

# CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AS ARCHITECTURAL PROXY

by

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## Author's Declaration

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# abstract

Conspicuous Consumption as Architectural Proxy  
M. Arch (2013)

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Contemporary architecture in emerging economies is at risk of losing rich cultural identity in built environments as much of today's reaction is driven by a fixation on superlative ostentatiousness as the normative design process. This thesis asserts that there are several attributes of architectural conspicuous consumption that emerging economies could adopt in order to sustain their cultural identity through architecture. This will be achieved through the inclusion of both past cultural traditions and current global trends, which will be demonstrated in the thesis project in Guangzhou, the centre of China's industrial market and growing urban center.

# S U A U U



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## Dedication

For my parents Vrej and Sossee Tilizian






# table of contents

Author's Declaration	iii
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	ix
Table of Contents	xi
List of Figures	xv
List of Appendices	xxix
Introduction	02
Chapter 1. Architecture of Identity	14
1.1 Architecture as Cultural Identity	17
1.2 Architecture and the Rise of Influence by Political and Religious Supremacies	21
1.3 Semiotics, Meaning, and Representation in Architecture	25
Chapter 2. Lucrative Cultures: Industrialization and Globalization	34
2.1 The Industrial Age	37
2.2 Globalization: An Economic Endeavour	42

Chapter 3. Conspicuous Consumption and Commodification in Architecture	48
3.1 Homogenized Environments: The Loss of Identity to Consumer Cultures (Trends, Technology, Marketing and Brand Names)	52
3.2 Conspicuous Consumption and Architecture: The Rise of Architecture as Object Commodity	71
3.3 Between Eastern Enterprise and Western Capitalism	92
3.4 The Superlative Nature: Emerging Economies and their Investment in Conspicuous Architecture	98
Chapter 4. From Genesis to Decadence: China's Role in Conspicuous Consumption	108
4.1 A Brief History of China's Political and Economic Rise	112
4.2 "Made in China": Consumerism in Contemporary China	117
4.3 Conspicuous Architecture in China	125
Chapter 5. This Time Tomorrow: Responding to Our Progressive Society in the 21st Century	138
5.1 Strategies that Respond to Conspicuous Consumption as Architectural Proxy	142
5.2 Value in Conspicuous Architecture	154
Chapter 6. The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory	160
6.1 Guangzhou: China's Industrial Giant	164
6.2 Guang Cai	175
6.3 Siling Guang Cai	180
6.4 Strategies Applied to Contemporary Chinese Architecture	194

6.5 Formative Design	196
Conclusion	250
Appendix	cclvi
Bibliography	ccxciv

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## List of Figures

- Figure 01. Marc-Antoine Laugier's Primitive Hut  
<http://deconstructionand.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/hut4.jpg>
- Figure 02. Pyramids of Giza  
[http://www.imagesu.net/data/media/527/landscape\\_pyramids\\_\\_cairo\\_-\\_egypt.jpg](http://www.imagesu.net/data/media/527/landscape_pyramids__cairo_-_egypt.jpg)
- Figure 03. Parthenon  
<http://toptravellists.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/parthenon-athens-greece-hd-desktop.jpg>
- Figure 04. Treasury at Petra  
<http://blog.kenkaminesky.com/2011/06/20/petra-jordan-historic-world-wonder/>
- Figure 05. Colosseum  
<http://www.mrwallpaper.com/wallpapers/Colosseum.jpg>
- Figure 06. Ise Grand Shrine  
<http://www.soundwalk.com/blog/in-gods-name-shinto-grand-shrine-ise-japan/>
- Figure 07. Native igloo  
[http://www.csulb.edu/~aisstudy/nae/chapter\\_1/001\\_002\\_1.03.jpg](http://www.csulb.edu/~aisstudy/nae/chapter_1/001_002_1.03.jpg)
- Figure 08. Egyptian adobe structure  
[http://www.egyptsearch.com/forums/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get\\_topic;f=15;t=003467](http://www.egyptsearch.com/forums/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic;f=15;t=003467)

- Figure 09. Indonesian raised rattan hut  
<http://wonkgonewild.wordpress.com/2012/02/25/abdi-homestay-in-harau-valley/>
- Figure 10. Pyramids of Giza  
<http://www.sobekegypt.com/gallery/the-magic-of-egypt/the-magic-pyramids-of-giza-in-egypt/>
- Figure 11. Colosseum  
<http://www.atravelbook.com/an-overview-of-the-colosseum-in-rome/>
- Figure 12. Langhua Temple  
<http://www.nikdaum.com/news/2009/10/moon-cake-fireworks.html>
- Figure 13. Taj Mahal  
<http://www.lowbird.com/all/view/2010/12/taj-mahal>
- Figure 14. The White House  
<http://theamericanlife.wordpress.com/2011/05/18/the-white-house/>
- Figure 15. Big Ben  
[http://wvs.toleftpixel.com/archives/photos\\_architecture/051103\\_1351.shtml](http://wvs.toleftpixel.com/archives/photos_architecture/051103_1351.shtml)
- Figure 16. La Sagrada Familia Cathedral  
<http://architecture.about.com/od/greatbuildings/ig/Antoni-Gaud-/Sagrada-Familia-.htm>
- Figure 17. Eiffel Tower  
<http://travel-junkies.com/2013/01/04/sydneys-corner-eiffel-tower/>
- Figure 18. Church of the Savior  
<http://www.listofimages.com/church-of-the-savior-saint-petersburg-russia-church-architecture-world.html>
- Figure 19. Sydney Opera House  
<http://dandelionmoms.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/sydney-opera-house-wallpaper1366x76819623.jpg>
- Figure 20. CN Tower  
<http://favim.com/image/474060/>
- Figure 21. Burj Al Arab  
<http://arabicguy.wordpress.com/2012/08/10/fun-facts-about-burj-al-arab/>

- Figure 22. Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition of 1851  
<http://www.studyblue.com/notes/note/n/arch-hist-2-final/deck/2825683>
- Figure 23. Eiffel Tower  
<http://www.mrwallpaper.com/wallpapers/paris-eiffel-tower.jpg>
- Figure 24. London Tower Bridge  
[http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/Tower\\_bridge\\_London\\_Twilight\\_-\\_November\\_2006.jpg](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/Tower_bridge_London_Twilight_-_November_2006.jpg)
- Figure 25. Paris Opera House  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/noviceromano/2462728880/>
- Figure 26. Skyscrapers in Downtown Dubai  
<http://www.letstravelsomewhere.com/travel-inspiration/sanjay-pradhan-dubai/attachment/lets-travel-to-united-arab-emirates-dubai-with-sanjay-pradhan-skyline-featured/>
- Figure 27. Apple Retail Store, New York  
<http://tracehotnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/apps.jpg>
- Figure 28. Tiffany & Co. Flagship, Beijing  
[http://maosuit.com/?attachment\\_id=36](http://maosuit.com/?attachment_id=36)
- Figure 29. GreenPix Energy, New York  
<http://glassisgreen2010.blogspot.ca/2012/07/10-best-unseen-green-buildings-in-world.html>
- Figure 30. The National Library of Belarus, Minsk  
<http://500px.com/photo/11444259>
- Figure 31. Agbar Tower, Barcelona  
<http://www.rediff.com/money/slide-show/slide-show-1-15-countries-that-lead-in-giving-citizenship/20120628.htm>
- Figure 32. Digital Beijing Building, Chaoyang  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/28464766@N07/3927422621/>
- Figure 33. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto  
<http://buildipedia.com/aec-pros/featured-architecture/keeping-up-with-torontos-evolving-architectural-identity>

- Figure 34. Denver Art Museum, Denver  
<http://www.aasarchitecture.com/2013/02/Extension-Art-Museum-Daniel-Libeskind.html>
- Figure 35. City Centre, Las Vegas  
<http://www.fotopedia.com/items/flickr-6338609553>
- Figure 36. Guggenheim Art Museum Bilbao, Spain  
<http://www.mirohotelbilbao.com/en/>
- Figure 37. Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles  
<http://architecture.about.com/od/theaters/ig/Theaters-/Disney-Concert-Hall.-9Sc.htm>
- Figure 38. Beijing National Aquatic Center  
<http://www.rauwblog.nl/london-2012/beijingtonalaquaticscenter5/>
- Figure 39. Casino Oceanus, Macau  
<http://www.seele.com/cover-en/casino-macao-oceanus-china-2.html>
- Figure 40. Beijing Olympic National Stadium  
<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=94095355>
- Figure 41. Phoenix International Media Center  
<http://architecturelinked.com/profiles/blogs/phoenix-international-media-center>
- Figure 42. Rogers Centre, Toronto  
<http://www.reddit.com/user/Schnooz>
- Figure 43. Rockefeller Center, New York  
<http://www.dieselpunks.org/profiles/blogs/art-history-rockefeller>
- Figure 44. Dolby Theater, Los Angeles  
<http://www.destination360.com/north-america/us/california/los-angeles/dolby-theatre>
- Figure 45. Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto  
<http://newz4u.net/archives/34861>
- Figure 46. Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, Toronto  
[http://www.johnbentleymays.com/index.cfm?PAGE\\_PATH=The\\_Look\\_of\\_Music\\_The\\_Four\\_Seasons\\_Centre\\_for\\_the\\_Performing\\_Arts&ID=15697](http://www.johnbentleymays.com/index.cfm?PAGE_PATH=The_Look_of_Music_The_Four_Seasons_Centre_for_the_Performing_Arts&ID=15697)



- Figure 47. Chicago Spire  
<http://tieku.fi/savukiehkura>
- Figure 48. Marilyn Monroe Towers, Mississauga  
<http://wvs.toleftpixel.com/12/08/13/>
- Figure 49. Shanghai Tower  
<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=102046616>
- Figure 50. Cayan Tower, Dubai  
<http://wallpapersget.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Infinity-Tower-Skyscraper-Dubai-Marina-United-Arab-Emirates1.jpg>
- Figure 51. Turning Torso, Sweden  
<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-LMXeavouwms/UYfkYtFlkiI/AAAAAAAAAGDY/fyqrc6NYo6E/s1600/031+San+tiago+CALATRAVA+1999-2004+Turning+Torso+Malmö.jpeg>
- Figure 52. One Bloor East, Toronto  
<http://urbantoronto.ca/database/projects/one-bloor-east>
- Figure 53. Aqua, Chicago  
<http://studiogang.net/work/2004/aqua>
- Figure 54. Landmark Project, Sweden  
[http://www.archdaily.com/64731/3xn-wins-landmark-project-in-sweden/view\\_3/](http://www.archdaily.com/64731/3xn-wins-landmark-project-in-sweden/view_3/)
- Figure 55. *Skyline of Egos*  
<http://www.eikongraphia.com/images/CrazyBuildingsSkylineFINALAllRightsReservedOMA-S.jpg>
- Figure 56. Oriental Art Center, Shanghai  
<http://riotrules.com/musics/a-night-at-the-symphony-the-royal-concertgebouw-in-shanghai/>
- Figure 57. Interior Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum (Daniel Libeskind)  
<http://archinect.com/features/article/38879033/in-focus-sam-javanrouh>
- Figure 58. Interior of ROCA London Gallery (Zaha Hadid)  
[http://www.archdaily.com/179092/roca-london-gallery-zaha-hadid-architects/\\_mg\\_5622/](http://www.archdaily.com/179092/roca-london-gallery-zaha-hadid-architects/_mg_5622/)

- Figure 59. Mirvish Towers, Toronto (David Mirvish and Frank Gehry)  
<http://www.designboom.com/architecture/frank-gehry-david-mirvish-plans-for-entertainment-district-in-toronto/>
- Figure 60. Shard, London (Renzo Piano)  
<http://nipunscorp.com/2013/02/05/londons-new-tallest-building-the-shard/>
- Figure 61. Burj Khalifa, Dubai  
<http://imagexsotic.com/hotel-dubai-burj-khalifa-hd.html>
- Figure 62. Sky City, Hunan  
<http://www.constructionweekonline.com/article-22562-video-broad-sustainable-buildings-sky-city/>
- Figure 63. Burj Al Arab, Dubai  
<http://hdwallpaper2013.com/city/hotel-dubai-burj-al-arab-sunset-hd-wallpaper.html>
- Figure 64. People's Daily headquarters, Weibo  
<http://www.dezeen.com/2013/05/09/>
- Figure 65. CCTV Headquarters, Beijing  
<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=179084>
- Figure 66. Great Wall of China  
<http://wallpaper.com/wallpaper/great-wall-424195>
- Figure 67. Forbidden City  
<http://www.fotopedia.com/items/ktwenchuan-Ef4q0nSWD3k>
- Figure 68. Classical Chinese Pagoda  
[http://www.picstopin.com/2560/description-download-classic-chinese-pagoda-2560x1440\\*.jpg/](http://www.picstopin.com/2560/description-download-classic-chinese-pagoda-2560x1440*.jpg/)
- Figure 69. Bespoke illustrating at Louis Vuitton Shanghai  
<http://www.theclotheswhisperer.co.uk/2012/08/louis-vuitton-shanghai-express-part-1.html>
- Figure 70. Louis Vuitton Maison, Shanghai  
<http://myfashionreview.co.uk/louis-vuitton-shanghai-maison-opening/dscn3477/>

- Figure 71. Beijing Skyline  
[http://www.allaboutskscrapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Beijing\\_Skyline.jpeg](http://www.allaboutskscrapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Beijing_Skyline.jpeg)
- Figure 72. Shanghai Skyline  
<http://curacaotribune.com/the-futuristic-shanghai-skyline/shanghai-skyline/>
- Figure 73. Chongqing Skyline  
[http://www.allaboutskscrapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/chongqing\\_skyline.jpg](http://www.allaboutskscrapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/chongqing_skyline.jpg)
- Figure 74. *in* Huizhou  
<http://coolstacks.com/china-pirate-austrian-village/>
- Figure 75. *in* Tianjin  
<http://historum.com/asian-history/38115-western-influence-architecture-modern-china.html>
- Figure 76. *in* Taizhu  
<http://historum.com/asian-history/38115-western-influence-architecture-modern-china.html>
- Figure 77. *in* Zhangjiagang  
<http://historum.com/asian-history/38115-western-influence-architecture-modern-china.html>
- Figure 78. Ronchamp Chapel, France  
<http://sophiadeboick.com/2012/08/28/blog-now-huta-new-towns-and-old-religion/>
- Figure 79. Zengzhou Chapel, Henan  
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2258975/Chinese-fakeaway-How-worlds-famous-buildings--cities--cloned.html>
- Figure 80. Tower Bridge, London  
<http://janusalmighty.wordpress.com/tag/tower-of-london/>
- Figure 81. Tower Bridge, Suzhou  
<http://suzhoupengyou.com/photo/towerbridge-copy-suzhou-china>
- Figure 82. Wangjing Soho, Beijing  
<http://www.designbuzz.com/beijing-based-wangjing-soho-complex-zaha-hadid-architects/>
- Figure 83. Meiqun Complex, Chongqing  
<http://www.octogon.hu/tervek-1/hadid+copypaste+kinaban++1.html>

- Figure 84. Ren Building, Shanghai  
<http://shelterbowl.com/blurb/?p=142>
- Figure 85. Pangu Building, Beijing  
<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/16432772>
- Figure 86. Shanghai Financial Towers  
[http://secret-architecture.blogspot.ca/2009\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://secret-architecture.blogspot.ca/2009_02_01_archive.html)
- Figure 87. Piano Building, Huaian  
<http://humanscribbles.blogspot.ca/2011/03/made-in-china.html>
- Figure 88. National Art Museum of China, Beijing  
<http://www.evolo.us/architecture/national-art-museum-of-china-proposal-mad-architects/>
- Figure 89. National Centre for the Performing Arts, Beijing  
<http://www.hdwallpapersfree.eu/view-national-centre-for-the-performing-arts-beijing-china-1920x1080.html>
- Figure 90. East Gateway of Suzhou  
<http://www.dezeen.com/2012/09/05/rmjm-skyscraper-dubbed-big-pants-by-chinese/>
- Figure 91. Wood Sculpture Museum, Harbin  
<http://www.archdaily.com/358346/china-wood-sculpture-museum-mad-architects/>
- Figure 92. Circle of Life, Fushun  
<http://www.my-walls.org/china-liaoning-province-fushun-circle-life/>
- Figure 93. Shidai Tower, Harbin  
<http://www.differentdesign.it/2012/10/15/shidai-tower-harbin/>
- Figure 94. Olympic Gardens, Beijing  
<http://beijingasiahotel.com/beijing-olympic-park/>
- Figure 95. The New South China Mall, Dongguan  
<http://sometimes-interesting.com/2013/05/02/largest-empty-mall-in-the-world-new-south-china-mall/>
- Figure 96. Jean-Marie Tjibaou Center, Noumea  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/43355952@N06/galleries/72157622972570402>

- Figure 97. Concerns and Strategies Relationship  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 98. The National Bank of Dubai  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/rougetete/4193887866>
- Figure 99. Jean-Marie Tjibaou Center, Noumea  
<http://jacobogordonlevenfeld.es/the-cultural-center-jean-marie-tjibaou/?lang=en>
- Figure 100. The Ordos Art Museum, Erdos  
<http://www.archdaily.com/35181/ordos-art-museum-dna/>
- Figure 101. The Museum of New 4th Army Jiangnan Headquarters  
<http://travelwithfrankgehry.blogspot.ca/2010/03/n4a-exhibition-hall-by-azl-atelier.html>
- Figure 102. Porcelain Illustration  
<http://source4interiors.com/store/Cambourne-Porcelain-Blue-Schumacher-p8473.html>
- Figure 103. Map of China (Guangdong Province)  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 104. Map of Guangdong Province (Guangzhou)  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 105. Map of Guangzhou  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 106. Plan of the City of Canton  
<http://www.metenenglish.org/View/Branches.aspx?ID=24>
- Figure 107. Thirteen Factories  
[http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/rise\\_fall\\_canton\\_04/gallery\\_places/pages/cwC\\_1805c\\_AH6424\\_Daniell.htm](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/rise_fall_canton_04/gallery_places/pages/cwC_1805c_AH6424_Daniell.htm)
- Figure 108. Guangzhou at Nighttime  
<http://www.worldpropertychannel.com/asia-pacific-vacation-news/guangzhou-marriott-hotel-tianhe-marriott-hotels-resorts-guangzhou-grandview-entertainment-co-ltd-5775.php>
- Figure 109. Canton Tower along the Pearl River  
<http://www.hdwallpaperstop.com/guangzhou-city-wallpapers/>

- Figure 110. Guangzhou Opera House  
<http://www.huftonandcrow.com/projects/gallery/guangzhou-opera-house/>
- Figure 111. Canton Tower  
<http://blog.arounder.com/arounder-com/best-of-arounder-com/best-of-arounder-guangzhou/>
- Figure 112. Guangzhou Slum  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ripcreations/7056495727/>
- Figure 113. Iconic Chinese Porcelain  
<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/asia/china/yangzi-basin/>
- Figure 114. Guangzhou's Urban Sprawl 1960–2010  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 115. Site Plan of Northwestern Haizhu  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 116. Haixinsha  
<http://www.echinacities.com/news/Asian-Games-Sites-Become-Tourist-Hotspots-in-Guangzhou>
- Figure 117. Canton Tower  
<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2010/12/prweb4901234.htm>
- Figure 118. Guangzhou Opera House  
[http://www.bustler.net/index.php/article/riba\\_international\\_award\\_winners\\_2011\\_announced](http://www.bustler.net/index.php/article/riba_international_award_winners_2011_announced)
- Figure 119. The Guangdong Museum  
<http://openbuildings.com/buildings/guangdong-museum-profile-40385>
- Figure 120. Guangzhou IFC  
[http://www.archdaily.com/356679/ifc-guangzhou-wilkinson-eyre-architects/516317ddb3fc4bc526000261\\_ifc-guangzhou-wilkinson-eyre-architects\\_366p646\\_h-jpg/](http://www.archdaily.com/356679/ifc-guangzhou-wilkinson-eyre-architects/516317ddb3fc4bc526000261_ifc-guangzhou-wilkinson-eyre-architects_366p646_h-jpg/)
- Figure 121. Guangzhou Library  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/interkulturevents/6665894445/>
- Figure 122. Guangzhou TV Station  
[http://www.e-architect.co.uk/guangzhou/guangzhou\\_building.htm](http://www.e-architect.co.uk/guangzhou/guangzhou_building.htm)

- Figure 123. Guangzhou West Tower  
<http://superjchung.wordpress.com/page/3/>
- Figure 124. CTF Guangzhou  
<http://www.archdaily.com/259172/ctf-guangzhou-kpf/1846r0058x/>
- Figure 125. Guangzhou Daily Culture Center  
<http://www.archdaily.com/239162/guangzhou-daily-group-culture-center-iapa/>
- Figure 126. Kasara Development  
<http://inhabitat.com/guangzhou-china-redesigned-as-a-green-city/>
- Figure 127. Guangzhou Velodrome  
<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=857440&page=8>
- Figure 128. Former factory  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/7591050@N06/4695374760/>
- Figure 129. Water Sports Management Centre (view West)  
<http://house.qingdaonews.com/xinloupan/show4506.html>
- Figure 130. Water Sports Management Centre (view East)  
<http://ningbo.jiwu.com/loupan/58797.html>
- Figure 131. Site Plan  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 132. Strategies and Tactics Relationship  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 133. Processional (Linear) Organization of Program  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 134. Eternal (Radial) Expression of Spaces  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 135. Program Distribution  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 136. Re-adjust Existing Condition  
Razmig Titizian
- Figure 137. Courtyards  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 138. Eternal Narrative  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 139. Porcelain Façade  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 140. Sample of Porcelain Façade  
<http://ceramitex.com>

Figure 141. Crackled Cage  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 142. Crackled Porcelain  
[http://www.picstopin.com/1278/08\\*.png/](http://www.picstopin.com/1278/08*.png/)

Figure 143. Chimney Trellis  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 144. External Program  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 145. Site Plan  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 146. Ground Floor Plan  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 147. Second Floor Plan  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 148. Third Floor Plan  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 149. Lower Level Floor Plan  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 150. North Elevation  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 151. South Elevation  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 152. East Elevation  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 153. West Elevation  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 154. Section A-A  
Razmig Titizian



Figure 155. Section B-B  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 156. Exterior view from the Pearl River  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 157. Retail Showroom  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 158. Design Studio A  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 159. View from Central Staircase  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 160. Illustration Room  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 161. Workshop B  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 162. Nighttime view from the Pearl River  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 163. Exterior view during the winter season  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 164. Exterior view of Clay Production and Drying  
Area  
Razmig Titizian

Figure 165. Blossom Tree  
<http://fototroph.tumblr.com>



## List of Appendices

Appendix A. Top 25 World's Tallest Buildings	cclvi
Appendix B. List of Guangzhou's Industrial Sectors	cclx
Appendix C. Glossary of Tactics	cclxiv
Appendix D. Process of Making Porcelain	cclxxvi
Appendix E. Guangzhou Porcelain Folklore	cclxxxii
Appendix F. Program Brief	cclxxxiv
Appendix G. The Hybrid	cclxxxviii



Figure 01. Marc-Antoine Laugier's Primitive Hut



## Introduction



## Introduction

One of the most enduring achievements of any society is undoubtedly its architecture. Constructed out of necessity for survival, shelters were built in order to protect humans from the elements. Similar to Marc-Antoine Laugier's Primitive Hut (Figure 01), the home was a simple construction of post and beam; it had walls, an entry, and a roof overhead – a place of peace and comfort. In many ways, architecture served a fundamental part of life, essential to humankind's survival. Aside from its primary purpose of creating shelter, architecture also allowed humans to *express* and manifest the traditions, ingenuity, innovation, and styles unique to their specific culture; architecture is one of the most lasting accomplishments of any progressive society.

In Vitruvius' treatises on architecture the essential requirements for “good architecture” are *firmitas* (solidity), *utilitas* (usefulness), and *venustas* (beauty) (Vitruvius, 1960). These conditions manifest themselves in buildings that consider technical means in order to withstand time, that are practical in terms of their functionality, and that feature aesthetic qualities that appeal to others. Architecture remains a living entity that expresses itself through



Figure 02. Pyramids of Giza; El Giza, Egypt  
 Figure 03. Parthenon; Athens, Greece  
 Figure 04. Treasury at Petra; Petra, Jordan  
 Figure 05. Colosseum; Rome, Italy





contemporary techniques that conform to Vitruvius' ideal architectural style to this day. Along with Vitruvius' ideals, the ability for architecture to express is precisely what makes it an autobiography that records the inner life of a culture: its moral, religious, and artistic values, social attitude, accomplishments, and a means of preserving a small piece of history. Fittingly, Victor Hugo (1917, p. 62) once said, "architecture has recorded the great ideas of the human race. Not only every symbol, but every human thought has its page in that vast book of architecture. It is and forever will be the greatest document of humanity."



As such, architecture is a work of art that serves as a symbol of culture and that is responsive to the social, political, environmental, and economic situations unique to a given society, and more specifically to the values, beliefs, traditions, and aspirations that have contributed to that culture making its mark on history. "Buildings are evidence of the cultures that made them. They are artifacts which demonstrate the values informing their construction and their life in use" (Sharr, 2012, p. 4). A building's organization, atmosphere, details, and even ambiance all embody the ideologies of its inhabitants and demonstrate the construction techniques and design preferences of their society. Architecture, regardless of program, inevitably draws upon cultural assumptions and

resources of its creators, by exemplifying the forces at work within those societies and its members.

The home and extended communities (markets, lodges, etc.) built by early societies provide information about their lifestyles. “Primeval” architecture reveals the planning and organization that went into the construction of structures; the goal was that the buildings be efficient and adapted for long-term use. Homes were no larger than the individuals who resided in them. Markets were located in centralized spaces so that the community could easily access supplies. Some common structures of these extended communities were medicine lodges, churches, community halls, etc. The materials used were carefully gathered from local resources and then assembled according to contemporary building techniques. Techniques changed over generations and were constantly modernized; as a society evolved, so did its construction techniques and aesthetic standards. The tracking of architectural changes is one way of obtaining important historical information on societies.

As societies progressed over time, so did their architecture. Construction began to take forms such as great palaces, churches, tombs, and governmental buildings that sought to satisfy the rising political and religious structures of their societies. ‘Polite architecture’, once just a simple means to shelter humans, changed as architecture began to glorify authority: ostentatious and elaborate buildings and monuments began to appear worldwide. Though some might consider this shift a negative turn of events, one must consider that many of these “authoritative” buildings created a sense of fortitude and community amongst their builders as they expressed their desire to seek guidance from a “higher power”. Domestic and populous-driven architecture preserved and

recorded cultural values, traditions, and lifestyles for those societies that built them, and these astonishing works further created some of the world's most significant examples of ingenious design innovation and engineering in architecture. Notable works, such as the Pyramids of Giza (2560 BCE), the Parthenon (447 BCE), the Treasury at Petra (100 BCE) and the Colosseum (80 AD) (Figures 02 - 05) became important figures (icons and markers) in the built environment and are to this day studied in academia and architecturally centuries later, they are extremely influential.

These “new” types of architecture quickly came to be representative of growing religious, royal, and political authority. It is considered that in the prominent display of wealth by an emerging elite often expressed through built works in cities is to be found a fundamental expression of that society's cultures (Fitzsimons, 2011). Architecture, being highly visible and durable, serves as the medium of politics, social engagement, cultural identity, and ideological and symbolic expression.

Architecture continues to be one of the most pervasive manifestations of status and power on the international stage. With the onset of the Industrial Age in the mid-eighteenth century and Globalization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, architecture went beyond simple representations of status and power. Much of architecture today, whether implicitly or explicitly, has fallen victim to our consumerist society; it has become yet another *product* of “conspicuous consumption”, a term coined by sociologist Thorstein Veblen (Veblen, 2005). As architecture once expressed cultural differences (through construction, materiality, and style), many modern built and proposed projects seem to present a much more unified vision. Unfortunately, this new vision does not

reference religious or political platforms, but seems to disregard the architecture of the past several centuries and to have become a platform for expressing economic superiority that interests itself in scale and aesthetic qualities, rather than in expression of cultural and site contexts.

The task of an architect is to create an environment that can be readily identifiable by a society as its own. Designing for and within contemporary societies must respond to the challenge of identifying, understanding, and creating architecture that is new, yet familiar. Architecture has in many ways become a commodity, another aspect of the consumerist society in our globalized economy. Architecture has increasingly been encouraged by mass media and the capitalist economy to portray something that it is not. “A new consensus is born: products will flourish as they will be presented as “commodities”: the brand as experience, as lifestyle” (Klein, 2000, p. 21). The ability to construct architecture based purely on ingenuity and innovation has been lost as built projects are deliberately used as advertising and marketing strategies not only by large corporations, but even by global cities whose power and economic status is largely expressed architecturally. Our preoccupation with mass media, popular culture, and brands in our contemporary consumerist society has led to an acceptance of commodified and repetitive environments while designers remain indifferent to the construction of unique, evocative, and robust architecture. In a world where there were once unique differences there is now only a collection of similarities in one homogenized environment.

Architecture has always serviced to articulate and distinguish cultures. Where is the culture of architecture

today to situate itself in the face of current dematerialized representation and misrepresentation? By and large, today's architecture prefers to focus on consumerist gratification and on the *image*, an approach at odds with Vitruvius' notions of *venustas*. This effect is ever more noticeable in developing countries, newly industrialized cities, and emerging economies. Architecture in these emerging economies is used as a means of superlative expression. They invest in taller, larger, more fashionable and more extreme architecture as they compete with one another on the international stage. This competition is seen around the world but has become an accelerated trend especially in cities located in Asia and the Middle East. These two areas in particular have looked to the West not only to adopt and implement their architectural styles, but have also gone so far as to commission Western architects to design tremendously ostentatious architecture for their cities that is in many ways unnecessary and that is not even expressive of local cultures. This superlative nature of architecture in our contemporary consumerist age has led to several significant changes that is creating a schism between a nation's cultures and the architecture being created in their cities. The emulation of Western ideals in distant nations has the effect of diluting their own cultures: distinctive urban environments become ever more homogenized as Western style spreads across the globe, and architecture becomes a superficial commodity that is consumed by our globalized world.

We must come to terms with mass consumption in our society and the conspicuous manner in which it is done. Conspicuous consumption is not a new practice. It has been found in societies ever since goods and services became readily available to the masses. So progressive societies must work both with and parallel to current

conditions. However, many fundamental issues with current methods of design and production make that a difficult task. First, there is the obvious concern regarding the ocularcentric mode of design seen in extreme and ostentatious projects. Other concerns include the inability of mega-structures in emerging cities to fulfill their programming. Ghost towns have resulted from inaccurate predictions regarding population migration, the ease of relocation of entire communities to new urban centers, and reaction to competition-based design amongst emerging economies. Architecture is no longer unique to a given society; locations may differ but the attempt to build the tallest, largest, and most extreme architecture in similar materials and styles, is now the driving force behind much construction.

It would be naïve to propose that architecture reject current trends and adopt archaic traditions. However, architecture now more than ever has to embrace the values of contemporary cultures not just to remain relevant but to adapt to the dynamic needs of growing societies. Moving forward, architecture of the twenty-first century, as it responds to conspicuous consumption, must leverage from past and present culture. It must transcend the values of tradition and history (both within the industry and outside of it) while at the same time being mindful of domestic design, and it must work in tandem with popular culture and lifestyles. In this way, architecture can remain pertinent and evocative and also maintain awareness of the unique differences between cultures and their architecture.







Figure 06. Ise Grand Shrine; Ise, Japan



## Architecture of Identity



## Chapter 1

### Architecture of Identity

Architecture displays the values involved in its inhabitation, construction, procurement, and design. It traces the thinking of the individuals who have participated in it, their relationships and their involvement in the cultures where they lived and worked. In this way, buildings, their details and the documents used to make them can be read closely for cultural insight... They are the identifiable manifestations of a culture... (Sharr, 2012, p. ii)

“For centuries architecture, painting, and sculpture have been called the Fine Arts, that is to say, the arts which are concerned with “the beautiful” and with an appeal to the eye. And indeed most people judge architecture by its external appearance” (Rasmussen, 1959, p. 16). However, architecture, because it is highly visible (beautiful or not) and also because of its durability, serves as a medium of political, social, ideological, religious, and symbolic expression. Architecture is expected to create visible boundaries; architectural style is intrinsically linked to and reflective of underlying cultural, organizational, behavioral, and symbolic structures. Moreover, architecture not only reflects social structures but also actively participates in maintaining them. One of the ways it does this is in the creation of structures with styles that

express a very unique character – whether through design features, local materials, or construction methods – that serve and speak to distinctive aspects of different cultures. Architecture therefore emerges from the history of a society and documents culturally unique works that are very much reflective of its situation centuries ago and today.

The ability for architecture to withstand the times and at the same time remain highly visible, unlike paintings and sculptures that are housed in museums or personal collections, is a powerful characteristic that can be realized on the level of the global built environment and that provides diverse cultural identities. This is precisely how architecture differs from the other Fine Arts.

### 1.1 Architecture as Cultural Identity

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “identity” as the character determining who or what a person or thing is, and not another (Identity, 2012). Identity is a distinctive characteristic that can be individual or collective within a particular society or social group; cultural identity is one aspect of it. Identity refers to, in the world context, cultural principles, norms, history, languages, beliefs, structures, and traditions. It is able to take on many forms and to make use of different symbols for expression. Architecture is one symbol of identity; it can offer value and significance to a cultural group.

The self is only able to ‘self-identify’ because of its interactions with others; in doing so, it creates a social structure that we define as our culture. The identifiable character of a culture does not merely exist but is the product of human will and historical circumstance(s) over time. Thus, cultural identity refers to the customs and

traditions shared by a group of people. When those ideals begin to manifest themselves in a dynamic society, their natural outcome is the production of tangible artifacts (architecture) that create an environment that allows the self and the collective to gather and associate within a communal culture. The most invaluable accomplishment of cultural environments is their architecture: buildings, spaces, construction, and their documentation can be studied for the insights they provide into the values and traditions of the cultures and individuals that made them. Concurrently, architecture is a powerful medium that itself influences aspects of a culture; the built environment is able to shape values, habits, and behaviours of a particular ‘social order’ (Sharr, 2012).

The meaning of culture, as it pertains to architectural discourse, practice, and production, is expressed in our built environment. “We find our identity by understanding ourselves, and our environment” (Torre & Fox, 2009, p. 64). Within environments, the building is present in every social and cultural discourse. This discourse addresses the environments and communities that can be contained, materialized, and symbolized. “It is within the space and form of the building in which the social is more frequently constituted, in which its visual images announces its presence in the city, in the nation, and in various distinct parts of the world” (Anderson, 1983, p. 5).

Architecture is expressed through locally available materials and the use of those materials to build environments. The study of architecture, however, emphasizes the reading of those environments with reference to their overall style. Style is constituted by a building’s design and construction, but most notably by its form. It encompasses the techniques, planning,



Figure 07. Native igloo  
 Figure 08. Syrian adobe structure  
 Figure 09. Indonesian raised rattan hut



organization, and aesthetic qualities of a structure. Architectural style is developed, often independently, in various locations around the world. Vague similarities may be noticed in many works of architecture, but generally speaking they display significant variation due to their embodiment of cultural differences and to their individual responses to their environments. For instance, the Renaissance style began in Italy, but soon spread to France, England, and Spain, where each city re-considered and re-envisioned the style in the light of their own cultural traditions, local materials, and construction methods; they would appropriate those aspects of innovation, design and technology that were suitable to them locally.



Early societies constructed structures that were essential for survival, ones that provided shelter, withstood the elements, and that could accommodate small families as well as provide communal spaces for rituals and customs. The style of architecture that consisted primarily of providing shelters for homes and spaces for communal use came to be known as the ‘vernacular’. Vernacular architecture was built by empirical builders, before there were any professional architects. More specifically, vernacular architecture refers to a form of primitive

shelter/ dwelling in rural and urban developments that were constructed by the indigenous people in a place in time. The structures of vernacular architecture varied considerably depending on the climate where they were located. The many styles included: aboriginal mud and timber lodges, native igloos, Arab tents, Egyptian/ Syrian adobe mud brick, Chinese stonemasonry, straw-bale huts of Africa and the Tropics, Norwegian staves and Malaysian/ Indonesian raised rattan huts (Figures 07 - 09). Architecture became an expressive medium that could be read similarly as a language is read. It responded to unique societal conditions and innovations that communicated cultural life, traditions, values, and identities of communities who shared the same beliefs. Vernacular architecture is not much practiced in our contemporary world, but it has had, and continues to have, a great impact on design and construction.

Architecture is organized by the designers and inhabitants, and it in turn organizes people's lives. If architecture is to make a positive contribution to culture, to projects that are critically acute and socially aware, it can only do so through the deliberate appreciation of architecture as a cultural identity. Architecture can create an identifiable structure that embodies the essence of a primitive society at the same time as it enhances the ability to survive off available and often limited resources. However, as social order came to be implemented in societies, architecture no longer had as its primary purpose the provision of a means of survival.

