

2011  
INTERNATIONAL  
INTERIOR DESIGN  
EXHIBITION

INFLUENCE  
&  
CONFLUENCE

Ab Rogers

Alex Cheng

**Colin Seah**

Danny Venlet

Ernest Guan

Lars Krückeberg

Horace Pan

Hsueh-Yi Chien

Kerry Hill

Kun-Yen Teng

Marco Coello

Mark Lintott

Mårten Claesson

Ray Chen

Shashi Caan

Shi-Chieh Lu

Shyr-Fong Hu

Tim Ventimiglia

Wei-Min Lee

Wong Wing Hung



AUSTRALIA  
BELGIUM  
CANADA  
CHINA  
ESTONIA  
GERMANY  
HONG KONG  
HUNGARY  
INDIA  
INDONESIA  
ISRAEL  
ITALY  
JAPAN  
KOREA  
MALAYSIA  
MEXICO  
PAKISTAN  
PHILIPPINES  
PUERTO RICO  
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND  
RUSSIA  
**SINGAPORE**  
SOUTH AFRICA  
SPAIN  
SWEDEN  
TAIWAN  
THAILAND  
TURKEY  
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
UNITED KINGDOM  
URUGUAY  
USA



## DECIPHERING THE CODE

*"I have always believed in the power of space to transform - the banal into the poetic, the everyday into the sublime. My work seeks to create such spaces by redefining and distilling the elements of Place, Ritual & Perception to its core - I term this approach Essentialism."*

My entry into the field of design was a progressive process. The strict school system in Singapore does not expose you to a lot of creative opportunities and a lot of the curriculum is math- and science based. This is not, as some people think, from a desire from the Singaporean state to "mind-control" the students. It's more a matter of pragmatism and survival. As an emerging nation, Singapore had to focus on infrastructure and establishing the "hardware" first - it simply needed engineers and teachers.

Because of this, it took me a while to find the right creative outlet for my ideas. I started out as a photographer, becoming fascinated with the ability to create, compose and refine a scene and capture it for eternity. But over time, I missed the fact that you could never really immerse yourself in a photograph - it was passive, there was always this distance. I moved on to designing and directing for the theatre, which was a much more visceral and corporal experience, but the irony is, of course, that stage work by definition is transient and fleeting, unlike photographs, which last forever. Stage arts lacked the sense of permanence that I was seeking.

So here I was at twenty-four - which in Singapore is an age at which you are supposed to have it all together and know what you want to do - and still I had no idea how I could combine my desire to choreograph immersive experiences with creating something had a sense of permanence. Looking for a different medium, I discovered architecture, and it was as if a light bulb came on in my mind. Suddenly everything made sense.

Yet, to this day, I do not consider myself an architect first, but rather a creator of experiences. For me, it all starts with the flow of an idea, and the choice of the actual discipline for executing this idea follows downstream. Sometimes it will be pure architecture, sometimes interior design, and today, more often than not, it's all of them, including other fields such as branding and collateral design as well.

Being a Singaporean, I do consider myself to be a true citizen of the world. Singapore has curiously remained on the crossroads between East and West for centuries, not just as a port of exchange for goods and commodities, but also of ideas and thoughts. Even philosophically, my country is a strange confluence of the keen Asian sensibility for the values of the community - with great respect for the general societal norms - and the more Western concepts, such as the brave and idiosyncratic fight for personal liberty and freedom of thought. I was always able to relate to both my traditional Chinese heritage and modern Western thought at the same time.

To this very day, Singapore plays the role of the translator; deciphering the "Western code" for the Chinese and translating the Asian way of thinking into something that Western businesses can relate to. This is, I think, why Singapore has not really developed a very strong and idiosyncratic aesthetic of its own. We are a country of immigrants, and being at the global crossroads, we never developed a culture in isolation, like the Japanese and the Koreans. But that is also our strength. I am always able to relate to both my traditional Chinese heritage and modern Western thought at the same time.

When we as designers use the word "global", I think we also need to acknowledge that there are many parts of the world that we do not take into account, and that there are many countries and cultures that do not influence us as much as we would like to think. Middle Eastern culture, for example, is not very widely represented in contemporary design - at least, not in relation to its geopolitical size. Perhaps this is because it can be very distinctive, having to accommodate climatic extremes and strong religious beliefs which exert a strong influence on



social behavior. On the other hand, there are also "global cultures" that punch far above their weight, such as the popular Balinese style that is being implemented everywhere nowadays. To me, this is really just oriental caricaturism, a style of ornamentation, and not a genuine "global" influence per se.

