<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Developer</th>
<th>Designers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block Sixteen Creative Park</td>
<td>Nanshan District, Shenzhen,</td>
<td>Shenzhen Yinno Land Co. Ltd.</td>
<td>Cube Architects, Ido Design (Interior Architects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dasha River Ecological Corridor</td>
<td>Nanshan District, Shenzhen,</td>
<td>China Resources Land Co., Ltd.</td>
<td>AECOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EY Centre</td>
<td>Sydney, New South Wales,</td>
<td>Mirvac Projects</td>
<td>Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funan</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>CapitalLand Mall Trust</td>
<td>Woods Bagot, RSP Architects Planners &amp; Engineers (Pte) Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinsong Community’s Urban Renewal Project</td>
<td>Chaoyang District, Beijing,</td>
<td>Beijing Yuanjing Mingde Management Consulting Co. Ltd</td>
<td>Jiuyuan (Beijing) International Construction Consulting Co. Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K11 ATELIER King’s Road</td>
<td>Hong Kong SAR, China</td>
<td>New World Development Company Limited</td>
<td>Woods Bagot, P &amp; T Architects &amp; Engineers Ltd. (Architect, Designer), P Landscape Co. Ltd. (Landscape Architect), ESKYIU Ltd (Interior Designer), Sirius Lighting Office (HK) Limited (Lighting Design Consultant), Speirs + Major LLP (Lighting Design Consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason Bros</td>
<td>Wynyard Quarter, Auckland,</td>
<td>Precinct Properties</td>
<td>Blair Johnston, Warren and Mahoney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitsui Fudosan Nihonbashi Revitalisation Plan</td>
<td>Nihonbashi, Tokyo, Japan</td>
<td>Mitsui Fudosan Co. Ltd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Futura</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>City Developments Limited</td>
<td>Skidmore, Owings &amp; Merrill LLP, ADDP Architects Singapore Pte Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMZ Ecoworld</td>
<td>Bangalore, Karnataka State,</td>
<td>RMZ Ecoworld Infrastructure Private Limited</td>
<td>FDP Architects Singapore Pte Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taikoo Place</td>
<td>Hong Kong SAR, China</td>
<td>Swire Properties Limited</td>
<td>Hugh Dutton &amp; Associates, Gustafson Porter + Bowman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE HUB</td>
<td>MinHang District, Shanghai,</td>
<td>Shui On Land</td>
<td>P&amp;T Group, CRKL, ARUP, HBA, Neri &amp; Hu, Design Land Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yagan Square</td>
<td>Perth, Western Australia</td>
<td>Development WA</td>
<td>Lyons Architecture, Iredale Pedersen Hook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In cities through China, there are probably hundreds of poorly-designed business parks located in out-of-the-way districts that offer facilities which are bland, out of date, and devoid of eating, shopping, or entertainment venues. While those working at such places must often suffer in silence, however, there are occasions when a minimum of investment and a large dose of collective willpower can transform them into showcases of vitality.

The Block Sixteen project, located in a technology park in the Nansha district in the west of Shenzhen, is one such place. Conceived as a prototype by staff from Shanghai’s Tongji University College of Design and Innovation, the brief was to breath life into a single block (#16) of the park by transforming it into a forum for a range of different activities, including a market, music events, and exhibition and lecture venues.

With minimal access to funding, the team focused on reviving the collection of mostly dilapidated properties scattered around the block rather than on building new ones. This meant that much of the work consisted of first cleaning up and painting exterior aspects, and then creating graphic signage, way finding, and street art. In addition, open street spaces were created to encourage pedestrian circulation and provide places where young people would like to gather. Retail and F&B providers then quickly moved in.

As for the buildings themselves, two poorly performing office blocks on the site were cleaned up, while at street level a couple of new venues were created. The first involved transforming a rundown warehouse into a “Needs Lab” to be run by the university as a co-working space and events venue to promote innovation through lectures and exhibitions. The second, larger, venue, is another warehouse-type building to be again for events but also offering space for shops, restaurants and a market.

While the project benefitted from having a captive audience given the lack of competition in the park, there was a need not only to create the venues where things could happen, but also to offer events that would draw a crowd. As one juror said: “The idea I like is that the university has a small outpost where they saw an
opportunity to embrace young people’s enthusiasm and partner with tech companies in the immediate vicinity. So they proactively programmed the space, holding different events both indoor and outdoor, and without very much investment have created a grassroots place for people to come together and share ideas."

The result, apart from providing a soul to a formerly lifeless locality, has been to revitalise it economically too. Rents in nearby buildings have increased dramatically, providing excellent returns on what was only a small initial outlay.

