

Singapore

Esquire

11
2020

r
i
z
a
h
m
e
d

REAL

REBELLIOUS

REVOLUTIONARY

DESIGN OF
THE TIMES
THE PEOPLE
& PLACES
DEFINING
INTERIOR
STYLE
TODAY



ISSN 2301-3397 S\$8.00

DESIGN

out of

Comprising just 20 apartments—each an entire floor—Eden is, as its 'starchitect', Thomas Heatherwick describes it, 'a home in a garden'.



eden

Singapore's newest residential building fully commits to the modern city's founding father's vision of a city in a garden, writes Mitchell Oakley Smith.

While we tout our little island as a garden city, most apartment buildings and condos in Singapore are surprisingly bereft of much greenery, and often, many plants are plastic rather than the real thing. Not so at the appropriately named Eden, a new Swire-developed residential property just off Scotts Road in the Newton district, which is not so much a building decorated by plants as an all-encompassing forest, dense with greenery, propelled vertically into the sky, but a barely visible structure.

“What me and my team are excited about is that we had the chance to make somewhere that is extremely green,” explains Thomas Heatherwick, the award-winning British architect responsible for the design of Eden, which is home to some 30,000 plants of more than 100 different species. The building marks a significant departure from the glass and steel tower typology that dominates most of Singapore's upper skyline, attempting to offer its residents a private and calming oasis despite being located in one of the country's most lively precincts. “The luxury is that we've let everything be as natural as it can be, and I hope it will be an emotional response that a resident has as they walk in and have that connection to nature.”

The sense of privacy is achieved in part by Heatherwick's subversion of the conventional

residential tower: in moving the services to the perimeter, each apartment is afforded a large central living space surrounded by smaller individual rooms and wide, shell-like balconies. This design in turn aids in the building's sustainability credentials, the natural cross-ventilation of each apartment eschewing the need for electric cooling and the cocoon-like outer structure protecting the glass windows from thermal conductivity.

Every element of Eden is a lesson in detail-orientated design, demonstrating the architectural potential of common materials. The building's primary structure, for example, is crafted from concrete, chosen for its thermal massing qualities; but rather than a flat grey surface, the external walls are moulded with an abstracted topographical map of Singapore's terrain, adding a tactility to the building. Inside the 20 freehold apartments, imperfections of natural materials are embraced, such as the knot marks in the handmade parquet floors that remain intact, and the 180-million-year-old cross-cut Jura limestone of the bathroom's walls and floors that retains its fossilised imprints. “There's something so powerful about materials that are millions of years old and doing nothing more than polishing them, bringing out their life,” says Heatherwick, as he reclines in an outdoor chair sculpturally crafted from stone.

Heatherwick—whose most famous works include the UK Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo 2010, the 2012 Olympic cauldron, and The Vessel at Hudson Yards' Public Plaza in New York City—explains that his inspiration for Eden was the manifesto of Lee Kuan Yew more than 50 years ago, in which Singapore's first prime minister set out a vision for ‘a city in a garden’. “I feel that we've been loyal to that original vision,” says Heatherwick. “I've designed a living building which has different tree types, grasses, leaves rustling... the whole idea is that this is a living, changing thing. I can't wait to come back in years and see how people adapt to their spaces and the plants, I hope, have matured and enriched the experience for everyone that lives here.” ■