## 1.2 Architecture and the Rise of Influence by Political and Religious Supremacies

Architectural styles evolve in order to better address changes in lifestyle and customs, just as do other styles in society. In some cases, traditional building techniques were



passed down from one generation to the next; to this day there are to be found people practicing original and traditional building methods. For instance, located in the city of Ise, Japan is the Ise Grand Shrine, dedicated to the goddess Amaterasu-ōmikami. This Shinto temple is rebuilt every twenty years (Figure 06). This rebuilding is done in accordance with the Shinto belief in the renewing powers of nature but also because it is a way of passing building techniques and traditions down to the next generation. (The next rebuild is scheduled for 2013). The tools are used and the procedures carried out just as they were by Shinto people centuries ago. However, new generations utilize advanced technologies and innovations unknown to previous generations to inform newer designs, methods of construction, and styles of architecture (Schittich, 2002).

As communities and their populations grew, there arose a class of people who would come to govern, regulate, and administer the “needs” of a society. This class of administrators usually presented itself as a supreme religious and political power that would rule and structure the people under their control in the most appropriate manner. These types of class and power structures assured societies a sense of community, direction, order, and protection. They also represented power, strength, wealth, divinity, control, authority, and affluence. It would come about that the power of a society’s leaders would be manifested through the environments that they built. The evolution of technologies and mathematics in societies would influence changing trends in the style of buildings. In most instances the architecture that resulted became monumental and iconic. The level of detail, ornamentation, ingenuity, and overall design of many of these structures is unimaginable. Examples of religious buildings are churches, cathedrals, temples, shrines, mosques, and synagogues; political buildings included palaces, royal

halls, and kingdoms, and later on, consulates and embassies. What made them different from the primeval shelters of early societies was the construction techniques, materials, and most of all their scale and ornamentation. “Supreme leaders demanded their aura to remain ‘alive’ forever... this could only be possible with the design of their resilient environments...” (Raymond, 2007, p. 99). Religious and political architecture became less about structures to provide for societal needs and more about the physicality of constructs that would embody strength, power, and supremacy over a society, reinforcing their status and authority.

This change is clearly illustrated in religious architecture. No matter the religion they are built to honor, or the customs, cultures or beliefs of their builders, structures that had their origin in a religious doctrine comprise some of the most highly praised architecture in the world. Ancient Greeks glorified their deities by building temples that were empty, aside from an altar or relic; it did not have as its purpose the sheltering of any members of the society. Egyptian tombs are impressive structures incorporating intricate tunnels; they were constructed as tombs for pharaohs. They are the result of extraordinary engineering done on an enormous scale. Christian churches and cathedrals, Buddhist and Hindu shrines and temples, and Islamic mosques, although they are used in religious practices and ceremonies by the community, are immense buildings whose sole purpose is to represent a divine being or God. Much religious architecture has been designed and constructed for symbolic purposes only and does not function in society in any other sense. In many ways contemporary architecture is remarkably similar. Buildings today incorporate impressive gallery spaces and large venues (tertiary to the program and not fundamental to its functionality), that are

designed with more intricate detailing, finishes, and larger spaces than are needed to functionally support the intended program.

Political architecture originally had royal patronage, for instance, from princes, emperors, and monarchs often believed to be of divine lineage. Political bodies also were responsible for the introduction of urban planning, which became necessary as populations gradually increased and ownership and occupation of land had to be regulated. Kingdoms and empires would include a palace and its associated buildings that included dwellings. Political bodies also created community spaces such as markets and small shops, where labourers were able to earn some sort of partial income, while they paid a percentage of their earnings in taxes. Wealth was the most significant factor in the development of societies. Wealth, whether expressed in currency, taxes, material goods, or real estate, meant status and power over the rest of society. It was manifested in opulent buildings associated with the wealthy. Architecture became an overt means along with the possession of material goods of showcasing the class system, one's family's status, and one's acquired wealth to the rest of the community. Ornamentation, decoration, scale, materiality, and any other visual application of architecture became more important in the design of buildings. Political architecture, like religious architecture, was superficial: that is, the buildings it produced tended towards excess and opulence. The Roman and Byzantine Empires, Chinese Dynasties, and European Kingdoms created admired and imitated works of architecture that remain at the forefront of architectural discourse. Political architecture became a powerful influence on the design of entire cities in the following centuries. Embassies, city halls, bureaus, and consulates currently employ design techniques that emanate the sense of power and authority

to society. Currently, many cases of contemporary architecture, especially in emerging economies, similarly rely on the spectacle of decoration and scale to communicate the superior power and wealth of cities to others.

Aside from the fact that religion and politics have always dominated over societies, religious and political architecture has been responsible for the most inspiring, revolutionary, and innovative designs and construction approaches in the field of architecture, engineering, and also interior design and fashion. At one point, it was clear that a modification of prevailing attitudes toward design of the previous centuries had taken place. There was a new, sudden interest in excess, decorative forms, and opulent styles. "... Architecture has exerted a powerful social force, to embed and stabilize society, to bolster religion and order... taking on an increasingly radical and dislocated shift... one more concerned with wealth" (Glendinning, 2010, p. 162).

### 1.3 Semiotics, Meaning, and Representation in Architecture.

Semiotics is the study of signs, indication, symbolism, metaphor, analogy, signification, and communication. Though it is commonly used in language/ literature, urban semiotics is the study of meaning in built forms that are generated by signs, symbolism, and cultural associations. Umberto Eco, an Italian semiotician and philosopher, categorizes architecture as the study of open objects. By "open", Eco refers to the ability of architecture to be viewed and perceived publicly, unlike small artifacts in museums by people with various interpretations depending on cultural background (Eco, 1976). Some may argue that architecture only serves its functional purposes,

because “good architecture”, according to Vitruvius’ treatises, must be useful (*utilitas*). However, its ability to be recognizable is due to its aesthetic qualities (*venustas*). Since it is a visible medium, it is able to symbolize and communicate meaning.

Architecture is a means of planning, designing, and construction. It is crucial, also however, to understand that architecture is also able to define and represent a culture and its lifestyle, progression, and impact in our world. Iconic and monumental, in terms of design and engineering, architecture can serve as an identifiable symbol of a culture and place to others around the globe. Unique works of architecture, especially in their visual interpretations, allow others to easily recognize the respective societies that designed and built them. They do not in all cases represent the realities of a culture, but do allow others to make the association with foreign places instantly through figures of monumental and iconic architecture. It is a sign. The simple silhouettes of iconic buildings trigger people’s place associations instantaneously (Figures 10 - 21). Contemporary architecture proves this to be more difficult.

In accordance with Vitruvius’ treatises, architecture is also able to sustain culture for future generations; it does so by recording lifestyle, traditions, and beliefs and by communicating these through meaning. Architecture has the ability to function as a “means of communicating message[s]”; architecture is not simply an object in the city, that “it is the peculiar task of architects to convey meaning: the human habitat is pivoted around meaning...” (Giurgola, 2011). Architecture conveys meaning, gestures and motion, and represents society; it is much more complex than just a “building”. For instance, a door does not simply act as an opening to walk through; it may signify

EGYPT

Figure 10. Pyramids of Giza



2540 BC

80 AD



ITALY  
Figure 11. Colosseum

CHINA

Figure 12. Longhua Temple



242 AD

1653



INDIA  
Figure 13. Taj Mahal

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Figure 14. The White House



1800

1858



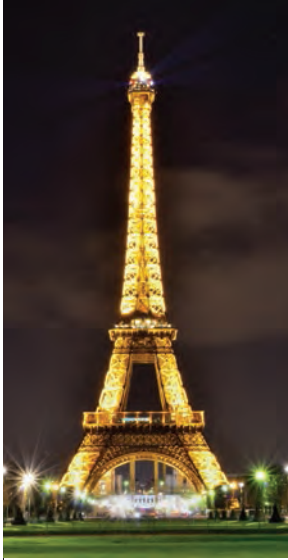
ENGLAND  
Figure 15. Big Ben

SPAIN  
*Figure 16. La Sagrada Família Cathedral*



1882 -

1889



FRANCE  
*Figure 17. Eiffel Tower*

RUSSIA  
*Figure 18. Church of the Savior*



1883

1973



AUSTRALIA  
*Figure 19. Sydney Opera House*

CANADA  
*Figure 20. CN Tower*



1976

1999



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
*Figure 21. Burj Al Arab*

a welcoming gesture, or act as a starting point, a grand entrance. In this way, it serves more than its basic functional program. Architecture on a larger scale acts in the same way. A building serves as a means of communicating a message. For instance, vernacular architecture may mean sustainability and tradition. Architecture, though it is able to communicate the livelihood of past generations, is actually capable of also conveying progressive social differentiation and cultural change. Contemporary architecture represents the ubiquity of technology and design in the profession, and shows where (in the world) these advancements are accelerating. Even the way we denote certain architecture types can convey different meanings; for instance, the house may mean shelter, whereas the home may represent family. Robert Hershberger, a professor of the study of meaning in architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, said that meaning is of considerable importance in perception, “one of the most important determinants of human behaviour” (Hershberger, 2010, pp. 44-45). This is because human perception is undoubtedly linked to feeling. Most importantly, architecture conveys a view of society indirectly, not by designing the “image” of society/ culture, but by projecting an environment for societies to live in. This is the most unique way in which architecture can convey meaning.

Accordingly, architecture is a symbolically expressive language that can be read, similarly to text. We are able to study buildings because architecture is able to record the progression of a society through its construction methods, materiality, formative design, aesthetics, and cultural intuitiveness. It also allows us to discover cultural groups by location, to extricate styles in chronological order, and to distinguish the cultural differences that created such a unique global



infrastructure. We are able to study ancient societies for their use of architecture as a survival technique and for their great insight into engineering and environmental design. For instance, at their most “primeval” many Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and African societies constructed buildings from earth. These buildings were able to withstand intense heat during the day and allowed for natural cooling and ventilation at night. They displayed simplistic designs that were efficient and ingenious. Medieval architecture, the Great Wall of China, and countless fortresses and kingdoms symbolized strength as well as engineering precision. Architecture during the European Renaissance, and the Baroque and Classical periods and all ‘post-versions’ of them not only symbolized the wealth and prosperity of the upper class, but also introduced materials like steel into the construction of immensely large buildings; its use would spread to the rest of the world. Architecture does not only convey a sense of meaning or type (wealth, strength, home, community), but is also able to symbolize the progression of societies, their ingenuity, and their lifestyles. Currently, in emerging economies, architecture overtly communicates both the successes of the thriving cities and people who build them and also the realities of the superlative nature of design in architecture. It is the scale, finishes, extreme forms, and completion schedules that do this communication.

Architecture is a conversation between the generations that is carried out across time. Though this could be said for all other forms of art and culture, “in architecture [the conversation] is the most conspicuous, the most obvious, the most impossible to tune out” (Vale, 2008, p. 53). It is not necessary that we all take part of this conversation, but we all have to “listen” to it. For this reason alone, architecture is the most significant feature of cultures, because it is around us at all times. Affecting us in

every which way, subtle and barely noticeable, or loud and conspicuous, architecture will never fail to be there. Urban semiotics communicates the underlying symbols, meanings, and representation of past, present, and future cultures through the built environment.





02

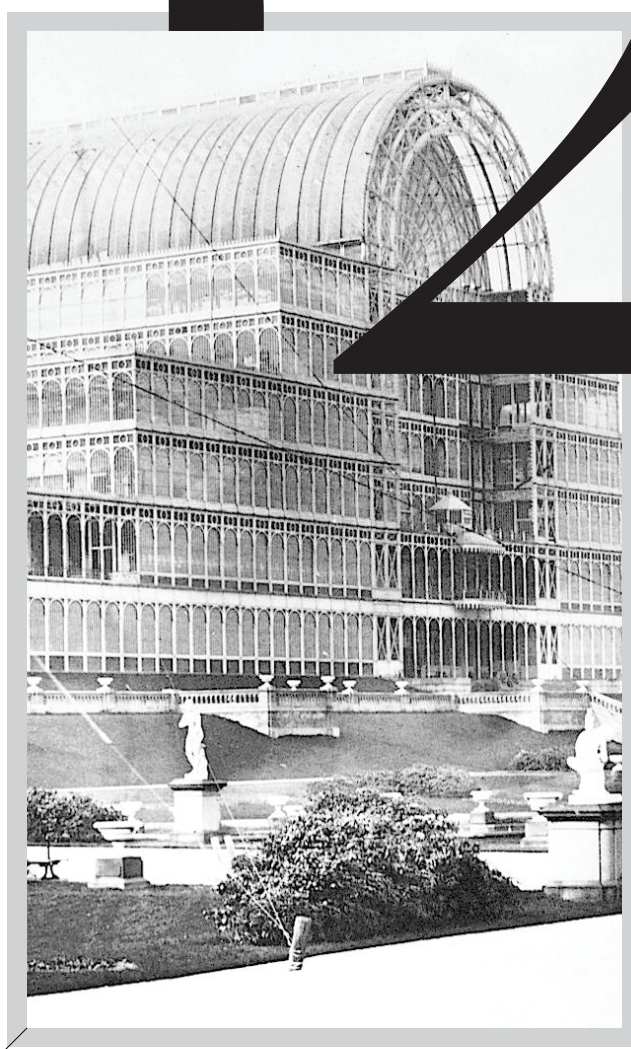


Figure 22. Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition of 1851

## Lucrative Cultures: Industrialization and Globalization



## Chapter 2

### Lucrative Cultures: Industrialization and Globalization

In the years that follow the pre-Industrialized societies in Europe and North America “there is a common complaint about the loss of identity which, to a substantial degree, is associated with the built environment in cities” (Herrle & Erik, 2008, p. 178). From the eighteenth century onward, the global market witnessed a new transferal of ideas about architecture. Within a very short period of time, and at an unprecedented speed, the integrated global economy would feature our current competitive global markets. Rapid urbanization and technological advances resulted in standardized built environments, with less evidence in human habitats of cultural and regional identity. The trend towards standardization became an international condition as similar building methods, materials, and styles were applied. The result has been a detrimental impact on the cultural role of architecture today that had at one time, for the most part, created for unique identities. Technology and innovation, in and out of the profession of architecture, resulted in what we now consider a significant change in architecture – the loss of cultural identity in the built environment and the outpour of homogenized and repetitive forms across the globe. The

world experienced a dramatic increase in population size and in expanse of dense urban environments. Architecture, within industrialized cities, since the Modern era, has created a new ecosystem of environments with tall, transparent, and extreme skylines that lost their place context and essential ties to cultural values, traditions, and beliefs.

Global change represents a new class of problems that severely challenge our ability to achieve sustainable development. The problems are fundamentally nonlinear in causation and discontinuous in both their spatial structure and temporal behaviour. Acting in the present age involves understanding the matrix of global and local forces, of domination and resistance, and of conditions of rapid change and great transformation brought about by the global restructuring of capital and multidimensional effects of trends and new technologies (Eldemery, 2009).

## 2.1 The Industrial Age

Societies continued to advance and formulate different strategies to better their lifestyles. As the appreciation of wealth grew in societies, so did their markets, political structures, social order, and architecture. This was not fully realized until the Industrial Era. Industrialization was a period of major social and economic transformations. It changed the social constructs of societies that predominantly relied on agriculture to ones that relied on industrialization in order to sustain their livelihood. This new culture of industry began in Britain, where the population grew from 2 million to 5 million around the early eighteenth century. At the onset of the Industrial Revolution of 1750, this number doubled at a rate of ten percent a decade (Morris & Winn, 1990). Soon enough, population growth was gradually occurring across most of



the world and would later develop into the world market.

Societies' primary method of receiving any sort of partial income, prior to Industrialization, had been to work on production in agrarian commodities, taking part in such activities as farming, breeding of livestock, and mining for natural resources. However, when tools were invented to aid in fieldwork, a secondary source of income was created: the manufacturing and processing of materials and goods. Manufacturing changed the way of life for those who lived in industrializing countries and it contributed to the rise of industries, factories, and plants. Like any other progressive society, Europe had to better its economic agenda by moving forward as a leader of industry. While governments, for the most part, had previously refrained from any direct involvement in land holdings, it now decided to implement new technologies, of machines, powered by steam, to accelerate the rate of production for collecting and planting in the agricultural industry. This dire need for increasing the speed of production arose from the desire to drive forward trade between the global markets. In many cases, people's farms and tenement lands were controlled by the state (Gauldie, 1992). This resulted in men losing their jobs and families being evicted from their homes. Thus, numerous workers migrated into the cities in search of employment in industrial mills. Factories were largely responsible for the rise of urban centers; essentially, the Industrial Revolution changed a mainly rural society into an urban one (Simpson & Lloyd, 1998).

As a result of many new inventions such as the steam engine, locomotive, and powered looms, production of goods radically changed. With new mechanized machinery, factories mass-produced goods at a rate manpowered-labour could not. The guild ideology of the master-craftsmen and apprentice was no longer



Figure 23. Eiffel Tower (1887-1889)

Figure 24. London Tower Bridge (1886-1894)

Figure 25. Paris Opera House (1861-1877)



widespread after the Industrial Revolution. The “master-craftsmen” were industry owners and the “apprentice(s)” were the inexpensive labour force.



With the agrarian culture transformed into a culture of industry, the built environment followed suit. Factories invented new building materials that revolutionized the design and constructability of architecture. Steel, iron, and glass-plate industries produced building members that allowed for larger spans, taller buildings, transparency, and sturdier structures. This new way of constructing was exemplified at the Crystal Palace (Figure 22), designed by Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition of 1851. With all the accumulated wealth, factory owners and investors commissioned buildings that sought to satisfy the newfound wealth and status amongst the classes. Architecture during Industrialization resulted in mass urbanization of industrial cores, now known as economic centers/ hubs and downtown. Architecture began to slowly celebrate the spectacular in the fashioning of buildings across Europe; representing the wealth and power of individuals, cities, and nations.

Architecture became more conspicuous with the design of opulent theaters, palaces, churches, as well as family homes (Figures 23 - 25). Though factories were designed to work efficiently, the surrounding context was more focused on aesthetics. Buildings celebrated ornamentation, spectacle, and scale. Cities that participated in the global market focused on the improvement of infrastructures and relied on their architecture to communicate to others their rise as leaders in industry, trade, and global status and power.

Industrialization not only changed the built environment, but also led to the rise of consumerism and the introduction of a middle class. In North America, Henry Ford, an American industrialist and founder of the Ford Motor Company, revolutionized the production of goods with the development of the assembly line. An assembly line is a manufacturing process where parts of a finished product are assembled in a sequential manner, allowing for a faster rate of production and increased number of finished goods. As goods became readily available in industrial cities across the globe, those who had once been unable to afford the possessions that had only been available to those with accumulated wealth were now able to. Henry Ford also pioneered “welfare capitalism”, designed to improve the welfare of workers. (Goodin, Headey, Muffels, & Driven, 1999). Workers were now able to save any partial income and spend beyond their necessities. Ford’s philosophy allowed for an astonishing five dollars a day wage, which was double what workers had made for decades (Quint & Cantor, 1985). He believed that the final products on his assembly line, in time, should be affordable to the workers who build them (Smith, 2012). Subsequently, those who were once unable to acquire any form of goods and services that were not essential for survival, had become much more attainable.

Thus, as industrial workers' incomes rose, markets for consumer goods and services of all kinds begin to increase and provide for further stimulus to industrial investment and economic growth globally. With the introduction of a new middle-class, conspicuous consumption of goods and services was practiced amongst all people within every society. Soon after, the culture of industry grew into a new paradigm based on an economic model called globalization.

## 2.2 Globalization: An Economic Endeavour

With the rising prosperity of the middle-class worker, the lack of any industrial sector in a country could be detrimental to its economy and power. Therefore governments encouraged industrialization as a tactical means of progressing society, but more importantly to remain powerful in a competitive global market. Economic expansion and wealth became the sole driver of social order. The introduction of transcontinental imports and exports, foreign investments, transfer of cultural traditions and artifacts, telecommunication, and the accumulated wealth in developed economies was all made possible by globalization; hence the economic expansion of world markets focused on wealth and power.

The Industrial Revolution modernized communication in the most innovative and revolutionary way – railway networks. Contemporary with the steam engine, the very first railway network was constructed in Britain in 1825 (Gauldie, 1992). The railway network truly advanced European and later North American transportation as goods and services spread rapidly and profits increased within the industries. Ideas spread quickly throughout Europe, North America, and later on to the rest of the world; networks of transportation and

information precipitated a globalized marketplace.

Globalization is the process of international integration arising from the interchange of political views, economic exchanges, and cultural trends. What arose was the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked by free trade, capital investments and flow, and the availability of inexpensive foreign labour markets (Globalization, 2012). With advances in transportation and telecommunication infrastructures, societies around the world were able to interchange not only supplies of goods and services, but were also able to learn systems, techniques, and innovations from others abroad. Globalization has had tremendous impacts on cultural values, traditions, and beliefs. It has increased social relations, connecting the societal lifestyles of a specific place with indeterminate other locations. It has widened the interconnection of local, national, regional, religious, political, economic, and social orders across the globe. It spawned international (public and private) businesses, empires, ventures, and corporations that currently make up the largest, most powerful, profitable, and enforcing structures that govern society's consumption lifestyle. The ability to gain capital on investment led to the development of industrialized economies; there are still numerous countries that are in the process of globalizing (developing). Regardless of accumulated wealth, all countries who actively participate in the world market seek out foreign natural resources, inexpensive labour costs, consumer cultures, and foreign investment in diverse regions. Companies, corporations, and small businesses, like the leaders of the Industrial Revolution, look for alternative means of producing goods and services in order to capitalize on income.

Aside from providing economic advantages for developed and developing countries, transportation also allowed for immigration. The influx of foreigners into developed world economies was made possible through globalization. Underprivileged individuals and their families were able to acquire a percentage of wealth because of business opportunities that were available in more promising places around the world. Naturally, with the influx of foreigners come alien cultural traditions, values, beliefs, practices, and observances. Many countries have become 'multicultural' and in doing so allow for cultural trends and practices in areas such as fashion, music, art, film, architecture, media, food, etc. Alternatively, tourism also allowed for an understanding of foreign cultures and of course, aided economies. The World Wide Web, introduced in the early '90s, heightened the interconnectivity of cultures. Individuals were able to attain knowledge and insight into unknown territories and understandably remained connected to others across the globe. Soon enough, the World Wide Web allowed for consumerism online, which fed capital to the world markets, companies, businesses, and corporations.

Globalization changed the built environment in urban centers worldwide. Cities witnessed an increase in high-rise condominiums, hotels, and office towers that housed the increase in local population, immigration, and foreign businesses. Scale became a key indicator of prospering societies.

The world had lived and thrived off of minimal requirements for sustaining livelihood and for nations distinguishing themselves, but now it was becoming more interconnected because of globalization. It allowed for the transferal of cultural traditions and order, as well as feeding into the rising power of capital marketplaces and



world economies. In countless ways, globalization has impacted our lifestyle. We are now, more than ever, able to do as we please, at any time we choose, and are able to access information almost indefinitely. Globalization's introduction of lucrative businesses, the production of never-ending goods and services, and its optimization of the consumer bracket to virtually all societies, has led to detrimental effects on societies and their artifacts (including architecture).









Figure 26. Skyscrapers in Downtown Dubai

## Conspicuous Consumption and Commodification in Architecture



### Chapter 3

#### Conspicuous Consumption and Commodification in Architecture

When considering the impact of industrialization and globalization on the profession of architecture, we must evaluate both their positive and negative influences. Industrialization revolutionized the aspects of architecture that had been responsible for the construction of many of our great urban centers. As we progress, so do the things around us—architecture is no exception. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the capital goods sector, the industrial infrastructure of transportation networks, communication grids, industrial cities, and financial centers brought about new transformation in goods, services, and unprecedented innovations in technology. There were significant changes afoot for social, economic, and cultural conditions across the globe. Architecture, in many ways, experienced the Industrial Revolution significantly. Previously, building materials had consisted of timber, stone, lime-mortar, clay, silt, and concrete; metals were not readily available in sufficient quantity or consistent quality and if used, were applied as ornamentation. Industrialization improved materials such as steel and enhanced the manufacturing of high-quality iron. Rigid materials allowed for larger spans to create sizeable interior spaces and made for taller and larger

buildings being quickly constructed across Europe, Northern America, and then the rest of the world (Martin, 2004). As iron members were being produced, glass (plate-glass) as a building material was also developed to inherit more structural integrity.

Buildings that used glass and steel/ iron as structural members — usually larger, unorthodox buildings — were witnessed across Europe and North America, notably in the city of Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871, where whole city blocks were reconstructed, on a greater-scale; they primarily used steel as structural support for both its integrity and ability to create taller structures. The case of Chicago is not inherently linked to conspicuous consumption through architecture, but countless buildings that followed, in similar fashion, were. The transfer of ideas globally in architecture is credited to the onset of globalization that allowed for the interchange of design, techniques, materials, and construction methods. As societies accumulated higher incomes, their desire to spend on consumer goods increased. As a product of consumerization, architecture became a function of conspicuous consumption that communicated the power and status of cities globally. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the materiality and design of buildings transformed to create the most unprecedented designs in architecture. The availability of innovations in software (parametric modeling), new tools and machinery (CNC and laser and water cutting), and a range of materials and fabricated connections, have allowed for impressive advances in the industries of architecture and engineering. However, the accelerated rate of global change and innovations in architecture has established a new host of issues that severely challenge our ability to achieve architecture that functions to serve the purpose of its intended program

(*utilitas*); rather, it has made for architecture concerned more with aesthetics and forms, a product of our consumer society.

The rise of consumerism is inherently a result of trends in social and economic behaviours that came about through industrialization and globalization. Consumerism is a socio-economic component that encourages purchasing of goods and materials in excess of basic needs. The “new” middle-class embraced the consumption of luxury goods and placed great importance on fashion and wealth. From the twentieth century to now, architecture similarly focuses on fashion and opulence in order to satisfy the rising consumer societies. The designs of buildings are focused on aesthetic qualities (scale, decoration, etc.) as opposed to functional aspects. Architecture has become more conspicuous in its fashioning, in order for countries to compete with one another, and also so it can remain relevant to consumer societies.

### 3.1 Homogenized Environments:

#### The Loss of Identity to Global Consumer Cultures (Trends, Technology, Marketing and Brand Names)

The current global conditions of our consumerist society arose from the rapid changes and great transformation brought about by global restructuring of capital and multidimensional effects of trends and new technologies from industrialization and globalization. Societies have been engaged in the purchasing, exchanging, and using of global goods and services that have been available in mass quantities and at low prices. We are more than ever engulfed by images, trends, brand names, and trademarks that govern who we are and what we consume. Our consumerist society has also influenced the way we see

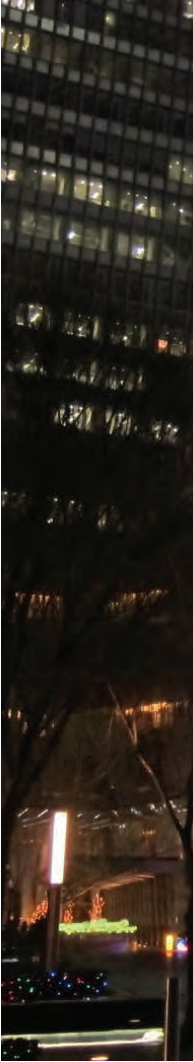


Figure 27. Apple Retail Store, New York  
Figure 28. Tiffany & Co. Flagship, Beijing





architecture and construct it. Architecture is often born out of images and lives on in this way. Before we begin to physically construct any design, we conceptualize a building as an image and as at most a formulized model. An image is conceived of to attract the interest of societies and to respond to the growing demand for more spectacle in architecture.

Architecture in this new society is only concerned with beauty... it has lost the reciprocity between people and their inherited artifacts (architecture), and the result is a loss of enchantment in the environment of real architecture. One more concerned with the satisfaction of excess, less of cultural exchanges (Baudrillard, 2006, p. 26).

Architecture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has lost its integrity to the world of consumer cultures that are more enticed by spectacle and less concerned with critical architecture. Architects and all other designers create images that rely on spectacle and the “excess” in order to garner attention; rarely do the inhabitants of a building understand its meaning; this is inherently linked to our consumer societies. Unfortunately, too often, we resort to displaying spectacular environments that dilute the message and cloud our perception of the architect’s intention.

### *Trends*

In the ongoing dialogue between architects and society, architects consider globalization a distinguishing trend of the present moment that focuses on pleasing the consumerist society. This view could be seen as positive and necessary in order to progress and diversify ourselves in this new age of trends and technology, but it could also be seen as a destructive force of homogenization of our built environment. As globalization introduced its way into architecture, an increase in tower construction of glass and steel was yet another way cities across the world became more similar in appearance. Architecture addresses our metaphysical, philosophical, and cultural identities within a material context. When those materials become available to the masses, place association becomes difficult to differentiate. Architectural history is full of movements opposing cultural and aesthetic diversity, while simultaneously sanctioning particular philosophies of architecture for national and international distribution, especially during and after the Industrial Revolution (El-Husseiny, 2004). Governments and religious entities have encouraged global design, employing architecture for corporate purposes and for product identification, and

even sometimes architects who have promoted their own theories and designs. This in many ways has transformed the industry from a unique cultural entity to one that is more “trending” across the globe.

In the early twentieth century, many architects argued that the modern age demanded that architecture be a response to new industries, technologies, communication (mobility), and social and political orders. It was from this viewpoint that the “International Style” was born; it was epitomized by architects such as Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and others (Mallgrave & Contandriopolous, 2008). Today, there are many reasons that pressure us to globalize architecture, but the two strongest forces are the culture of commerce and the culture of design aesthetics (Eldemery, 2009). The global culture of commerce is driven by consumer expectations, market opportunities, and business agendas by political and social parties, especially by large corporations. In architecture, they have manifested through iconic and recognizable skyscrapers, business towers, banks, international hotels, educational institutions, restaurants (franchised), and the infamous shopping malls, that themselves carry a gross amount of brand name stores. Our consumerist trend is to construct buildings that are associated with trademarks, brands, and mass media (Figures 27 and 28). There seems to no longer be an International Style, but a “consumer style” where buildings are plastered with nametags to attract society. We understand that our society literally buys into brands, and so consciously or unconsciously architects design buildings in order to please the mass media and to keep up with trends; these are survival tactics to remain fashionable and current in our trending world.



Figure 29. GreenPix Energy, New York  
 Figure 30. The National Library of Belarus, Minsk  
 Figure 31. Agbar Tower, Barcelona  
 Figure 32. Digital Beijing Building, Chaoyang





In many cases architects partake in the study of what other architects halfway around the world are designing, and appropriate their designs in local environments. For instance, in Dubai, where the humidity and heat from the desert create less than desirable temperature fluctuations, steel and glass towers have been erected to associate with the success of Western cultures (Figure 26). Regardless of building envelopes failing or the price associated with cooling/ tempering the buildings, Dubai has adopted this trend of sleek, tall, and glamorous



buildings that are widely recognized across the globe. With photographs of iridescent and glimmering buildings in magazines, journals, articles, and press, trend-conscious designers can “scan and span” these buildings worldwide. Due to globalization and its attractive qualities in the late twentieth century, steel, aluminum, glass, titanium, iron, and natural stones are readily available. If they are not available locally, they can be imported with a nominal fee.

We can symbolize the accelerated momentum of globalization in architecture by the glossy facades of mega capital, which have changed the skylines of major cities around the world. Office towers house multinational corporations, transnational banks, world trade centers, and five-star hotels (Oncu & Weyland, 1997, pp. 1-2)

Architecture has become a conspicuous artifact of our consumer society that lusts for aesthetics and illustrious appeal. Architects no longer concern themselves with what buildings do for our societal structure, but why should they when these buildings appeal to our senses, especially in our ocularcentric society? Architecture is now a “trending” subject. Blogs, magazines, and social media give evidence of how architecture has become an object of desire. Thus, we design recognized forms of architecture in order to remain present on those covers. Many of the advancing themes in architecture are progressively associating with our consumerist culture. No longer do architects design for societal needs; they conform to societal wants.

Take for instance LED lights. The automobile company Audi first introduced LED lights in the design of their headlamps, which then sparked a craze of automobiles and electronic devices to appropriate LEDs in the design of various products. It became such a popular trend amongst people that buildings soon after were plastered with showy LED displays and facades. The spectacle that was created with LEDs placed people in environments that were more dazzling than they were informative (Figures 29 - 32).

In order to discern the trending forecast of our consumerist society and globalization’s impact on architecture, we should also explore technology of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in order to develop a better understanding of how our contemporary built environments have conformed and changed architecture in accordance with societal wants of trends and technology in the profession and practice.

## *Technology*

Without a doubt, the past decades have undergone significant periods of technological innovations and global restructuring. Cities have remained the center of vitality and progression through material and scientific advances. “Rapid urbanization has only been made possible by the introduction of modern technology as a part of the development process” in the unstoppable progression of globalization (El-Husseiny, 2004, p. 49). Vitruvius’ essential requirements for “good architecture” (*firmitas, utilitas, and venustas*) considers technical means in order to withstand time, practical in terms of the functionality of the building, and of course the aesthetic qualities that appeal to others. Architecture is a living entity that expresses a manifestation even when they do so through contemporary techniques, which conform to Vitruvius’ ideal architectural style. However, complex advances in technology, especially in construction methods, have accelerated the design of buildings to a dimension that has conformed more to leisure and wonder in the built urban fabric. The extreme forms of architecture that are witnessed across the globe are a direct result of technology and its ability to construct never before seen forms that once again conform to the trends of our consumer society. Advancements in technology, especially in respect to engineering, have proved to provide *firmitas*, and, according to some critics of design aesthetics, have developed some sort of *venustas*. Contrarily, there has been an incredible amount of built work that does not fulfill the *utilitas* that was intended in the program. Too often, extreme forms of architecture battle the famous “function over form” philosophy in architecture, as countless buildings across the globe have proven functionally inefficient because of unconventional spaces and due to the effort to force programs into the awkward spaces available. For instance, the Beijing



Figure 33. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto  
Figure 34. Denver Art Museum, Denver  
Figure 35. City Centre, Las Vegas





National Aquatic Centre is now an oversized public pool. Currently 623 of the 900 condominium units are occupied in the Burj Khalifa (operational now for 3 years) (Kamin, 2013). The Royal Ontario Museum's Crystal, aside from the collection it houses, also features numerous inefficient spaces. The Shanghai Business Headquarters incorporated a retail podium after construction had begun because of an over-stipulation of office suites that were not being leased (Chang, 2012). These buildings, and countless others, have all been built to garner attention, but have been unable to be appropriately used.



Beyond just the technological advancements in parametric modeling, technologies such as cyberspace, virtual realities, and dynamic (changing/ transforming) environments have found their place in the realm of architecture. The desire to commission extreme forms of architecture has given rise to the role of architecture in cities that are dependent on technology. This has created a new role of architecture that appropriates technology to conform to design by mastering computer skills, engineering, and digital fabrication and parametric modeling in order to survive in the profession. It is not wrong to incorporate technology into the profession;

however, with new technologies comes the demand to keep up with trends, which was not the case decades ago. The “pioneers” who have quickly adapted these extreme forms of architecture through technology are the iconic architects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have been successful at adapting their own style not only locally, but also across the globe, which in turn has fed into the branding of architecture and homogenized the built fabric worldwide.

### *Marketing and Brand Names (Starchitects)*

Globalized commercial architecture has developed a symbiotic relationship with a new breed of global architects, referred to as the astounding starchitects (star-architects). “As cities now compete to attract global investment and global tourism, they seek brand differentiation and symbolic modernity” (Adam, 2007, p. 33). When cities decide to revitalize, progress, or even compete on the international stage, building commissions are awarded to starchitects. This has now become an established marketing technique. Buildings now must be astonishing feats of design, not necessarily of functionality, designed by a small band of critically acclaimed global architects. These include architects and design firms such as Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, BIG, OMA, Jean Nouvel, Renzo Piano, etc. The demand for these “celebrity” architects is so high that educational institutes, lecture series, competitions, and cities all over the world ask that they be present in order to attract attention. It is ironic however, that educational institutes that teach less and less about theoretical studies in the twenty-first century and more about practical skills, still invite starchitects who are stronger at conceptual ideas than at detailed studies essential for the “real” world. For instance, Zaha Hadid’s Guangzhou Opera House is a typical,

extreme project with fluid surfaces that strongly resembles all her previous projects. Not even a year after completion, the integrity of the building envelope has failed. The intention of many cities is to build iconic global *products* that can be managed with design technologies, even if they fail. Though architects do ensure that a building works structurally, programmatically (as best it can), and aesthetically, our consumerist society does not meddle with the “nitty-gritty” of how architecture works. People are consumed by the ostentatiousness and brand names of architecture. The new architectural style is more concerned with beauty and brand names; marketing techniques have been appropriated into the profession in order to please the globalized world.