While the types of improvements required to make this project a success were not in themselves difficult to implement, either practically or financially, the fact that such transformative results could be achieved with so little investment—apart from the imagination and dedication of its sponsors—is what makes the approach replicable. Given the number of similar locations across the country that could benefit in the same way, the model created by Block Sixteen creates a future ripe with opportunity.
Thirty years of rapid economic development in China has led to big improvements in overall living conditions, but has come also at a steep ecological cost, especially in terms of badly polluted inland waterways. In recent years, however, both local and central authorities in China have rolled out policies to regenerate contaminated watercourses, especially in densely populated urban areas. The Dasha River Ecological Corridor is a prime example of how even severely-polluted environments can be successfully rejuvenated.

Winding for 13.7 kilometres through the Nansha district of Shenzhen, starting from the University district and flowing to the river’s exit in Shenzhen Bay, the corridor is a major initiative that has created almost 100 hectares of new riverside park, forming a greenbelt traversing the western part of the city.

Though still less than ideal, the river’s water quality has now been improved. The real value of the corridor, however, lies in the quality of the associated parkland, which is divided into a series of three themed landscape zones varying in character according to the areas through which the river runs. The landscape changes as it moves through different urban areas, allowing visitors to track their location as they traverse the length of the watercourse. A network of footpaths and bicycle paths runs continuously along the river on both sides, while intermittent footbridges connect both sides of the river.

Authorities were able to create a continuous green belt along each riverbank by removing illegal buildings and bridges and connecting un-owned or idle stretches of land or green space. Indigenous animals and vegetation have

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**Dasha River Ecological Corridor**

**SHENZHEN | CHINA**

**Developer:** China Resources Land Co., Ltd  
**Designer:** AECOM
been reintroduced, while invasive species were removed. Designers also preserved existing forest and wetland areas to attract more wildlife and fauna and dredged the riverbed in some areas to create new water habitats. Finally, authorities have integrated rainwater management elements to improve absorption, storage, and water purification by (among other things) introducing plant species that can naturally perform these functions, in particular by filtering out pollutants.

One of the most striking aspects of the project is how quickly it was completed. Although initial planning and site inspection work did not take place until mid-2017, the scheme was completed in stages from September 2019 through March 2020 – a timeline one juror described as: “Unbelievably impressive – I cannot think of anywhere else in the world where this big a project could be taken on so quickly and comprehensively.”

While the compressed timeline is one project feature that perhaps would only be possible in China, the financing needed to undertake an initiative of this size is another aspect that would be difficult to arrange in countries lacking China’s command economy. Nonetheless, the fact that it could be completed at all given the extent of the environmental damage inflicted on the river over several decades of rapid industrialisation is enormously impressive. As such, the corridor serves as a showcase of ecological regeneration that would be instructive to many cities elsewhere in the world.
Completed in mid-2016 by developers Mirvac, the EY Centre is a 37-storey office building featuring 38,650 square meters of leasable space located in the Sydney CBD.

The building incorporates a wide range of interactive smart features that automate various aspects of its functionality. Daily desk assignments are software controlled, for example, and various interactive technologies are used to measure air quality, power and water consumption, and lift usage.

However, the EY Centre’s most striking feature is the world’s first timber-and-glass closed-cavity façade system, which comprises a building-wide array of wooden blinds fitted inside its double-glazed windows, with a further skin covering the outside surface.

Because it is an enclosed system, the blinds cannot be affected by outside air conditions and are therefore forever free of dust and condensation. In addition, the blinds are controlled by the building’s software system to allow automatic adjustment on every floor (except the top few) for light and temperature control. This allows the structure to be extremely responsive both in terms of control of natural light and its thermal performance, creating a highly sustainable ecosystem that the developer claims has produced a 30 percent reduction in overall heating and cooling costs, together with a consequential uplift in asset value.

The façade louvre system has now been adopted in a number of other projects, though it remains too soon to judge whether it will be embraced on a widespread basis.

Architecturally, the building sports an extremely warm façade, another function of its wooden blind system. The golden façade has appeal for building occupants too, as sunlight filters naturally into the interior. Its warmth is complemented by the tower’s rounded corners, creating what one juror described as the “one of the softest buildings in Sydney”.

The EY Centre was the first in Australia to achieve a Gold WELL certification. Beyond that, it holds 6-Star Green Star Office Design rating, 6-Star Green Star As-Built rating, and 5 Star NABERS Energy rating, making it one of Australia’s most environmentally-friendly buildings.
Singapore is not a market usually associated with an adventurous approach to retailing, with local mall operators opting over the years mostly for tried and tested formulas as they built out their portfolios. The explosion in online shopping over recent years, however, has forced reassessment of the role brick and mortar retail assets will play in future.