One of the key notions I share with my clients, is that I strive for relevance, as opposed to novelty. Innovation needs to come from a deep understanding of how we really use our spaces and what we want from them. This is not just relevant for residential spaces. Take, for example, the concept of "soft power": how nations of influence will no longer exert their power through military might, but are increasingly turning to "softer" means of persuasion, such as culture, art and other expressions, to win over the hearts and minds of other people. This new concept will fundamentally change how we build embassies, for example. Perhaps this is the time of the emergence of the "gallery embassy" instead of the traditional foreboding walled fortress. I believe that designed interiors and architectural spaces have a responsibility to reflect and respond to the zeitgeist.

But we should not fool ourselves. It is not always about how much we should change, but about how much we can change. Something like ninety percent of all the houses being built in the USA are not even built by architects, but by engineers and construction companies. We need to be realistic about what we can do.

I don't believe in heroes in architecture. It is not a solo endeavor. The best work is always generated from good collaborative interaction. To create a sense of collaboration that is not just critical or counter-productive, is an art form in itself. The role of the individual designer is not that of a prima donna, but of a surveyor, a keen analyst of the moving times, who tries to use his medium to shape the next step in the fluid continuum of design. Often, an architect is an artist at war with himself. He has a perfectly valid desire to be present in his work, yet his profession requires him to step back and be content to be the leader of a collective endeavor. It's always a balancing act to combine the two.

In the design world, we clearly see people vote with their money and paying top dollar for a much prescribed kind of design from a certain individuals. If an individual designers' style shines through in his complete body of work, is a sign of genius - or just laziness? Is the designer's creativity so rich that it can afford to manifest itself repeatedly in different shapes and forms, but in a recognizable fashion - or is it just repetition? I have no real answer for those questions, but culturally, this is where we are right now. The people who are funding architecture and design - city councils, governments, project developers - are willing to pay for repeated iterations of the same thing. I suspect that this stems from a sense of slight insecurity, a desire to deliver things that are recognizable, acceptable to everybody, instantaneously, right here and right now. It's easy to gain recognition and credibility through these icons. This is, after all, the age of the cult of the personality.

I think it would be hypocritical to deny that I have a personal style. Too many architects and interior designers proudly proclaim that they don't have a "fixed style" and that they always approach things from a fresh perspective. I'm not afraid to admit that I have a certain "predisposition", which is perhaps a better description than "style". I do have a recognizable approach, a way of thinking. If that shines through in my work, I have no problem with it.

**Colin Seah**

A photograph of the Zig Zag House at dusk. The building is a long, low-profile structure with a white facade and a dark roof. It features a series of large, rectangular windows that are illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. The house is set on a gravel path, surrounded by lush greenery and trees. The sky is a deep blue, and the overall atmosphere is serene and modern.

## ZIG ZAG HOUSE

8 Holland Park, Singapore

**Client** Lien Family

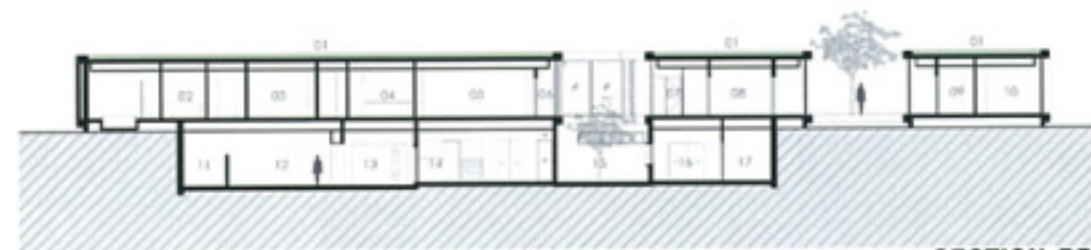
**Design** Colin Seah / Ministry of Design

**Photo** Ministry of Design



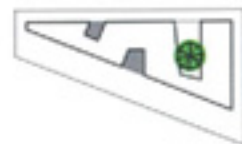
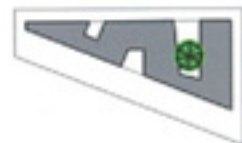
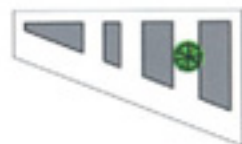
SECTION AA'

- 01 TYPED ROOF
- 02 DRIVE
- 03 MAIN DOOR
- 04 DRIVE WAY CARPARK
- 05 HOLLARD PARK ROAD



SECTION BB'

- 01 TYPED ROOF
- 02 MASTER BATHROOM
- 03 MASTER BEDROOM
- 04 STUDY
- 05 BAR AREA
- 06 POWER ROOM
- 07 BULAN TUBO BATHROOM
- 08 BULAN SLEEP
- 09 STUDY 02
- 10 BEDROOM 02
- 11 HALL SPACES
- 12 PARKING SPACE
- 13 DRIVE WAY
- 14 BUSH AND TREE
- 15 SUNSHY SANDGLAZED COURTYARD
- 16 NOT STITCH
- 17 DEY STORE



Returning to the romance of the single storey bungalow house - which is an endangered typology in densely urbanized Singapore - the Zig-Zag house acquires its characteristic form by responding to the challenging site constraints through a series of spatial maneuvers that negotiate a long and triangulated sliver of land and its resident mature Tembusu tree\*.

