

*elite traveler*

# Thomas Heatherwick on the Inspiration Behind Eden

Heatherwick Studio's first residential project is a manifestation of biophilic living.

BY SOPHIE KILLIP | JANUARY 11 2021



Eden's garden arrival / ©Hufon+Crow



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Biophilic design – design that aims to bring nature back into the built environment – continues to be a growing interest across the globe, cropping up in a variety of projects. One such example is the recently completed ultra-luxe high-rise in Singapore's prestigious District 10, Eden. Inspired by Singapore's vision as a 'City in a Garden', the property was developed by Swire Properties and features 20 freehold apartments. Each of the apartments occupies an entire floor of the 22-story building and has four en-suite bedrooms, a spacious central living area, and a large, luscious hanging garden balcony.

Behind the design of Eden is the iconic London-based design studio, **Heatherwick Studio**. Founded by Thomas Heatherwick, the studio is renowned for its inventive and exciting buildings, which can be found across the globe and include the Vessel in New York and Coal Drops Yard in London. Eden is Heatherwick Studio's second project in Singapore after the 'Hive' Learning Hub at Nanyang Technological University, but it also marks the studio's first foray into residential design. We spoke to Heatherwick to find out more about Eden and why integrating nature into our cities and buildings is so important.

The conversation begins with a discussion of the difference between houses and apartments; Heatherwick himself was "brought up in streets of houses" that are common in Britain, and remarks that "people who live in houses recognize the funny aspect" of "always [needing] to go up and down" between the floors. In contrast, he found that the high-rises in America and Asia had an "amazing practicality" but felt that these apartments usually experienced "disconnection from the surrounding world. Even though the views are stunning... You can't touch the earth," he says. "It gets very extreme in some very built-up urban areas."

Heatherwick mentions that these residential "buildings are also frequently wrapped in glass... you're strangely exposed and yet entombed in the glass." It was something he kept in mind when designing Eden, in an effort to avoid falling into the same situation. As part of the research for the project, Heatherwick visited other apartment complexes; the best "place I saw had two windows open," he says. "There was a breeze blowing through the apartment."

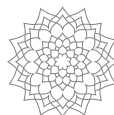




Eden is an ultra-luxe high-rise in Singapore's prestigious District 10 / ©Hufton+Crow



Heatherwick's design opens up the central space to allow plenty of light and a large living area / ©Hufton+Crow



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When creating the design for Eden, the studio also had to contend with Singapore's tropical climate. "The heat and humidity mean that even in apartments that have balconies, often the balconies are dry, unused spaces," Heatherwick mentions, remarking on the other developments he saw. The desire for cross-ventilation and bringing apartment dwellers closer to nature became two points of inspiration during the process of creating Eden's stunning balconies and innovative structure. Pulling apart the conventional rectangular apartment layout, Heatherwick's design places the bedrooms and service areas on the apartments' perimeter, opening up the central space to allow plenty of light and a large living area.

Heatherwick says that the starting point for this innovative approach to Eden's layout was asking himself and his team, "what if we [built] the bedrooms into wings that wrapped around the building?" Another question that cropped up was "What if we created balconies that were protected or partially shaded by the ones above?" The team wanted the balconies to be "really comfortable for people to be on," he says, with "generous windows all the way around [that] could open." Having three sides of the apartment featuring full, opening windows, Heatherwick says, would create a "really pleasant cross breeze for numbers of hours... [meaning] you [could] turn off the air conditioning for a little bit."





Each apartment has a large, sheltered balcony / ©Hufton+Crow

As part of the research for Eden, Heatherwick also visited Singapore's popular Black and White houses, which he found had a stronger sense of "being closer to nature and living indoors and outdoors. They have an architecture that is appropriate to the tropical context," he mentions. Being immersed in Singapore's greenery also showed the design team "the wonderful thing about tropical planting, [which] is the abundance and generosity of the thriving quality that nature has."

This, combined with the inspiration from Lee Kuan Yew's philosophy that Singapore should be a 'City in a Garden', paved the way for the abundance of greenery found on the balconies and on the ground floor at Eden's entrance. "I'm very proud of the arrival," Heatherwick says with a grin. "You're basically walking into a garden; in that garden are two lifts, which can take you up to your apartment. The building touches the ground very lightly, and allows the garden to carry on through."

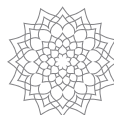


But why was it so important to Heatherwick that nature was incorporated into the design for Eden? He explains that this move towards integrating nature is not specific to this project; in all Heatherwick Studio's projects, the focus is on making places "more diverse and particular to their location, and [for them to have] the real qualities that humans respond to."

"It feels important to be respectful to a place, and the most respectful thing you can do is listen," Heatherwick continues. "We thrive off finding the differences, rather than trying to impose our own personality style for a pre-resolved solution on the place." When it came to Eden, the biggest challenge for the design team was the tropical climate and the tight limitations on land area. Designing the apartment building, Heatherwick explains, "was about coming up with the response that was unique to that site and those constraints."



All four bedrooms feature en-suite bathrooms / ©Hufton+Crow



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Eden is surrounded by an abundance of greenery / ©Hufton+Crow

The integration of nature is the focus of several of Heatherwick Studio's other projects too. Maggie's in Leeds (a cancer care center), for instance, is another of Heatherwick's most recent projects. The new center is "very much trying to be a counterpoint to the literally clinical buildings all around it," says Heatherwick; the biophilia there is "based on northern [English] indigenous planting." Another project Heatherwick is working on is 1,000 Trees, a mixed-use development in Shanghai. "That is very particularly using Chinese mountain trees," he explains, and – as the name would attest – "there are a thousand of [these trees] making up the main building."



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Perhaps the reason that biophilic design is at the forefront in many of Heatherwick's projects is that he's seen "a focus on the hardness of buildings and [buildings] with very hard, brutal geometry... you go to districts with office buildings and they are pretty harsh," he says. "I feel that there [needs to be] a readdressing of the balance [between] trying to create modernity [and] an integration of nature."

"We don't see [nature] as an add-on or a fashion, but as something essential that needs to be integrated intelligently," Heatherwick continues. "It's not about the quantity of greenery but the quality of it, and getting it closer to people for there to be real emotional meaning." So, what exactly does this mean for any future projects that Heatherwick Studio finds itself working on? Heatherwick smiles. "It's highly likely that we will be integrating nature more and more into the world around us," he says. "Not as a trend, but as a counterpoint to [other] very large buildings being built – and as something that feels like it's high time to do."

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