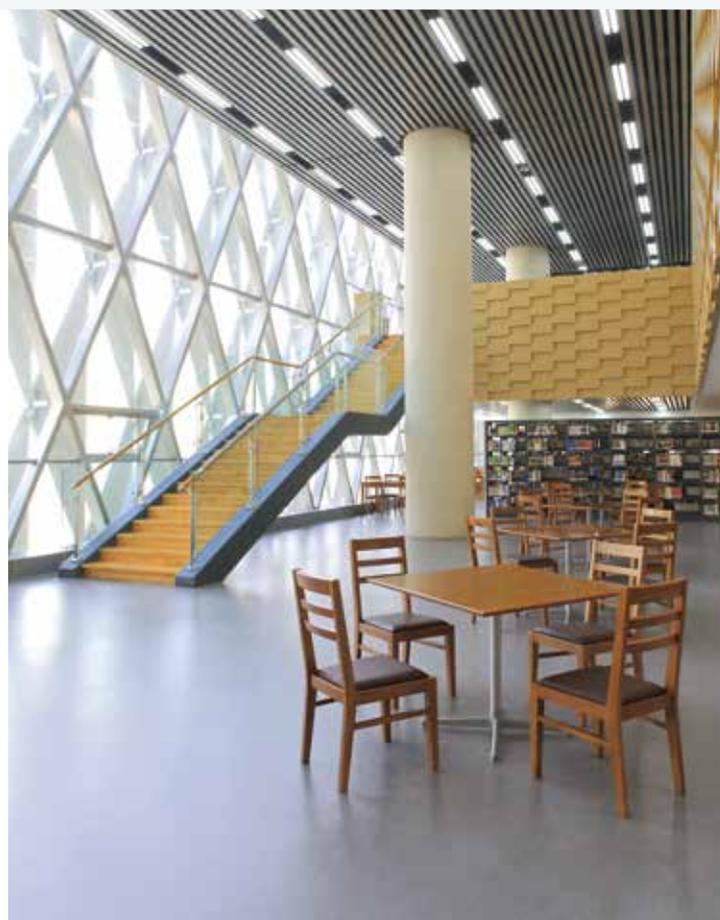
Installation by Beijing Ogalin

Flooring material 25.000 m² Marmoleum Marbled

Photos Vanessa Chen



Marmoleum Fresco 3866





NANNING WUXU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Location Nanning, People's Republic of China