As a first impression, the Zig-Zag House appears to be a single storey building detached from the datum of the existing landscape but in actuality comprises of two floors: on the first floor, a sky-lit basement entry/garage and on the basement floor, 'servant' areas which anchor the 'served' spaces above. Each of the building's three interconnected wings houses an entertainment zone, a family zone and a private master room zone. This spatial strategy allows for areas to be interconnected whilst maintaining the ability to be zoned for privacy.

Designed as a seamless form, the building encourages an ambiguous reading between architecture and abstracted sculpture. Viewed from the vicinity's taller structures, the building's roof-scape provides the final design touch - where diagonally arranged planting strips echo the unique twisted form of the Zig-Zag House.

Responding to the region's tropical climate, the building is organized along a continuous series of single loaded spaces, which allow for ample cross ventilation and natural light. Each of the building's elevations is rhythmically lined with full height sliding glass doors which open onto internal corridors that serve as naturally ventilated breezeways. Courtyards, captured by the twisting building form, bring light into the basement areas as well as allow for outdoor deck spaces that link indoor and outdoor spaces seamlessly.

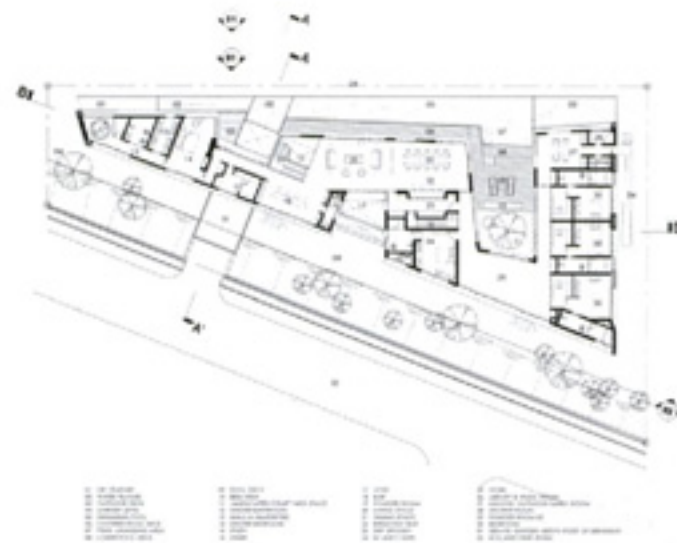
A simple plaster white finish for all the walls was chosen to accentuate the twisting form of the building as well as to capture the shifting light and shadows throughout the day. Timber flooring was used internally and carried through to the external decks to provide a reading of greater seamlessness between internal and external spaces.

The Zig-Zag house contributes to the evolving typology of the tropical house with its pared-down materiality, simplicity of form and fenestration, complexity of space and the re-interpretation of key tropical architectural tenants.

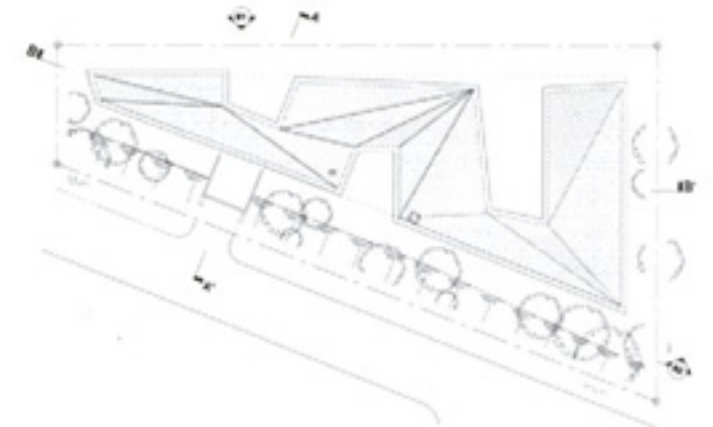
\*The site's resident tree had to be felled later during the course of construction due to the poor health of its root system.



\_ BASEMENT PLAN



\_ 1st STOREY PLAN



\_ ROOF PLAN



