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PERSONALITIES

The global citizen

 Audrey Simon, 2 years ago |  7 min read

Rudy Taslim’s design strength lies in his multi-disciplinary approach to his projects and his dedication to helping the marginalised communities around the world.

Architect Rudy Taslim has caught the attention of his peers and the media with his multi-disciplinary integrative approaches, innovative ideas as well as profound awareness of the local context in which these projects operate.

Taslim is the managing director of Genesis Architects (GA), a company he started in 2014. A committee member at the Singapore Institute of Architects, the 36-year-old studied in Singapore and Australia. He graduated top of his cohort and was conferred Valedictorian in 2008.

Armed with his credentials, Taslim leads both architectural and interior design projects in Singapore and beyond. His practical tenacity and attention to detail also make him a natural leader in the areas of design and project management.

GA offers general design as well as full architectural services for clients that range from individuals to multi-national corporations. Other areas the company has experience in include boutique residential, hospitality, F&B, commercial (retail and offices) and institution projects.



GA LOOKS INTO ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS TO SERVE THE MARGINALISED PEOPLE AND GROUPS

But the company does not limit himself to just local projects. GA also looks into architectural projects serve the marginalised people and groups. Taslim believes that architecture is a strong tool that can transform environments, lives and future generations. Key projects are located in Borneo and a growing number of African countries including Rwanda, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo).

Taslim is an advocate of architectural excellence and education, and spends his time educating and mentoring the next generation of design professionals. He is an adjunct lecturer at the Singapore Polytechnic and visiting lecturer at the School of Architecture and Built Environment (SABE) in Rwanda (where GA also has an office).

As a Singapore Institute of Architects committee member, he also contributes to the Institute's efforts toward a dignified and caring profession while upholds a high standard of professional code and ethics.

Taslim spoke to Haven recently, sharing his approach to design and how his international experience offers a unique approach to his projects.



THE TEAM ALSO FLIES INTO AREAS AND GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE OR WORK WITH THE PEOPLE

What are your design principles and ethos?

We believe in purpose-driven design, and this underlines all our projects — both commercial and pro-bono. Architecture is multi-faceted and we believe in an integrative and multi-disciplinary approach to our works. Our pursuit for design excellence is flanked by our understanding and focus on the humanitarian dimension of architecture to serve the needs of users.

Why do you believe that architecture can be transformative?

I have lived with marginalised communities in Africa for a season in 2014. I have witnessed poverty first-hand and, being trained as an architect, I could see how infrastructural and building projects could fulfil its purpose, benefit and transform thousands of lives. It gives me tremendous satisfaction in playing a part in such transformational architecture.

Transformational architecture transforms lives. It accords dignity back to the people, it gives hope and future — something that goes beyond the building itself. In countries where we operate — building primary schools in DR Congo are means of getting children saved from being exploited as child soldiers and brides [while building a] school for the blind in Rwanda helps provide shelter and learning opportunities for a future that otherwise may not exist. So we build not just buildings, but hope and future.

What are some projects you have done? Tell us about the design process for those projects?

We are currently building a full-scale university that covers an area of more than 75 hectares along the coast of Pemba in Mozambique. This is a beautiful nation that has been plagued with extreme poverty, cyclical natural disasters like cyclones and diseases like cholera and Ebola.

When I lived with them, I experienced a teether of their pain, and their needs. I began to build relationships with the people and saw the latent beauty of their culture behind their pain. Working with the community (from tribal chiefs to skilled masons to women and children), I began to focus on design that celebrates the people and their culture, and something that would heal and bring dignity back to them.

In DR Congo, we understood the important long-term role that schools play in the future of Congolese. My team and I worked on school prototypes that would first and foremost meet their ministry of education's requirements for accreditation, that are modular. Think like Lego. Where building components (columns, beams, roofs, for example) and spaces (like classrooms, lavatories and teachers' room) are modular kits-of-parts that can be assembled in many ways to address different context and needs.

In trying to overcome shortage of conventional materials like bricks, we developed a gabion wall that would allow men to build these 'cages' and everyone else from the village to be involved in gathering and filling up these cages with volcanic rocks (aplenty in the region) and these are used as the walls of the schools.

Community involvement leads to community ownership (and pride) and buildings that are absolutely relevant and well-utilised by the people.

How do you inspire your team and students and get them excited about design and architecture?

Our team is involved with everything — from interacting with clients, stakeholders and beneficiaries — the people, the end-users on the ground. They will get to understand the situation for themselves.

Our team also flies into these areas and get the opportunity to live or work with the people. This constantly reminds us of the transformation and impact our projects have. We are blessed that our team is not just capable, but have their hearts in the right place — share the same vision and goal as I do.

Everyone is excellent, motivated and passionately driven by purpose. Singapore students who intern with us are taught to value the skillsets and opportunities to be schooled in a world-class education system. We show them what the world out there is like, and teach them to treasure this season of their life and to open their eyes and heart. In seeing, becoming convicted and stewarding that conviction to use their skills, talents and vocation for greater things.

What is the current trend in design space?

Covid-19 is a disruptive accelerator. It disrupts current norms, and accelerate new ways of thinking and doing things. In the midst of this ongoing crisis, those who are agile and adaptable are in better position to pivot and come around. Everything is reprogrammed, and needs to be re-programmable.

Spaces need to become flexible and adaptable for different usage too. Increasingly, the way we think and design homes and offices would change. Consumer patterns will change, and the way developers think will invariable change too — to provide for that shifting demand. In Mozambique, when the university works have to be paused, we transformed existing buildings as isolation and medical facilities for the local government, as well as command base for international agencies to coordinate relief efforts.

How do you see the future of design changing over the next few years as we recover from Covid-19?



WITH SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES OUT THERE, COLLABORATION IS THE NEXT BIG THING

The practice of design is going to be more collaborative, more cross-cultural and global. In Singapore, the Board of Architects is advocating and making it possible for architects to be registered in Asean and the Asia Pacific countries.

The doors are opening for cross-cultural and global practices. As Singapore architects, we should recognise that we have the privilege of living in a First World nation and we are in a position to render our expertise and skills to help our neighbouring countries advance. With so many opportunities out there, collaboration will be the next big thing. We can do so much more together if individual practices come together and leverage on their strengths.

Another trend is the increasing use of technology in our built environment. With augmented reality and virtual reality, we can allow clients to have an immersive experience of the space before it is built. Technologies such as BIM (Building Information Modelling) are also increasing our productivity, accuracy and experience. These reinforce the fact that learning has to be a lifelong journey for an architect.

What is next for you?

As soon as the Covid-19 situation improves and borders open up, we have more projects coming up in Brazil, Nagaland and Uganda.

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