Trends, technology, fashion, and brand names have ultimately resulted in the homogenization of architecture across the globe. Take for instance, Daniel Libeskind’s infamous *Crystal(s)*. His architectural style of extreme crystal-shaped prisms has been commissioned by several cities not only to keep up with trends, but to get attention from the rest of the world and to prove the city’s relevance in today’s era. Toronto, Denver, and Las Vegas have all commissioned Daniel Libeskind to design his magnificent creations in their cities and this has resulted in the continuation of homogenized environments, each practically identical to one another (Figures 33 - 35). Without a doubt, Daniel Libeskind has successfully branded himself and his style in a competitive market. Libeskind is not to blame for the homogenization of cities. However, when starchitects like him and other designers span “popular” styles across the globe, environments become less concerned with their immediate surroundings (context, culture, etc.). The urban fabric everywhere becomes congested with identical buildings and spaces globally. There are no longer unique identifiers within

cities aside from those built several centuries ago or the ones that currently compete with one another, especially in scale.

With the networking and transferal of cultural designs, styles, and construction methods in the industry, it goes without saying that buildings that make up the urban centres of thriving cities seem to be visually indistinguishable from one another. Contemporary architecture is guilty of falling prey to the consumerist society that is convinced that tall, large, and extreme structures are the most appropriate method of designing buildings today. However, it must be kept in mind that architects are not solely to blame for the homogenization of cities. Urban planners and political bodies also partake in the homogenization of their “diverse” city fabrics.

### *Homogenized Environments*

Communication has contributed to cultures becoming increasingly unified and less constrained by geographic borders and cultural distinctions. Virtually all cultures in the contemporary world are syncretistic by necessity; they cross traditional boundaries and participate in a global market driven by economy and politics. What makes it even more difficult to distinguish one culture from the next is the extraordinary speed at which globalization spreads. Especially within the extent of consumerism’s impact on popular culture there is no time for adaptation, but rather an overwhelming compulsion for economies to keep up with current trends.

As globalization operates beyond the subtleties that distinguish one culture from another, the underlying nature of universality that is brought about by globalization can by no means include the innumerable

factors of culture, such as attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions, etc. (Rieger, 2002). Societies and cultures worldwide are undergoing dramatic changes. Architecture in our globalized markets has come to present a much more unified vision of similar and sometimes identical proposed and constructed conditions that create for a very homogenized environment across the globe. Architecture serves as a medium that helps express to others the differential qualities that specific cities (countries or cultures) have to offer to the world. Post-industrial architecture has culminated in a world of repetitive forms and conditions that are threatening the diversity and intellect of many societies. Since there seems to be no set limits to what modern architects, engineers, designers, and builders can do in the twenty-first century, the worldwide spreading of the latest building practices is accompanied by the increasing uniformity of built environments. Traditional design elements, features and forms, long rooted in specific geographic environments, have migrated across the globe and have found themselves amalgamated into the modern built context.

The Guggenheim Art Museum in Bilbao, Spain (Figure 36) was commissioned to Frank Gehry in 1997 as a response to the revitalization of Spain as a progressive economical hub in the twentieth century after it had battled a very difficult economic downfall. Six years later, Gehry designed the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, California (Figure 37), which is essentially a reconfiguration of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Jean Baudrillard (2006, p. 31) said, “Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao represents not the culture... but a ready-made culture... the building is a kit-of-parts, a symphony of pieces assembled then rearranged somewhere else and voila you have your next monumental city” (Baudrillard, 2006, p. 31).

GUGGENHEIM ART MUSEUM BILBAO  
*Figure 36.*



1997

2003



WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL, LOS ANGELES  
*Figure 37.*

BELJING NATIONAL AQUATIC CENTER  
*Figure 38.*



2008

2010



CASINO OCEANUS, MACAU  
*Figure 39.*

BEIJING OLYMPIC NATIONAL STADIUM  
*Figure 40.*



2008

2012



PHOENIX INTERNATIONAL MEDIA CENTER  
*Figure 41.*



The Beijing Olympics of 2008 presented the first time architecture in China truly garnered a presence in terms of innovative design in contemporary architecture. Many professionals in the industry, on architecture blogs and websites, magazines, and countless journals, glorified the Beijing National Aquatic Center (Figure 38). However, unlike other iconic buildings that were able to sustain a unique presence for eras or at least for several decades, the Aquatic Center was virtually replicated as the Casino Oceanus in Macau, China (Figure 39) two years later.

Herzog & de Meuron's famed Beijing National Stadium (Figure 40), commonly referred to as the Bird's Nest, was awarded the RIBA Lubetkin Prize – an award given each year to the best building by an RIBA member built outside Europe. RIBA President, Sunand Prasad said,

This year's shortlist was a clear choice. The National Stadium in Beijing will for a long time to come, and around the world, remain amongst the most memorable emblems for the years to come... For a single work of architecture to hold such a charge is extremely rare, and at the same time to flawlessly accommodate a very complex set of functions makes the feat still more extraordinary. (Ziari, 2009)

However, in 2012, BIAD UFO's Phoenix International Media Center, in Beijing (Figure 41), designed a structure reminiscent of the National Stadium. In countless architecture journals, publications, and blogs, it was said to be "a poorly designed version of the famously stunning "Bird's Nest" Olympic Stadium..." (Yu, 2011) Chinese architecture in the new millennium seems to be favouring the diagrid structure as its architectural identity, but with previous projects completed by such architects and firms as Norman Foster, Buckminster Fuller, Asymptote, and OMA, the diagrid cannot be labeled as truly a Chinese architectural design process. It is more a function of



aesthetics, as it is only a transferal of innovation in design and engineering that is now a global standard in construction practice.

The New York Condominiums, the Chicago Towers, and South Beach Condominiums are developments built in Toronto, Canada, that have been designed to reflect the architectural style and prosperity of major American cities. Though Toronto is a thriving metropolitan city, with a growing urban population, the projects do not seem to fit within the “Toronto” context of previous high-rise developments. In 2011, Macleans Magazine wrote, “Toronto’s aspiration to *be* New York... is a pitiful attempt at creating the cosmopolitan city it wants to be... the vision of a “Manhattan-like” skyline with soaring towers is an ill-fitting response to this growing urban jungle.” (Andrews, 2011). It is obvious that emerging cities like Toronto find precedence in similar preceding cities and that its buildings reflect many of the same planning principles, but to replicate stereotypical or cliché styles of such iconic cities is not only a sad dismissal of identity, but also an acceleration of the homogenization of cities across the globe.

It seems as though in the twenty-first century there is no limit to what modern or contemporary architects can build. The worldwide spreading of building practices is accompanied with the danger of uniformity and loss of identity. For those cities without a specific architectural identity (a contemporary identity), adopting styles that mimic past buildings fuels that homogenization of environments. If this trend is to continue for much longer there will soon be nothing left but the one universal global culture, the ultimate in homogenization. Such an outcome would be an unmitigated misfortune for societies, especially for developing ones and ones with minorities.

Individual and local creativity, identity, and distinction, would be washed in a uniform world of global culture where even personal identity would severely be restricted in the forms it could assume (Render, 2004). If all people became nothing more than cultural consumers, and if all that we were able to choose from was a limited range of products, we would eventually become as alike as the products we consume. We will become those brand names and labels, as different as Coke and Pepsi, Forbes and Bloomberg, Windows and Macintosh, or Saks and Bergdorf Goodman.

### 3.2 Conspicuous Consumption and Architecture: The Rise of Architecture as Object Commodity

Today, we are surrounded by remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence established by a plethora of objects, services, and material goods, and by their availability. This is now what constitutes the fundamental transformation within the progression of humans across the globe. Men and women with some degree of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings, but by objects. We have shifted from the rather complex domestic organization of our everyday lives to a machine that governs what we do, what we look at, and how we do things. We are manipulated and infatuated with the goods and services industry and no longer care about labour-intensive exertion or the acquisition of the “real”. What lies ahead of us is superficial environments and ambiances that have become fashionable only because we are forced to live within them or at least in close proximity to them. (Proto, 2006).

All human societies have now become engaged with the consumption, acquiring, exchanging, gifting, and use of objects and services for their own satisfaction. The

identity we now take on is that of a ‘consumer’. The Industrial Revolution brought about the “Consumer Revolution”. This consumer revolution represents not just our changes in taste, preferences, or buying habits, but a fundamental shift in the culture of our modern world. It has led to a change in the concept of time, space, society, the individual, the family, and the state (McCracken, 1990). This epidemic is the act of our modern world that invests in conspicuous consumption.

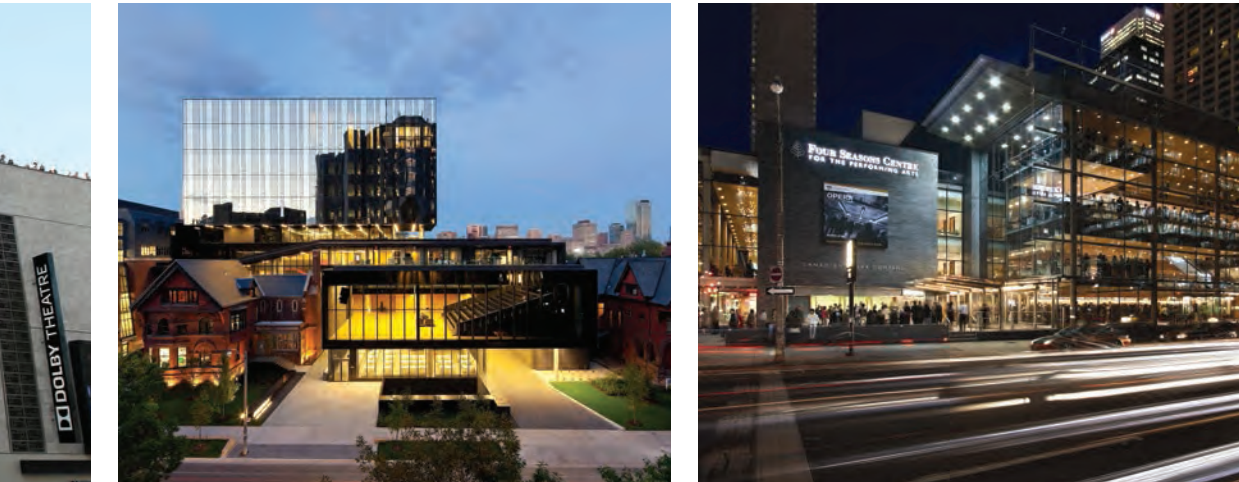
Conspicuous consumption is the spending of money for, and the acquiring of luxury goods and services for, the public display of economic power. The term was invented to describe characteristics of the leisure class that emerged in the nineteenth century “ to describe the behavioural characteristics of the *nouveau riche* (new rich) social class who emerged as a result of the accumulation of capital wealth during the Second Industrial Revolution” (Veblen, 1899, p. 15). Given the ubiquity of conspicuous consumption across history and human culture, it may be useful to examine the motivation for conspicuous consumption from an evolutionary perspective in order to understand its relevance to architectural discourse in our contemporary society, and to explore its detrimental impact on current design proposals of the past several decades.

In the social and historical context, the term conspicuous consumption was applied to the behavior of men, women, and families of the upper class who used their accumulated wealth as a means of publicly manifesting and displaying their social power and prestige. This was the case whether their wealth was real or just perceived. It was in its own way a measure of families against one another. In the twentieth century, the standards of living were improved, and consequently there



Figure 42. Rogers Centre, Toronto  
 Figure 43. Rockefeller Center, New York  
 Figure 44. Dolby Theater, Los Angeles  
 Figure 45. Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto  
 Figure 46. Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, Toronto

emerged the middle class, who now took part in patterns of economic consumption with the discretionary income they possessed. The prestige and power that wealth possessed influenced the middle-class to also invest in the public display of goods in order to display social status, rather than just buying according to the practical utility of the goods and services proper.



Conspicuous consumption is a behavioural addiction and sometimes a narcissistic one, with psychological conditions induced by consumerism. It provides immediate gratification of hedonic expectations (Lury, 2011). Though the act of conspicuous consumption has been associated very much with the rich, upper-class, the complex of this socio-economic behaviour is very common to the less fortunate classes and economic groups as well, and also very common in countries with emerging economies. Moreover, the act of conspicuous consumption not only takes the form of acquiring goods and services, but of the gifting/ donating of large sums of money by members of the upper-class in order to enhance their social prestige; thus there are buildings which commemorate the donor's or family name(s). So, besides marketing and branding starchitects, architecture also markets and brands wealthy families and corporations that

participate in conspicuous consumption in order to demonstrate their status to society. The list of examples would be endless; take for instance the Rogers Centre in Toronto (the Rogers family), the Rockefeller Center in New York (the Rockefeller family) Dolby Theater in Los Angeles (Dolby Laboratories), Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto (Joseph and Sandra Rotman), Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto (Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts Corporation); all explicitly showcase the donors and investors of the buildings (Figures 42 - 46).

Our current identity is no longer steeped in the rich cultural traditions that had sustained past generations for centuries. We are now identified by the goods and services we deliberately acquire in order to present our wealth and status to others. We have been significantly changed to believe the material objects around us inform others about a certain lifestyle and have combined the acquisition of superficial products with our culture and the norms, values, and practices of it. We actively partake in conspicuous consumption both consciously and unconsciously because we are satisfied with others' interpretation of us. Our consumer society defines its status and so-called wealth by the material goods it can purchase; like the ruling elites, it displays its own power and status. The consumer culture is more of a "material culture"; certainly the two are closely associated to one another. Thus, an individual's identity is influenced by the symbolic meanings of his or her own material possessions, and the way in which he or she relates to objects. This is the case for all individuals across the globe; even those with minimal amount of wealth and acquired goods continue to define themselves with the materials available in mass quantities in every corner of our cities.

### *Architecture as Object Commodity*

When products become available to the masses, without any qualitative differentiation, they are referred to as commodities. Objects are able to satisfy the wants and needs of people, and so they are produced in great quantities locally and in many cases are imported from around the world because of inexpensive labour costs and also local demand. The process of commodification occurs when the goods and services markets for particular products lose differentiation across the supply base, due to the interchange of ideas and techniques brought about through globalization. Moreover, when we consider consumer culture we can see how people often attempt to increase their satisfaction through material goods, but when they reach habituation they move on to new levels of indulgence. The purchase of any item often involves considerations beyond the product's quality, and may be motivated by one's own desire for status and prestige. This is most evident in the case of material culture. Clothing as an instance of material culture has several dimensions that can begin to explain our infatuation with conspicuous consumption and how we use objects to express/ convey messages onto others. For instance, there is the purchasing of jewellery. Jewellery is a superfluous accessory that represents status and prestige. A wedding band was created to signify the unity between two partners. Later on it became a competition of carat size and material properties. Another example is that of the watch: its fundamental purpose is to tell time. However, it is not the simple workings of a watch movement that is important now; it is how that watch portrays status and prestige to others. Watch brands such as Rolex, Patek-Phillipe, Chopard, and Cartier are not purchased for their ability to tell time, (as countless other fashion houses are able to produce similar if not better movements), but are bought



CHICAGO SPIRE  
*Figure 47.*



2007 -

2012



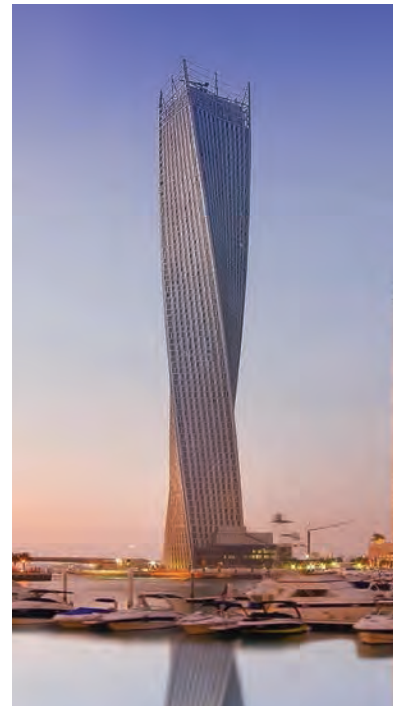
MARILYN MONROE TOWERS, MISSISSAUGA  
*Figure 49.*

SHANGHAI TOWER  
*Figure 49.*



2008 -

2006



CAYAN TOWER, DUBAI  
*Figure 50.*



TURNING TORSO, SWEDEN  
*Figure 51.*



2005

2012 -



ONE BLOOR EAST, TORONTO  
*Figure 52.*

AQUA, CHICAGO  
*Figure 53.*



2009

2011 -



LANDMARK PROJECT, SWEDEN  
*Figure 54.*

and worn to convey a message of wealth and “class” to others. Similarly, architecture is a form of material culture that in the twentieth and especially twenty-first centuries has conveyed popular status onto local and global societies. Cities purchase material objects in the same way that people purchase watches. The purchasing power of the economic market has led architecture into the realm of material culture where objects are bought to convey specific prestige, rather than out of necessity.

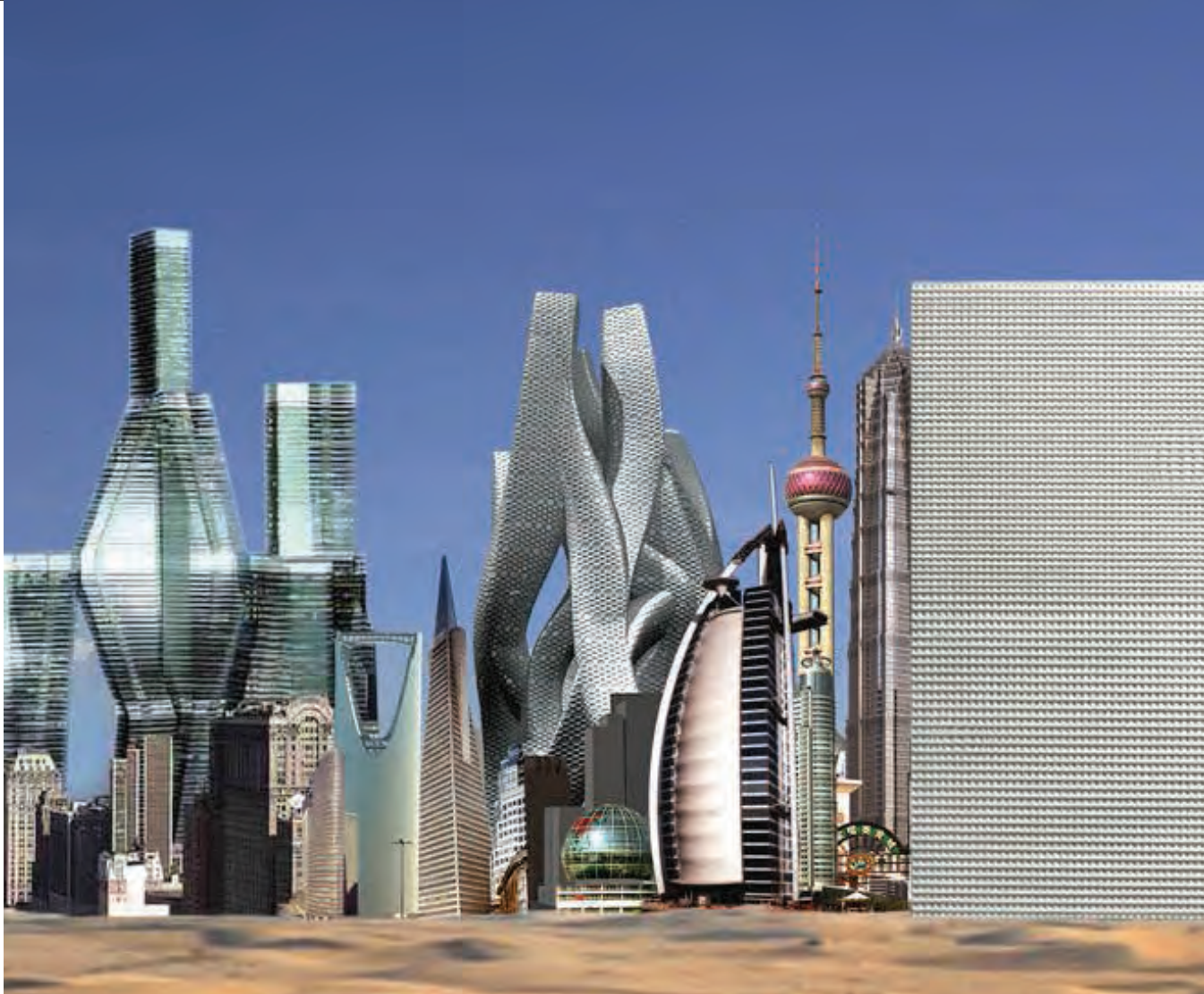
An obvious example of architecture as a commodity can be found in cities worldwide. Condominiums and office towers were introduced in urban centers in order to accommodate unprecedented population growth and the migration of people to live and work in industrial cities. Nowadays, they are located in numerous cosmopolitan cities that are driven by finance and entertainment. The construction of condominiums and office towers began in the early to mid-eighteenth century and accelerated from the nineteenth century onward. It is evident that verticality is a homogenous design factor across the globe; this can be a valid response considering that it is the most effective means of accommodating people in a place that is unable to span horizontally. However, with the introduction of parametric modeling and twentieth and twenty-first century technology, architecture became yet another commodity. Many architects, looking to change the extruded rectilinear forms, began to seek a contrast with the conventional tall towers by twisting or rotating floor-plates and extending balconies as design features.

For instance, the Chicago Spire, Marilyn Monroe Towers in Mississauga, Shanghai Tower, Cayan Tower in Dubai, and Turning Torso in Sweden (Figures 47 - 51) are all buildings that aspire to create a more exciting outcome out of what is usually a very banal form. What makes

buildings such as these commodities is the fact that they are available everywhere. One Bloor East in Toronto, Aqua in Chicago, and Landmark Project in Sweden (Figures 52 - 54) are all condominium projects whose balconies have been designed as curved floor slabs, reminiscent of Antonio Gaudi's La Pedrera. Architect James Law's proposal for the Aquaria Grande in Mumbai, India has pushed the curved balconies one step further by programming them as outdoor swimming pools for each unit.

It is rather erroneous, however, to hold only architects responsible for the evolution of architecture into a commodity. In preparing a project, regardless of an architect's intuition and imagination, it is the client who plays a major role in its overall design. In many instances, clients look at projects in other places and determine a "look" that they favour. In an economic downturn, especially, it is romantic to assume architects will stand for their morals and ethics and construct what they think to be appropriate. In all reality, business does not allow for that. We try to innovate what has already been done because we are well aware that nothing is new. The sad truth is that gratification of our consumerist desire to construct similar buildings adds to the homogenization of built work everywhere. Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, BIG, OMA, Jean Nouvel, Norman Foster, and their sort, have all been asked to design buildings that have already been constructed in different cities. Their style becomes a commodity of sorts. The award-winning Millennium Park in Chicago, designed by Frank Gehry, was in fact not the original proposal. His initial design was revealed in April of 1999 and featured a very colonial-style venue with a bridge; the emphasis was on the transportation aspect of the area, which was under the auspices of the Chicago Transportation Department. When additional funding

Figure 55. *Skyline of Egos*







became available in 2000, Gehry was asked, by the City of Chicago to re-design a park in his well-known style (Becker, 2004).

Architectural designs have become so common across the globe that cities purchase them as though they were buying them from a vending machine. The fashioning of extreme architecture has become so popular internationally that rarely do those who commission work care about a building's functionality. They are more concerned with the level of spectacle that a building emanates than with how it functions.



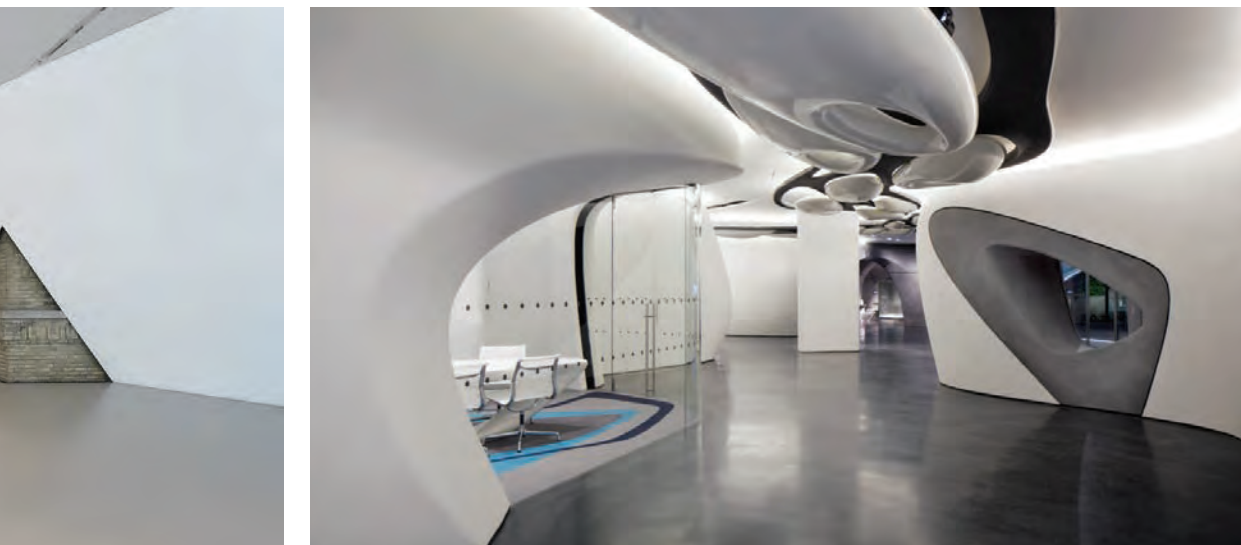
Figure 56. Oriental Art Center, Shanghai

Figure 57. Interior Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum (*Daniel Libeskind*)

Figure 58. Interior of ROCA London Gallery (*Zaha Hadid*)

### *Conspicuous Consumption as Architectural Proxy*

The built urban fabric is no longer the place we explore in our daily routines. The department store has become the landscape and focus of affluence with an abundant accumulation of clothing, appliances, food, and products of luxury. Outdoors, we notice elaborate conglomerates plastered on soaring buildings in downtown cores and great urban centres. This too in many ways serves as an act of conspicuous consumption.



The most ostentatious display of conspicuous consumption has been associated with the built urban fabric. With mass media influence felt in every aspect of life, architecture justly takes its place as yet another object to be consumed by society. As with fashion trends, extreme forms of architecture have garnered popularity amongst the masses and so the requirement to keep up with those trends and to remain current has resulted in numerous completed projects and proposals that strive to “fit in”. There is hope that a few proposals can stray away from architecture as a commodity, even though so many projects do reflect consumption ideals.





Figure 59. Mirvish Towers, Toronto (*David Mirvish and Frank Gehry*)  
 Figure 60. Shard, London (*Renzo Piano*)





Changing forms and identities in architecture has as much to do with the disappearance of a particular type or style of patrons as it does with the appearance of others. Modes of production and ideologies, like capitalist consumerism and social order, have replaced the nation-state as major influences on architectural identity. What every society aims for in terms of architecture is the monument. Monumental architecture embraces large houses, public buildings, and special-purpose structures. “Its principal defining feature is that its scale and elaboration exceed the requirements of any practical functions that a building is intended to perform” (Trigger, 1990, p. 95). What is striking about all these structures is

their lavish scale and the expertise that highly skilled designers put into their construction and ornamentation. The function of these buildings was secondary to their scale. In order for buildings to be noticed, they needed to be large and this in itself witnesses a shift from necessity to the investment in conspicuous consumption in architecture (Figure 55). It is not to say that all extreme forms are inevitably inefficient. Several of Frank Gehry's unorthodox designs, though extreme in every way, do manage to appropriate reasonably efficient plans within unconventional forms. However, too often buildings today do challenge the "function over form" rationale. In the twenty-first century, form is valued over functionality. Buildings are noticeable due to their visual impact on the built environment and not for their ability to work inside.

These ostentatious architectural marvels stand as statements that are sometimes careless of programs, sites, and surrounding demographics. Many of these extreme buildings are able to garner presence on the international stage and to evidence their area's wealth and prosperity, but prove to be very inefficient for everyday users. The subversion of functionality for the sake of form is an unfortunate outcome of the prosperity of cities. For instance, Shanghai's Oriental Arts Center (Figure 56), a beautiful and impressive building, is designed to look like a butterfly orchid from above. To design a building to resemble a shape of any sort, it must be viewed from an aerial perspective, and such forced programs can lead to the creation of very inefficient buildings. In this case, a 40,000 square-meter cultural complex was created that includes five interconnected hemispherical halls, the smallest of which is 4,000 square meters. It includes a performance, concert, exhibition, stadium, and opera hall (Jie & Wenjun, 2010). It seems quite outlandish to have a complex, which does not operate nightly taking up an area

of six city blocks. Daniel Libeskind's infamous *Crystal(s)* are very interesting and break the mundane forms of polite architecture, but they also create for very inefficient interior spaces. Several Libeskind projects (Figure 57) feature sharp geometric facets that have created impractical and unusable spaces; they were designed mainly to present external forms. Similarly, Zaha Hadid's curved walls, floors, and ceiling combinations provide minimal useable floor and wall space (Figure 58). They may create a visually pleasing aesthetic, but after such a large expenditure one would assume that the result would work efficiently. Radical forms in architecture often do provide a certain flair and differentiation in the rudimentary urban fabric and, regardless of criticism, can be very impressive. When Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, and other high-profile architects offer the same design (with slight variations) to other cities, it is counter-productive to the original purpose of being unique.

Although eccentric forms are often unable to fulfill their intended programs, many city planners direly want taller buildings in order to "out-design" other cities. In Britain the chief executive of the English Heritage, Simon Thurley, is warning the city of "the 'extraordinary ambition' of individuals who want to 'create a monument to themselves'" (Thorpe, 2012). In an interview with *The Guardian*, Thurley describes his battle to convince those in charge of planning policy that preserving the history of Britain's famous skylines does not mean preventing progress. UNESCO has also recently recognized the historic, iconic buildings in the capital, including the Tower of London and the Palace of Westminster, and has suggested that they are now endangered world heritage sites because of surrounding high-rise building developments (Thorpe, 2012). Renzo Piano's 'Shard' (Figure 60) and Richard Rogers's informally named

‘Cheesegrater’ have broken London’s 1,000 feet height barrier.

Toronto’s proposed Mirvish Towers (Figure 59), to be situated along King Street West, are three 80-storey condo towers designed by David Mirvish and Frank Gehry that would involve the elimination of the Princess of Wales Theatre. In an interview with CBC (Canadian Broadcast Center) Mirvish admittedly said, “These towers can become a symbol of what Toronto can be... I am not building condominiums. I am building three sculptures for people to live in” (News, 2012). Aside from the poetics, what this seems like is a cry for some sort of identity and a superfluous, ostentatious response when multiple residential or mixed-use developments could be built on the site at a respectful scale and with a more efficient plan. Moreover, how would this proposal represent Toronto if the extreme forms of Frank Gehry are available in other cities around the world?

With the realization that architecture has become a commodity, projects currently try to differentiate themselves by designing the most opulent, ostentatious, extreme proposals in order to attract any sort of presence on the international stage. Architecture expresses, in a public and enduring manner, the ability of an authority to control the materials, skills, and labour required to create and maintain structures. It almost goes without saying that the larger and more ornate a building is, the more power it can express and the more attention it will acquire. In all societies, the control of energy, resources, and skill (labour forces) constitutes the most fundamental and universally recognized measure of power. The most basic way in which this power can be symbolically reinforced is through the conspicuous consumption of architecture. For instance, monumental architecture by being both enduring and

conspicuous, plays an important role in not only shaping the political and economic behaviour of societies, but also in maintaining their relevance in an ever more amalgamated global culture. In all early societies, power was symbolized and reinforced by the large scale on which processional routes, palaces, throne rooms, temple platforms, and royal tombs were constructed (Trigger, 1990). In our contemporary age, architecture may not be as occupied with palaces and temples, but is concerned with expressing the superiority and monumentality of large corporations and growing economies.

Another concern with extreme forms is their inability to connect with the surrounding context. This issue concerns both scale and site/ surroundings. Many rendered images of the final project depict lush greenery and pedestrian-trafficked thoroughfares, but rarely showing adjacent buildings. Society is convinced that the stimulating images will be realized, where in all actuality they will stick out like sore thumbs in a dense urban fabric, with narrow pedestrian walkways barely visible through the forest of towers along the urban streets. It is unfortunate that it has become a new practice in architecture for designers to create a building (devoid of site) and then situate it on a site; these sites have not been designed, they have been paved over by harsh hardscaping. Landscape architecture is a study that has for centuries worked parallel to architecture. Today, it seems as though many projects place buildings in polluted cities with no consideration of greenery, and with tight alleyways, and diminishing open green spaces.

Many of these ostentatious buildings do allow architects to be creative, and to practice the art, the craft, and the skills that have been and forever will be a part of their field. However, today people live fascinated by the

image of the great city, in a technologically glorified world. The fascination with architecture is a contemporary passion in the modern world with its local and global tensions that infuse all places. Architecture is currently concerned more with the aestheticization of environments. There is no longer any thought given to spaces and how they may be used, or to their narrative or potential experiences when interacting with them, or their connection to their surrounding contexts. Architecture today is a collection of tall, large, transparent, glamorous, luminous, steel, ornamental, and aestheticized objects that are conceived of independently and then stand as a conglomeration of superficial bodies in dense urban cores. Architecture is purchased across the globe as an item of conspicuous consumption simply for the sake of following fashion and attracting attention. Architecture becomes lost in its situation. "The decisive role of architecture is simply as an 'iconic' project, gigantic in its form, and concerned with none other than popular culture, socially detached from its host community" (Glendinning, 2010, pp. 96-97). Strong international movements swept throughout the course of architecture, especially during and well after the 1920s, but its production was effectively divided between countries or cities, which made them unique as societies adapted and changed design according to their specific requirements and methods of construction. Architecture has become a product that can no longer be associated with a specific society, place, or real movement in architecture. It is a commodity available to anyone, anywhere, and we as consumers buy into the glorious rendered images, extreme forms, and unconventional spaces. Purchasing products, living and playing in specific places, and associating with certain people are all conscious decisions that we make. In the same way, those who invest in conspicuous architecture are completely aware of what they are investing in and why. There is no



critical thinking in the process of design and construction anymore. It is now just about options that we choose to project an image into the world.

### 3.3 Between Eastern Enterprise and Western Capitalism

“Globalization is the simple expansion of Western capital and concomitant spread of products, culture, and style that has transformed, in every like of the word, architecture into a mere object of desire” (Adam, 2007, pp. 51-52). Conspicuous consumption has explained the psychological mechanics of current consumer societies, and the increasing amount and types of goods and services that people consider necessary to their lives. In many developing economies, the act of conspicuous consumption has been viewed as the Western ideal. Westernization is also referred to as “modernization”, since most modern and contemporary mechanics/ technology, religious and economic structures, and influences have been derived from the western countries that have established and excelled in different professions and practices. Westernization has had a major effect on the process of developing societies, particularly in the Eastern world. Easterners have come to adopt Western culture, including their modern industries, technology, economy, lifestyle, and language. The West has been thought to be the leading powers by many emerging economies. Thus, Eastern economies that have appropriately adopted Western ideals have advanced tremendously on the world market. However, consumerism has weak links in the Western world currently because consumer societies are very much present in Eastern states, especially in Asia and the Middle East, influenced by the “image” of the West and Westerners.

In regards to Westernization's impact on architecture in Eastern societies, there is one significant and innovative building type that has successfully represented power and status, simply by its sheer height: the skyscraper. The height and design aesthetics of transparent glass that soars into the sky represented success in the eyes of many Eastern enterprises. They believed that America was the ideal environment where economic capital and political order effected the progression of society. Emerging economies mimicked their environments in the hopes that they too could represent success and development in the world economy.

Architects who participate in the process of communicating and expressing cultural ideas, patterns and styles successfully in specific cultural locations are usually members themselves of a particular culture; they create appropriate responses to the progression of societies and to their immediate surroundings. In many respects, development in connection with the built environment has made clear that the main concern is that the designer of a building be Western or that they can mimic the Western style.

Many emerging economies invest substantial amounts of money in order to Westernize their economies. By commissioning work to local and foreign architects that can embody the Western ideal into their emerging urban centers, Eastern economies believe they too can become successful players in the world of economics. Many developing countries, in their quest to becoming developed/ industrialized, seek to begin this process of Westernization by participating in architectural conspicuous consumption in order to garner presence on the international stage.

Throughout modern civilization, Western society



and its lifestyle, attitude, and environments have dominated most of the world: global markets, foreign investment, and even foreign lifestyle and infrastructure. For emerging economies, the Western world and its domineering status on the international stage have provided a difficult and often envied measure of success against which emerging economies and developing countries have gauged their own success.

In the past thirty years, however, emerging economies have slowly become more involved in the fashioning of their built environments which have been in many ways been comparable to those in the West. As many of these growing cities became more involved in global markets and their economies began to surpass those in the West, their architecture and infrastructure did as well. As this thesis has mentioned, architecture being a cultural identifier because it is highly visible; architecture in emerging economies signified their countries' successful rise in economic and political power through its spectacular nature. For the most part, their success was not the focus of the West, but became evident in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. With massive and internally unexploited domestic markets, emerging economies excelled at restructuring their economic and social agendas. Emerging economies had taken the opportunity to strategically prioritize leadership and internal affairs. They focused on developing their country's internal economy, business, capitol, and their physical and social infrastructures. Soon enough, these economies established themselves as constructive and biddable members of the international community.