CapitaLand, one of Singapore’s largest developers, therefore created Funan as a testing ground for innovative retail strategies it might use in its many other retail facilities. In the process, it has created a hip, fun, experiential destination full of energy and new ideas.

Funan is located in the middle of Singapore’s civic district, surrounded by a number of staid institutions such as the City Hall, the Supreme Court, and the National Gallery. While this may seem an unlikely location for a venue aimed at a millennial audience, the opportunity to redevelop an older, rundown asset that previously occupied the site provided the momentum for change.

The new mall occupies 83,000 gross floor area (GFA) and features a sometimes-chaotic mix of uses, including:

- an experience-focused retail centre spread across four floors and two basement levels,
- two Grade-A office blocks, one of which is occupied by co-working operator WeWork,
- a nine-storey co-living serviced residence aimed at millennials,
- a 358-seat theatre,
- extensive roof gardens and outdoor public spaces,
- click and collect logistics facilities in the basement, together with a vertical servicing and circulation system that allows tenants to store stock in the basement rather than in-store.

In addition, Funan offers a number of unique features that have quickly captured local consumers’ imaginations, such as a publically accessible indoor climbing wall that
rises from the basement level into the mall’s main atrium and a cycle path that enters from one side of the building and exits the other. The path is served by both a bicycle park and shower facilities that allow office workers to use it to commute to work. The facility has proved so popular among local cyclists that a local biking brand has become the best-performing shop in the mall.

Meanwhile, the spirit of experimentation is seen throughout. A scheme launched in conjunction with a nearby university created a mockup of Funan’s co-living facility and recruited students to advise how they think the space should best be set up and used.

The ‘Tree of Life” is a centrepiece feature that occupies 10 percent of the mall’s leasable area. It offers short-term leases (as little as three months) of plug-and-play space for use as workshops for local artisans or pop-up retail for small or start-up brands, allowing them to test new ideas and products. Successful concepts can then take up conventional space either in Funan or one of CapitaLand’s other malls.

Technology, and in particular big data, is used extensively. In particular, more than a thousand cameras installed throughout the development provide real time statistics about how many people are using the mall and the individual shops they are visiting. The mall operator can then use this info to advise retailers, help them curate storefronts and also with merchandising. In addition, it is able to cross-market products between individual tenants and consumers.

Beyond that, by actively curating different experiences and coordinating them between specific types of users, it has attracted significant numbers of new consumers. These include not only cyclists, as already mentioned, but also a ‘super hero’ running club under the umbrella of a well-known athletic clothing brand, a photo club (the local area has long been a centre for photography shops).

The result of this dedication to experimentation is a melting pot of new ideas. As one jury member described it: “What they’ve done is phenomenal in their preparedness to experiment and the intensity of the mix of uses. Some things will work well and others will not, but they are prepared to challenge the conventional and should be commended for their innovation – there will definitely be replication arising from this.”
The Jinsong Urban Renewal Project is a Beijing based initiative by a private-sector group that has forged a new template to rejuvenate China’s many run-down inner-city residential neighbourhoods. The project is situated in Jinsong Community, covering an area of approximately 165,000 square meters in an otherwise prime location in Chaoyang District, not far from the Beijing CBD.

Although local authorities in cities across China recognise the need to regenerate increasing numbers of similarly dilapidated neighbourhoods, the problem is complicated due to lack of funding and the fact that each area needs a tailored solution depending on its own circumstances. The strategy adopted in Jinsong, while not especially memorable in terms of its cosmetic appeal, is much more sophisticated than the government approach. Starting with an initial period of painstaking fieldwork to compile a comprehensive database of information about different aspects of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants, the developer also launched an extensive engagement exercise with local residents in order to understand their priorities and concerns.

Leveraging expertise in a variety of disciplines ranging from development, architecture, property management, and real estate investment, the developer then created an overarching and long-term plan based on the specific issues identified by residents, together with an analysis of their own data-gathering initiative.

By persuading the community to allow them to operate as, in effect, a property management company, and with minimal capital outlay, the group then either created or renovated various strategically located neighbourhood facilities—a new bicycle shop here, a remade storefront there, some pocket parks scattered around the area to create a sense of community. They also reintroduced retail tenants and vendors, again injecting vitality as well as creating profitable businesses.

In practical terms, while the amount of work performed may not have been onerous, its careful targeting has meant it has delivered a disproportionate impact. An influx of former residents has now returned to the community, together with a significant number of newly-arrived younger residents. The result is a subtle but very real improvement in the overall living environment. As one jury member said: “The bigger question, relative to the amount of money that was invested, is what were the impacts achieved for a large number of around 10,000 or more residents. The changes were actually quite small things, but they make it feel that this is neighbourhood—its not so much about design, but about creating a home.”