Architect Beijing Institute of Architectural Design

Interior designer Wei Wang

Floor designer Yuan Kong

General contractor China Construction 8th Engineering Division Co., LTD

Installation by Beijing Xinghejiaye Technology & Trade Co., LTD

Flooring material 15.000 m² Flotex tiles and Flotex Classic

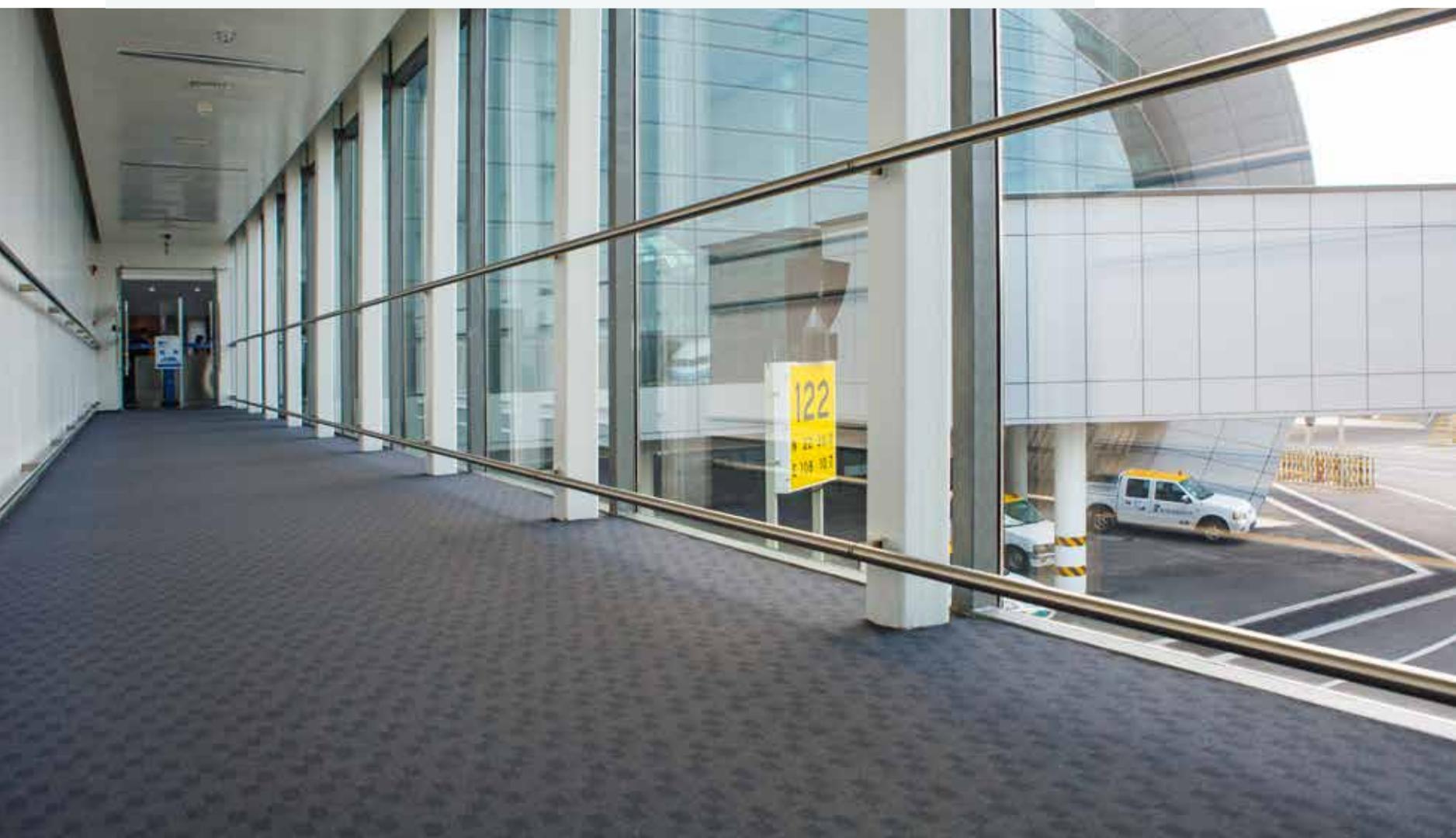
Photos Zhang Xuetao



Flotex Montana 296074



Flotex Berlin 368060





CURTIN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Location Bentley, Western Australia

Architects Taylor Robinson Architects

Flooring material 825 m² Marmoleum Marbled

Photo Robert Frith



Marmoleum Real 2629



Marmoleum Real 3126



Marmoleum Real 3139



Marmoleum Real 3146



Marmoleum Real 3226

The refurbished Curtin Library provides students with an informal learning environment consisting of reference areas, study pods, collaborative learning spaces and a newly refurbished café with alfresco terrace. Since these areas will experience significant pedestrian traffic, all the finishes used in the project were selected for robustness and maintainability. The main contrasting lines in the floor are mirrored in the ceiling, combining to usher students towards areas of interest.

CURE & CARE HOTEL UDENS DUYN

Location Uden, The Netherlands
Architect De Jong Gortemaker Algra
Flooring material 1200 m² Marmoleum Linear
Photo Erik Poffers

The new Udens Duyn Cure & Care Hotel aims to provide the very highest standard of recuperative surroundings. The architect made extensive use of sustainable materials including Marmoleum for the floors. From the clean rectangularity of the exterior, the transparent entrance draws the visitor inward to the flowing space of the tall lobby which connects all the floors. The swirling forms of layered wood combine here with top-lighting to suggest a natural rock canyon.



Marmoleum Striato 5216



Marmoleum Striato 5217



FORBO CONFERENCE CENTRE

Location Assendelft, The Netherlands
Flooring material 100 m² Marmoleum Modular
Photo Erik Poffers