Physical infrastructures were improved and architecture flourished in these emerging economies with impressive buildings, monuments, and social venues. The

only problem was that, rather than strengthening or re-envisioning cultural and national architectural style, emerging economies blatantly mimicked and replicated built environments that were already common in the Western world. This situation was the result of two major circumstances. The first one is simply that far more quickly than they had anticipated, emerging economies took on internationally prominent positions economically and geopolitically. The complex growth of these economies could no longer avoid global attention and thus had very little time to invest in their cultural and national infrastructures, thereby improving on and re-invigorating domestic styles. With excess revenues, these countries built taller, larger, more unorthodox, and more extreme built environments that simulated the infrastructure of domineering Western countries. In just a decade countries like China and the United Arab Emirates have gone from being mid-ranking power sources with very limited leverage to being leading members of the global elite. This has resulted in expansive and populous city cores. The second circumstance, one that these economies may not want to admit to, is their inferiority complex. This sense of inferiority can be seen not only in political structuring, but also in the people themselves. Having been the less dominant nations for a good part of the past 3 to 4 decades, these societies are still “sensitive to foreign evaluations of the country and confined to an inferior mentality” (SinoStand, 2012). In moments of political and economic isolation, emerging economies, specifically China, were left vulnerable. As countries such as China were during the period of isolation unable to modernize to keep pace with the West, a lack of self-worth, a sense of uncertainty, and an inferiority complex sprouted. The socio-economic whereabouts of such countries quickly began to “out-do” their successors in the West. Architecture reflected this first-hand. Buildings were replicated at unprecedented

speed with banal typologies such as condominiums and office towers being constructed in an irregular fashion. Lifestyles changed as well. The societies in these countries openly embraced the life of leisure and status as countless hotels, resorts, shopping malls, plazas, and promenades were erected almost overnight. For these emerging economies it was, in a sense, a way to show their worth to the international community; they had once stood in the shadows of others with an inferior status but now they were “surpassing” these others through a competitiveness born of a lack of self-worth in the past and of assurance and acceptance in the present. Unfortunately, due to a lack of time to modernize or to figure out an architectural identity, and also due to feeling inferior for four decades, the complex of emerging economies and their conspicuous architecture resulted in a superlative competition amongst themselves and against the West. From an exterior perspective, emerging economies arguably became much more successful in the structuring of their social, economic, and political agendas. However, despite this acknowledged success there remain deep-rooted inferiority complexes. In China the inferiority complex involves the West and even Japan. The most significant factor in the evolution/ formation of China’s modern identity has been the “legacy of the country’s “humiliation” at the hands of foreigners, beginning with its defeat in the Opium Wars... and the shameless treatment of Chinese immigrants in America” (Shell, 2012). This “humiliated” identity was exacerbated by Japan’s successful industrialization. The reason why Japan’s success is so difficult for the Chinese to grasp is because Japan was an Asian power that had succeeded in modernizing and that had been noticed internationally, whereas China had failed (especially after Tokyo’s invasion and occupation of its mainland during World War II) in these regards. This inferiority complex has been institutionalized in the

Chinese mind until now. After the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, when Germany's concessions in China were given to Japan, "the expression *wuwang guochi* "Never forget our national humiliation" became a common slogan" (Koren, 2011). Thus, the inferiority complex goes beyond the country's approach to its environment; it is also instilled in the society itself. China's national "failure" created a hesitation in the minds of the masses. Chinese people emulate the "typically" American fashion and lifestyle as a way of justifying their successes and abilities. This has direct result on their architecture, with Western designs being pirated and virtually copied. It was their way of attempting to prove, mostly to America, that they were able to do the same work and to do it possibly better and faster. It was a way of declaring that they, much like Japan, did go through modernization and should in many ways be measured according to the same rubric as other countries internationally. However, a superlative means of designing architecture is in no way able by itself to communicate/represent the cultural identity of the country. This inferiority complex has much to do with the fact that the society is unable to let go of the past and move into the future, to celebrate its countless successes and accomplishments.

By adopting Western design and ideals into the construction of new city centers, business towers, head offices, grandiose theatres, malls, and sports facilities, emerging economies believe that the building of bigger, taller, and even more ostentatious structure than are currently found in the Western world will project them to the forefront of leading industrial nations. However, with the advancements brought about through globalization, well over one hundred countries are participating in the Westernization of their urban centers, none more than the leading emerging economies; countries are accelerating at

unprecedented speeds with the aid of Western investment (Eldemery, 2009). As the Western countries capitalize on the relatively inexpensive labour markets of the Eastern world, so do the Eastern countries feed on the constant influx of money, and create massive enterprises that are currently leading the world's market economy. As many countries in the Orient become daily better integrated into the world economy, millions of new buildings are under construction, all influenced by buildings in America.

### 3.4 The Superlative Nature of Emerging Economies and their Investment in Conspicuous Architecture

Change, above all else, is a cultural process. It allows societies to adapt to changing conditions that otherwise could threaten their survival in an ever growing competitive world. This is exactly why the ability for humans to survive is directly associated with their ability to change; not one culture is impervious to change. New needs are created, new ideas and means of achieving them are introduced, as people are continually aspiring for improvements in ever more efficient and satisfactory ways. The internationalization of images, trade, information technology, fashion, and the advent of software expertise have all increased the frequency of international competition. The significance of creating "utopian" cities has been influenced by the images of superfluous and extreme forms of architecture. Throughout the centuries, countries have always practiced acts of competition such as war in order to attain more land, and have also built up competitive industries. Currently the competitive reaction of emerging industries and their assault on countless ventures has proven to cause loss of identity and to diminish any cultural association. In an ever-globalizing world, the diluting of cultural identity due to the misfortunes brought about through competition between

world markets is an unfortunate occurrence that is accelerating every year. In developing countries, societies are often caught between the desire to progress and the fear of change. This does, however, differ drastically depending on the political structure that is governing the countries' ventures, specifically its capital. As progressive societies advance and their economies begin to flourish with foreign investment, ideals and desires change drastically; architecture is no exception to this desirable change.

### *Conspicuous Conflict*

For millennia, humans have had the ability to manipulate their environments for their own benefit. The ability to do so has allowed certain people the feeling of power. This feeling of power becomes a personal fixation and the easier and more effectively they can manipulate others (with their power), the greater the euphoria and prestige they gain (Damian, 2002). In the context of architecture, these individuals are the heads of state, royal families, political bodies, investors, donors, and those with capital invested in the city's economy, architecture, and infrastructure. These administrations enforce their *power* and *prestige* onto individuals of a city. This occurs most commonly amongst the emerging economies in Asia and the Middle East. "Power is endorsed by the manipulation of the built environment, and prestige is brought about through the quality admirable enough to have influence onto others" (Damian, 2002, p. 21). Most importantly, the state's worth is not measured in itself, but rather relative to others. Being measured against others brings about conflict and competition — *conspicuous conflict*. Knowingly, states participate in a back and forth antagonism of who holds more power and prestige. The consensus is most obvious in two ways: the country's yearly GDP and the

built environment. As the GDP indicates the approximate standard of living (rarely accessed by the masses), the built environment materially symbolizes the power and status of a country. As material constructs, buildings can be easily compared to one another, judged mainly on aesthetics and scale by all humans across the globe. The illusionary sense of empowerment brought about by building the most extreme and ostentatious forms in the emerging economies of the Orient clouds understanding of the individual, cultural, and site context. Architecture becomes important in determining where one stands in relation to others *architectural proxy*.

This issue of conspicuous conflict and architectural proxy could be better understood at a micro-level of socialization in a system driven by the ideology of power and prestige. An engagement ring, (as mentioned in a previous chapter) is a symbol of unity, love, and devotion. Starting as simple bands, engagement rings started to be affixed with large diamonds and precious stones. Today, it is a mainstream convention to exchange lavish, diamond-encrusted rings that are considered the only sign of legitimizing unity. However, the exchanging of diamond rings was not a common practice until De Beers (a diamond manufacturing company) decided “they would like us to” (Scott, 2013). In 1938, De Beers launched a marketing campaign that strived to ‘inculcate’ the masses that “diamonds are a gift of love: the larger and finer the diamond, the greater the expression of love” (Epstein, 2002). From then on, young women were encouraged to view diamonds as an integral part of any romantic courtship. De Beers went so far as using the British royal family to help advertise the prestige that comes with the purchasing of diamonds. Companies forced consumers to believe that diamond engagement rings were the only way to properly profess one’s love to another. It was not as

though individuals had decided to do so themselves. It was explicitly forced onto consumers, by a global conglomerate, that this should be a common practice. It has now more than ever become a status symbol where individuals show their worth to others and compare their wealth and success based on the 4-Cs (carat, colour, clarity, and cut). Carat size, like scale in architecture, becomes the most significant factor when purchasing. Very seldom do people realize that a carat is not actually a matter of size, but of weight. Similarly, buildings in emerging economies have become material possessions that are superficially used to measure power, wealth, and success compared to others. Their economies perpetuated a belief system that scale, decoration, ornamentation, and exceeding/ surpassing one another is a measure of success, and that doing so warrants you a spot on top. Emerging economies provoke a lust for conspicuous conflict between one another and try to validate their sense of worth in the global market. As the leaders augment their power through architecture their “worth” becomes proven in the minds of their masses. The masses are then led to believe that extreme and opulent architecture becomes the key indicator of power and status.

#### *Architectural Proxy*

Between emerging economies in Asia and the Middle East, this fulfillment of power with the manipulation of environments is a common occurrence. Architecture, especially now, is used as a type of competition and comparison amongst emerging economies. These emerging economies seek popularity through architecture, for the sake of being seen as important figure(s) by others, and to further their role in the economic markets. Emerging economies believe that by constructing the most extreme forms of architecture, they are demonstrating that they are in the vanguard of



innovative and current trends across the globe.

What drives these emerging markets to invest in such a trivial thing? Simply put, it is a cry for any form of identity in the contemporary world. As global competition increases, cities that have the capital are *investing* in any and all forms of ventures in order to stay identifiable. However, architecture is no longer contested as an identifiable artifact within many of these emerging cities. A conflict arises from producing extreme built environments purely as a superlative means of competition. There is no longer any identifiable association with culture, but rather a dilution of cultural identity because of the environments that *they* create. As architecture is highly visible, these emerging economies that once stood in the shadows of flourishing world leaders (originating in the west), have now acquired substantial amounts of capital and have emerged from political oppression to modernize and have broken free and advanced their development of extreme luxury and of ostentatious environments.

Many of these emerging economies are desperately trying to imitate designs in their locations. Cities such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, two of the richest cities in the United Arab Emirates, have constructed and are proposing hundreds of projects that use considerable amounts of glass in the design of superfluous towers in their urban centers. As previously mentioned, the amount of energy and money required, not only for the construction of these projects, but also for their maintenance in excruciating temperature fluctuations, is outlandish. These cities so desperately want to push the limits that they build structures that drain money, only so that they will be considered the ultimate leaders of industry.



Figure 61. Burj Khalifa, Dubai  
 Figure 62. Sky City, Hunan  
 Figure 63. Burj Al Arab, Dubai  
 Figure 64. People's Daily headquarters, Weibo

The image of architecture as a commodity has taken on new meaning and cultural associations because of the superlative nature of emerging economies. There is very little concern given to the cultural traditions associated with architecture or even to those who reside in these cities. Scale becomes the most significant factor in the design of buildings. There is no consideration of a public scale (scale that is respectful of the ground plane). As of 2013, 21 of the 25 tallest buildings in the world are in Asia, namely in China and the Middle East (Dezeen, 2013) (Appendix A). The proposal for Burj Khalifa, in Dubai (Figure 61), the tallest completed project in the world, has



now been superseded by the proposal of Sky City in the Changsha district of Hunan, China (Figure 62). It is not as though Sky City is essential to the people of Hunan; construction of this massive tower is only being undertaken in order to outdo Dubai. The competition has not only concerned itself with the superlative effort of remaining fashionable by the construction of a building of extreme height, but there is also competition as to the construction methods and scheduling of buildings. Reports claim that, unlike the five years it took to build the Burj Khalifa, the Sky City will be constructed in only ninety days (Coonan, 2012). Emerging economies have

gone on a building spree by constructing massive contemporary monuments for no other reason than that they can.

The Burj Al Arab (Figure 63), a hotel that was designed to look like a sailboat on the Arabian Gulf, features a projecting helicopter pad, tennis courts, and a driving range. The building not only has an extreme form, but also offers residents all the luxury and leisure one would expect in this fabricated oasis. It has become an identifiable monument in the city, and around the world. However, in Weibo, China, the proposal for the state newspaper *People's Daily's* headquarters (Figure 64) takes on a peculiarly similar silhouette with a projecting helicopter pad. Both buildings have significant similarities. Not only do such cities try to supersede one another, they also replicate many of the same designs. China alone has been under much scrutiny for doing so.

In the Chinese paradox, to replicate something is to dominate it. To take the great architectural achievements of powerful cultures past and present and copy them is to marginalize their original creators. [It is] a way of saying, see, they are not so great after all — or perhaps more accurately, we are just as powerful as they are (Shepard, 2013).

In regions that are still in the process of closing economic backlogs, architecture as a superlative means has obliterated architecture as a form of art and has become a competition-based commodity. What one has the other wants, as long as it is taller, larger and more extreme in form, and especially if it can be constructed in less time. Architecture is being used to measure a city's success amongst others. There is a startling realization that architecture is no longer concerned with culture or even the societies that engage with it; architecture is nothing more than a frivolous commodity. These emerging

economies are starving to show their status. They are slowly, but surely, diluting their unique, rich culture into a culture bent on building monuments to itself. The conflict they pose with conspicuous architecture becomes a significant factor as the world becomes more globalized and identity becomes an issue when trying to differentiate amongst individuals.



04



Figure 65. CCTV Headquarters, Beijing

## From Genesis to Decadence: China's Role in Conspicuous Consumption





## Chapter 4

### From Genesis to Decadence: China's Role in Conspicuous Consumption

The rationale behind the current development of ostentatious architecture in the East is the aggressive entry of Asia's economy onto the global stage of economic and political power in the twenty-first century. The new developments are not only seen as marking the rise of the emerging expanse of economic and social growth and order, but also the close of the millennium with the emergence of the powerful world era of the "*Asian Century*" (King, 2004). China is the most populated and fastest developing emerging economy, amongst the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), and it is in China that the site dealt with in this thesis project is found. A shift of historic proportions (was) taking place and architecture is the premier symbol of that transformation, "the Chinese tend to want buildings as tall as possible and in the most ostentatiously modern style..." (King, 2004, p. 66). China has chosen to design their skyline as the most forthcoming urban development in the world. This invasion of spectacular architecture seems almost impossible to avoid, considering China's open markets and porous borders. Rapid economic development in contemporary Chinese cities has made available numerous opportunities for



Figure 66. Great Wall of China  
Figure 67. Forbidden City  
Figure 68. Classical Chinese Pagoda

architects both locally and abroad to propose outlandish designs. “It’s what China wants” (Shepard, 2013). However, countless examples of modern Chinese architecture show that contemporary architecture there has very little to do with the thousands of years of rich history, local traditions, and surrounding contexts. The response is in many ways a patchwork of unrecognizable foreign work that concentrates more on spectacular forms than on creating a suitable architectural expression of a rising economic giant that carries with it thousands of years of hardship, culture, tradition, and societal needs.



#### 4.1 A Brief History of China’s Political and Economic Rise

It is impossible to summarize the trials and tribulations of over six thousand years of history in China. In order to understand China’s current emergence as a leading economy on the international stage and its unfitting architectural response to contemporary modernization, the following is a brief insight as to the rationale behind China’s new architecture and the political implications that have in many ways heavily influenced it.

‘Ancient’ China began with dynastic families who attained power and ruled over vast territories, many of which still remain under the People’s Republic of China. During the time of the Dynasties and Imperial Court (c.2100 – 1911) identifiable architecture in China included many outstanding buildings, such as the Great Wall of China, the Forbidden City complex, watch towers, pavilions/ pagodas, etc. (Figures 66 - 68). However, the beginning of economic and political change in China came about in 1912 with the formation of the Republic of China. Later in the Qing Dynasty the Imperial Court resisted the reformation of China and what resulted was a weakening of China’s power, especially when compared with the West. Frustrated with the lack of direction of the Court, younger officials, officers, and even a small number of students rose up against the Dynasty and advocated an overturn and the creation of a republic (Vermeer, 2007). The revolution, led by a forceful military, was said to have taken place in the early weeks of October 1911, in the state of Wuhan. After a successful overpowering of the former Dynasty, the “Republic of China” was formed in the state of Nanjing on March 12, 1912. At the time, the revolutionists elected Sun Yat-sen, a political leader, to be the new president. However, soon afterwards the governing body fell apart and there was an endless succession of leaders and a division of China into right- and left-winged. Soon enough, the Chinese Soviet Republic came into existence and China was led on the Long March to take back as much land as they were able to from the Japanese (Vermeer, 2007). It was during this time that World War II began, and also the Sino-Japanese War (1937 – 1945). With the Japanese defeat in 1945, the Chinese government began to restructure under a new regime; it became a much more forceful, powerful body, led by a skilled, educated, and energetic militant, Mao Zedong.

Chairman Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) is considered to be the greatest Communist revolutionary and the founding father of the People's Republic of China. In 1949 Chairman Mao came into power and quickly strategized a tactical endeavour that was to revolutionize China amongst the growing countries around the world. In January of 1958, Mao launched the Five-Year Plan, known as the Great Leap Forward. The plan was to model the People's Republic as a heavy industry-based conglomerate, advocating for rapid industrialization. Mao is a very controversial figure as he has been accused of having caused the death of over 45 million civilians during the time of China's industrialization (Hung, 2011). However he is also regarded as one of the most important individuals in modern Chinese history. Besides his ability to industrialize a vast territory, Chairman Mao was also a strong proponent for women's rights, higher education, and the provision of universal housing and health care. There are varying opinions as to the staggering number of civilians that died during his reign, but in spite of these deaths, the population nearly doubled as well. It is said that the population grew from around 500 million to almost 900 million in the matter of just over thirty years (Hung, 2011).

However, the current situation of China as a leading economic giant is due to another person: Deng Xiaoping. Xiaoping was a Mayor of Chongqing, and a fearless politician during Chairman Mao's leadership, but was very much at odds with Mao's ideologies and with his inability to innovate. Mao believed that Deng's capitalist theories would eventually lead to the end of China's Revolution. As a reaction to this "opposition" Chairman Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, which led to Xiaoping being stripped of all his former positions. Xiaoping was now forced to work in the fields, where he spent most of his spare time writing about the possibilities that awaited





Figure 69. Bespoke illustrating at Louis Vuitton Shanghai  
 Figure 70. Louis Vuitton *Maison*, Shanghai





China's growing industries (Vermeer, 2007). Shortly thereafter, a Chinese Communist militant by the name of Lin Biao launched a coup, which led to the slow downfall of the Maoist regime. Eventually, Chairman Mao died in 1976, and during the second generation of leadership to follow him, Deng Xiaoping became the most influential army leader, after having convinced many of his former troops to join his cause for a "New" China. Xiaoping was able to enforce his policies by outmaneuvering Mao's chosen successor, Hua Guofeng. (Vermeer, 2007). What Deng saw that Mao did not, was that socialist thinking would be instrumental in the restructuring of China's economic market. This realization eventually led to one of China's most revolutionary moments: the opening of its market to foreign investment. Moreover, Xiaoping raised

production levels, and introduced political and economic ideologies that were then in place in Western America, such as the limiting of private competition. What followed in consecutive years shaped modern Chinese ideologies and led to its sudden rise in economic and political power, as well as to its appropriation of architecture.

#### 4.2 “Made in China”: Consumerism in Contemporary China

Domestic demand in China accelerated with its opening to markets and with the development of a new social order there. In the years that followed the Asian crises and downturn, the East Asian momentum has largely been recovered due to its export-led economy. With low labour wages and even lower resource costs, the new China, fast-forwarding several centuries, soon became and still very much is, the go-to source for the production of mass quantities of goods at low costs. Most significant for any developing country are the productivity levels offered in many developing and emerging markets. China has power in numbers. Thousands upon thousands of skilled employees work to output a staggering amount of material goods in unprecedented lengths of time. America, Canada, France, Italy, and countless other countries have exported their goods production to this fairly new economic industry to capitalize on the inexpensive cost. Deng Xiaoping’s return to power in 1978 and the reforms initiated under his leadership that led the country from a predominantly agrarian society to a market-oriented economy, set a pattern for a new wave of economic growth in this country of over one billion.

It is in fact the consumers that are driving this economic engine forward, those in China and outside of it. With contributions from the simple farmer and the nouveau



riche businessman, China is not only producing material goods and services, but also is consuming them; the ‘Chinese Consumer Revolution’ is in motion. China’s race to gain economic ground over the years immediately following Xiaoping’s reformation is exemplified by an average GDP growth of ten percent per annum. The economy continues to escalate at such unprecedented speed that it is expected that China’s GDP will eventually surpass that of America’s by 2020 (Garner, 2011). And as the Communist Party dissolved after Xiaoping’s takeover of the previous leading party, the people of China no longer were forced to pay considerable taxes to the government. With new accumulated wealth and no Communist direction, the Chinese people looked to the West for ideas on how to build “successful” environments and also for guidance on living a life of luxury. As it had been for several decades, Chinese society believed that the West exemplified success and with success came wealth and luxury. Therefore, they accumulated innumerable goods to emulate the Americans. There are currently over 600 billionaires and 1,000,000 millionaires in China. China is the largest luxury goods market in the world, to the extent that fashion houses are constructing new warehouses just to keep up with China’s consumption demand. (Garner, 2011). A Louis Vuitton fashion house opened in Beijing in 1992. In July of 2012, Louis Vuitton opened a boutique *Maison* in Shanghai (Figures 69 and 70) and it was reported that the entire store sold out of goods within three hours (RedLuxury, 2012). This gorilla consumption is not undertaken only by Chinese millionaires; anyone in China with any sort of partial income can partake in conspicuous consumption, and is doing so.

The 1980s in China saw a dramatic change from the previous thirty years of revolution with a rise in incomes, a shift towards emphasis on production, work, and



Figure 71. Beijing Skyline  
Figure 72. Shanghai Skyline  
Figure 73. Chongqing Skyline

consumption, a change in lifestyles, and the consumer revolution. Rapid consumption in China was led by the arrival of goods and specialty stores that sought to target the Chinese markets and their consumers. These retail sites encouraged shoppers to purchase new possessions, pursue new lifestyles, and adopt new Western identities, all swayed by fashion. In the early years of reform, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly referred to consumption as the “motor of production” and “his oft- mantra ‘to get rich is



glorious’ not only sanctioned riches but the exchange of goods and services and the development of a retail culture” (Croll, 2008, p. 57). Indeed it was on the basis of rising expectations and improved living standards that the new leadership, one less concerned with strict rules, based its support the pursuit of a new type of reform ‘socialist modernization’. Since China truly only experienced industrialization in very controlled environments, they were unable to “modernize”, both as a society and a country. Consumption came to symbolize the novel and immediate freedom from years of controlled leadership. The defining feature of this new revolution gave way to new lifestyle practices, perceptions, and self-identities impacted by the consumer goods and services sector. Not





Figure 74. *in* Huizhou

Figure 75. *in* Tianjin

Figure 76. *in* Taizhu

Figure 77. *in* Zhangjiagang



only was the society ambivalent regarding the foreign shift, but so too was the government; it remained unsure about consumerism and its bourgeois and almost irrational habits.



The consumer revolution in China has been studied for the past decade and the current trend towards understanding it proposes that the process of consumption went through three specific phases. The first phase was the consumption of food, the sway of fashion, and the ‘desirable durables’ (televisions, appliances, etc.). The second phase followed with ambivalent shopping, advertising and branding, selling of identities, and gifting. The third phase, one associated with the built context, deals with malls and markets, frugality, and architecture (Croll, 2008). Never before has China been so committed to globalization and to the world system of capitalism. It has transformed so rapidly into an industrialized and market-oriented society that it now seems remote from the cultural traditions that made it uniquely “Chinese” for thousands of years. Every aspect of Chinese culture, from its language, political system, education and architecture to

RONCHAMP CHAPEL, FRANCE  
*Figure 78.*



ZENGZHOU CHAPEL, HENAN  
*Figure 79.*



TOWER BRIDGE, LONDON  
*Figure 80.*





TOWER BRIDGE, SUZHOU  
*Figure 81.*



WANGJING SOHO, BEIJING  
*Figure 82.*



MEIQUN COMPLEX, CHONGQING  
*Figure 83.*



its customs, values, entertainment, fashion, and even cuisine, has undergone tremendous changes. Modern Chinese people hastily break with anything deemed “traditional” and the rush for economic wealth has resulted in the sad loss of a rich culture and identity, and has dramatically affected the environment. This trend has become most evident in the Chinese architecture that flourished after the Beijing Olympics of 2008. China had resorted to the tactic of conveying their dominance over the global market by a most visible means – its architecture.

#### 4.3 Conspicuous Architecture in China

China’s recent arrival on the global economic market scene has resulted in a significant design upheaval marked by the appearance of ostentatious architecture designed by local and foreign architects. This is no doubt a response to the nation’s cultural investment in conspicuous consumption through architecture as it attempts to make its presence felt on the international stage. What China risks is the loss of its rich cultural identity as countless developments are built and proposed within its cities. By the 1980s, the increasing economic competition and rivalry between established and potential major financial centers in the world economy was having profound effects on the built environment. Fueled by the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991, competition was increasing to create strength and power in great urban centers of spectacle and wealth (King, 2004). The early 1990s, characterized by artistic individualism, brought about a contest as to what city could produce the tallest, most architecturally unorthodox, and spectacular buildings. A cluster of developments globalized the nature of architectural production; these featured highly capitalized, rather than vernacular or local forms, and were marked by an internationalization of images, trade,



information and technology that was facilitated by revolutionary communication methods. In the new millennium, the global competition for, and desire for expansion of, architectural design mainly concerned two nation states – America and China.

America had evolved the profession of architecture and engineering with the creation of the very first high-rise towers in the cities of Chicago and New York. Fierce competition from the East, however, challenged many of these marvels with various buildings that attempted to surpass the already revolutionary architectural style. As the new “Asian Millennium” opened, countless projects were erected in several cities within China. “The Chinese want extreme buildings... they are in a hot pursuit of finishing first...” (Herrle & Erik, 2008, pp. 209-210). In erecting their towers, they are able to build their skyline along the water’s edge in perfect view of international waters, messaging their ultimate supremacy as *the* economic hub of world finance (Figures 71 - 73). Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng, said that the Oriental Pearl Television Tower Shanghai (Figure 72), for instance, was to be “the symbol of a new Shanghai for its [then] thirteen million inhabitants’, a firm sign that the city is rising from the depths in which it brooded for the first four decades of communist rule” (Faison, 1994, p. 12). The reasoning for this is really quite simple: skyscrapers contributed to an embodiment of what a strong financial/ business district should look like. The desire to encourage these enormous skyscrapers is associated with modernization. Many emerging economies seek the design of ostentatiously tall and unusual buildings in order to remain current in a faltering economy. It is odd though that ‘classical’ Chinese buildings, “especially those of the wealthy, are built with an emphasis on breadth and less on height... with the vertical walls not well emphasized” (Weston, 2002, p. 221). The most appropriate

REN BUILDING, SHANGHAI  
*Figure 84.*



PANGU BUILDING, BEIJING  
*Figure 85.*



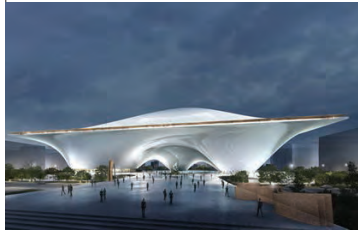
SHANGHAI FINANCIAL TOWERS  
*Figure 86.*



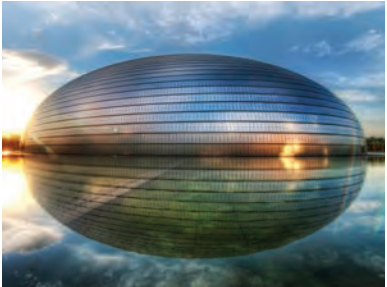
PIANO BUILDING, HUALIAN  
*Figure 87.*



NATIONAL ART MUSEUM OF CHINA, BEIJING  
*Figure 88.*



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, BEIJING  
*Figure 89.*



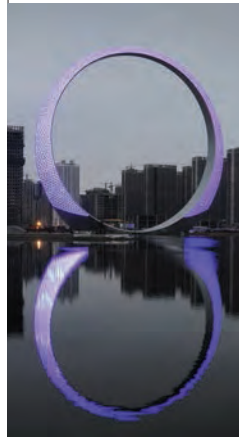
EAST GATEWAY OF SUZHOU  
*Figure 90.*



WOOD SCULPTURE MUSEUM, HARBIN  
*Figure 91.*



CIRCLE OF LIFE, FUSHUN  
*Figure 92.*



SHIDAI TOWER, HARBIN  
*Figure 93.*

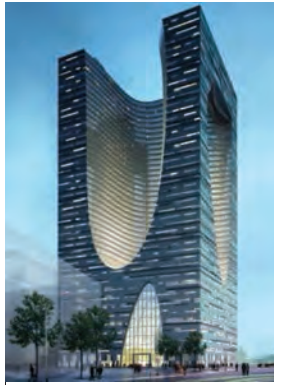




Figure 94. Olympic Gardens, Beijing  
Figure 95. The New South China Mall, Dongguan





method to express the reformation from a heavily industry-based China, to a fresh contemporary (lacking in modernization) “in the mind of planners was through the emergence of gleaming architecture that thrusts upwards, bends corners, pushes boundaries, and lights up the night sky” (Denison & Yu Ren, 2009, p. 215).

This “gleaming architecture” seems to be characteristically connected to China’s late arrival on the international stage, and has made a practice of compensating for its comparatively brief modernized history by positioning various of its attributes in relation to similar real or imaginary phenomena of the western world. The overwhelming onslaught of architecture that followed the Beijing Olympics truly attests to the nature of China’s

political and economic establishment as it attempts to garner acceptance by an increasingly universal system of representing power and status.

As China continues to open up its borders to foreign investment, the whole society becomes more and more influenced by globalization and to a large extent its architecture too. Contemporary architecture in China is in many ways a reaction to the country's formerly introverted policies. This influence has affected its architecture in many ways, such as the blind imitation of Western designs, styles, and construction without considering any of the local history and culture in China. The misinterpretation of what architectural concepts were fitting for a growing economy had led China to commission work to local and foreign architects in an effort to embody the Western vision of successful environments in their own growing urban centres. Currently, architecture in China, both that commissioned to starchitects and that done by a small band of local architects, is gaining more recognition internationally. Simply put, while many Western societies have become skilled in the theory and practice associated with architecture, China has not. There, in fact, had not been any Chinese word for "architect" until recently; before that, China had proclaimed designers "artisans", but had not referred to such skilled professionals as "architects". Chinese architects are quite uneducated in the practice, profession, and discipline of architecture (Vermeer, 2007). They are therefore unable to discern right from wrong, in such matters as the pirating of Western designs, and the producing of superlative fashioning in contemporary architecture. This may be in part due to the stronger culture of the Western society dominating the weaker local cultures that are still developing. Intimidated by their assimilation, these developing countries localize a global culture. Traditional Western styles of architecture

have swept across most of China. Full-scale European towns, replicated Mannhattans (in Tianjin), and even a clone of an entire Austrian village (in Guangdong province), have popped up across the country (Figures 74 - 77). The Chinese have appropriated these styles, have adapted them to the contemporary era, have claimed them for themselves, and have used them for their own monumentality (Shepard, 2013). Though globalization cannot take the place of localization, it also cannot resist the influence of it. Thus, Chinese architecture is valued in accordance with the rubric of Western standardization of conspicuous consumption and commodity.

In regards to China's involvement in architecture as commodity, the Beijing National Aquatic Centre, as previously mentioned, was copied in Macau. Aside from commodification within China, the country also partakes in plenty of architectural pirating. Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel in France was virtually copied in Zhengzhou (Figures 78 and 79). As well, London's Tower Bridge was replicated in Jiangsu, China as the Tower Bridge Suzhou (Figures 80 and 81). To give a very recent example, the three curved towers of Zaha Hadid's Wangjing Soho in Beijing, an office and retail complex, have been copied by a local firm (Figures 82 and 83). The Meiqun Complex in Chongqing features two towers that are identical to Hadid's and is planned to be completed faster. Moreover, China's Intellectual Property Alliance has stated that there is no special law in China with specific provisions on IP rights related to architecture (Raustiala & Springman, 2013).

Whereas in the West, imitation is an indication of deference, a sign of submission, "in China imitation shows mastery and dominance" (Shepard, 2013). It is as though replicating architecture shows that the fundamentals of



something are understood; taking something apart and reassembling it is the best way to learn how it works. Western technology, language, architecture, and culture are being consumed and reproduced, and are proliferating in China. However, this does not demonstrate a bowing down to the developed states, but is rather a show of mastery over them.

China not only commodifies and carbon-copies building designs, but it can also be held accountable as the strongest, independent proponent of conspicuous consumption and architecture (Figures 65 and 84 - 93). Many projects are very superficial in their conceptualization. Several projects, such as the Beihai Building, Pangu Plaza (Figure 85), and City Shanghai have been designed to reflect a dragon. The Piano Building by MAD Architects (Figure 87) is designed as a building shaped like a grand piano and violin. Similar to the Shanghai Performing Arts Centre, the National Art Museum of China (Figure 88), the new Port Building Shanghai, and countless other projects reveal extreme forms that are devoid of programming and that accommodate several city blocks.

Some projects, for instance the Olympic Gardens (Figure 94), have removed entire communities. According to a Chinese census released in 2009, 300,000 houses were demolished, 7,037 residents were evicted, and more than 600,000 residents relocated, all to pave acres of land and attach to them ostentatious buildings that once again are unable to fulfill programming (Scotsman, 2008). The monotonous environment brought about through contemporary architecture in China is damaging to its urban history and culture. They tend to focus on the image of a building and what it represents, rather than on a critical architecture that addresses a progressive society.

There is very little concern about the rich cultural identity of a nation that is steeped in human history.

China's careless investment in conspicuous consumption and architecture has led to several ghost towns and projects that have been abandoned after only a few years of occupancy. The two largest malls in the world are of course in China, one in Dongguan and the other in Beijing. The New South China Mall (Figure 95) is an 892,000 square-meter mall that opened in 2005; designed to accommodate over 2,350 stores, it has remained 99% vacant ever since according to Emporis, a global building data firm (Emporis, 2012). "Ghost towns" are abandoned villages, towns, cities, and other built complexes/ projects that are the remains of natural disasters. In China, however, ghost towns usually result from over-stipulated projections of new cities and large complexes (shopping malls, villages, condominiums, and parks) that cannot fulfill occupancy.

China's rapid architectural development has attracted much attention internationally. The country is still in the process of developing, industrializing, and urbanizing; however, developing is progressing through the logic of consumption. The design and construction of buildings and their urban environments are based on the economies of scale (profit-maximization principle). "The over-pursuit of quantity, scale, and speed became the ultimate activators of Chinese large-scale, high-speed urbanization" (Jie & Wenjun, 2010, p. 15). The intent of buildings is the pursuit of eternal and universal standards of aesthetics and forms. The stylization of architectural form has become the principle factor of design. There is no longer any reflection on functional purposes nor on the needs of society. Nor has anyone reflected on thousands of years of cultural context. What China wants, China gets. Its investment in conspicuous consumption and in

architecture and all other goods and materials is felt everywhere.

It is clear that aesthetics and scale play a major role in China. Something about adapting foreign styles of architecture represents status for China. Their cultural identity is diluting as a result of designing architecture through the lens of conspicuous consumption. It is a way of saying “veni, vidi, vici”: I came, I saw, I conquered (Vermeer, 2007). Contemporary architecture in this rich country stands as trophies, far removed from a unique cultural identity and from differences between regions, districts, urban, and suburban communities. China represents something of a culture with something to prove, a great culture that is perhaps insecure about its actual greatness. It is a country that builds the tallest skyscrapers and the most spectacular buildings, and is unafraid of experimenting with futuristic and extreme designs. Chinese architecture is divorced from reality. Its environment has become surreal with an unfortunate loss of culture, community, environment, and identity.