A key part of the success of the project is that developers acted in cooperation with the local government. According to one locally-base jury member: “They understood how to approach the problem and do what the government couldn’t, behaving almost like a government agency. In doing that, they also enjoyed some policy concessions, because without them, some of the things they achieved would not have been possible.” The group was able, for example, to take over an abandoned garage and turn it into bakery—something that would normally be
impossible due to strict local planning regulations. In the end, the game plan for the developers is for this to be a long-term initiative, exploiting the fact that Jinsong’s city-centre location means the land has great inherent value. By rejuvenating it today, the intent is that over a five-to-ten-year period, values will have risen, and that younger and better-heeled white-collar workers will have gradually moved in. Basically, the area will have been transformed from an old and dilapidated community to a younger, more lively, mixed-use, neighbourhood abutting the CBD.

Give its low cost, high replicability, and associated social benefits, together with the high number of similar slowly-decaying residential neighbourhoods found around China, the model sets an appealing precedent for future inner-city regeneration efforts across the country.
One side effect of Hong Kong’s high real estate prices is that building owners are usually determined to use every square foot of floor space to generate a financial return. This may be efficient, but it has tended to result in an urban landscape that is monotonously predictable and devoid of public spaces.

What is immediately striking, therefore, about this 22-storey, 45,300 square meter office redevelopment project in Hong Kong Island East is the commitment of developer New World Development (NWD) to set back the building at podium level in order to devote some 50% of its ground-floor level space to pedestrian access, including an innovative green-ceilinged passageway that allows the public to walk through the building from one block to the next.

Street-level porosity is just one of the building’s surprises, however. Another way in which NWD has paid more than just lip service to the public realm is its wholesale dedication to sustainability, a commitment reflected in numerous details, from its green financing to an elaborate rooftop garden.

K11 Atelier King’s Road has been awarded a number of green certifications, including (among others) all platinum levels of WELL and LEED. Over 70 different sustainability and wellness features embrace a bucket list of green features that, in the words of one jury member, “go well beyond what any developer in Hong Kong ever builds”.

These include the green ‘floating box’ podium design, highly-specified indoor air and water quality, fitness facilities, healthy dining options, rainwater harvesting, and multiple types of renewable energy generation that include the Asia Pacific’s largest installation of hybrid solar photovoltaic and thermal (PVT) panels.

In addition, K11 ATELIER offers a variety of smart systems, such as a whole-lifecycle building management strategy featuring both BIM and a digital construction documents control system that significantly reduced building construction time.

Beyond that, the developer has made a major effort to establish green spaces in and around the building. Total project greenery covers 6,700 square metres, or more than 2.2 times the site area. It includes, on its lower floors, a distinctive building envelope that breaks down the massing into small-scale cubes wrapped in vegetation. On the rooftop, a microclimate-controlled garden boasting an urban farm, a 170-metre long jogging track, and an over-40 metres stretch of lawn area, covers 90% of the space and is available for use by building tenants.

Inside the building, meanwhile, an innovative multifunctional space located on the second floor and easily accessible from street level offers frequent events and gallery exhibitions. Notably, the space is equipped with large doors that open to the outside, allowing major art installations to be hoisted directly into the building from street level.
As one Hong Kong-based jury member commented: “You have to know how brutal Hong Kong is to understand that somebody actually did the right thing for the first time. I can’t say I’ve ever seen an office building in Hong Kong do so many things to be a better neighbour – and when you look at the cost and rate of return on your investment here, as well as local land values, it’s just a breath of fresh air.”

Although building owners in Hong Kong are usually reluctant to give-up valuable ground floor space to provide pedestrian access to the public, the developer in this case was able to convince the government to grant it expanded gross floor area (GFA) because the building’s open areas were deemed to be partly for public use, thereby improving both the microclimate and the overall neighbourhood. In this way, the project has set a precedent for other local developers to negotiate similar public space exemptions for future projects in the city.
Located in an older part of Auckland’s harbour area that has long served as a base for fishing, shipbuilding, and various industrial purposes, New Zealand’s Mason Bros project involves the adaptive reuse of a character warehouse that served originally as a heavy engineering factory, and more recently as a manufacturing base for high-end yacht masts.

After regeneration, the building has been transformed into a contemporary three-storey commercial development featuring 5,700 square meters of large-format commercial floorspace.

From the start, designers were intent on preserving as much of the original features of the building as possible. By leveraging the existing gantry crane framework to support new floors, they were able to retain almost all the pre-existing structure, together with significant portions of the façade and foundations. They were also able to raise the building’s seismic standard from just 20% of NBS (New Building Standard) to 100%.