Marmoleum Modular t3716



Marmoleum Modular t3717



Marmoleum Modular t3242



Bulletin Board 2185



Marmoleum Modular t5232



Marmoleum Modular t3573



Marmoleum Modular t5231



Bulletin Board 2201





JOHANNES DE DOPER KERK CHURCH

Location Hoofddorp, The Netherlands

Architect Architectenbureau P.D. van Vliet

Installation by Master Totaal Projecten

Flooring material 700 m² Marmoleum Marbled

Photo Erik Poffers



Marmoleum Real 3203



Marmoleum Fresco 3886



HOSPITAL SAGRADA FAMÍLIA

Location Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

Architect Helio Sá Leitão

Flooring consultant Manoel Ferreira – F Andrade

Flooring material 430 m² Eternal Smaragd, 150 m² Safestep, 360 m²

Marmoleum Marbled (aquajet technique applied) and 50 m² Colorex EC

Photo Mateus Lima



Marmoleum Real 3055



Marmoleum Real 3077



PLEIMO OFFICE

Location Barueri, SP, Brazil

Architect Sergio Camargo

Flooring material 65 m² Marmoleum Marbled and 135 m² Allura Flex

Photos Nelson Kon



Allura Flex 1675



Marmoleum Real 3048



CONTI HOUSE LEIPNITZ UNIVERSITY

Location Hannover, Germany

Architect Woelk & Wilkens Architects BDA

Installation by Arbo Fußboden GmbH

Flooring material 600 m² Marmoleum Solid and Marbled

Photos Jochen Stüber



Walton Cirrus 3352

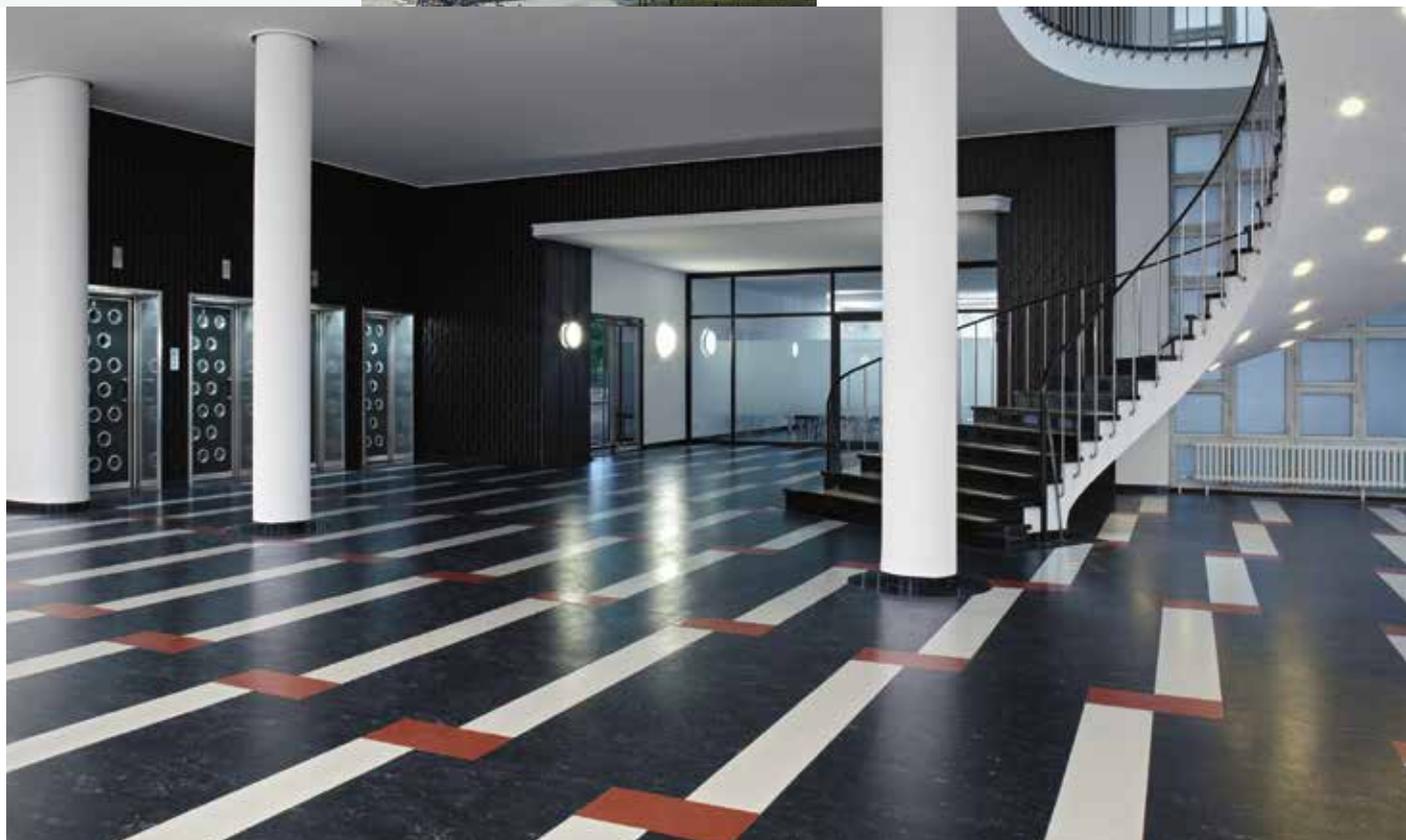


Marmoleum Real 2939



Walton Uni 169

With its glass-block walls, geometrically patterned linoleum floors in anthracite, white and red, and curved, sweeping staircase, the entrance to the former headquarters of Continental AG exudes the charm of the fifties. At its inauguration in 1953 it was the tallest and most modern office block in Germany. The renovation has successfully preserved and restored many period features. A good example is the reconstructed floor in the foyer, with linoleum in the original marquetry-like geometrical pattern.