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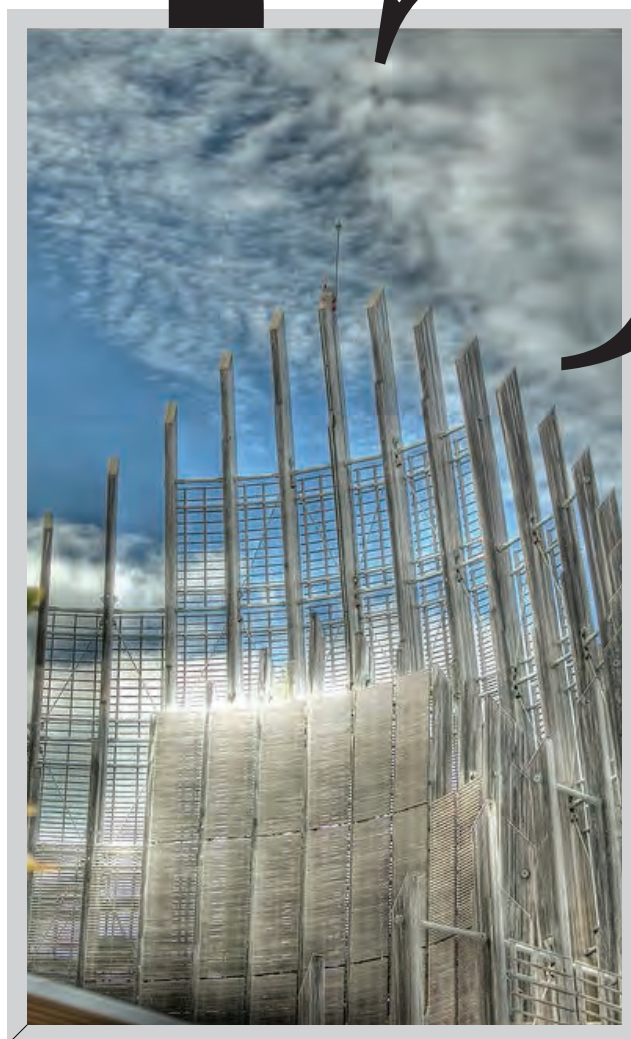


Figure 96. Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center; Noumea

## This Time Tomorrow: Responding to Our Progressive Society in the 21st Century





Chapter 5  
This Time Tomorrow:  
Responding to Our Progressive  
Society in the 21st Century

The only course open at present in order to counter conspicuous consumption through architecture is to draw upon both traditional and modern local cultures (architecture and lifestyle) in an attempt to prevent them from disappearing forever, to try to retain anything left from the movement from local to global. The uniqueness of a rich culture must be re-engaged without any anti-globalization. This response is not a cultural conservation effort akin to historic conservation of architecture. Rather, it upholds local culture and works within the invisible boundaries of progressively global world markets.

In the last three decades, the rapid globalization of emerging economies has led to the construction of diverse collections of work that in many ways aspire to project culture onto the international stage. Unfortunately, this effort has not always been successful. The way forward seems to involve some sort of re-integration of the rich realm of unique culture into contemporary architecture, at the same time as the efforts and effects of globalization are

maintained. The response will vary radically in different parts of the world, but the efforts to progress in what is to come in the next several decades, even centuries, may relieve the assimilation of cultures into conspicuous architecture everywhere. This is what the planned response will strive to achieve. Resolving such a sensitive and at times difficult problem as the loss of cultural identity through conspicuous consumption will be a challenge. What will follow is an attempt to relieve many of the perplexities and suggest a way forward.

This response to the current conspicuity of architecture as an object to consume is not a resistance. It is a mediation of the impact of globalization, trends, commercialization, and the universal adaptation of architecture, with the elements offered from the peculiarities of a specific place/site. In this way, we can begin to move forward, towards a built environment that is derived more critically in regards to culture, the surrounding context (site), and our current lifestyles. By understanding the mediation between both global and local cultures and its unique traits, designers can offer a possibility in the process of self-representation in a globalized market, without lapsing into the processes of clichés, stereotypes, or nationalistic tendencies. The search for an absolute authenticity is likely to create an oversimplified picture of a complex cultural situation.

Cultures consist of the ideas, beliefs, traditions, knowledge, technology, intellect, and art that are produced and shared by a particular community. This response to it embraces the values, significance, and understanding of peculiarities and balances universality. Globalization has not replaced social structures. Its consequences are largely the results of human decisions. The generic imposition of an impersonal globalization should be replaced by a

considered respect for identity. In order to succeed, architects have to reinforce the need for culturally informed architecture and environment. The following are strategies that can begin to answer some of the concerns brought about through conspicuous consumption and architecture, and respond to the design of what can be a better informed rendition of contemporary architecture in emerging economies.

### 5.1 Strategies that Respond to Conspicuous Consumption as Architectural Proxy

In the contemporary world, the contested meaning of culture, as it pertains to architecture, raises many uncertainties. Today architectural production involves a struggle to reconcile the necessity to conform to technology and production with the desire to re-assert cultural identities through architecture. Given the homogeneity of architecture, its materiality, design aesthetics, production and construction processes, and the limits that are faced in the attempt to innovate anything in a world that is thought to have it all, architecture is still able to continue its role as one of the most important components of culture, and to function as a medium that communicates the ideas, beliefs, and values of societies.

In the exploration of potential design outcomes based on several strategies that have been steeped in cultural tradition through function and form, architecture will serve as an agent of cultural renewal; its ability to re-invigorate earlier cultural traditions by means of their appropriation into new avenues of creative endeavors will lend itself to a final thesis project. From our increasingly globalized consumer perspective, the assertion of such a project will tease the conspicuity of consumption through architecture, not because of its ability to attract attention,

but for its potential to be progressive and because of its culturally conscious qualities in the twenty-first century.

There must be much consideration of how architecture can be designed with a balance between globalization and localization, form and function, past and present; this will then prevail as a valuable and critical architectural response. Below are several concerns that are brought about through conspicuous consumption and architecture, and following them are some strategies that respond to them.



### *Concerns: Problems with Conspicuous Architecture*

#### *1. Homogenized Environments*

While architecture once served as a unique representation of cultural identity through the built environment, many completed and proposed projects currently seem to represent a much more unified vision. Designing within contemporary societies presents the challenge of identifying, understanding, and differentiating architecture.

As globalization operates beyond the subtleties that distinguish one culture from another, the underlying universality in architecture that is brought about by globalization has created an architecture of homogeneity and commodity. We are losing the social (cultural), physical (site), and sensorial richness of the built fabric. The repetition of designs is stopping us from observing and experiencing our surroundings, as much of it has been lost

due to pirating, adapting, and regulating of building design.



## *2. Scale*

Scale has become the most significant factor in the design of contemporary architecture, especially in emerging economies. Urban environments become disconnected from their surrounding fabrics, as does the public that interacts with them on a daily basis. The surrounding context is dismissed and buildings of either towering height or considerable size are placed in already dense city cores as mere monuments to attract attention on the international stage.

Too often, the program and usability of spaces are not considered and the result is monstrous buildings that are unoccupied or abandoned altogether.



## *3. The Superlative Nature of Emerging Economies*

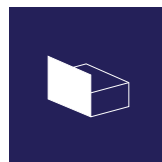
By and large, today's architecture prefers to focus on consumerist gratification and on image. This effect is most noticeable in developing countries, newly industrialized cities, and emerging economies. Architecture in these areas is being used to create superlatives, as a type of competition (conspicuous conflict). The cities involved are underestimating their

despair by investing in taller, larger, more fashionable, and more extreme architecture that is focused on spectacle, aesthetics, and monumentality in order to compete with one another.



#### *4. The Subversion of Functionality for the Sake of Extreme Forms*

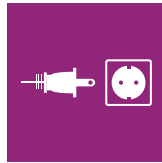
Ostentatious architecture that revels in foreign, extreme, and impressive forms has witnessed a subversion of functionality and the rise of spectacle in form. The trend towards superlative architecture has reached the point of creation of extreme forms that are unable to fulfill their intended programs. Spaces have become inefficient and unusable, purely for the sake of external form. In an age where real estate holds so much value, too many commissioners spend a considerable amount of money to gain/ use little more than half of the building's footprint. Though many of the emerging economies may be able to afford these pricy ventures, architecture as a process of considering the inner workings of a space, its relation to other spaces, and its usability is discredited.



#### *5. Superficiality, Ornamentation, and Decoration*

The superficial design of trivial forms (dragons, orchids, fan movements, etc.), the decorative appliqué of materials, envelope systems, and the output of parametric

modeling, though impressive to many, is informed by nothing more than the fact that technology enables designers to create them. Very rarely is the aesthetics or ornamentation of/ upon a building derived from any aspect of a culture, its fashion, lifestyle, tradition, etc.



### *6. Inability to Connect with Surrounding Context*

Context is a major concern brought about by conspicuous architecture in emerging economies. Context stems from two areas: cultural and site. Site context refers to the surrounding site(s), and involves typology, neighbourhoods, institutions, and the people living and working around new developments. Too often, developments are proposed without considering an area's history, its typology, or the impact that a new building may have on the immediate environment. The only cultural context found in the design of many contemporary buildings that are being proposed in emerging economies is the dismissal of cultural intuitiveness. Both cultural and site context have been lost in the integration of architecture into the consumer lifestyle of these emerging economies.

### *Strategies: Responding to Concerns*

In order to address the aforementioned concerns, three essential strategies have been devised that will inform future conspicuous architecture. Each strategy draws upon the cultural values, past and present, and on current socio-cultural matters in order to design environments that are better aware of the influences that



our current lifestyle has on contemporary architecture. Furthermore, these strategies will then inform countless tactics that are unique to a collective society that will then influence a final design.



### *Strategy 1: Context Consciousness*

As from being indifferent to the consumerist lifestyle, architecture should also respond to and be inspired by the context of where it is built. The built environment affects people, their perceptions, memories and experiences, as well as previous existing built environments. An appropriate response is *Context Consciousness*, a strategy that addresses both site and culture, past and present.

In regards to site context, almost all new proposals and constructed developments sell buyers, commissioners, and citizens on the potential “image” of the completed project. In renderings, buildings tend to become glorified beacons in the midst of congested cities, portrayed as though they were situated on acres of lush gardens and surrounded by public parks. In actuality, many of these proposals once completed pay very little attention to context: surrounding buildings, neighbourhoods, and citizens. Outdoor property, or the lack of, is marked by expansive hardscapes that are unwelcoming to the people who interact with it on a daily basis. The ongoing pursuit of building taller and larger buildings has made scale a significant design factor of conspicuous architecture. Within already congested cities, scale contributes to plenty of negative qualities that affect the city’s context. The

experience for many is that of intimidation, suffocation, and the loss of natural light. As a response, the environment including in-between spaces should be designed along with the building, responding to the entirety of the built environment. One must also take into consideration the typology of the area and any design program, aside from the buildings, that may be used by the people who occupy the site. These considerations may influence the scale, program, and site intervention(s).

As the built environment becomes more homogenized and extreme forms divorce society from the unique qualities of their culture, *Context Consciousness* is also an intervention that attempts to include past and present cultural context. Too often, emerging economies integrate Western influences into the design of buildings, thereby diluting the identities of their respective cities. By integrating features or qualities of past cultural environments and present technologies, environments may feature buildings that are spectacular, but in fact do not rely on spectacle. Environments can be created that are able to modernize unique cultural traits from the past and to include them in the lineage of contemporary architecture. One can design conspicuous architecture that is more responsive to unique cultural identity by accepting consumer cultures, extreme forms, ornamentation, and decoration, and integrating these aesthetic characteristics with that of domestic cultural qualities (further explained in strategy 3). It may seem strange to be accepting of the consumer lifestyle, which much of this thesis scrutinizes it for having influenced the conspicuous architecture that dilutes cultural identity; however, it is important to accept the consumerist lifestyle if architecture is to progress along with the natural development of people and their environments.



*Strategy 2: Function can inForm*

The ostentatious forms of contemporary architecture in emerging economies have earned attention on the international stage; too many of them have paid closer attention to aesthetic appeal than to intended programs. The superlative nature of these forms demonstrates the constant attempt to build the most imaginative forms possible, taller, and larger than those in other cities. However, the forms are derived prior to their programs. The extreme forms that commissioners seek are realized, but they do not create successful interior environments. In many cases, buildings have remained unoccupied, or have been inefficient, or completely out of tune with the functionality of the building. When designing a building, both its interior and exterior, architects should make certain that the program serves as the driving force behind the overall design prior to any aesthetic treatments. Allowing the program (function) to *inForm* the overall design of the building would allow for a more appropriate architectural response, which can then inform the overall design aesthetic of the building. This strategy would ultimately concern itself with spatial programming and with the creation of relationships between given spaces. Then can architects design the exterior and interior finishes, ornamentations, and treatments that best suit the aesthetic qualities of the building.



### *Strategy 3: Tradition and Transcendence*

Without conforming to archaic traditions, the strategy of *Tradition and Transcendence* is an important aspect of designing in architecture that incorporates traditional or cultural influences into the fashioning of contemporary built environments. In the most literal way, this could be done by using traditional construction methods and assemblies by also using technological advancements in the industry, to generate newer means of stylizing contemporary architecture. In a much more abstract way, the construction and fashioning of cultural artifacts may only influence design, construction, materials, details, structure, and assembly by examining design methods previously used to build unique works. Most importantly, as many commissioners seek for an aesthetic appeal, *Tradition and Transcendence* is a strategy that could be used to inform ornamentation, decoration, façade treatments, and overall exterior and interior finishes and aesthetics. For instance, just as semiotics and meaning in architecture communicate cultural traditions and customs, so does folklore, one of the oldest ways of communicating to successive generations; allowing societies to remember and recognize the past and inform the present and future. In relation to architecture, folklore can contribute to the narrative of interior and exterior environments. Interiors can be made through narratives and through the procession and perception of spaces and interior qualities. Exteriors are created by means of an overall design aesthetic that involves rhythm, balance, proportions, and harmony. Folklore, as we can see, can serve as a design generator that influences both the design

and planning of architecture and its surroundings, and that creates a rich articulation of culture in the built form.

While applying these strategies, each individual city would inform further tactics more specific to their own society, culture, and environment. Together, these three strategies and the several tactics from each could inform the fashioning of robust, culturally identifiable, contemporary works of architecture.



Figure 97. Concerns and Strategies Relationship



Figure 98. The National Bank of Dubai



Figure 99. Jean-Marie Tjibaou Center, Noumea

Figure 100. The Ordos Art Museum, Erdos

Figure 101. The Museum of New 4th Army Jiangnan Headquarters



## 5.2 Value in Conspicuous Architecture

It is not as though all contemporary architecture that showcases extreme forms and unorthodox designs is divorced from cultural values, traditions, and identities. In the twenty-first century there are several projects that, although they are conspicuous by nature, are also actually quite immersed in rich cultures that are the driving forces behind their designs. The positions these projects take on are those of contemporary fashioning that has been influenced by some sort of cultural value (tradition, folklore, and beliefs). Examples include the Alexandria Library by Snohetta Architects and Hamza Associates in Alexandria, Egypt; the Vacheron Constantin Watch Factory by Bernard Tschumi in Geneva, Switzerland; Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum by Moshe Safdie and Associates in Jerusalem, Israel; Mercedes-Benz Museum by UN Studio in Stuttgart, Germany; Institut du Monde Arabe by Jean Nouvel in Paris; France.



There are also many examples in emerging economies, which although they have countless examples of ostentatious architecture, also have conspicuous architecture influenced by its culture. The National Bank of Dubai (Figure 98), designed by Carlos Ott, is a modern example of iconic imagery in the United Arab Emirates.

The building's design is influenced by the traditional *dhow* (the flat-bottomed sailboats that plied their trades along the banks of Duabi Creek) (Tamsin, 2007). The building features an elegant, curved glass façade (reminiscent of a sail) that reflects the water's edge and the docked sailboats. Since the United Arab Emirates built much of its economy originally through trade, Ott included the curved façade as homage to the economy's traditional trading ways (the trade port of Dubai). Though the Burj al Arab is also influenced by a sailboat, the Bank's intention is not to stand as a spectacular monument. It is a subtle gesture of extreme form that serves more as a representation of its culture than as an ostentatious design.

The Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center (Figure 96 and 99) by Renzo Piano in Noumea, New Caledonia, is dedicated to the celebration of the indigenous Kanak culture. The Cultural Center is made up of ten separate units, all of different sizes and functions; they are mask-like structures designed by Renzo Piano in his "High-Tech" architectural idiom filtered through traditional Kanak forms (Stathaki, 2007). These structures not only resemble Kanak "huts", but also are earthquake and cyclone resistant (site specific). Linking each of the structure is a central path, a reminder of the Kanak village's traditional main ceremonial walkway. The complex is inspired by the cultural origins and vibrant identity of the Kanak people, and its structures are representative of traditional building methods and forms, made with the modern technologies of the twenty-first century.

The Ordos Art Museum by Tiantian Xu in Kokoshina Cultural District, Erdos, (Figure 100) is a contemporary art museum, whose design has been conceived to reflect the rough terrain of the area. Architect Tiantian Xu believed that creating an unorthodox form in

such a rural area was ill-fitting (Jie & Wenjun, 2010). So she envisioned a design that was simply a reflection of the tortuous route through the Kokoshina District. She believed that the natural site context would best inform the narrative of the building. The landscaped courtyards of the interior galleries and common spaces run zig-zag alongside the natural terrain. While the linear space is continuous, the cross-sections reflect their elevations and feature varying widths and heights, all of which are influenced by the high-peaks, low-lying landscapes, and dried reservoirs of the site. The building is quite complex and the elevations seem quite extreme; however, the design of the building respects the context in which it is situated.

The Museum of New 4th Army Jiangnan Headquarters (Figure 101), a museum commemorating the battle against the Japanese in the 1930s and 1940s, was designed by architects Zhang Lei, Shen Kaikang, and AZL Atelier Zhnglei, in Liyan, Jiangsu, China. The building acts as a museum, education centre and memorial. Typically, museums in China over the past two decades have been conceived as momentous and spectacular building; however, the Museum of New 4th Army was designed with symbolic meaning. “In China, rocks and stones have been used to commemorate people and events” (Jie & Wenjun, 2010, p. 36). The museum is a geometrical body of rock with deep and irregular cracks that lies flat on the Liyan horizon. Its expression seems quite simple, but it has a metaphorically rich meaning. Each unit along the façade commemorates casualties of the war (World Architects, 2007). Vivid red incisions on the surface of the museum are allusions to the battle and also serve as light cannons in the interior spaces. The building is polite, yet unorthodox and more informative than spectacular.

There are many instances where conspicuous

architecture has been designed with symbolic, metaphoric, cultural, traditional, and site influences/ meanings. These buildings at first glance may seem to fit within the precincts of conspicuous consumption as architectural proxy, however, quite a lot of conscious decisions have been informed by specific strategies that leverage off of cultural differences, unique traits/ characteristics, surrounding contexts, etc. Many of these projects are less about status, power, and prestige than they are about representing the unique culture of societies through architecture, remaining pertinent and at times provocative, and being informative, rich, and simultaneously conspicuous.







Figure 102. Porcelain Illustration

## The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory





## Chapter 6

### The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory

It has been discussed how difficult it is to reinforce cultural identity through architecture as much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have changed many local cultures into one unifying global culture of trends and technology. The ostentatious forms, homogenized environments, superlative reaction, and glorification of wealth and power through architecture have led to an acceptance of commodified objects that traverse their built environments. In responding to the current concerns brought about through this thesis, the resultant project reacts to the concerns outlined as it attempts to create a balance between cultural identities and current lifestyle trends. This does not mean, however, that the response is invalidated in any way, since, as previously stated, in order to progress, architecture must attempt to address both cultural authenticity and global culture. It does not rely solely on one or the other, but stresses the importance of rich local culture to the development of architecture that will remain relevant and progressive for the growing consumer lifestyle.

Today, there is a conscious divide between vernacular buildings and buildings designed by professional architects. Both have to do with culture, both in a very different way. The architect can gain knowledge from traditional approaches of the people regarding use of key elements in the design, and the people in turn can be strongly influenced by the impact architects make on their environment. The thesis project aims to achieve progress and consciously works to communicate a cultural expression.

As a major contributor to conspicuous consumption through material goods and architecture, China will serve as the site for exploration of an appropriate architectural response that remains critical and tolerant of current lifestyle demands; to create an environment that sustains aspects of cultural identity, leverages from tradition (artifacts, assemblies, design features, etc.), create opportunities for locals, all the while offering the aesthetic qualities sought out by this emerging economy.

When choosing a site and a program that addresses the thesis, it is important to study what significant feature(s) truly embody or convey the Chinese lifestyle. Thus, by exploring both a relevant program and an appropriate site to develop that program on, it has been determined that the architectural response will respect a Chinese trait that began several centuries ago and continues to be part of its society's welfare.

The production and industrial sector of China has outrivaled virtually all other countries across the globe. The criticism is often made that goods and services exported from China are of lesser quality, available at discount stores and at inexpensive prices. Many people

complain about the “junk” that pours out of China, but they truly rely on China for a lot of that “junk” in order to maintain their industrial and domestic livelihood. On the other hand, China excels in the field of production with the output of high-quality goods at relatively low prices, due to the inexpensive labour force (Fallows, 2007). The industrial sector is important for China and everyone else. China’s success in manufacturing is what has made its mark on the world. In China, factory output has contributed to the building of roads, homes, and schools. It offers many a chance for a paying job, and a chance to escape rural poverty. China’s economy works around numbers both in quantities of goods and people and in matters of finance. Several luxury brands have their goods made in China almost to the point of completion, and then import them back into their city to affix one or two other pieces and label them as “made-in” their respective cities. Apple, one of the most influential technology companies in the modern lifestyle, designs their products in California, but exports the production of all their stock to China. Thus, China stands as a great example of a society that has excelled in the production sector and continues to create almost all the goods and products we interact with every day. Thus, to design a thesis project that responds to architecture in emerging economies, China’s “industrial giant” will serve as the site to develop on.

### 6.1 Guangzhou: China’s Industrial Giant

Guangzhou (Figures 103 - 105), formerly known as *Canton*, is the largest city, and capital, of Guangdong province in the southern region of China, located north-north west of the cities of Hong Kong and Macau. With a population of approximately 12.8 million, this “Beta World City”, identified by the global index GaWC (Globalization and World Cities Research Network), is expected to grow to a

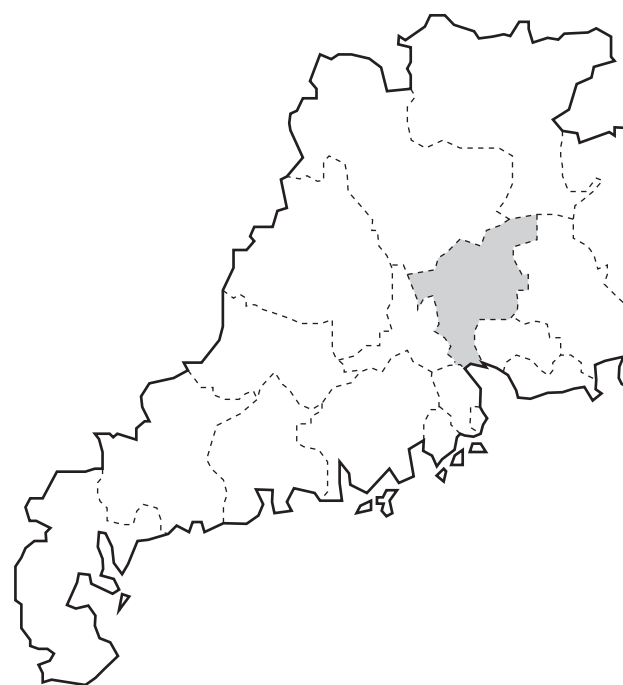
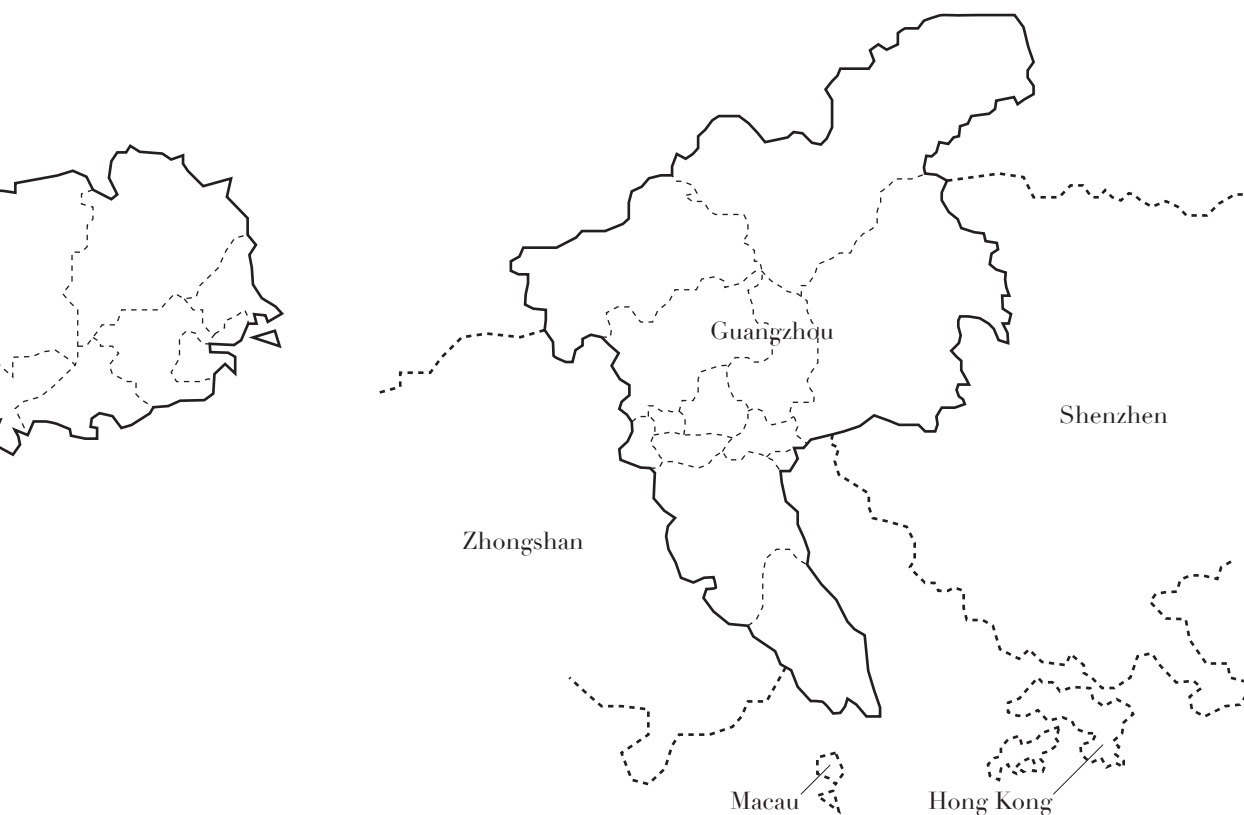


Figure 103. Map of China (Guangdong Province)

Figure 104. Map of Guangdong Province (Guangzhou)

Figure 105. Map of Guangzhou



population of 18 million by the year 2020 (Lau, 2013). Coveted for its production of industrial goods and services, China is considered to have 40 industrial manufacturing sectors, 34 of which are located in Guangzhou (Appendix B). Rich in industrial heritage, Guangzhou developed advanced textile and porcelain industries, dealt in foreign exchange with merchants overseas, and has been altogether a vital port for trade and export.

During the Tang Dynasty Guangzhou truly flourished as a world-famous trading harbor, exchanging goods with countries along the South Pacific and Indian Oceans. The history of Guangzhou's transformation into an industrial hub has a deep-rooted past amongst the succession of Dynasties. Some time in the mid-1680s, Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty allowed foreigners to trade with China in four major cities, including Guangzhou. Trade was limited to Portuguese, Dutch,



Figure 106. Plan of the City of Canton  
Figure 107. Thirteen Factories



French, and German traders. However, in 1757 his successor, Emperor Qianlong, sanctioned a policy of isolation with any foreign trade except at the port of Guangzhou (Canton Port) (Figure 106) at the head of the Pearl River (Rogers, 1996). It was then the only open port into China and in the eighteenth century a stretch of land heavily guarded by Dynasty officials housed the Canton Factories, also known as the “Thirteen Factories”. These Thirteen Factories (Figure 107) were the first foreign trade centers after the ban on any maritime activity. The site is currently known as Wenhua Park, located at the major intersection of Thirteen Hong Street and Shisanhang Road. Later in 1949, when Communist China took possession of Guangzhou, trade isolationism was no longer in effect and the city remained as “the” industrial center and a modern port of China proper. Following Xiaoping’s encouragement of China’s open-market, production-based economy, Guangzhou surpassed all other Asian industries





Figure 108. Guangzhou at Nighttime  
Figure 109. Canton Tower along the Pearl River





in the fields of machinery, technology, and chemical engineering (Pridmore, 2008).

Currently, Guangzhou is credited for excelling in the regions of automobile and parts machinery (tool and die), electronics and communication, textiles and plastics, petro-chemicals, and bio-medicine; rating of the primary leaders in these industries was done by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (UNIDO, 2012). These five industries alone gross a profit of over 160.9 billion Yuan (equivalent to 20.1 billion USD) (Guangzhou Municipality Government, 2012). Other industries include integrated steel complexes, paper mills, textile industries (silk, cotton, jute, and synthetic fibers), as well as factories that produce tractors, machinery, machine-tools, newsprint, refined sugar, alcohol, small



Figure 110. Guangzhou Opera House

Figure 111. Canton Tower

Figure 112. Guangzhou Slum

appliances, tires, sports equipment, porcelain, jade, ivory, cement, and chemicals.

Amongst the largest cities in the country, Guangzhou is also known for its transportation, finance, and as the most prosperous trade center in Southern China. It has very important trade partnerships with Hong Kong, generating approximately 2.28 billion dollars (USD) (CNN Money, 2012). Guangzhou's industry plays a significant role in the economic output of the whole country. The industrial added value has been ranked



second among the ten largest cities of China for the last 12 years. The gross industrial output in 2012 was estimated at 1 trillion Yuan (equivalent to 152 billion USD), a 12.9 percent increase from the previous year (Guangzhou Municipal Government, 2012). Therefore, Guangzhou has grown as an excellent investment environment and has great potential for economic development through foreign investment. There are currently 145 companies of the *Global 500* that have established their subsidiaries in Guangzhou (CNN Money, 2012).



After Shanghai and Beijing quickly became the great urban centers of finance within China, the province of Shenzhen followed suit. Moreover, trends in economic growth and expansion forecast that the city of Guangzhou is the next target for large re-development within the country. Fairly recent projects in Guangzhou seem to be in direct line with contemporary Shanghai and Beijing in terms of their architecture. The industry-driven society of Guangzhou is witnessing a shift not only in the contemporary fashioning of its architecture, but also in lifestyle. The society has openly embraced the lifestyle of fashion and leisure. While it may be a very much top-tier city in terms of economic revenue, and despite its showpiece malls and the comparatively high per-capita income of residents, Guangzhou has proved frustrating for many major luxury brands. Brands had been slow in investing heavily in their Guangzhou operations as local luxury consumption lagged far behind cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Hangzhou, and Dalian. However, in 2009 the city saw a tremendous increase in the influx of luxury goods and services. In 2011 alone Louis Vuitton opened its largest flagship in all of Asia in Guangzhou: a 2,800 square-meter mega-boutique that cost over 9 million dollars (USD) to build (RedLuxury, 2012). In the same year Hermes opened a 1,400 square-meter store that is the only location of the brand's home furnishing line, Gucci re-entered the city after a seven-year absence with a 1,800 square-meter boutique, and Chanel opened its very first store in all of Southern China (Jing Daily, 2011). The accumulated wealth within Guangzhou drew conspicuous consumers who sought out a life of luxury and leisure.

Surrounded by the Pearl River, the many waterfronts along the coast of Guangzhou have become attractive destinations for travelers within China and

abroad (Figures 108 and 109). With the introduction of luxury brands and lifestyle, the once heavily trafficked coastline of shipyards has depleted with the introduction of countless five-star luxury hotels, resorts, and casinos. Currently, there are several projects and proposals that have been designed, which of course, are done through the lens of conspicuous consumption as China battles architecture against the fortunes bestowed on their economic markets.

Perhaps even more astonishing is not the amount of construction that has gone up, but the architectural audacity that has imbued the city with ostentatious, flamboyant, and colourful architecture that in no way reflects the historic past of the city. The heavy industry-based water's edge has witnessed a decrease in the number of large industry mills, factories, plants and an increase in extreme and opulent buildings. Such buildings include The Pinnacle, Pearl River Tower, Guangzhou IFC, China International Tower, and Vertical City, all of which soar above the relatively mid-rise typology. The Opera House by Zaha Hadid (Figure 110), yet another organic-shaped building, was designed based on the movement of a fan. The now-famous Canton Tower (Figure 111) is massive structure that envelops an abandoned factory. Affixed to the Tower is a roller coaster and two restaurants, all of which light up the night sky with colourful LED lights. These and countless other developments, especially the multitude of condominiums and hotel resorts, are focused on spectacle and conspicuous designs and cast large shadows over the entire city. Guangzhou also features several slums (Figure 112) that are located within the congested area of the towers and make for a drastic contrast between affluent and ostentatious architecture and poorly maintained low-rise housing districts. This juxtaposition is in part due

to the non-existence of by-laws, which allows for development wherever real estate is available. The city, much like Beijing and Shanghai, is growing as a congested metropolis with soaring towers and extreme built form, all of this driven by Guangzhou's significant contribution to the global market.

Guangzhou is rich in cultural heritage and has been identified as *the* industrial hub of China. It is therefore important that there are steps taken to introduce a project there that will work within its forecasted growth as a new urban center and also simultaneously preserve its rich industrial heritage, as the loss of cultural identity has threatened the integrity of China's architecture on the international stage. This once heavily industry-focused city has changed into a consumer-driven cosmopolitan area that features countless examples of conspicuous architecture. In an effort to allow for this transition whilst sustaining Guangzhou's cultural importance to China and commerce nations, the program of the thesis project will offer the city a revival of its historic lineage and will offer opportunities for local artisans, at the same time as it contributes to its growing consumer society.

## 6.2 Guang Cai

Guangzhou is the center of industrialization in China and therefore the program to be designed for a thesis project, as a response to the faults of architecture in emerging economies, must be a venue that presents a form combining cultural tradition and consumerist culture. The program will evoke an appreciation of one of China's most prized industries while catering to the appreciation of its rising consumer lifestyle. *The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory* will be a modified industrial venue that incorporates a factory for the production of porcelain, a leading industry

in Guangzhou, while it also integrates a commercial component, a gallery-studio facility, as a satellite workshop for the Sun Yat-sen University, and outdoor recreational and leisure grounds.

The venue will aim to be an interactive complex that produces custom goods rather than simply displaying them. It must offer skilled labourers, artisans and students the opportunity to learn and work within the complex. By creating a bespoke retail component, China's societies may appreciate the customized products that feed into its consumerist lifestyle. It should not, however, be thought of as comprising a factory and retail component separately. The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory is a fusion of high-end retail and an outstanding production industry. The factory component allows for artisans, students, visitors and consumers to learn the trade in an effort to preserve and continue the production of a valued artifact. The high-end retail offers consumers customized engraving, inlaying, and illustrations on the porcelain. This fusion of parts is made possible by a building that is designed not to separate its two components, but to harmonize both programs into one. The result creates an environment that re-invigorates its society by connecting it with its rich cultural lineage.

Porcelain, informally referred to as "china" or "fine china", was invented during the Qing Dynasty in China. However, proto-porcelain dates further back to the Han Dynasty, originating in the city of Jingdezhen. Since higher quality Kaolin or Kaolinite (Gao-ling in Chinese), the essential clay mineral used to produce porcelain, is available in the city of Guangzhou, Guangdong porcelain is very sought after. This high quality is due to Guangdong's close proximity to water, which makes its Guang Cai, (Guangdong porcelain) the most durable type of porcelain.

Figure 113. Iconic Chinese Porcelain







It is renowned for its low permeability, considerable strength, colour, resonance, as well as its lightweight qualities (Li Zhiyan, 2010).