The end result is a modern, high-performing workspace that has simultaneously preserved the industrial legacy of the original. In particular, the structure retains a dramatic saw-tooth roof that now funnels south light into a 60-metre internal lane running down the length of the building.

Given the age and nature of the original structure, the redeveloped version is remarkably sustainable. Known today as one of New Zealand’s greenest buildings, it has won multiple certifications, including 6-Star Green Star and NABERSNZ 5.5 Star. Sustainable features include CO2 control of outdoor air rates, variable-speed EC fan coil units, and daylight and zone-based automatic light switching.

The project has proved popular with occupiers, who report improved productivity and an overall 25% drop in absenteeism. It is also frequently used as a public amenity, hosting numerous events ranging from innovation showcases to fashion shows.

While redevelopment costs were relatively low, the scheme has had a disproportionately large impact on the surrounding area. Land was sold at a discounted price by the city government as part of a longstanding initiative, in collaboration private sector developers and designers, to revitalise the area while simultaneously preserving its
character and industrial history. The goal was to create a high-quality nucleus that would act as a catalyst for regeneration of the surrounding neighbourhood as a mixed-use, sustainable, waterfront community.

To that extent, the plan has been strikingly successful. New investment and development activity has followed, breathing life to an area situated not far from Auckland's CBD but whose potential had been long been neglected after original industrial users moved away. Land values in the area have now risen significantly.

Today, Mason Bros has emerged as the centrepiece for a neighbourhood that links various evolving residential and commercial precincts, and can be seen as a template for future public/private partnerships in New Zealand that aim to boost local land values by reviving formerly run-down or neglected areas.
The newest component of Mitsui Fudosan’s substantial portfolio of properties in Tokyo’s ultra-prime Nihonbashi district, the recently-completed Nihonbashi Muromachi Mitsui Tower is a 26-storey, mixed-use office building featuring high grade offices, a convention centre, and a well-rounded assortment of retail and restaurant offerings.

Featuring large, highly-efficient floor plates (according to the developer, the largest standard-floor exclusive areas in the Tokyo metro area), the tower also incorporates the latest sustainability initiatives in terms of building specifications, technology, and energy performance ratings. These include the latest seismic features, such as structural control oil dampers to reduce building sway during Tokyo’s frequent earthquakes.

While the architecture was variously described by the jury as “timeless”, “harmonious”, “beautifully detailed” and “premium mainstream”, there was also a sense (common to Tokyo generally) of a somewhat “conservative”, “traditional”, and even “a bit dated” approach. Notwithstanding this, the Tower was seen as “an exemplary office building built to premium standards of any building in the world, with the highest grade of technologies and finishes”.

Given that central Tokyo is full of similarly highly-rated office buildings, however, even the finest facilities can find it difficult to stand out. What swayed the jury in this case was the way the Tower has been integrated by the developer as a key part of a long-term master plan—already almost two decades in the making—to reinvent the contiguous 15-20 blocks of the local neighbourhood as a modern, smart, and resilient district.

The developer has upgraded its Nihonbashi assets with an eye to recapturing the area’s past energy, in particular by preserving or reviving historic shops and alleyways dating back to the Edo period in the early 18th century. Other landlords in the area have followed suit, implementing changes focused on placemaking and making both their own properties and the overall neighbourhood more user-friendly.

Future plans include creation of a riverside park that will extend 1.2km along the Nihonbashi river after the Shuto expressway (which currently extends over the top of the river) is rerouted underground.
The jury noted that, while smart city projects are quite common in the context of greenfield or campus projects, implementing them in a dense urban context that is already integrated into the existing city fabric is much different challenge, and the developer’s dedication to pursuing such a constantly evolving project is a commendable commitment.

Another aspect that reflects the building’s community-oriented focus is the creation of the ‘Nihonbashi Smart Energy Project’ in collaboration with the Tokyo Gas Company. Following the lead of similar projects in other parts of Tokyo, Mitsui Fudosan has installed a large-scale gas cogeneration energy plant in the building basement. This power plant is capable of providing power and heat to 20 neighbouring buildings featuring total floor space of some 1 million square metres.

While the highly-efficient plant is stated to result in a 30 percent reduction in CO2 emissions, the main appeal of such systems, as proven during the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, is their ability to provide redundant power supplies to local neighbourhoods should the national or metropolitan grids be knocked offline during a natural disaster.