STABILE AMMINISTRATIVO 3 OFFICE

Location Bellinzona, Ticino, Switzerland

Architects Sabina Snozzi Groisman, Gustavo Groisman and Luigi Snozzi

Commissioned by Dipartimento delle finanze e dell'economica – Cantone Ticino

Installation by Giotto SA

Flooring material 8100 m² Marmoleum Decibel

Photos Simone Mengani



Marmoleum Decibel 387235





IT ALLIANCE OFFICE

Location Dublin, Ireland

Interior designer Jean Feeney, Peacock Interiors

Flooring material 1100 m² Tessera Teviot, Westbond and Allura Abstract

Photo Bernard Weldon



Tessera Teviot 104



Westbond 9484



Westbond 9584



All these projects were winners or runners up in the UK Fly Forbo competition.



WILLIAM MORRIS ART GALLERY

Location London, UK

Architect & floor designer Karsten Weiss, Pringle Richards Sharratt

Flooring material Marmoleum Marbled, Solid and Patterned, aquajet technique applied

Photo Newspics



Marmoleum Real 3127



Marmoleum Real 3223



Marmoleum Vivace 3417



Marmoleum Graphic 5306



CGT OFFICES

Location Peterborough, UK

Interior & floor designers Chere Waddington, James Cubitt & Partners Ltd
 Flooring material 4825 m² Allura Flex, Tessera Alignment and Atrium,
 Westbond, Coral Welcome and Nuway Tuftiguard

Photos Helen Abraham

Chere Waddington: "We wanted to provide the employees with a bright and fun working environment, one which expressed the company's branding and manufacturing heritage - an interior they could respect and feel proud of. We managed to meet this brief by installing a multitude of products from Forbo's large portfolio, in the company's brand colours and complementary shades."