Also, Emperor Qianlong's isolationist policy affected all trading ports except Canton Port and so artisans from Jingdezhen travelled to Guangzhou to work. Eventually, Guangzhou excelled at porcelain artistry and is one of the most sought-after products in North America, Asia, and especially Europe. Guang Cai has always been highly prized all over the Middles East as well. During the Qing dynasty, the expertise that "fine china" was made with was so valued that it became the fourth most exported good across Europe, Asia, and Africa through the Silk Road (Li Zhiyan, 2010). European bourgeois considered fine china an extravagance, and it was coveted for its exceptional properties. Some of the most well known pieces are the iconic blue-and-white wares (Figure 113) and the coveted Chinese porcelain urns and vases, illustrated with landscapes, flowers, and traditional Chinese inscriptions. Many others across Europe and

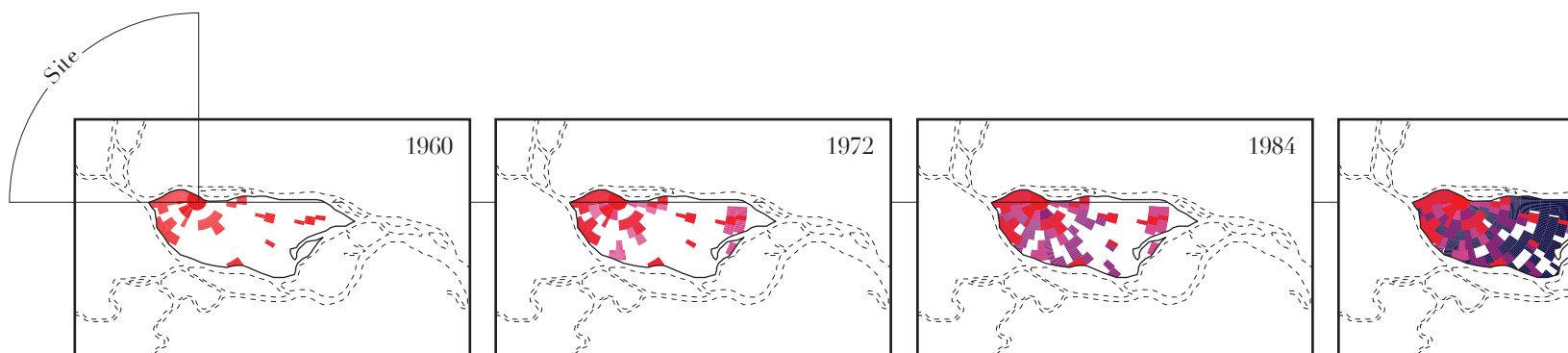
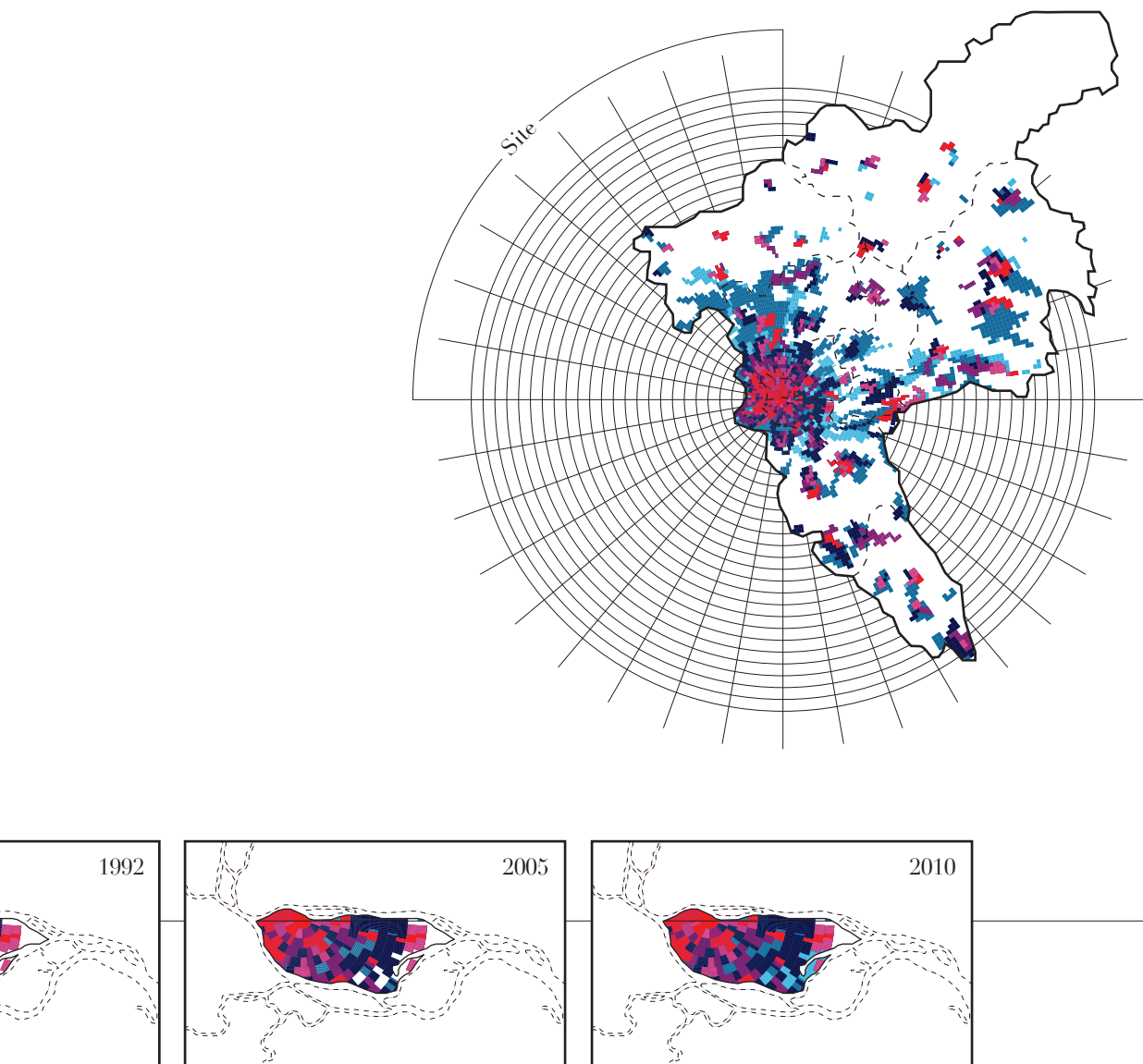


Figure 114. Guangzhou's Urban Sprawl

- 1960
- 1972
- 1984
- 1992
- 2005
- 2010



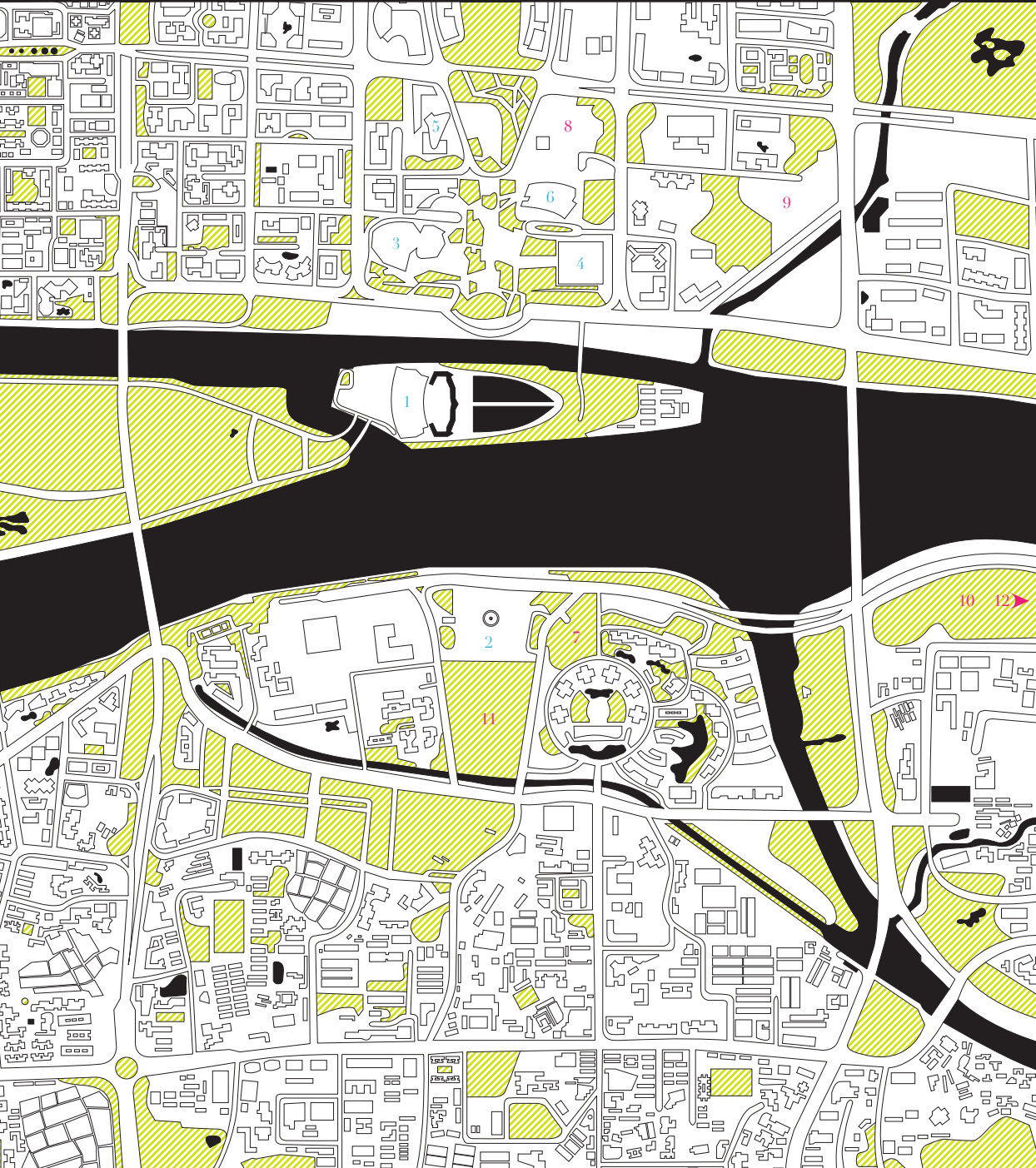
North America tried to imitate fine china, but they were unable to produce wares with the same expertise, composition, and technique that was uniquely a product of China. Today, porcelain still remains a highly sought-after product because of its enduring quality and prestigious value.

### 6.3 Siting Guang Cai

The particular site of The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory is in the Haizhu District on the north-western band of the

Figure 115. Site Plan of Northwestern Haizhu





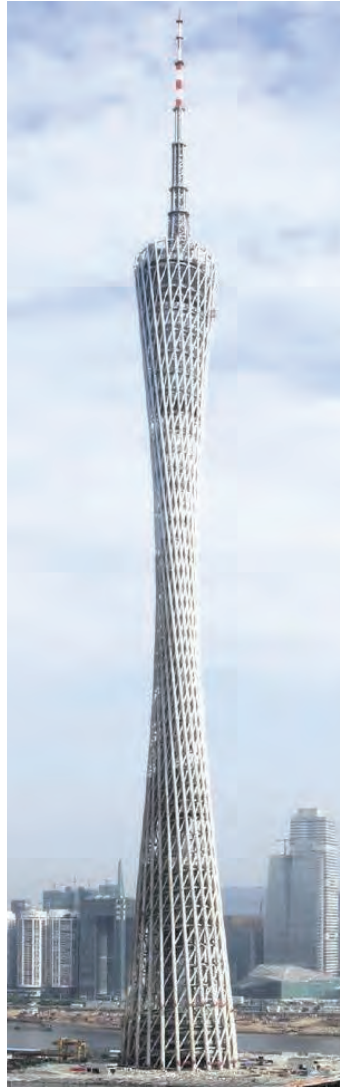


HAIXINSHA  
*Figure 116.*



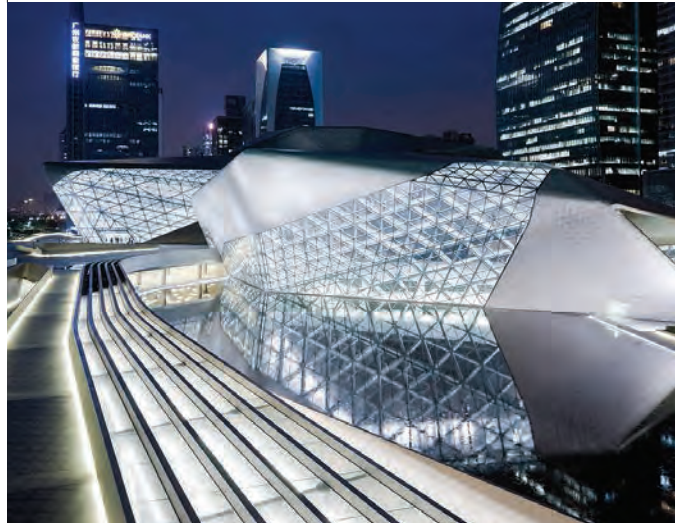
1

2



CANTON TOWER  
*Figure 117.*

GUANGZHOU OPERA HOUSE  
*Figure 118.*



3

4



THE GUANGDONG MUSEUM  
*Figure 119.*

5



GUANGZHOU IFC  
*Figure 120.*

6



GUANGZHOU LIBRARY  
*Figure 121.*



GUANGZHOU TV STATION  
*Figure 122.*



7

8



GUANGZHOU WEST TOWER  
*Figure 123.*

CTF GUANGZHOU  
*Figure 124.*



9

GUANGZHOU DAILY CULTURE CENTER  
*Figure 125.*



KASARA DEVELOPMENT  
*Figure 126.*



GUANGZHOU VELODROME  
*Figure 127.*





Figure 128. Former factory

Figure 129. Water Sports Management Centre (view West)

Figure 130. Water Sports Management Centre (view East)





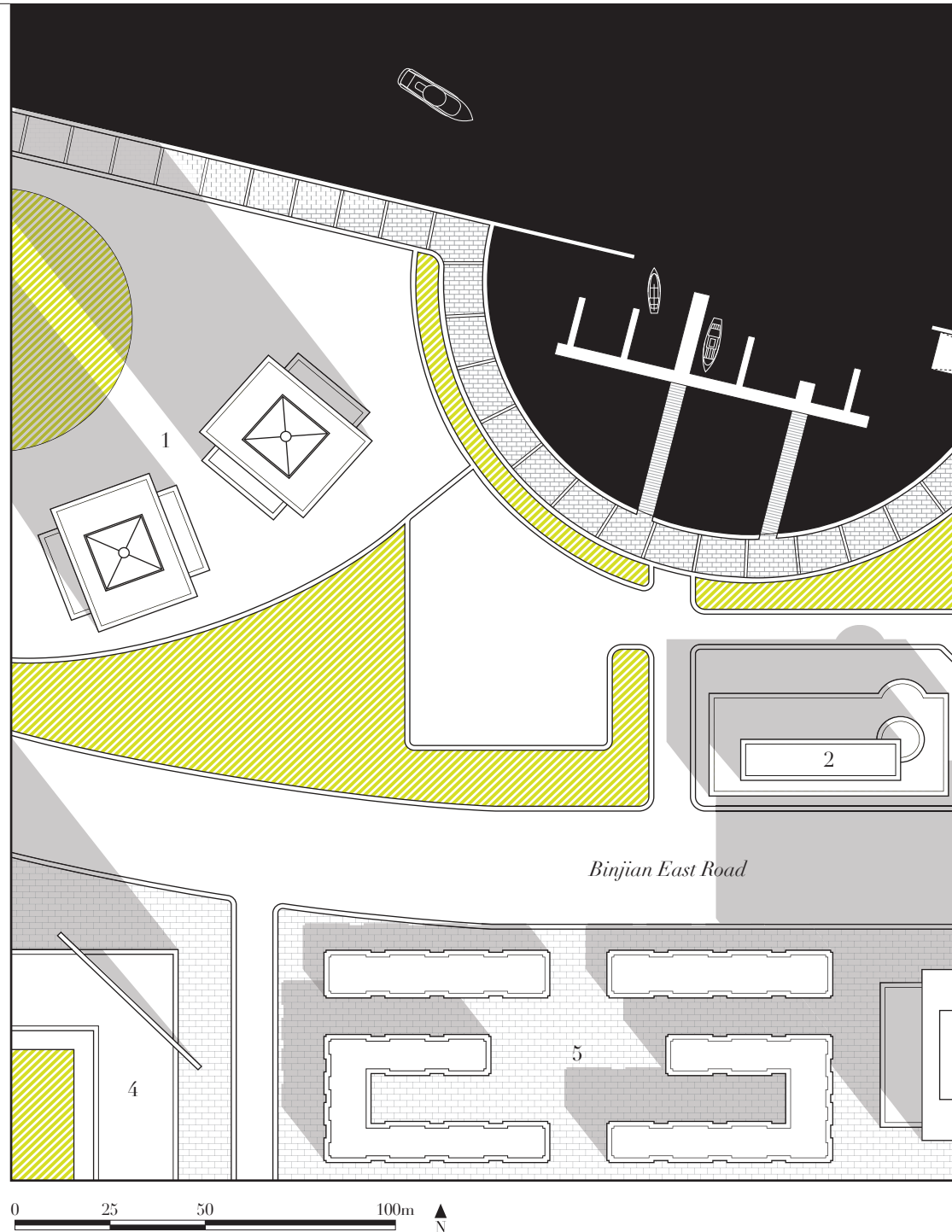
Canton Islands, surrounded by the Pearl River (Figures 114 and 115). Along and across the shoreline, countless high-rise and ostentatious developments have cleared all the previous low- and mid-rise industrial factories and family homes. The current typology consists of office towers, condominiums, luxury hotel-resorts, and Zaha Hadid's Guangzhou Opera House, The Guangdong Museum by Rocco Design Architects, along with several other proposals that are to be completed by 2014 (Figures 116 - 127). Some of the towers measure up to 200 meters tall; the Canton Tower alone measures approximately 600 meters. The Haizhu district is also home to the Sun Yat-sen University, a prestigious school focused on the development of sciences. Along the shore is a mid-rise building formerly occupied by the Water Sports Management Center. This is being relocated to a considerably larger development on the eastern shore of Haizhu (Figure 127). Before it was a Water Sports Management Center the building housed a parts and piece factory (Figure 128). The specifics regarding it are unsure due to the lack of historic record. This site will serve as the home to The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory.

The current 5-storey building measures an approximate area of 1000 square meters (Figures 129 and 130). The site measures approximately 6,500 square meters (Figure 131). To the north of the site is an existing pedestrian walkway with an unobstructed view across the island. To the east of it is a parking lot, the Sun Yat-sen University Gardens, followed by several high-rise condominiums measuring up to 130 meters tall. Directly south of the building is the Gold Coast Marina Hotel and Club Resort; beyond the Resort is a ramped freeway and multiple mixed-use high-rise developments. To the west of the site are 6 mixed-use hotel resort and condominium towers measuring approximately 160 meters tall.

In the past decade Guangzhou's water's edge has witnessed the depletion in the amount of industry-based buildings and an increase in architecture that celebrate spectacle, ostentatiousness, and extreme forms. As a response to the current conspicuity of architecture, the proposal will re-introduce the factory typology to the edge of the Pearl River, while simultaneously integrating notions of the conspicuous design in order to harmonize with the architectural language that is in its proximity.



Figure 131. Site Plan



- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| □ Site                                      | 4 Caribbean Bay Apartment    |
| ■ Pearl River                               | 5 Binjiang East Condominiums |
| ▨ Vegetation                                | 6 Juyayan Gate               |
| 1 Haizhu Peninsula Garden Hotels and Resort | 7 Fujiang Ge Apartment       |
| 2 Gold Coast Marina Hotel Resort            | 8 Golden Bay Apartment       |
| 3 Former Water Sports Management Center     | 9 New Development            |



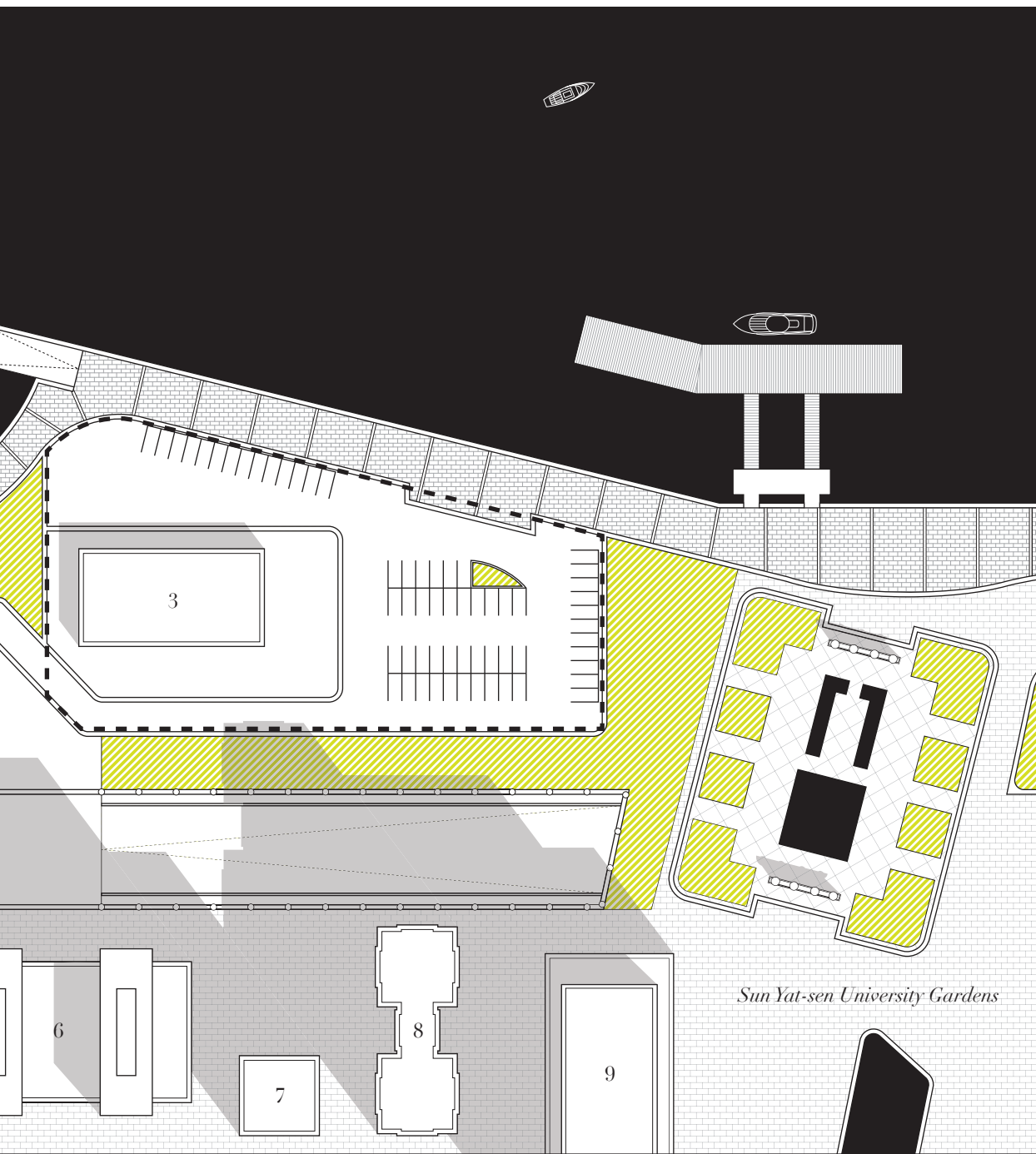
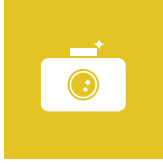




Figure 132. Strategies and Tactics Relationship ( Refer to Appendix C)



*Tourist  
Destination*



*Internship  
Opportunities*



*Extend Pedestrian  
Thoroughfare*



*Natural Light*



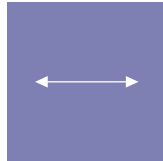
*Local Materials*



*Folklore*



*Courtyards*



*Accentuate  
Horizontality*



*Semiotics and  
Metaphor*



*Perception  
of Spaces*

#### 6.4 Strategies Applied to Contemporary Chinese Architecture

Contemporary Chinese architecture, for the most part, was ignored in the Western world for almost the entirety of the twentieth century (Jie & Wenjun, 2010). As followers of Western architecture, China has contributed very little to the world in terms of architecture compared to Japan or India. However, in the past decade or two, China has demonstrated its successful economic growth, in the context of globalization, with countless architectural designs. China has quickly become an attractive destination for designers, especially foreign ones, a place where buildings that do not conform to strict rules or regulations can be designed. The display of these designs has warranted China the attention it seeks, but has also diluted rich cultural associations with the built environment.

Exploring the definitive character(s) of Chinese architecture has proven difficult, especially when it takes into account the loss of cultural identity through architecture. As it is, the challenge remains to denote what design elements, techniques, and planning principles truly embody, or even “belong” to, the unique architectural identity of China. In our globalized world, many definitive elements have traversed borders and have been amalgamated into an international style. For instance, traditional Japanese and Chinese architecture shares many of the same traits of design and construction, as do many European and Western models and especially those built after industrialization. To begin developing strong functional characteristics that can be used in Chinese architecture, traditional and contemporary architectural styles, characteristics, and planning will be examined. Trends and characteristics that can work together will be accumulated and will contribute to the formulation of the three strategies that can be applied to contemporary fashioning of architecture in modern China.

When one thinks of the planning principles that are commonly associated with Chinese architecture, the initial thought is of feng-shui, Confucianism, Dao, or Yin-Yang. These belief systems are means of orienting key architectural features according to sets of rules and are intended to organize people so that they can live much more “peaceful” lives. While there is no denying that these principles have merit, closer examination of them may lead to the conclusion that many of these design approaches are based on superstition and even contradict one another. To truly live in an environment that practices feng-shui or any of the other systems would prove to be very difficult and, in fact, would not inform architecture, but begin to work against it. There are however, several characteristics of traditional Chinese architecture and its organization that

could produce strong *design tactics* and that could be appropriated into contemporary Chinese architecture. The aforementioned strategies will be appropriated into Chinese culture and architecture in order to devise several tactics, features, and characteristics that will further develop this thesis project (Figure 132).

While the strategies used could be applied anywhere, this specific situation requires that in the beginning stages of design conception, the tactics considered must arise directly from strategies appropriated from Chinese culture. The response will be informed by cultural traditions and beliefs but will, without resorting to archaic customs, be re-invented with modern technology, materials, and design methods.

### 6.5 Formative Design

One of the circumstances that arise when emerging economies begin to invest in conspicuous architecture is the accelerated demise of an identity that had already been dying, and of struggling establishments. In the case of Guangzhou the dying identity is that of the industrial culture. This industrial culture has propelled Guangzhou into its position as one of the most successful cities in all of China. Culture, as defined in this thesis, is made up of the community and all the beliefs, traditions, environments and livelihoods that contribute to defining that city's unique qualities and distinctive character(s). For many of those who were born and raised in the city of Guangzhou, its well-being not only gave an advantage to the city's political and economic standing, but also helped define its people. The city and its culture have been so successful because of the culture of industry. This culture of industry has given structure and order to Guangzhou's infrastructure and environment; in addition, it has at a metaphysical

level defined the society as one composed of hardworking individuals with humble beginnings who live within their means.

In the past decade, however, Guangzhou's unprecedented success in the international market and the recent state of its people's consumption of popular culture, leisure, and lifestyle, has created an inherent danger to the culture of industry. People have begun to cultivate false psychological needs that could only be met and satisfied by the products they consumed. Environments began to celebrate spectacle in building typologies that satisfied the desire for leisure and consumption, and that clearly showcased the success of their country through its built environment. This new socio-economic way of thinking resulted in the dramatic depletion and abandonment of the industrial typology (factories, mills, etc.). Guangzhou is riddled with abandoned buildings that once housed credible industries. The question now is: how can this culture of industry and the abandoned/ depleting establishments be re-invigorated, re-purposed, and re-introduced to this invaluable city?

As the former Water Sports Management Centre, now situated on valuable real-estate (along the Pearl River), had once been a factory, the industrial typology will be once again re-introduced in countless high-rise developments. It must be made clear that the factory is not an adaptive re-use project: the physical infrastructure will not drive the design of the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory. Rather, the building will serve to represent the re-occupation of the factory typology in the city of Guangzhou. Though the basic structure will remain, much of the building will be re-adjusted to accommodate the program of its functionality; in addition, adjustments will be needed to adapt to defined tactics. This approach may require the

removal of floor slabs, the addition of half-storeys, and excavation to accommodate a kiln and chimney-stack (Figures 133-144). And the re-invigoration of the factory does not concern itself with the physical preservation of the building alone. The factory is a hybridization of commercial and industrial typologies. Here the building, designed for exchange and manufacturing, meets the principal needs of commerce and industry. In the past, these needs were for the most part thought of separately; however, in the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory the two typologies meet in a domestic architecture that is distinguished chiefly by the stitching together of both physical structure and program, and by commercial and societal appreciation of what is often thought of as a banal building type. This hybridization of commercial and industrial typologies is instrumental in preserving cultural lineage and the identity of past and present environments. Each typology that preserves the past also works along with the modern lifestyle to create future conspicuous architecture.





Figure 133. *Processional (Linear) Organization of Program*

The driving design strategy of the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory is to allow *Function to inForm*. Too often, conspicuous architecture features inefficient spaces that do not allow for successful, useable (*utilitas*) spaces. Here the linear organization of program (*Procession Through Space*) has been derived based on the process of creating porcelain (Appendix D). The production process serves as the ultimate organizational feature for the entirety of the factory. Thus, these spaces that work efficiently as programs are organized in direct relation to one another. The amount of space needed was determined according to the approximate number of people occupying the area, the amount of comfortable space needed to work within, and the equipment required for each room (drafting tables, workmen's benches, storage, etc.)



- Retail Showroom
- Clay Production Area
- Design Studio A
- Design Studio B
- Workshop A
- Workshop B
- Drying Area
- Buffing and Polishing
- Illustration
- Glazing
- Kiln

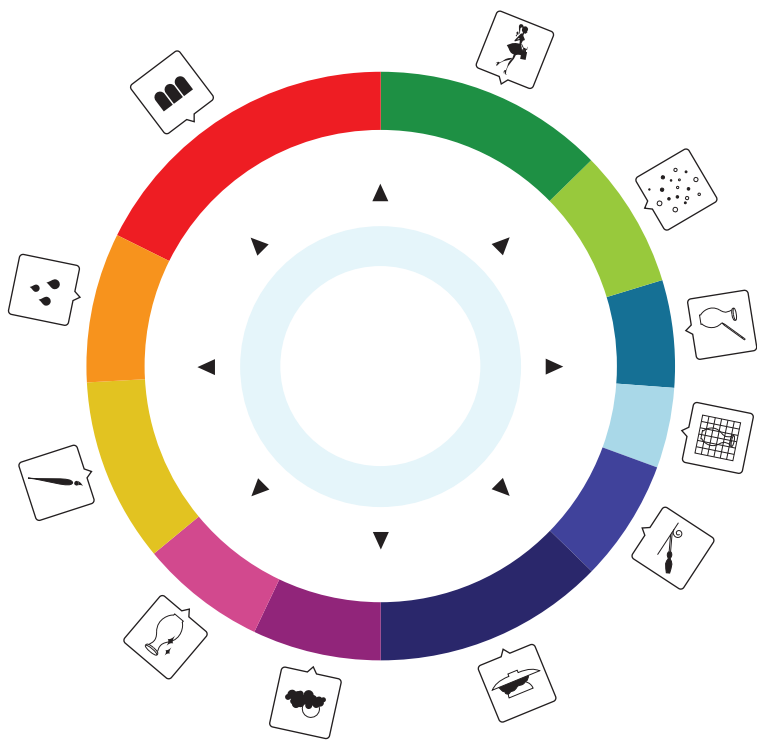


Figure 134. *Eternal (Radial) Expression of Spaces*

As Chinese society maintains the symbolic expression of eternity as a cultural belief that is thought to symbolize the non-existence of time and that is also a death to re-birth metaphor, the concept of eternity will be symbolically expressed through the tactical organization of spaces. Additional support spaces and facilities are then added, such as fire stairs, elevators, storage, staff room, offices, and additional programs, for instance a VIP Showroom, Inspections and Quality Control Room, etc.



- Retail Showroom
- Clay Production Area
- Design Studio A
- Design Studio B
- Workshop A
- Workshop B
- Drying Area
- Buffing and Polishing
- Illustration
- Glazing
- Kiln
- Support Spaces

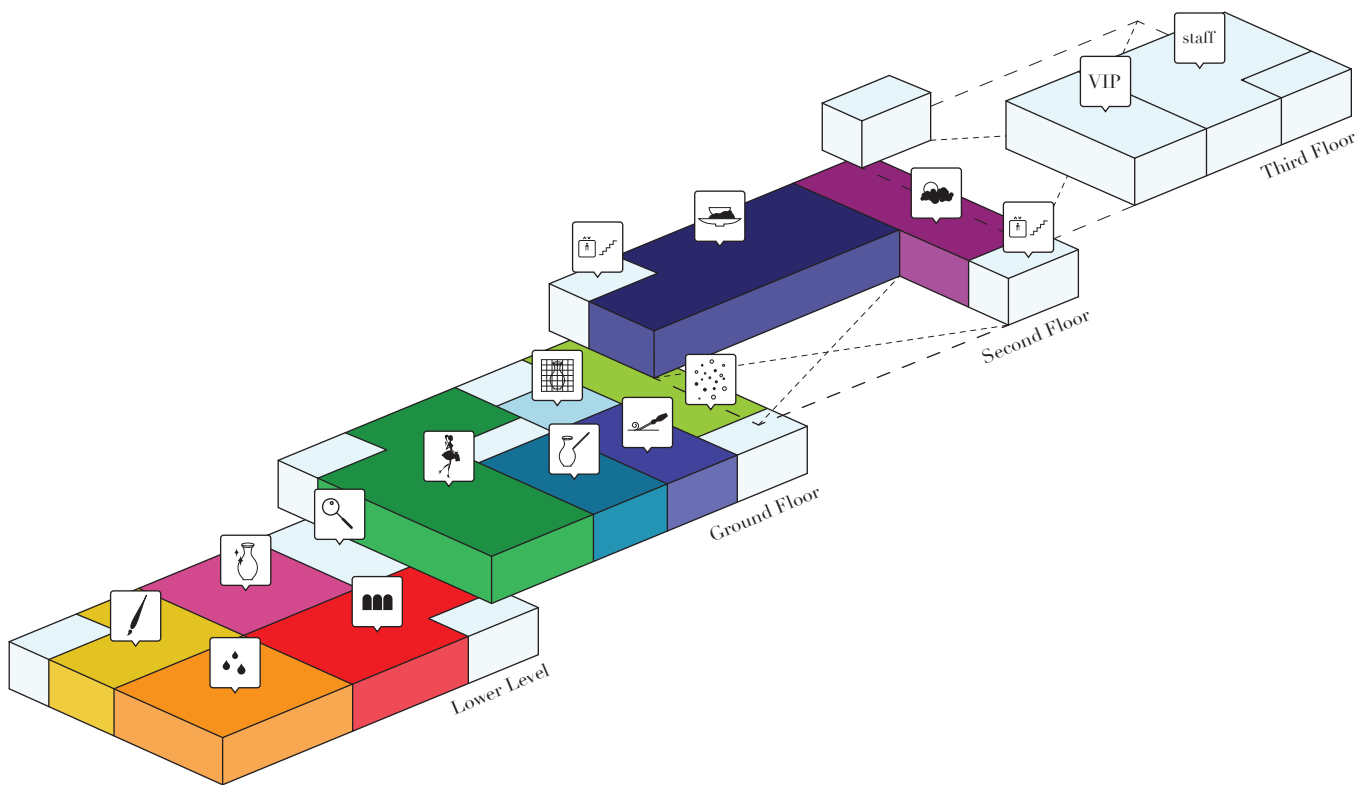


Figure 135. *Program Distribution*

The programmed spaces were distributed between the four floors with the addition of support spaces. Programs that are dependent on one another are placed strategically on each floor in order to create a programmed solid that fits the site. In studying the day-to-day functionality of porcelain production and the amount of “extra” room required, ample floor area was provided in order to allow for flexible spaces that would serve secondary functional purposes such as moving large and numerous porcelain wares, equipment, transfer carts, and materials/tools, as well as providing space for setting up small workshops for youth, visitors, and students. Space is also provided to allow for circulation of staff and public/ clientele who visit the site – sufficient space that will however not disturb the efficiency of production (Appendix G).

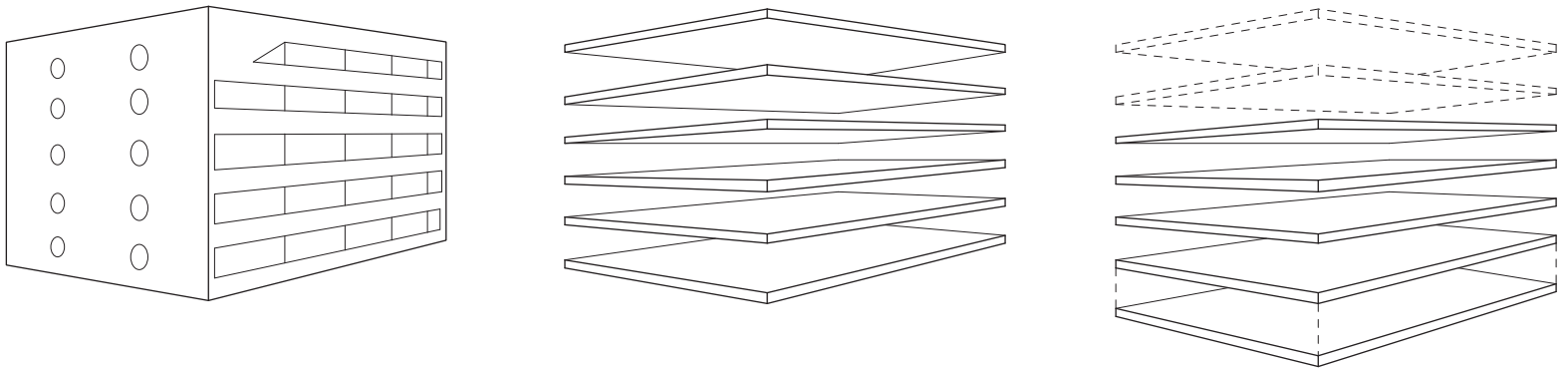


Figure 136. *Re-adjust Existing Condition*

After formulating the programmed spaces and the areas required, the existing building conditions will be adjusted in accordance with several of the planned tactics. For instance, in order to *Balance Scale*, the original 5-storey building will be reduced by 2 floors, which will allow for an increase in *Natural Light* into the congested city core and will also *Accentuate Horizontality*, rather than maintaining the current vertical typology. Most significant, however, in the lack of concern for removing the 2 existing floors, is that since ample space is provided for each stage of porcelain production it was important to maintain a tight organization of spaces with rooms located no further apart than they had to be for functional purposes. Also, a lower level will be added to incorporate the traditional imperial kiln (*Re-introduce Industry*).