While operational co-gen facilities of this type currently represent only the tip of the iceberg compared to the city’s total power demand, more such plants are now being rolled out in various parts of the city for the same purpose, creating a patchwork of alternative energy networks that will protect local neighbourhoods once Tokyo’s next big earthquake inevitably arrives.
New Futura
SINGAPORE

Developer: City Developments Limited
Designers: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP
ADDP Architects LLP

The elegant, twin-tower New Futura is a high-end, 124-unit residential project located not far from the city-centre Orchard Road shopping district of Singapore. Built by local developer City Developments Limited (CDL), it replaces an earlier complex (the ‘Futura’) that previously stood on the same site, and features a look that echoes the personality of the original iconic design.

As to be expected of a modern luxury development, New Futura boasts any number of high-quality details and fixtures, from private lift access to top-of-the line interiors. However, the appeal for the jury was not so much the buildings’ premium fitout and design, as the way that CDL committed to incorporate an array of sustainability aspects, in the process absorbing construction costs of some 3%-5% over the norm. Developers of most premium for-sale residential projects in Singapore will routinely cut corners in terms of green design because there is little incentive to invest in features whose long-term benefits will accrue only to the buyers of the units.

Key sustainability strategies embraced by designers include a passive-cooling building design embodied in its horizontal sun-shading fins and low-emissivity double-glazing, rainwater harvesting for landscape irrigation, pneumatic waste disposal, and extensive use of energy-saving and other sustainable devices integrated in the structure on a lifecycle basis, including in the choice of construction materials. Widespread use of pre-cast elements and prefabricated bathrooms were adopted to improve efficiency and construction quality. The project holds BCA’s Green Mark GoldPLUS Award.

Other distinctive New Futura features are the three ‘sky decks’ incorporated into each tower, providing residents access to landscaped open-air platforms at various floor levels. Sky decks are not uncommon in Singaporean high rises, partly because the tropical climate favours cultivation of lush, year-round, vegetation, and partly because enlightened planning guidelines encourage developers to include them by making such spaces GFA-exempted.
In addition, the developer has gone the extra mile to be a good neighbour to other developments in the vicinity. Great care was taken in calculating the optimal orientation of the towers’ structures so they do not form a ‘superblock’ obscuring views from neighbouring developments. The extensive landscaping was also planned to conserve existing large trees and otherwise allow onsite greenery to be enjoyed from surrounding perspectives. In general, the site is designed to be porous, allowing it to be viewed from the street and the general environs rather than creating a walled enclosure that excludes outsiders.
Rapid economic growth, especially in its booming outsourcing industry, has created millions of new office jobs across India in recent years. However, given the lack of available space in downtown locations, developers have moved to meet mushrooming demand by building vast amounts of new office capacity in out-of-town business parks, in the process creating sprawling facilities that often cater to tens of thousands of employees.

While the growth of these campus-style developments has been exponential, the rush to build has meant that many Indian business parks suffer from chronic problems of one type or another. That said, however, some of these new developments have adopted an approach that rises above the norm. The RMZ Ecoworld development is one example of a best of class template for the Indian business park space.

Located on the outer ring road of Bangalore, India’s IT capital, RMZ Ecoworld is built on an approximately 80-acre site that offers some 7.5 million square feet of tech-enabled offices spread across 17 buildings. A central ‘bay’ area in the heart of the campus creates a secluded space that also features a 500-seat amphitheater, foodcourt, and green recreational area.

While the types of office facilities on offer are for the most part not dis-similar to those found in other Indian business parks, it is the developer’s community-oriented approach that makes RMZ Ecoworld stand out. During construction, for example, the developer launched a programme offering training to construction workers to help improve their skillsets, while the park’s more-than-50 retail and dining outlets have been made available for use by the wider local community.

Other civic-engagement exercises include a programme of music and other events, a variety of art installations featuring well-known artists, an indoor exhibition space, health and wellness centres, sports clubs, and a net-zero building that is often used for educational purposes.

Beyond that, the project commits to a range of sustainability initiatives. It is LEED Gold certified, having incorporated a number of sustainable design elements in terms of building shape, orientation, and choice of construction materials. It also sports various other green features that include intelligent property management systems, rainwater harvesting, a water treatment plant, 22-acres of landscaping, and two large lakes.
This is not to say that RMZ’s business-park peers are not also sustainable in their own right. India’s campus approach to workspace provision tends by nature to tick various sustainability boxes simply because the shortcomings of local utility infrastructure has forced developers to build their own facilities, creating what one juror described as “self-sustaining islands of development”. While this is a positive as far as it goes, it often creates problems of its own because workplaces are far removed from where workers live, thereby creating an army of commuters who then want to drive to work given the poverty of local public transport options. Not only is this environmentally unfriendly, but in Bangalore it exposes them to the city’s notoriously congested traffic.

In RMZ Ecoworld’s case, however, this problem has been short circuited by the fact that the development is built next to a large residential neighbourhood, allowing many workers to live nearby rather than subject themselves to grueling multi-hour commutes.

