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100PP

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Photography courtesy of MOD



There's not that much you can do to (or for) a generic commercial office building, unless you don't treat it as generic. And if the motive for the building was to attract design and digital firms, you'd begin by looking at what they're after. Flexible space? Large floor plates? High ceilings? Access to food and strong coffee? For 100PP, a new structure near the waterfront in Singapore's grittier neighbourhood, Ministry of Design worked with what it was given to enliven the massing of the block, exploit views and natural daylight, and make the building announce what it was after.

To exploit the sea views – and, hopefully, breezes – MOD stepped the facades back to provide balconies at varied floor levels. The apparent randomness of the stepping lends the building's mass its primary characteristic, which is that it resembles a stack of giant books. Because there is a busy elevated freeway directly in front of the building, this strategy also helped to screen floors above from the noise of passing traffic. The shifted stacking has effects on the overall scale of the structure, making it seem less like a single block or cube, and more like separate, and smaller, flat plates. Within the context of surrounding blocks that are generally monotonously cubic, the result jumps out positively. But simply offsetting floor levels is hardly new, and not enough to set it apart from the crowd. It may have been the single largest gesture in formal terms, but MOD was just getting started.

To unify the facades, the architects 'wrapped' them with stripes, composed of necessary architectural elements such as windows, balconies and the ubiquitous air-conditioning ledges. The intention was to "blur" the distinction between them so that they read as collected horizontal bands. Tonal variations of grey were selected to do the job, and after dark, lighting takes up the task. The bands also accentuate the step-backs of the floor plates.

The effect is youthful and eye-catching, suggesting not so much a single commercial tenant as something like an active hub, which was the intent of the project from the outset. If the building were any more sleek or polished, it would lose the edginess that is part of its appeal and business plan; it has to answer to the kind of progressive, startup mentality of its prospective tenants. The drama of the stepped periphery works to that end, and 100PP straddles the fence between where such tenants often gravitate to – lofts in revitalised industrial warehouses – and the sort of planned, government-sponsored facilities often provided for the creative industries in Singapore. You can only plan so much for this crowd – it naturally seeks out undiscovered corners in which to be spontaneous – but in a city-state where virtually everything is planned, even randomness, 100PP stakes out a distinct position.

