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# THE PEAK

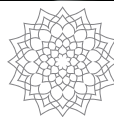


C H A T R I

*The One Championship CEO  
is raring to return to the cage  
for the next round*

S I T Y O D T O N G

THE CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT ISSUE  
WHEN PRESENT & FUTURE ICONS MEET | KEEPING A HERITAGE TICKING | A HOMEGROWN CIRCUS ACT



SHAMIN ABAS

ULTRA-LUXURY BRAND MARKETING  
& BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

lifestyle



BY  
CHARMAINE CHAN

## The Human Touch

For British architect Thomas Heatherwick, good design is about connecting us to nature, each other and our essential humanity.

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02



03

*“Desks are such deathly places, yet we spend hours at them.”*

In the world of design, few individuals consistently surprise but British wunderkind Thomas Heatherwick is one of them. He first came to our collective attention for his work on the UK Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai Expo, a shimmering sculpture of 60,000 gently swaying translucent fibre optic tubes making up the Seed Cathedral.

Heatherwick has been variously described as a Pied Piper, a Willy Wonka and a larger-than-life showman. Yet the bright-eyed, curly-haired man who turns up for our Zoom interview is soft-spoken, thoughtful and considered.

The ongoing pandemic has sparked a million ideas for him and he speaks about our upended lives and how much that has impacted his thoughts on design, especially when it comes to our work and home spaces. “Desks are such deathly places, yet we spend hours at them,” he says.

On a more macro level, the current Covid crisis has worked to solidify his belief that there is no more excuse for “lazy placemaking” or what he describes as formulaic designs based on clumsy stereotypes. “Now that so many people are working from home, homes have to be better and offices have to be better,” he says. “Otherwise, why would any of

us go into the office? The answer has to be because of the social dimension of coming together with others.”

Heatherwick is certainly turning these realisations into reality with his work for his studio with a 180-strong team, as well as for up to 4,000 employees in the Google headquarters in California and Charleston East, which is a collaboration with Danish firm BIG. “I’m always thinking about how to make each and everyone feel they are special so they will come forward and have the confidence to collaborate and challenge each other.”

His design philosophy is centred on the idea of connection with each other as well as with nature. Hence, his recent pivot to biophilic design with nature

**01** The Vessel is the centrepiece of the Hudson Yards redevelopment project in New York City.

**02** Visitors admiring the Seed Cathedral within the UK Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.

**03** A render of the external terrace at 1000 Trees, an upcoming mixed-use development project in Shanghai.

front and centre, as seen in Eden, a 22-storey-tall luxury residential tower in Singapore. “Nature is an essential element for healthy environment-making – a counterpoint to these very large man-made objects.”

Heatherwick’s priorities were to connect Eden’s occupants to the outdoors, both through the maximisation of natural cross ventilation as well as the provision of lush gardens for every resident. “The big push was to have tonnes of soil on every floor because the tropical climate is amazing for growth,” he says.

“I’d been feeling that there was a gulf between the buildings being built and the human experience,” he says, citing “pompous apartments, sterile offices, tombstone towers and boring big blocks of shininess” as evidence of a design disconnect.

This gap between designer and end-user leads us back to Heatherwick’s focus, and why the connection is so important to him and even more so in today’s climate.

“How can I design a place that truly cherishes our humanity? This is what the Covid-19 crisis has emphasised: how people come together must be the centre of everything we do now.” 🌱