In themselves, these finer details of community-oriented design may not seem significant, but collectively they add up to what, in the Indian context, amounts to a significant improvement in working and living conditions. At the same time, as more and more business parks spring up in cities around India, they provide developers and tenants a way both to differentiate themselves from the competition and also address the vexed issue of talent retention, which has become one of the biggest problems for both business parks and the multinational tenants that have taken up residence.
Large-scale urban renewal projects are rare in Hong Kong due to the city's high land prices, a shortage of consolidated land parcels, and the general inclination for quick profit over long-term placemaking. The Taikoo Place regeneration, launched some 40 years ago by developer Swire Properties in the neighbourhood surrounding a former sugar refinery and docklands in the Eastern district of Hong Kong island, is therefore all the more remarkable, not only for its staying power, but also its single-minded pursuit to fashion a large, diverse, self-contained community.

Located some 8 kilometres from the Central CBD, Taikoo Place functions as an alternative business hub currently featuring an enormous 6.1 million square feet of gross floor area. The area has evolved over time, with some buildings now into their second and third generations, and the developer continues to acquire older industrial buildings in the area as part of an ongoing commitment to redevelopment.

Commercial assets comprise nine Grade-A office towers together with a universe complementary of other offerings that include hundreds of F&B outlets, numerous retail facilities, a 345-room hotel and serviced-apartment component, and much else besides. The area tends to be favoured by companies in the creative and IT industries, as well, more recently, as an increasing number of more established businesses fleeing high rents in the Central CBD.

The overarching design philosophy that runs throughout the entire project reflects Swire's enlightened approach to development, incorporating a strong commitment to sustainability in everything from building design to energy saving, green financing, waste management, large expanses of open green space at ground level, and an overhead footbridge network that links the area's main components. Major buildings are all highly-rated in terms of BEAM Plus, LEED, and WELL certification.

What makes the project remarkable, however, is not simply that it creates a critical mass of first-class commercial facilities. The bigger story, as one locally-based juror put it, is about placemaking and community: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is one of these 15-minute communities that has everything: the
residential, the schools, the shopping mall, the doctors’ offices—literally everything you need within walking distance. It is a post-COVID 19 world where a large quantity of people can choose to live close to where they work, send their kids to school, and have everything they need right there. That is what makes Taikoo Place quite unique in Hong Kong."

The emphasis on community is not restricted just to tenants of its commercial assets, but is intended to serve the entire neighbourhood, most obviously via Swire’s commitment to sponsoring frequent social and cultural events (such as street carnivals, markets, and art events) that draw people from the whole of Hong Kong. Less obviously, but probably more importantly, that commitment is also evident in a focus on investing in the public realm to ensure the neighbourhood’s original character is preserved. The developer has therefore retained many of the original street-level shops in the Taikoo Shing Estate and Cityplaza areas, together with community-friendly shopping options such as the Cityplaza mall. All too often in equivalent regeneration exercises, the replacement of such facilities with a sea of high-end shops leads inevitably to gentrification and the slow death of the area’s former identity. Swire’s dedication to maintaining that neighbourhood personality bears witness to the community spirit that is part of its DNA.
Shanghai’s Hongqiao Integrated Transit hub is a long-term development project on the city’s western edge that aims to build and connect an out-of-town CBD, a major new airport, a high-speed railway (HSR) terminus, inter-city bus networks, and connections to the city metro system into a single, interlinked base catering to the 75 million people living throughout the Yangtze River Delta. Currently serving 400 million passengers annually, it is the only such facility in the world.

As part of this massive transport-orient development (TOD), Shui On Land has built a dedicated mixed-use facility that sits at the centre of the new CBD and adjacent to its transport infrastructure, featuring direct walking connections to the high-speed rail station and within easy reach of the airport by way of a 1,000 square metre check-in lounge. Essentially, the project is conceived as a means to tie together all the disparate elements of an integrated transit facility in a way that is both functional and user-friendly.

Known as THE HUB, it features gross floor area of 380,000 square meters, with four office towers, a Xintiandi village lifestyle centre, an indoor shopping mall, a performance/convention centre, and a 5-star hotel. Sustainability and placemaking are also key design features, with all buildings certified with the Chinese Green Building Label and many meeting LEED standards as well.

Planning and implementing a TOD framework that caters effectively to the multitude of uses (and users) it is intended to serve was an enormously challenging exercise, especially given the lack of comparable projects to draw from. Overall, however, the development has been remarkably successful.