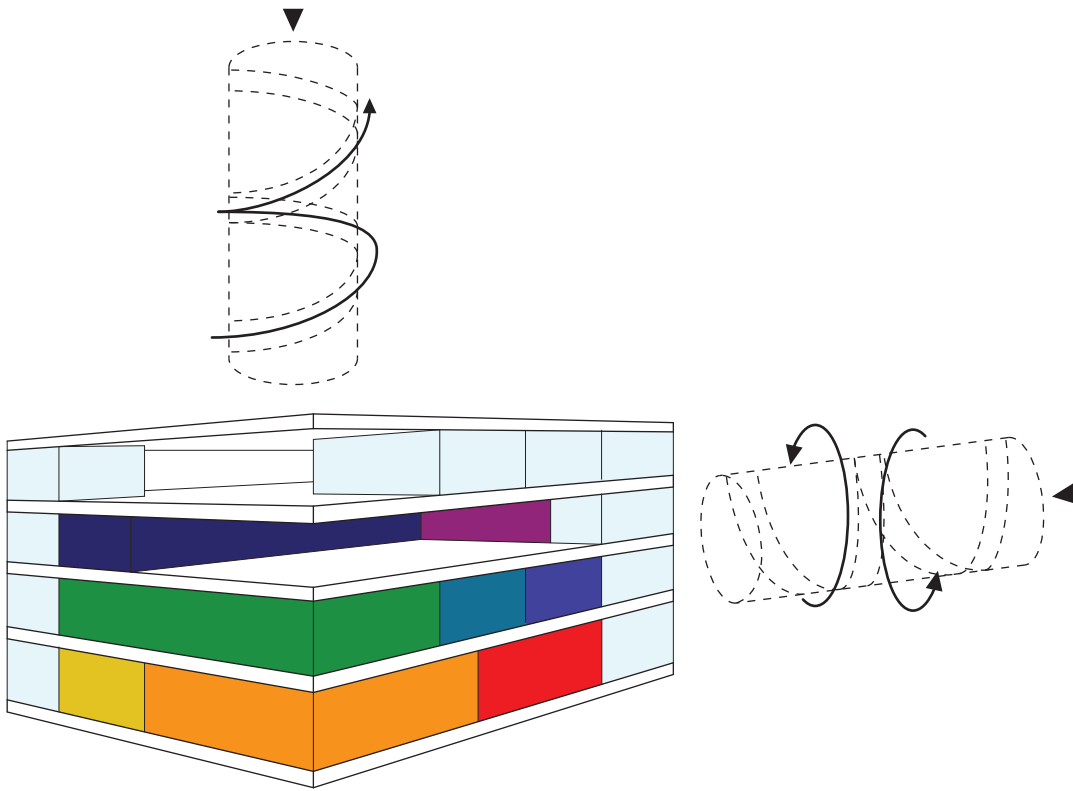


Figure 137. *Courtyards*

The traditional architectural feature of *Courtyards* will be introduced into the building for the purpose of re-introducing a traditional design element that will allow for *Natural Light* to permeate through rooms, with the consideration also that it is an organizational element. The *huti* is a traditional circular staircase in Chinese architecture, where rooms are branched off of a singular staircase. The *huti* will be featured in the retail showroom and will work its way into several of the programmed spaces. Additionally, there will be a horizontal courtyard to the west of the building around the chimneystack. As the *huti* motions vertically through the building, the west courtyard takes on a horizontal movement, reflecting the fact that items will eventually move in opposite directions (for the next process of creating porcelain). Moreover, by branching rooms off of the staircase, individuals are able to view into other programmed spaces (*Perception of Spaces*).





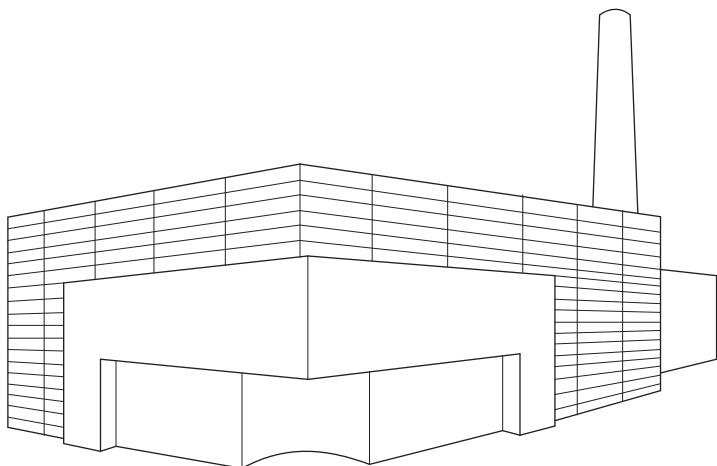


Figure 139. *Porcelain Façade*

The exterior/ aesthetic appearance of the building accentuates the horizontal expression. The main body of the building is clad in white porcelain panels that are made locally in Guangzhou. This further strengthens the program (function) of the building *inForming* the overall form.



Figure 140. Sample of Porcelain Façade



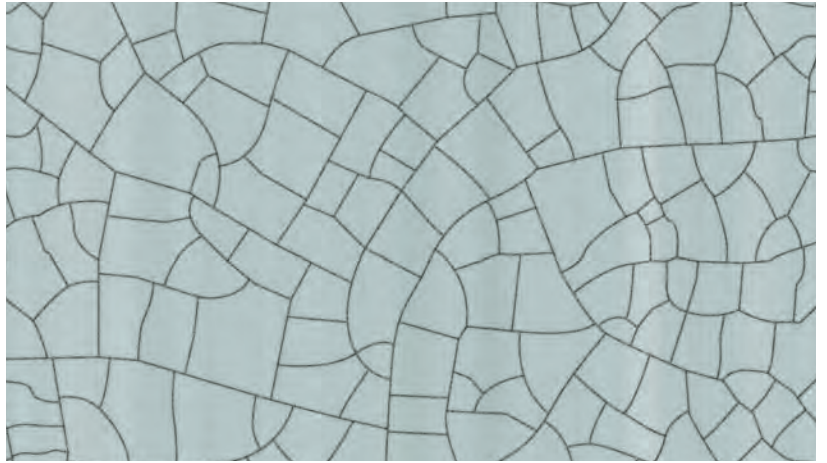
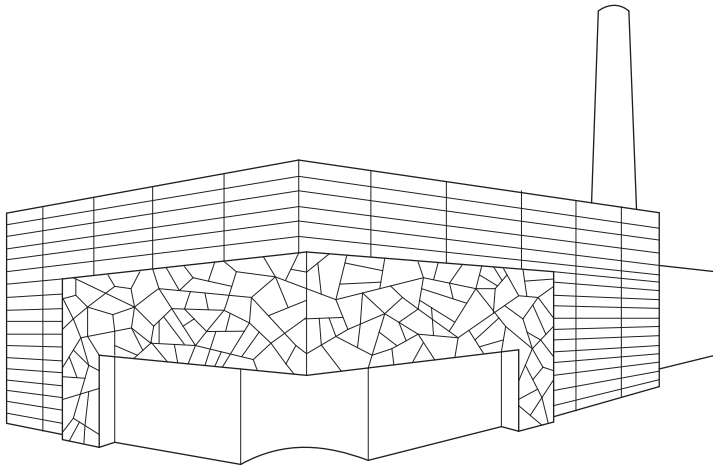


Figure 141. *Crackled Cage*

Another feature of the building besides its porcelain façade is a golden cage. Gold in Chinese culture represents divinity, wealth, happiness, and consciousness. Most significant of the golden cage, however, is that the design has been derived from the iconic crackled porcelain on traditional wares. In fact, crackled porcelain originates in Guangzhou; there is even a Chinese *Folklore* that is associated with this specific porcelain (Appendix E).



Figure 142. Crackled Porcelain

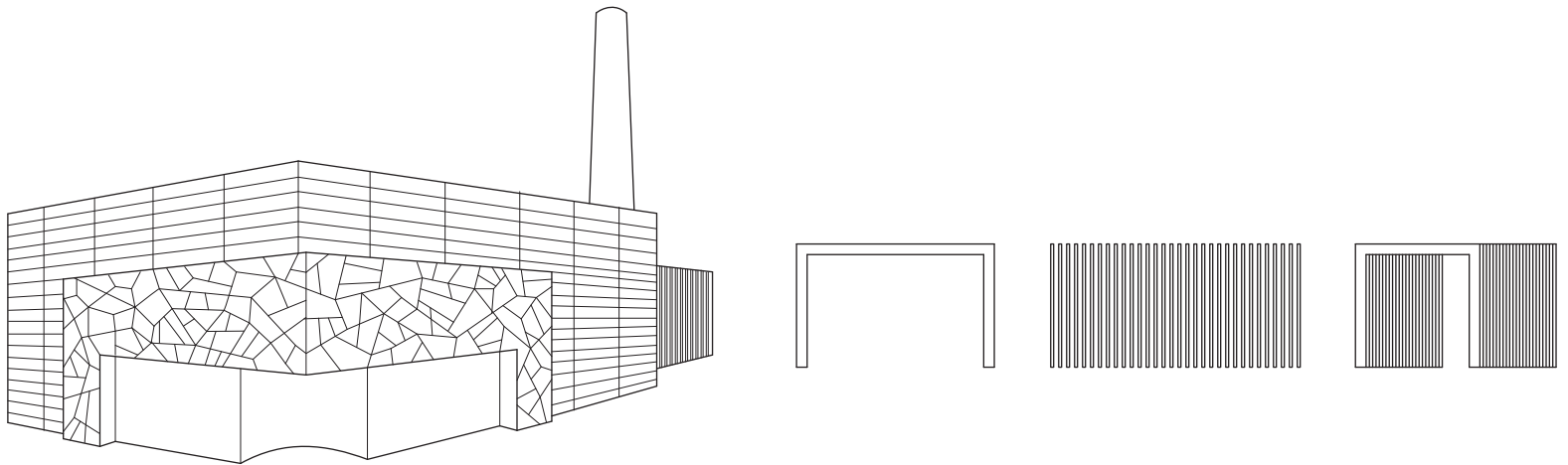


Figure 143. *Chimney Trellis*

The outdoor clay production area, consisting of drying area, workshop, and chimney, is surrounded by a trellis design based on the tactic of *Blurred Boundaries*. Depending on the angle, individuals have either a direct view through or between, or an obstructed view of the program within. The very first iteration of the trellis wrapped the chimney entirely; however, the strategies and current condition of Guangzhou made clear that the industrial typology needed to be strengthened along the water's edge. Thus, the trellis is used in order to highlight the chimney, protect spaces overhead, and *Accentuate Horizontality*.



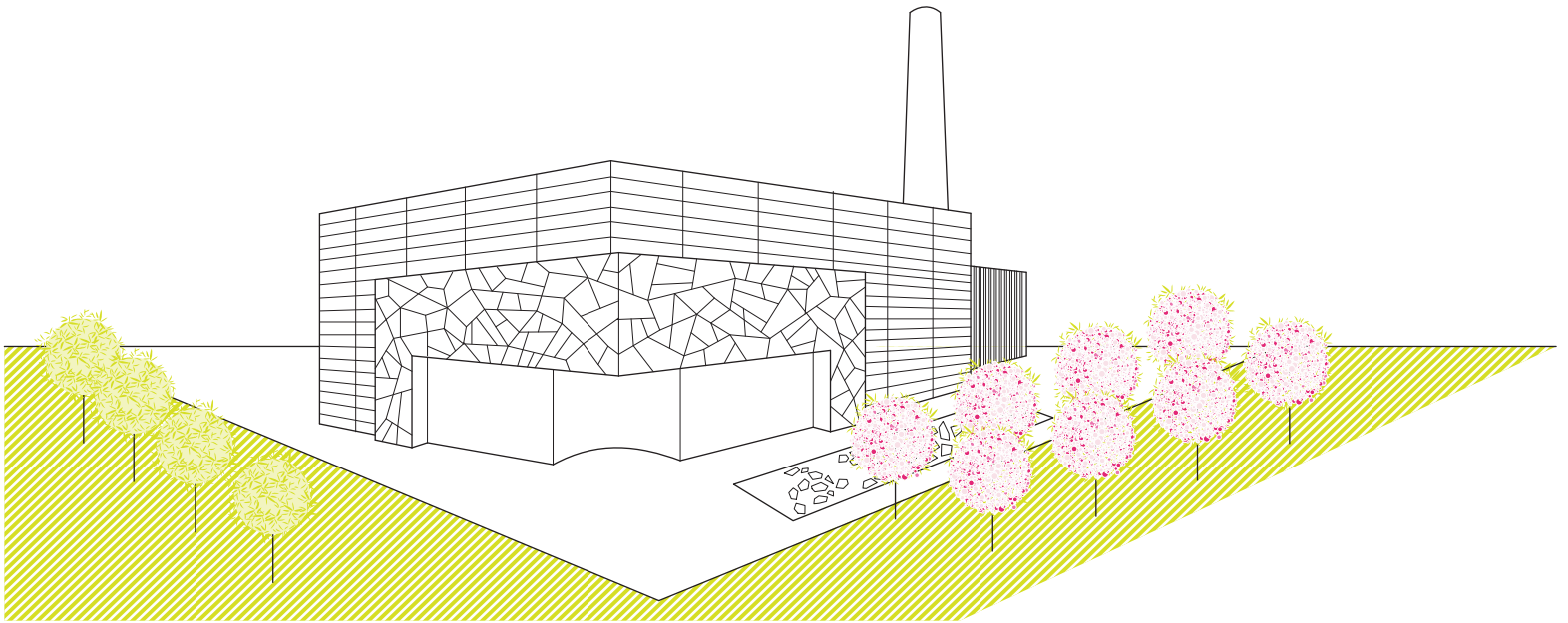
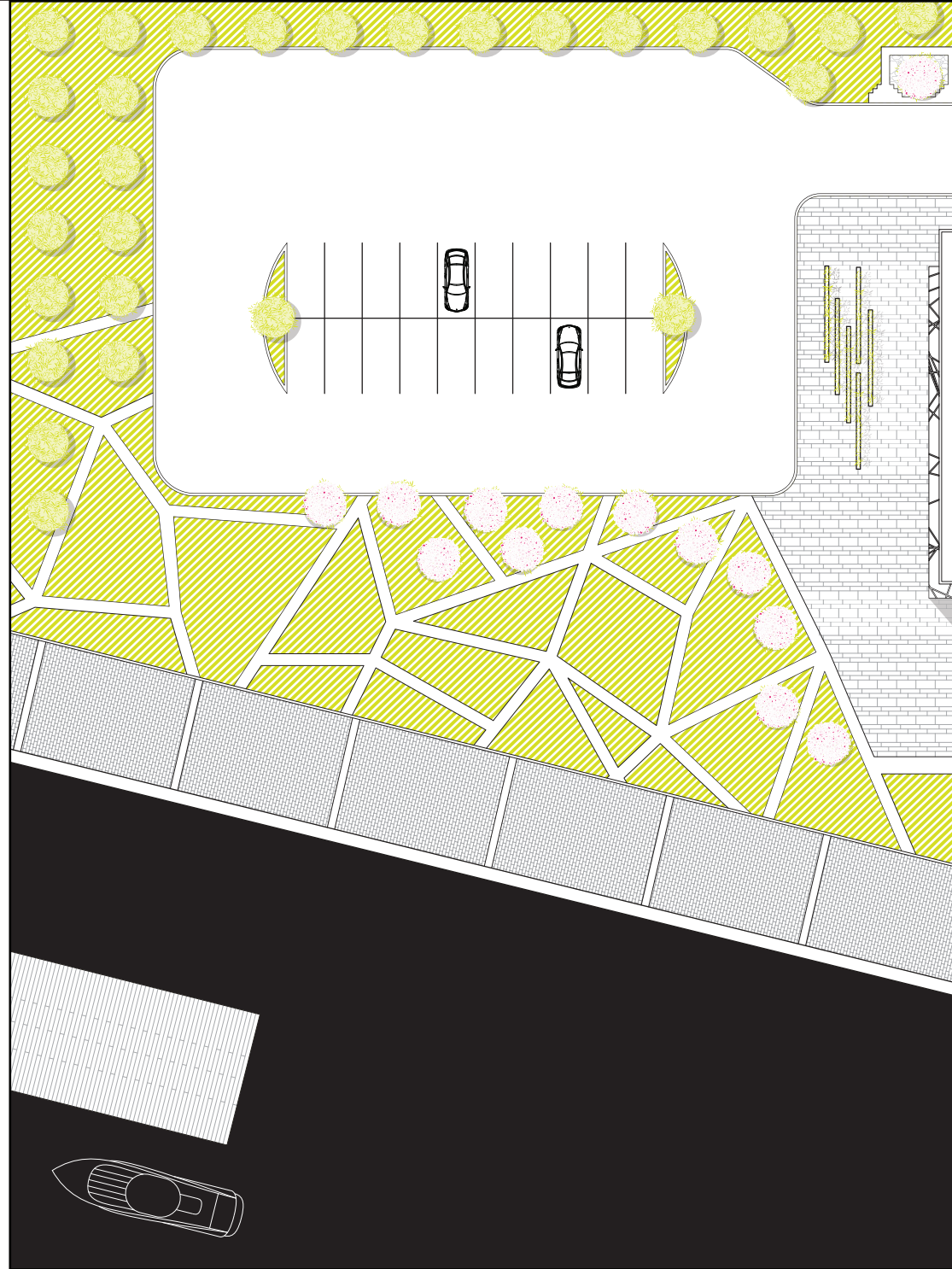


Figure 144. *External Program*

With the countless developments along the water's edge, Guangzhou has witnessed a decrease in the amount of green space in the area. With countless condominium developments adjacent to the site, external programming features large green areas without fixed programming; these open environments can be used for various events, leisure, etc. by citizens, residence of the condominiums, and workers at the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory. Apart from the large green space(s), the site will include a water feature, a blossom promenade, an extension of the existing boardwalk, as well as a large hardscaping surface for outdoor youth workshops and various leisure-use spaces for the public.



Figure 145. Site Plan



- Pearl River
- ▨ Vegetation
- Blossom Trees
- Foliage
- Water Feature

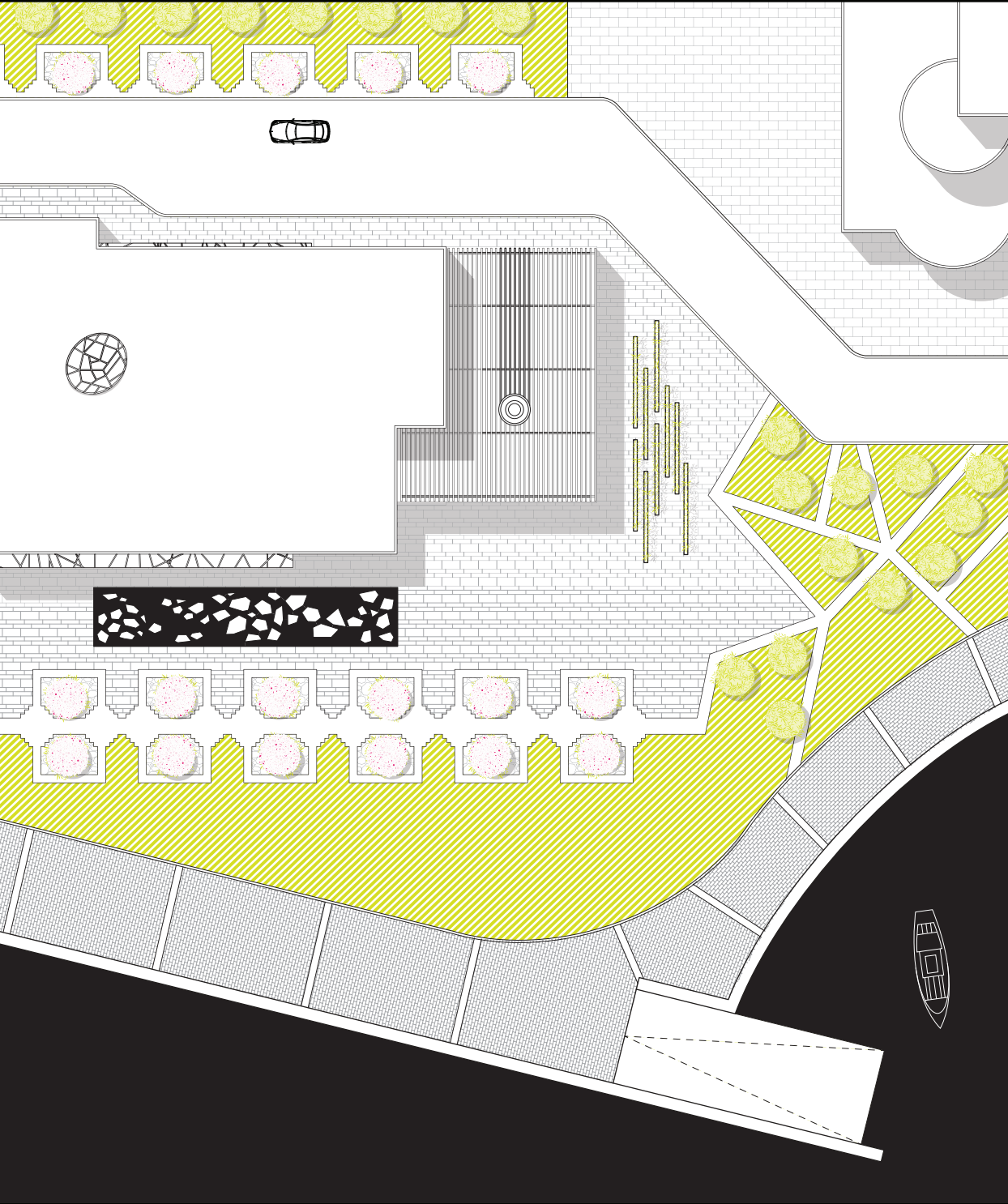
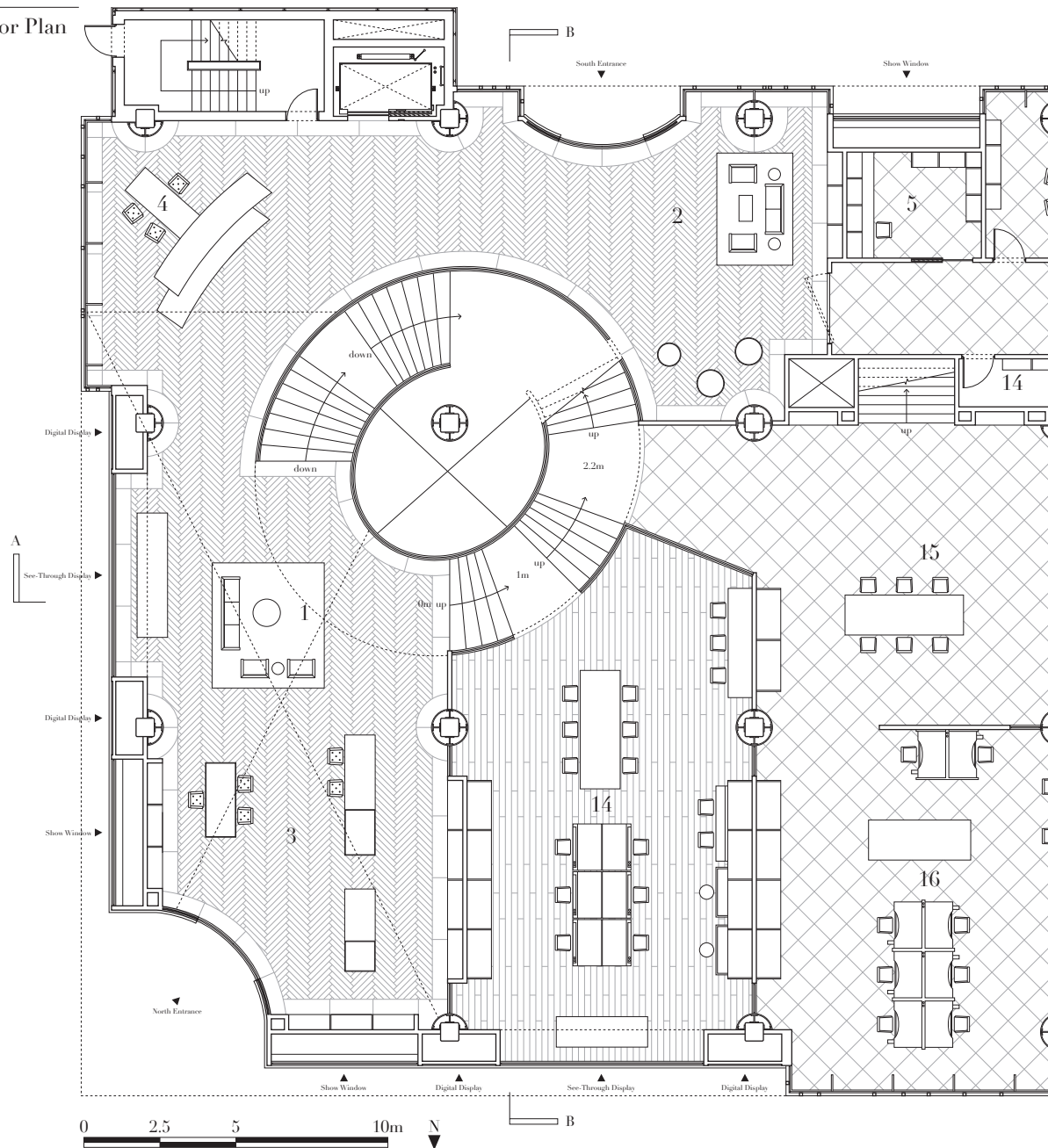


Figure 146. Ground Floor Plan



- |                                   |                                       |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 North Lobby                     | 14 Design Studio A                    |
| 2 South Lobby                     | 15 Design Studio B                    |
| 3 Retail Showroom                 | 16 Workshop A                         |
| 4 Sales                           | 17 Plaster and Bronzing Room          |
| 5 Sales with POS                  | 18 Large Supplies Storage             |
| 6 Floor Manager's Office          | 19 Garbage Room                       |
| 7 Packaging and Parcel Room       | MR Mechanical Room (below Workshop B) |
| 8 Clay Production Area (Outdoors) |                                       |
| 9 Clay Storage                    |                                       |
| 10 Generator Closet               |                                       |
| 11 Garbage and Recycling          |                                       |
| 12 Storage                        |                                       |
| 13 Custodian's Room               |                                       |



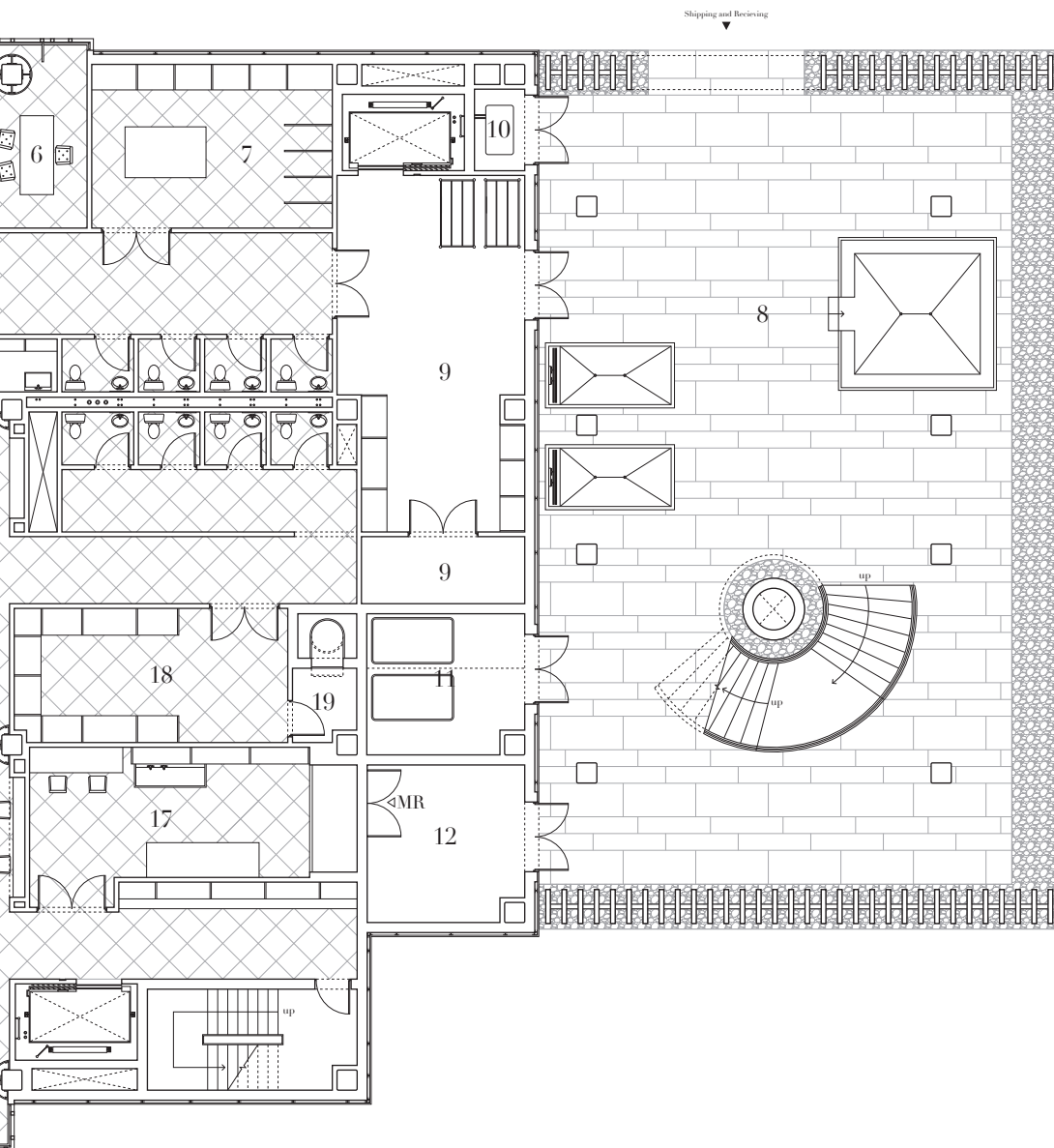
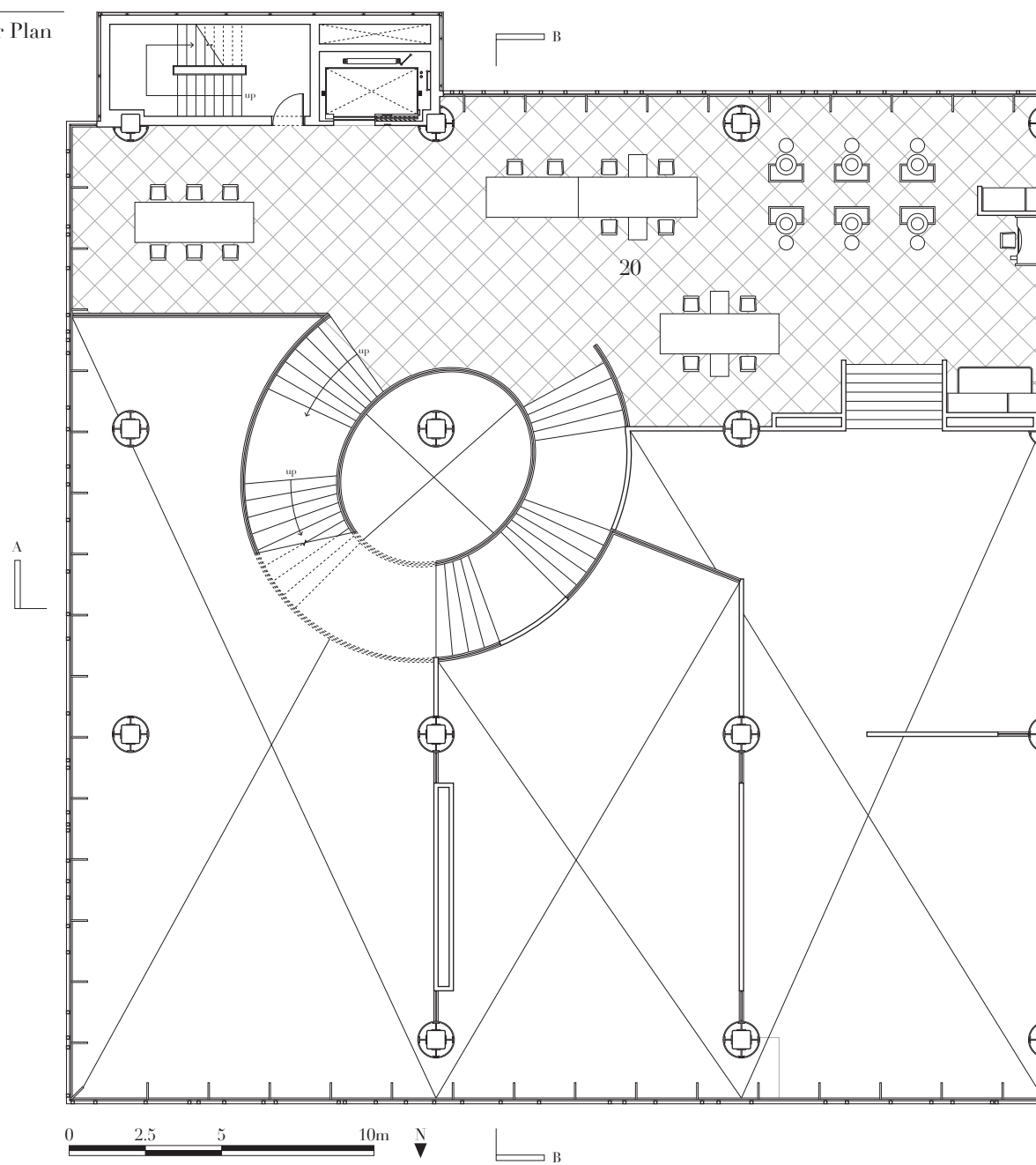




Figure 147. Second Floor Plan



- 20 Workshop B
- 21 Wedged Clay Storage
- 22 Large Storage
- 23 Transfer Cart Storage
- 24 Garbage Room
- 25 Drying Area
- 26 Outdoor Workshop

