

THE PEAK

SINGAPORE

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AUGUST 2015

THE BIG 5-0

CEOS SHARE THEIR
HOPES FOR S'PORE

GOURMET DINING
THROUGH THE YEARS

OUR LIVES IN 2065
REIMAGINED (WE WISH)



TAN MIN-LIANG
CHANNELS PASSION FOR PLAY
INTO BILLION-DOLLAR BUSINESS

WHO Colin Seah, director of Ministry of Design
WHERE Tuas – 1993; Tuas – 2015.



SPACE CRAFT

Deserted places hold as much appeal as urban landscapes for this local architect.

For visual artists across any discipline, space is of utmost importance. It is in spaces that they create and are inspired by. The same holds true for architect Colin Seah, director of Ministry of Design. His firm is responsible for The Club Hotel, the 100PP Office Building and numerous other projects both here and overseas. But the 43-year-old didn't always dream of erecting beautiful buildings.

"I took a gap year after completing national service because, like most young people, I didn't know what I wanted to do," he says. All he knew was that he wanted to create, and so he pursued theatre (set design and directing) and fashion photography.

It was because of the latter that he stumbled across the sandy dunes of Tuas 20 years ago. "My first car was a panel van and I would drive to industrial estates and godforsaken areas to pick up all sorts of nonsense for props. I would find gorgeous bundles of recycled copper cables, tree trunks and, once, I even picked up an uninstalled fire hydrant," he says. "That was when I discovered the far reaches of Tuas. It's hard to find naturalistic places in Singapore, so, back then, my friends and I would get some drinks, drive out here and just hang out."

How Seah took in the world around him was ultimately what seduced him to the world of architecture. "My frustration with photography is that the liveliness and tactility of a scene I witness can be captured, but never interacted with. Theatre, on the other hand,

offers that immersion, but I have issues with its temporality. After all that preparation, a show will run for weeks, maybe months, and then it's over," shares Seah. "I wanted a discipline that is immersive, interactive, yet with semi-permanence – because nothing lasts forever – and architecture and spatial design provides that."

Ironically, it is his favourite medium that has transformed his former "retreat". The sands have been swept away by the winds of industrialised change, and the once-empty expanse is now filled with factories, offices and the construction sites of the MRT stations on the Tuas West Extension.

"I was always fascinated by how desolate this area was, but Singapore will never again be able to provide that sense of escape. When I was studying in Arizona, all I had to do was drive for 20 minutes to reach a canyon and there would be no one else about. Being able to feel alone in your own space is very precious, and that's hard to find here." Of course, Seah understands that it is ultimately a small price to pay for a land-scarce island. His escapes are just farther away now; he cites Germany's Black Forest as one such place of tranquillity he recently visited.

"I do miss how this place used to be but the value of my nostalgia cannot be commoditised, right? All this development is much more beneficial to the nation as a whole." 🌱