Allura Flex 1632



Tessera Alignment 208



Westbond 9578



Coral Welcome 3210





CITY2 SHOPPING CENTER

Location Taastrup, Denmark

Floor designer Haskoll Architects and Designers London England

General contractor Danica Ejendomsselskab

Building contractor DEAS

Installation by Allan Jensen Gulve

Flooring material 3000 m² Flotex Colour and Flotex Naturals

Photos Peter Jørgensen



Flotex Colour 290010



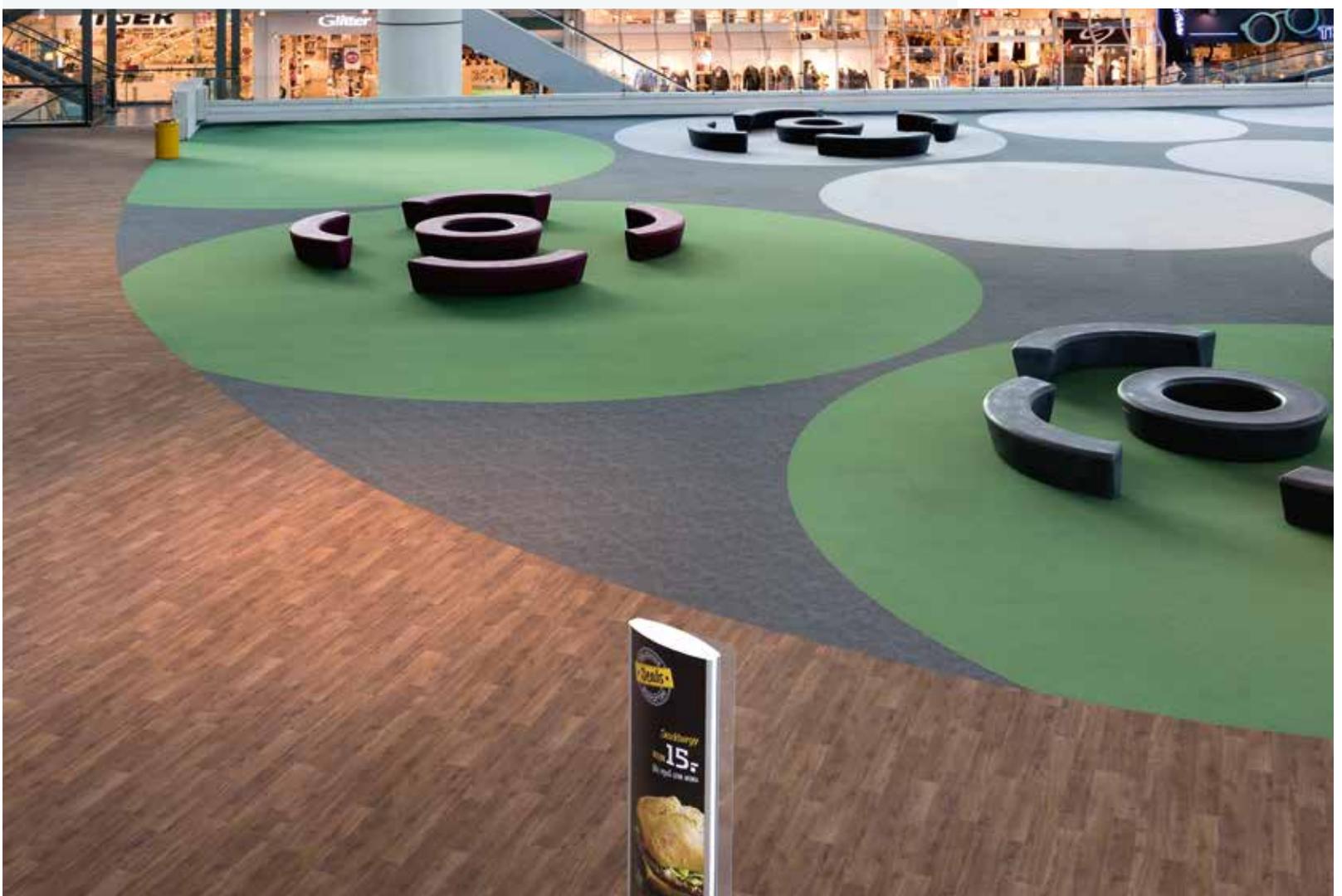
Flotex Colour 290012



Flotex Colour 482010



Flotex Naturals 10055



OULU AIRPORT CAFE

Location Oulu, Finland

Interior architect Studio Arcibella, Kristiina Michelsson

Flooring material 200 m² Marmoleum Modular

Photo Jari Kestilä



Marmoleum Modular t3224



Marmoleum Modular t3238



Marmoleum Modular t3243



Marmoleum Modular t3244



Marmoleum Modular t3245



Marmoleum Modular t3251



Marmoleum Modular t3566



Marmoleum Modular t3127



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CREATING BETTER ENVIRONMENTS BEGINS WITH CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT. IN THIS SECTION FORBO FLOORING IS PRESENTING UNIQUE PROJECTS WHICH FEATURE BETTER INDOOR ENVIRONMENTS.