Unsurprisingly, the entire development is conceived around the idea of connectivity. It does so, however, in various multi-dimensional ways, both spatially and in terms of accommodating a mass of different stakeholders. Vertical and horizontal connections therefore seamlessly incorporate more than 20 escalators and 400 metres of pedestrian walkways at basement, ground, and above-ground levels. In particular, retail, dining, and cultural options are located on the ground floor, the 2nd and 3rd floors are mainly offices, and the shopping malls are connected to the HSR station at the basement level.

As one juror commented: “Its one of the rare times when you’re down in the basement level and you think you’re at grade. It’s a car-free environment. You’re in a neighbourhood square with restaurants and cafes open to the sky. The scale of it is correct. It’s very welcoming, and then as you begin to work your way up to what is the true grade level you realise how connected and three dimensional this project is”.

Beyond that, the project has anticipated the many ways in which the facility might be used and then created an environment with appeal to each of those different constituencies. It caters, therefore, to office workers from across the CBD, to passengers in transit, attendees at the Convention Center, and to families from surrounding areas who visit on daytrips to enjoy a variety of child-friendly amenities.
In addition, by touting the virtues of the high-speed rail interconnections, the developer was able to convince tenants from apparently far-flung locations to open offices there. According to another juror: “Some of the people that have taken leases are based in neighbouring provinces. But because HSR connections allow them fast access, they can have both a showroom and an office in Shanghai. They show products manufactured a couple provinces away in a proper setting and at the same time maintain a toehold of office space, so when it’s convention time customers can come and be entertained and be part of the whole convention centre connection.”

For much the same reason, THE HUB has also been able to attract a number multi-national companies, who have opted for a base that exploits the interconnected transit links rather than a conventional (and more expensive) office in the Shanghai CBD.

Given the efficiencies afforded by the massive amount of integrated transport infrastructure on offer in Hongqiao and the multitude of users whose priorities have been addressed by the project, THE HUB can be considered a highly replicable facility offering a template that could in principle be implemented in almost any market in the world. That said, there are few destinations today where greenfield projects of the same scale are likely to emerge, and few governments outside China able to bring to bear the scale of resources and long-term commitment to such an exercise needed to make it a success. Hongqiao may therefore remain a spectacular, one-off, example of TOD on a grand scale.
Located on a formerly-disused 1.1 hectare site in the heart of Perth’s CBD, Yagan Square stands next door to Perth Train station and not far from a major metro line. The project was sponsored by the state government of Western Australia with the objective of creating a civic space in the centre of the city that bridges a long-standing disconnect between the CBD to the south and Northbridge, Perth’s major entertainment hub, to the north.

One important function of the project is to integrate with various transportation networks, including the city rail and bus networks, as well as its pedestrian and bicycle pathways, providing an important alternative transport system for a city that is often perceived as car-dependent. It also establishes an axis for people to gather, pulling together previously isolated surrounding areas and creating a catalyst for the creation of further people-oriented spaces in the land to the west, which is earmarked for extensive development.

Opened in March 2018, and featuring an array of public amenities including a Market Hall eatery, play space, wildflower gardens, a digital tower, art installations, and an ampitheatre performance and meeting place, it immediately proved a popular destination, especially when sports events are held at the nearby Perth Arena and Optus Stadium. More than 4 million visitors passed through the site in the first two years since its opening.

Another way in which Yagan Square contributes to the civic realm is in bringing more public space to the middle of the city. Perth is well endowed on its perimeter with such space, but has struggled to create it in its central districts.

Beyond that, by developing it with a low-scale format that stands in contrast to the skyscrapers lining St George’s terrace, it has preserved the scale and sensibility of a foregone era in Perth that has to great extent been lost as the city’s original building stock has been gradually renewed.

Given its proximity to the CBD of what is sometimes known as a rapaciously commercial city, the redevelopment could easily have ended up as another high-density commercial project. Instead, the developer opted to pursue a long period of public consultation with stakeholders (and in particular indigenous Australians) to understand what the people of Perth really wanted.
As a result of that process, which the city says has now set a new benchmark for its planning procedures, the facility focuses predominantly on serving community needs rather than making a profit.

Last but not least, Yagan Square aims to kickstart a much-needed reconciliation with the local indigenous community by establishing a unique sense of place. Featuring a bold ‘rock-strata’ architectural design that captures the spirit of Perth and Western Australia, it celebrates the culture and landscape of Australia’s indigenous people with exhibitions of both installation and performance art. From a sustainability point of view, it has also gone well beyond the norm, with a wide range of sustainable attributes and a 5-Star Green Star Design certification.

According to one Australia-based member of the jury: “It’s reminiscent of the Kimberley up in the north—there’s a resonance in the qualities of the light and space. Australia has not been as advanced in pursuing this type of issue as some other countries, so creating a meaningful relationship with the land and culture is a real step forward.”
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