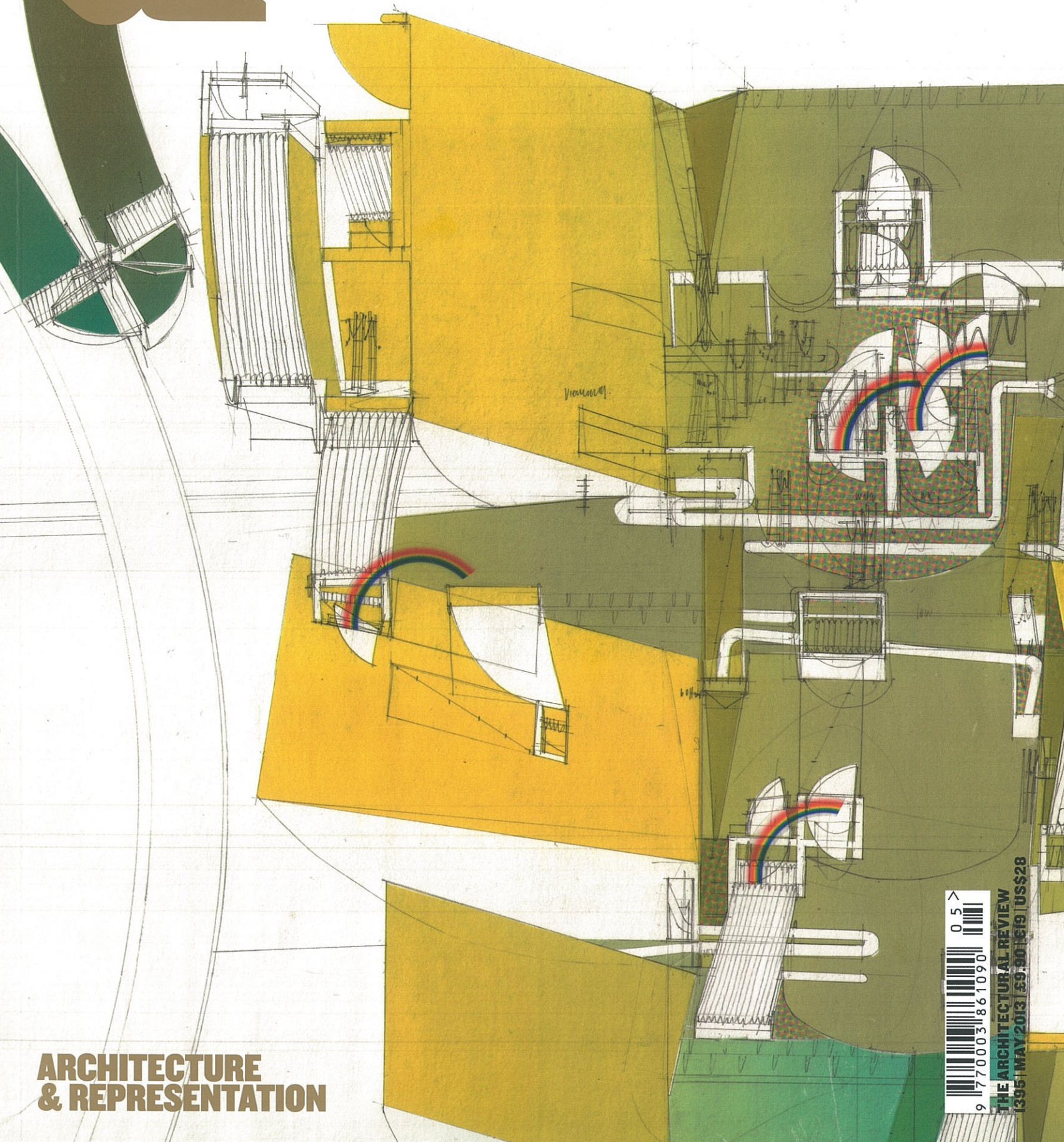


# AR



**ARCHITECTURE  
& REPRESENTATION**

0.5 >  
9 1770003 861090

THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
1395 | MAY 2013 | £9.90 | \$19 | US\$28



# View from...



**The world's tallest public housing towers dwarf Singapore's traditional low-rise urban milieu, epitomised by the shophouses in the foreground. Increased density is seen as the key to accommodating a growing population on a compact land mass**

## Singapore

One of the world's most liveable but most geographically constrained cities faces huge challenges in housing an expanding population, says *Colin Seah*

In the annual beauty contest to be ranked among the world's most liveable cities, Singapore has always figured. Few would be surprised by this, as the tiny city state has a global reputation for being clean, green and safe. Yet to take Singapore's current standing for granted would be to ignore the dynamics of its past and the uncertainties surrounding its future.

Singapore has developed at an incredible rate. Observers have often dubbed its rapid urbanisation the 'Singapore Miracle'. Over an abnormally short period of less than 50 years since independence, a series of government decisions have irreversibly shaped modern Singapore through frequently pervasive and prescriptive policies. Overcoming racial and political unrest and a scarcity of essentials such as hygienic housing, infrastructure, natural resources, land and water in its formative decades, modern Singapore's current phase of evolved urbanisation strives to strike a balance between conserving key heritage sites and developing new work, live and play environments. Its success has imbued the city planners with confidence and established it as a global authority on urbanisation. Developing nations such as China and India frequently consult the Urban Redevelopment Authority and other key governmental agencies.

However, 21st-century Singapore faces new pressures and cannot rely solely on re-enacting the policies of the past. These pressures are both external and internal. Externally, Singapore's dependence on a world in flux demands that it remains agile and relevant. To remain relevant, it must address internal factors, notably that its population needs to grow in order to maintain economic competitiveness. Official projections forecast an increase from the current level of 5.3 million to 6.9 million by 2030, resulting in significant pressures on the provision of housing and infrastructure, coupled with an ageing population.

To maintain its status in the face of these challenges, Singapore has two parallel development strategies. It continues to explore radical notions of increased urban densification, in tandem with developing new towns in suburban locales. In one key paradigm of densification, the Housing Development Board (the government arm responsible for developing apartments which house over 80 per cent of the population) held an international competition for a pilot high-rise development in central Singapore. The brief was for seven 50-storey towers housing over 1,800 households on a 2.5 hectare site, a scale that would be unimaginable in Europe.

Now built, the winning scheme by ARC Studio boasts the world's tallest public residential towers and has established an important precedent for future urban densification and development.

Numerous suburban new towns exist on the fringes of Singapore Island, but with its finite land area (710 sq km), Singapore has had to look beyond its shores to house its growing population; specifically to its northern neighbour, the Malaysian city of Johor Bahru. Both governments have agreed to enhance connectivity between the two cities with a new transit line joining the existing bridges across the narrow straits. Bolstered by this clear signal, private developers from both countries have responded by launching housing developments in vast gated communities (projected for completion in the next five years with more to come) on sites around these access points.

Yet though these strategies may generate the required quantity of new housing, the quality of life in such developments remains largely unaddressed. This can only be gauged over time, as neighbourhoods mature, and social and cultural amenities kick in. However highly ranked Singapore may currently be, maintaining its liveable city status in years to come will be a constant work in progress.