Photo Jari Kestilä



Photo Jari Kestilä

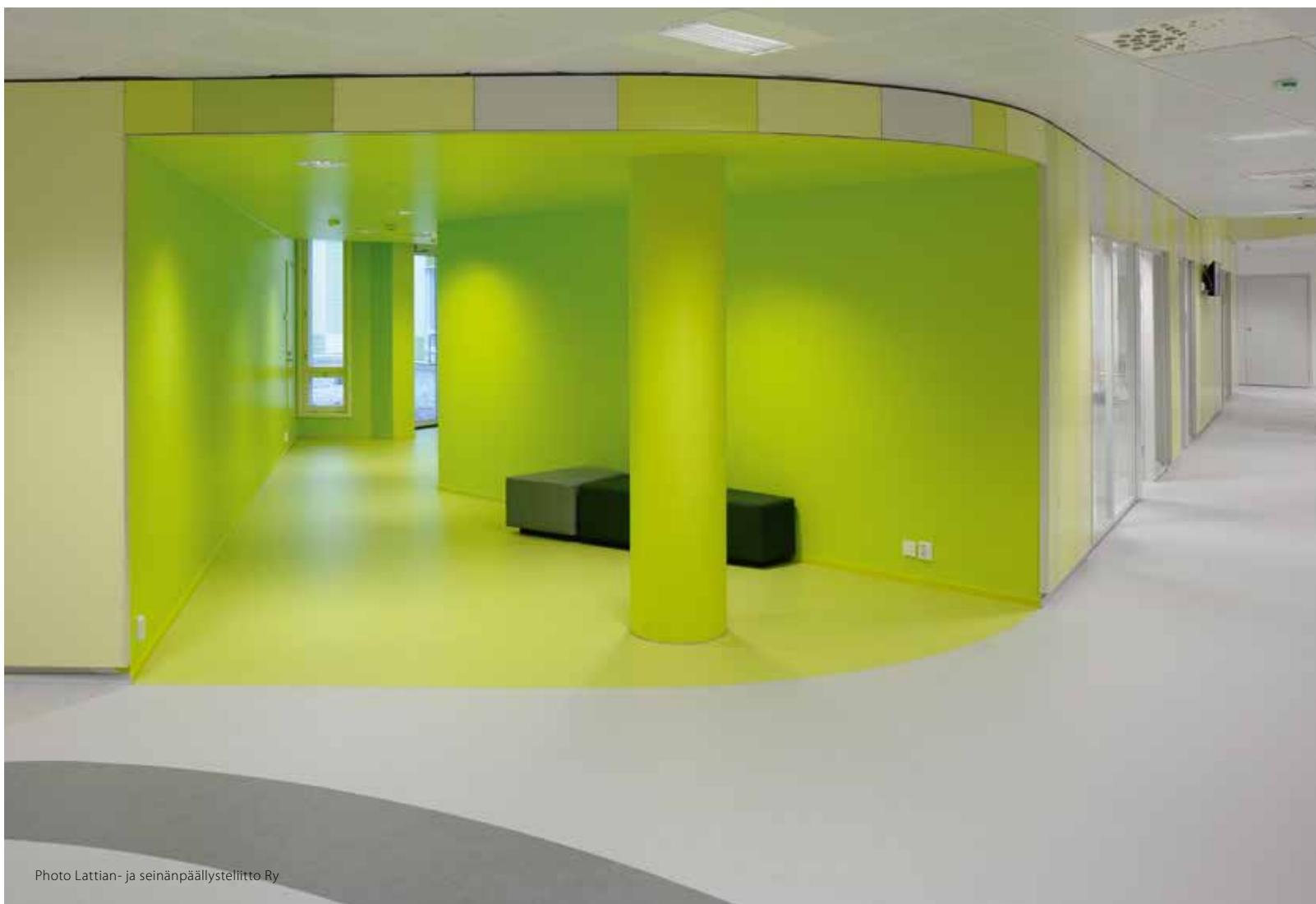


Photo Lattian- ja seinäpäällysteliitto Ry

KASTEELLI COMMUNITY CENTRE LEARNING, LEISURE AND CULTURAL CENTRE

Location Oulu, Finland

Architect Arkkitehtitoimisto Lahdelma & Mahlamäki Oy

General contractor Lemminkäinen Oy

Flooring contractor Matto Nurminen Oy

Flooring material 10.000 m² Marmoleum Marbled, 3800 m² Nordstar and 700 m² Bulletin Board



Marmoleum Fresco 3860



Marmoleum Fresco 3866



Marmoleum Real 3221



Marmoleum Fresco 3885

The interior space of the Kastelli Community Centre is highly adaptable, with structural solutions that are designed to be sustainable and have a long, useful life. Kastelli is a lifecycle project developed on the PPP model. The Lemminkäinen Group takes responsibility for maintenance and basic renovation investments over a service period of 25 years. Kastelli was the first design in the Nordic countries to receive the international LEED for Schools Gold rating, and also won the 2014 Floor of the Year award in Finland.

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