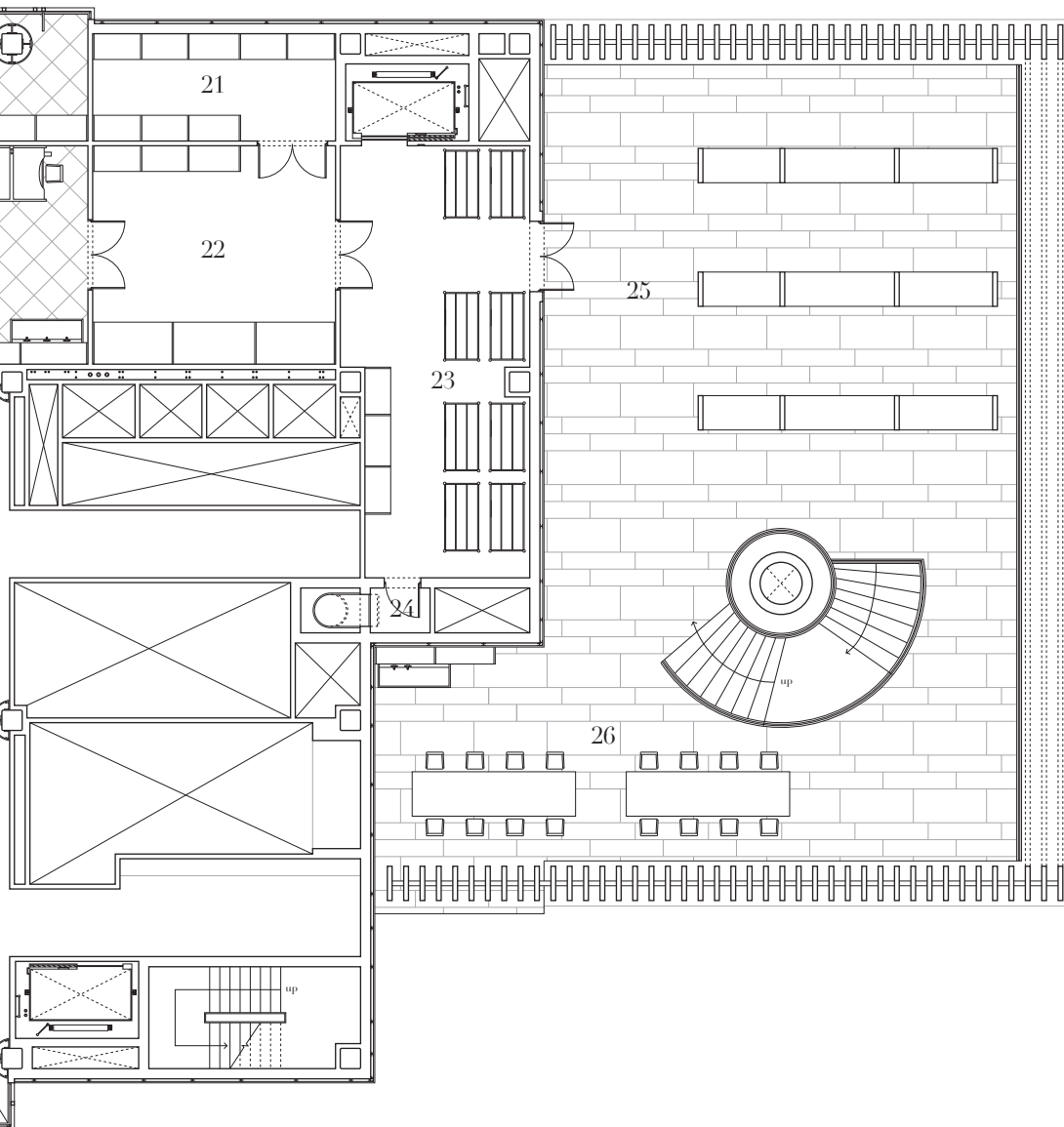
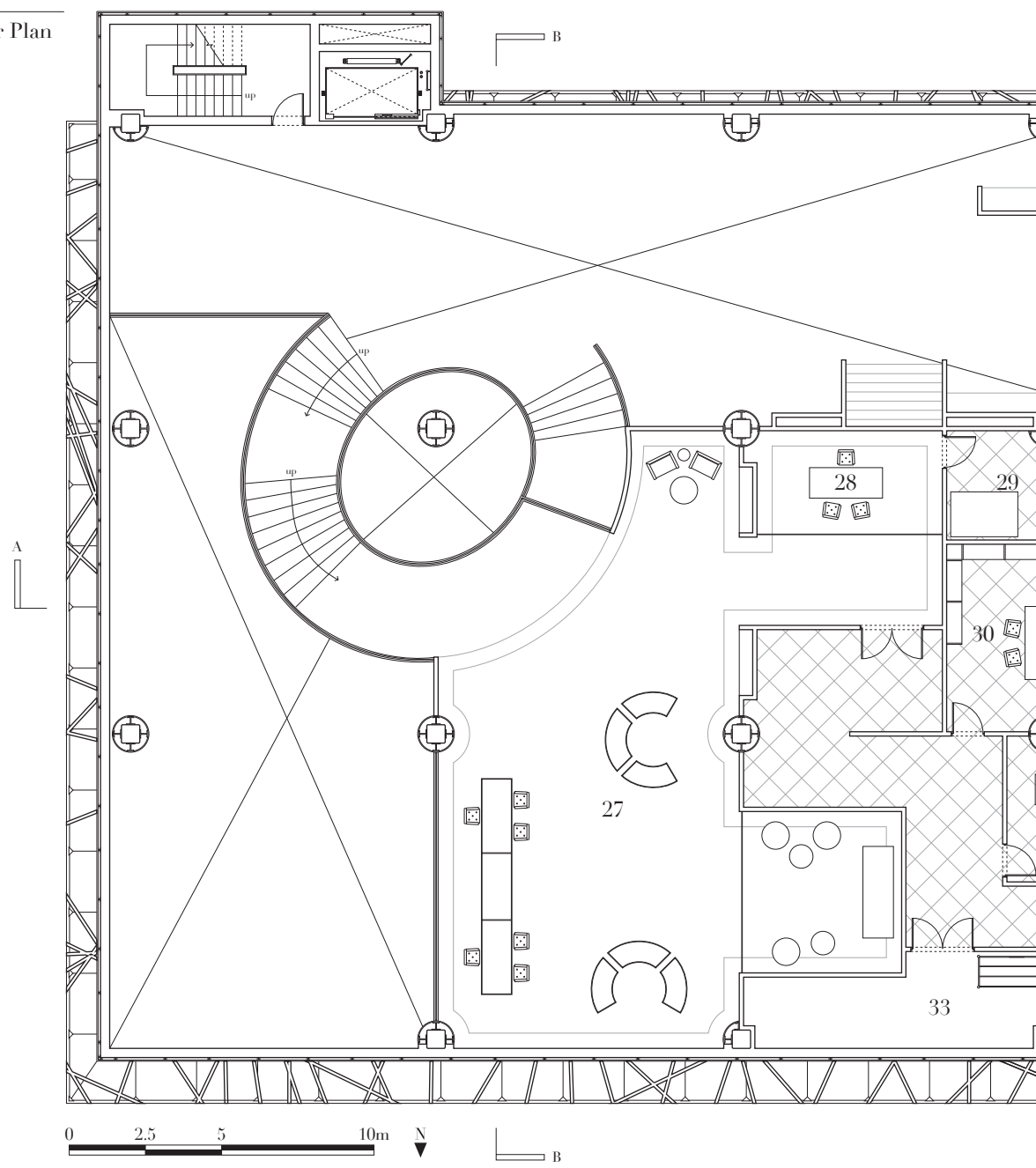


Figure 148. Third Floor Plan



- 27 VIP Showroom
- 28 Private Sales
- 29 POS and Safe Room
- 30 Office
- 31 Staff Room
- 32 Garbage Room
- 33 Large Storage

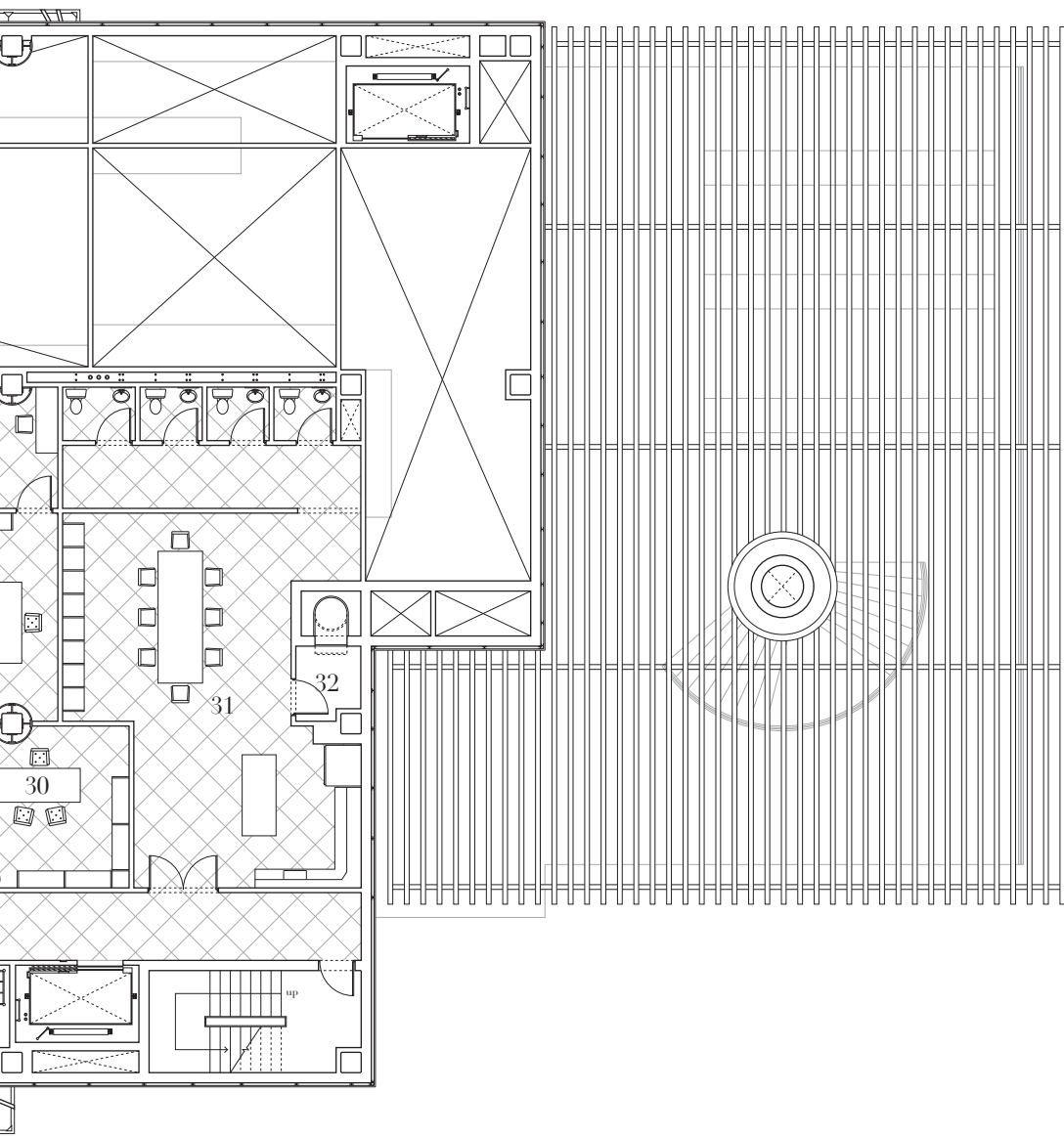
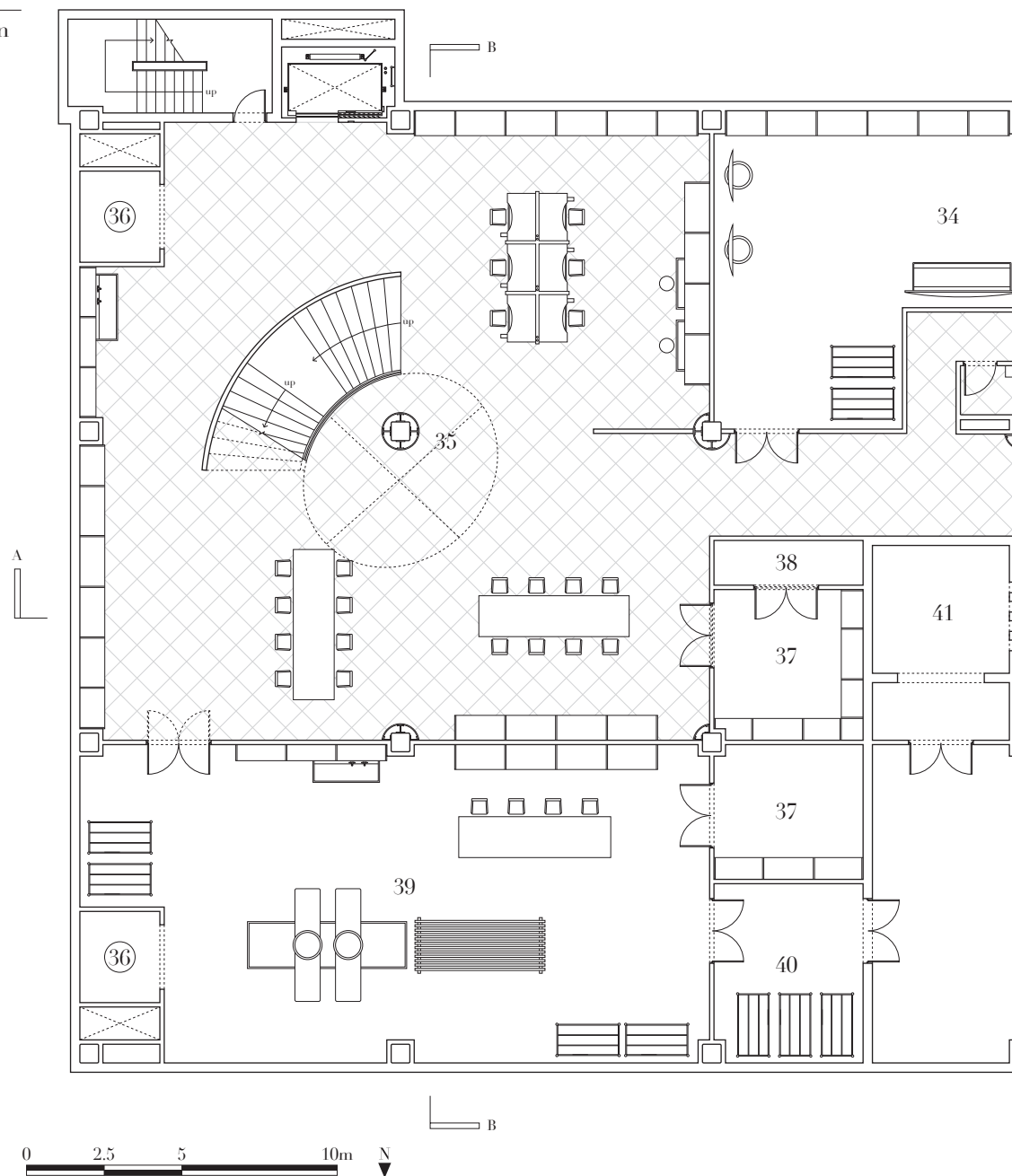


Figure 149. Lower Level Floor Plan



- 34 Buffing and Polishing Room
- 35 Illustration Room
- 36 Spray Booth
- 37 Storage
- 38 Telecommunications Closet
- 39 Glazing Room
- 40 Transfer Room
- 41 Gas Supply/ Allowance
- 42 Kiln Room
- 43 Combustion Chamber
- 44 Cooling Room
- 45 Inspection and Quality Control Room
- 46 Garbage Room

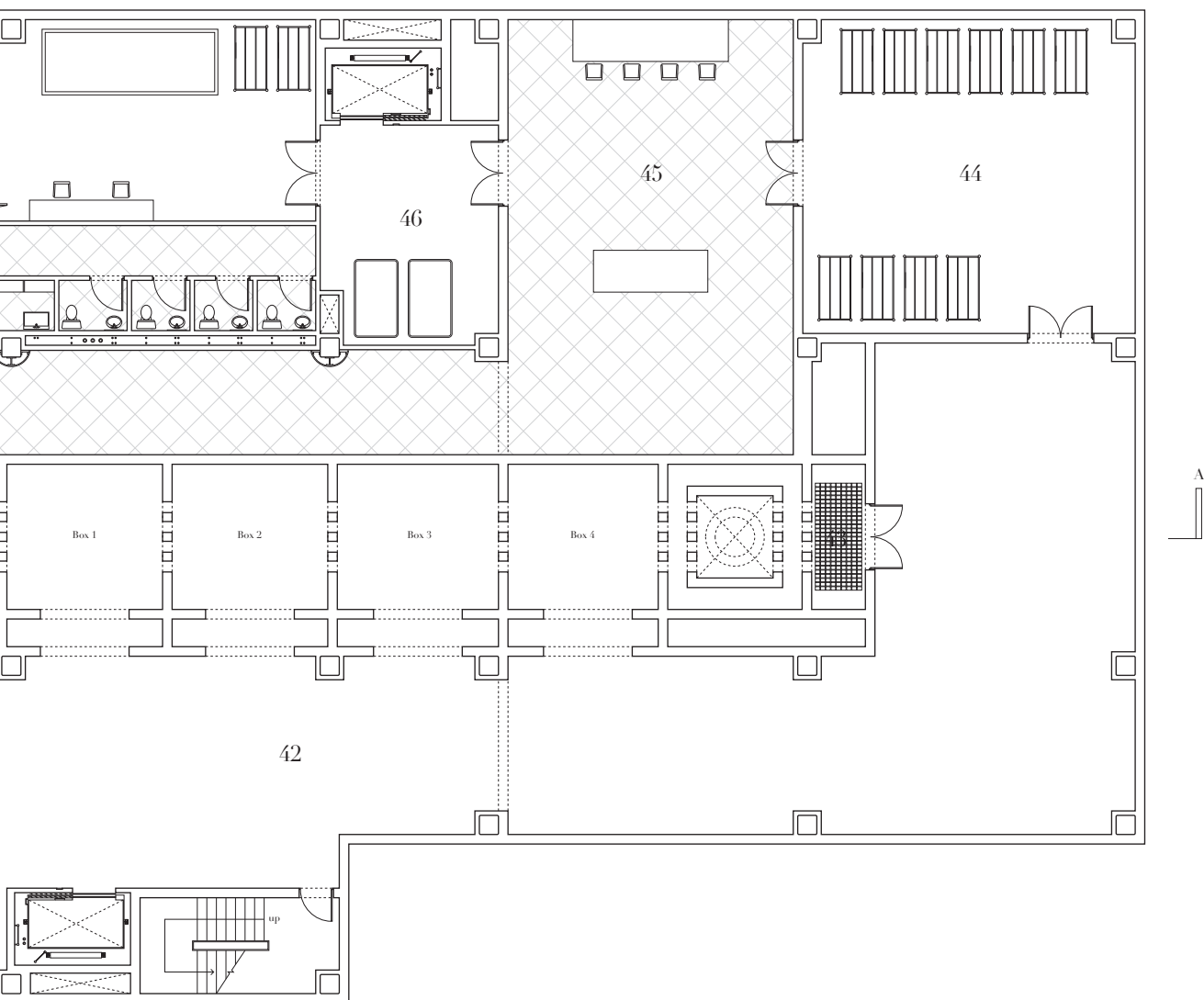
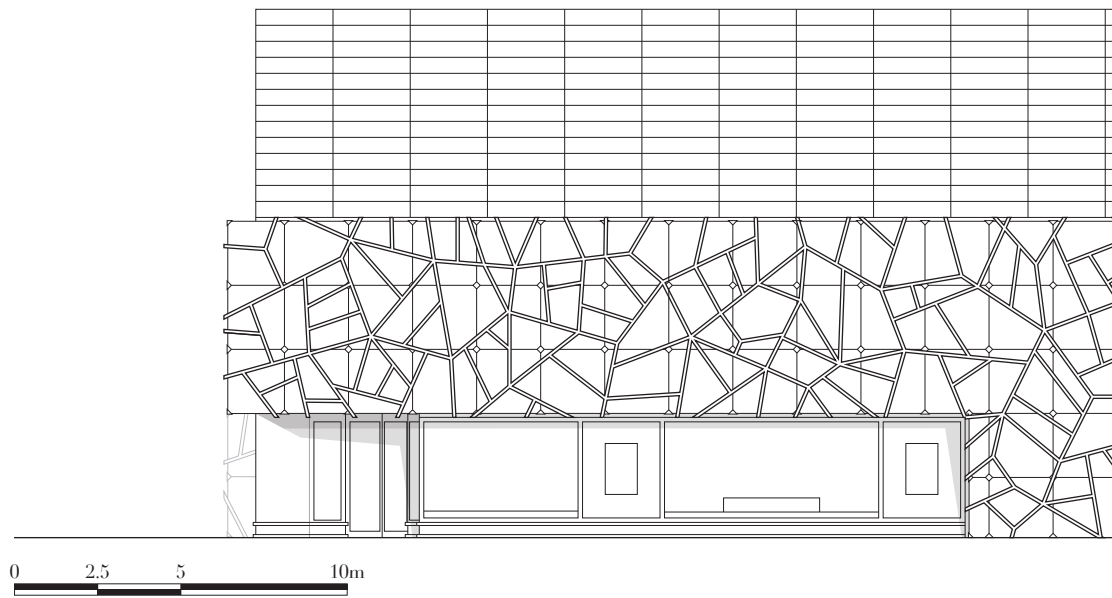


Figure 150. North Elevation





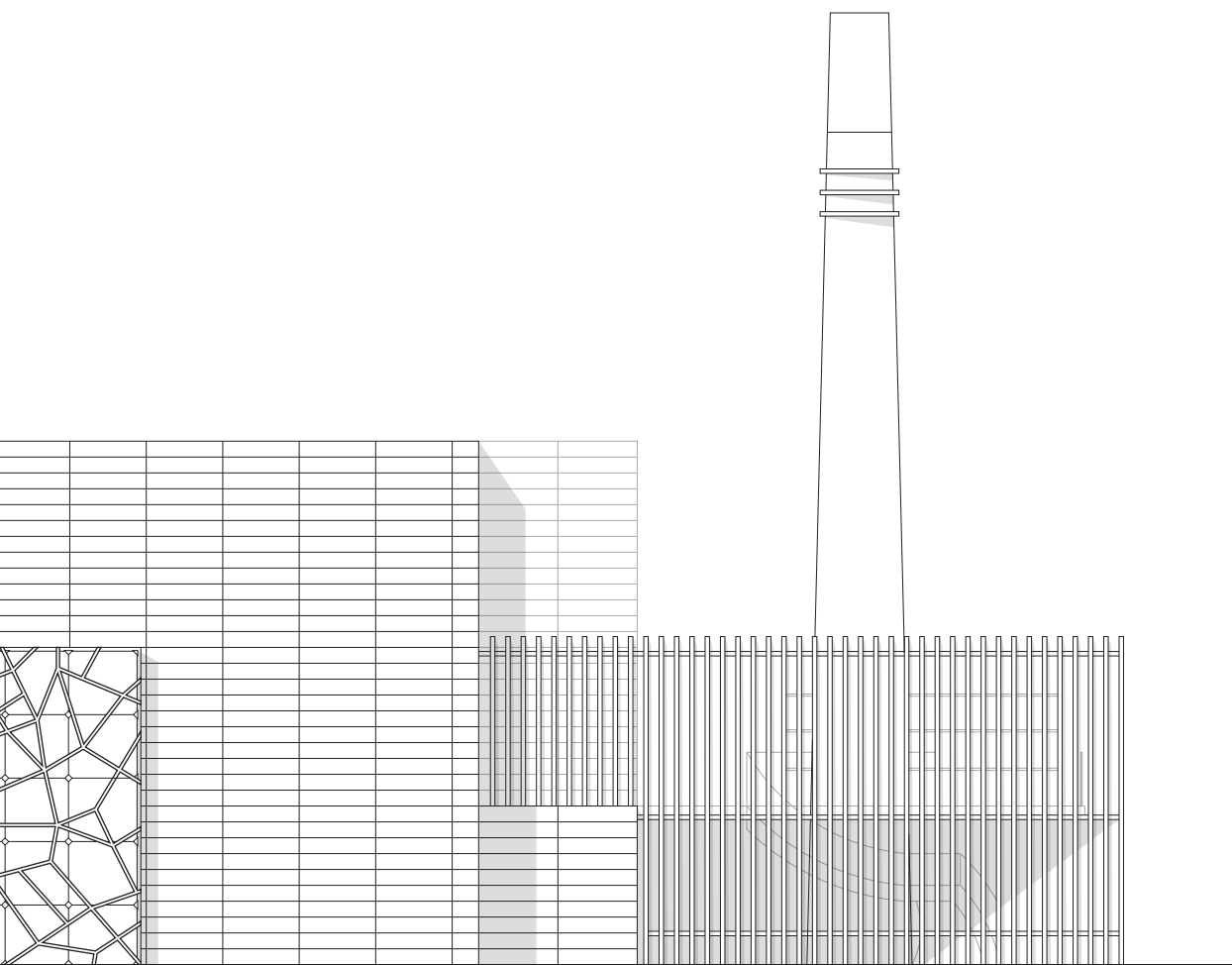
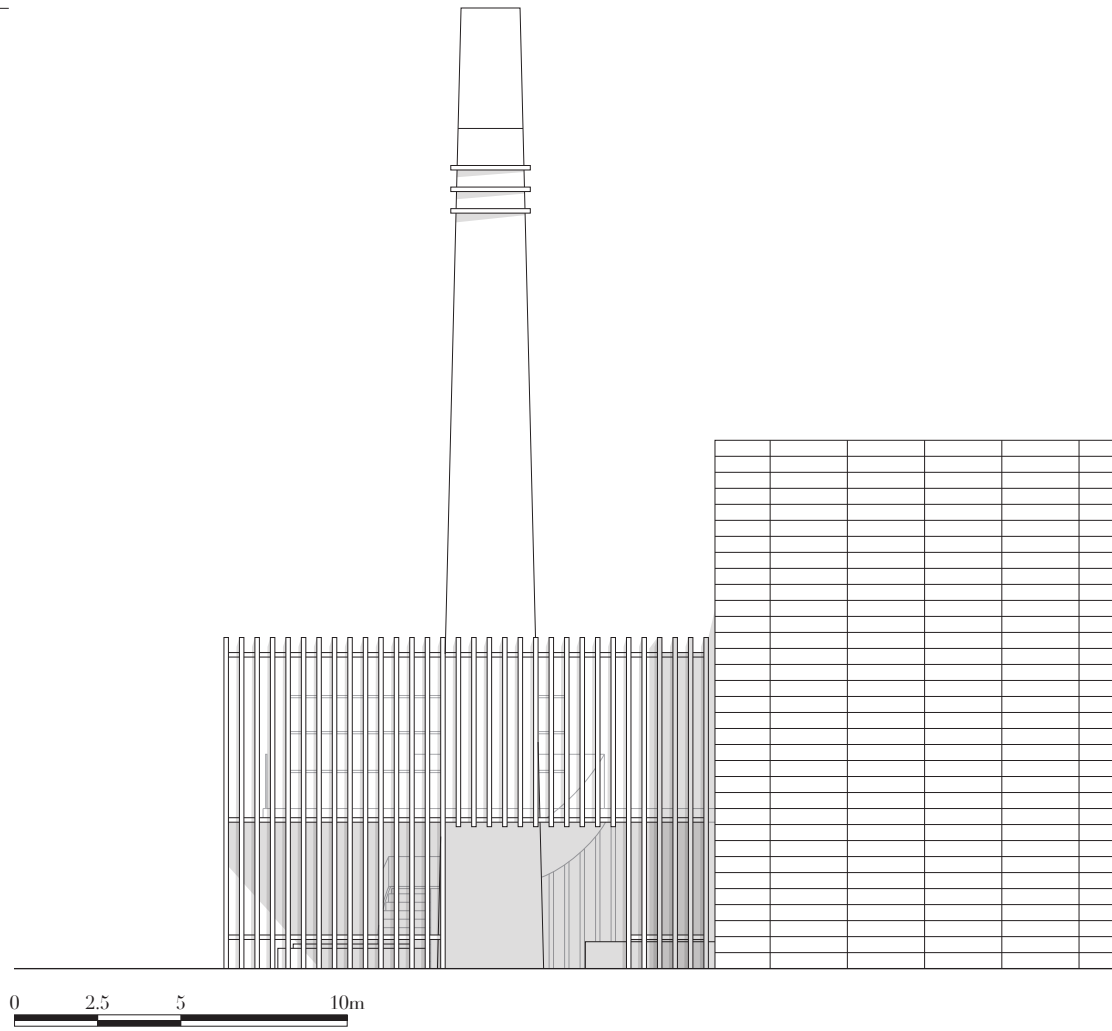


Figure 151. South Elevation



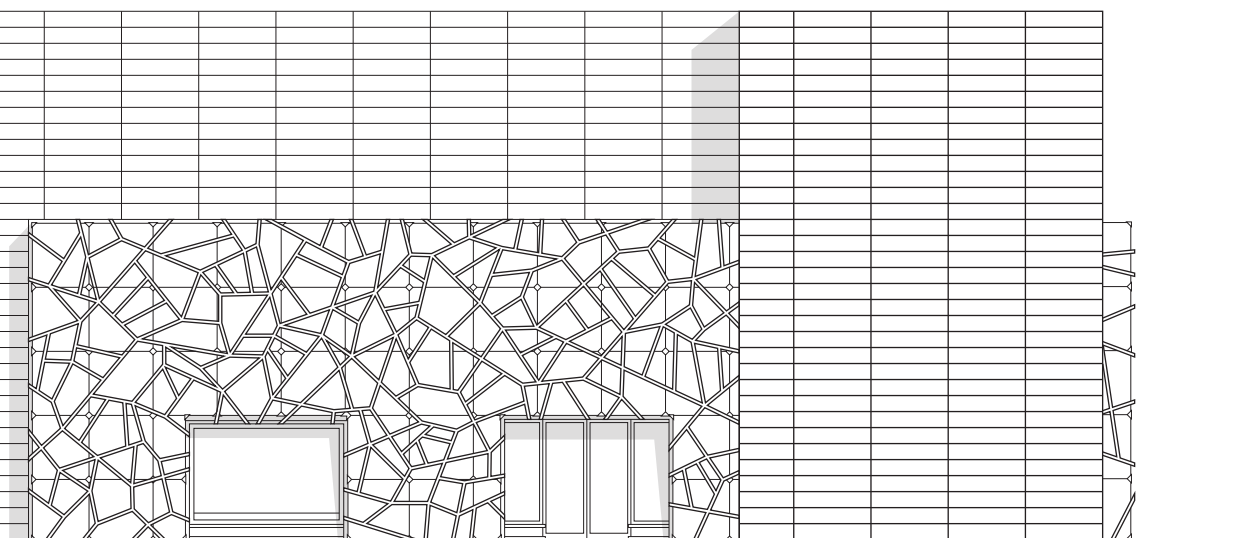
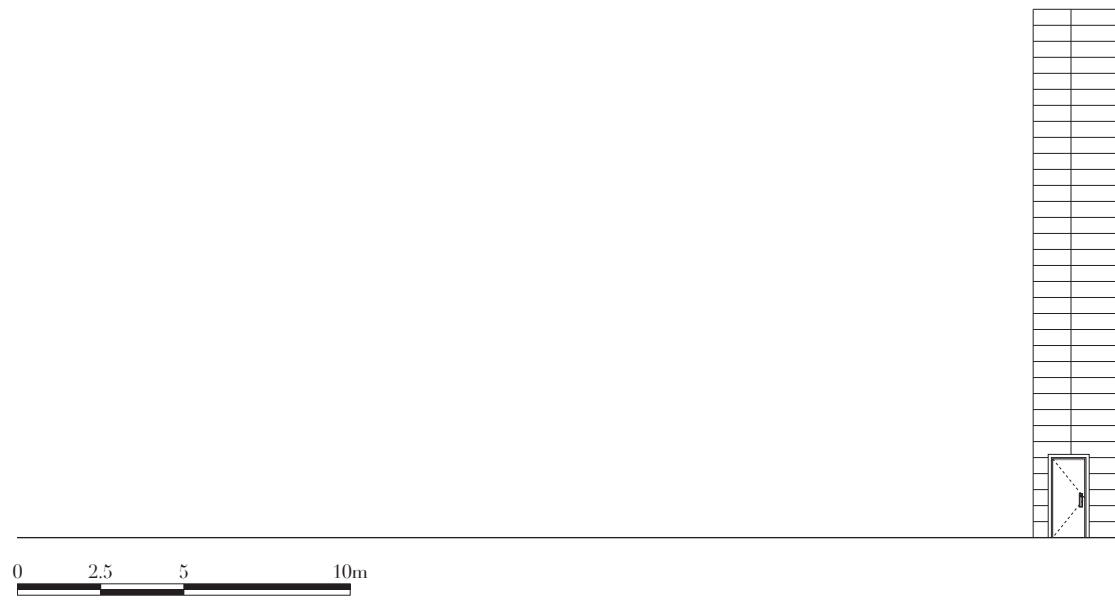


Figure 152. East Elevation



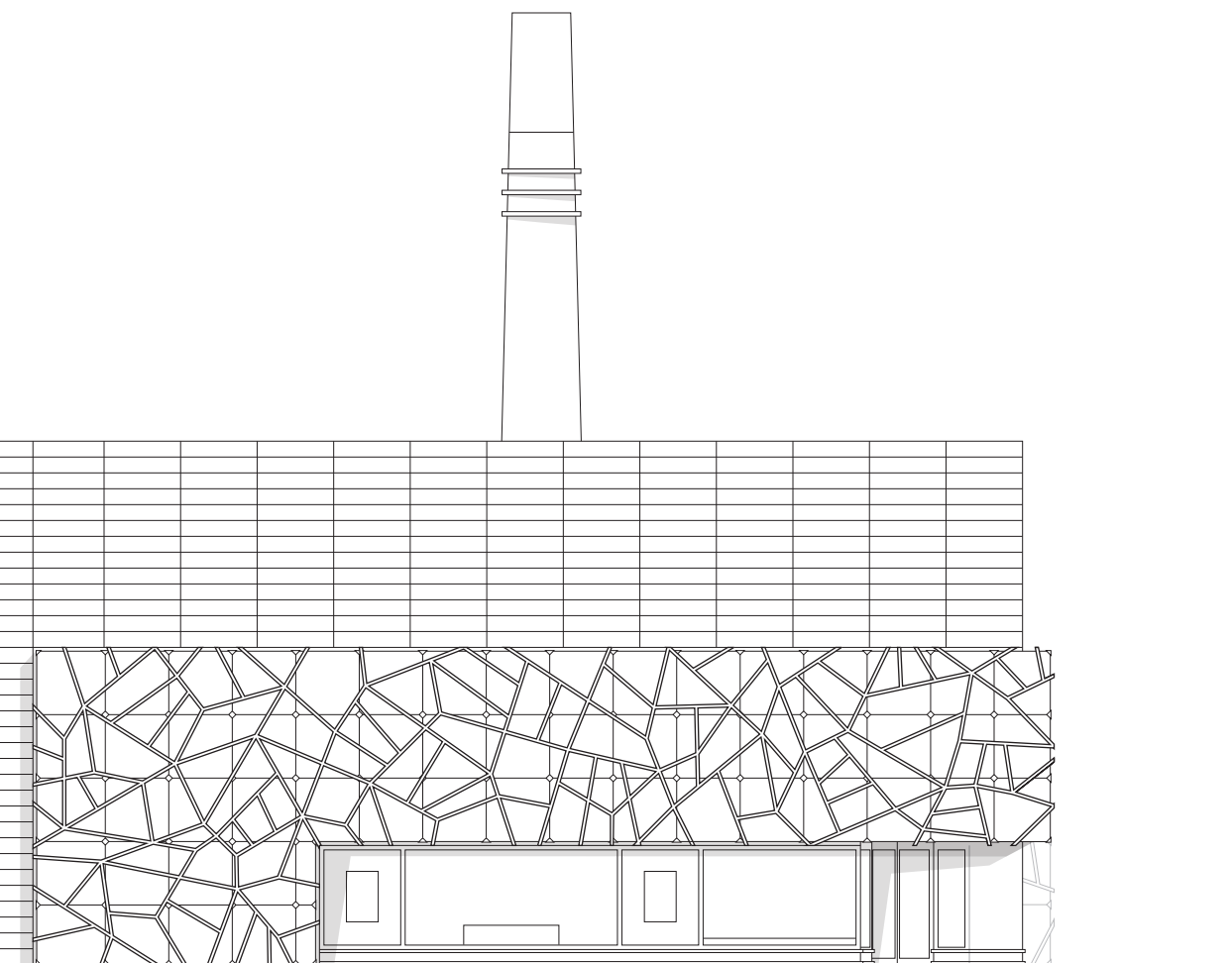
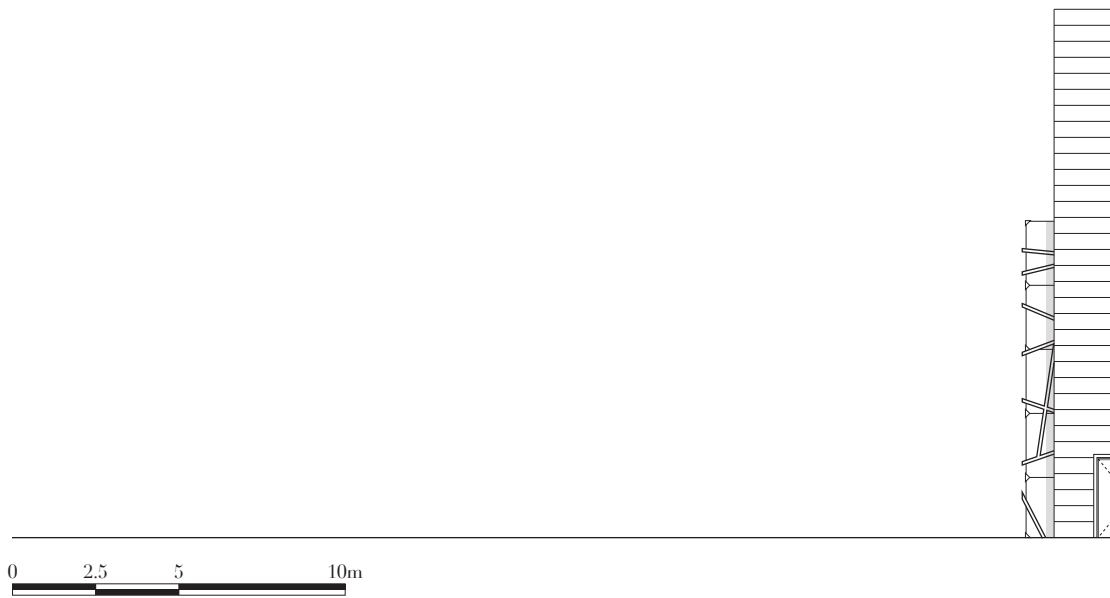


Figure 153. West Elevation



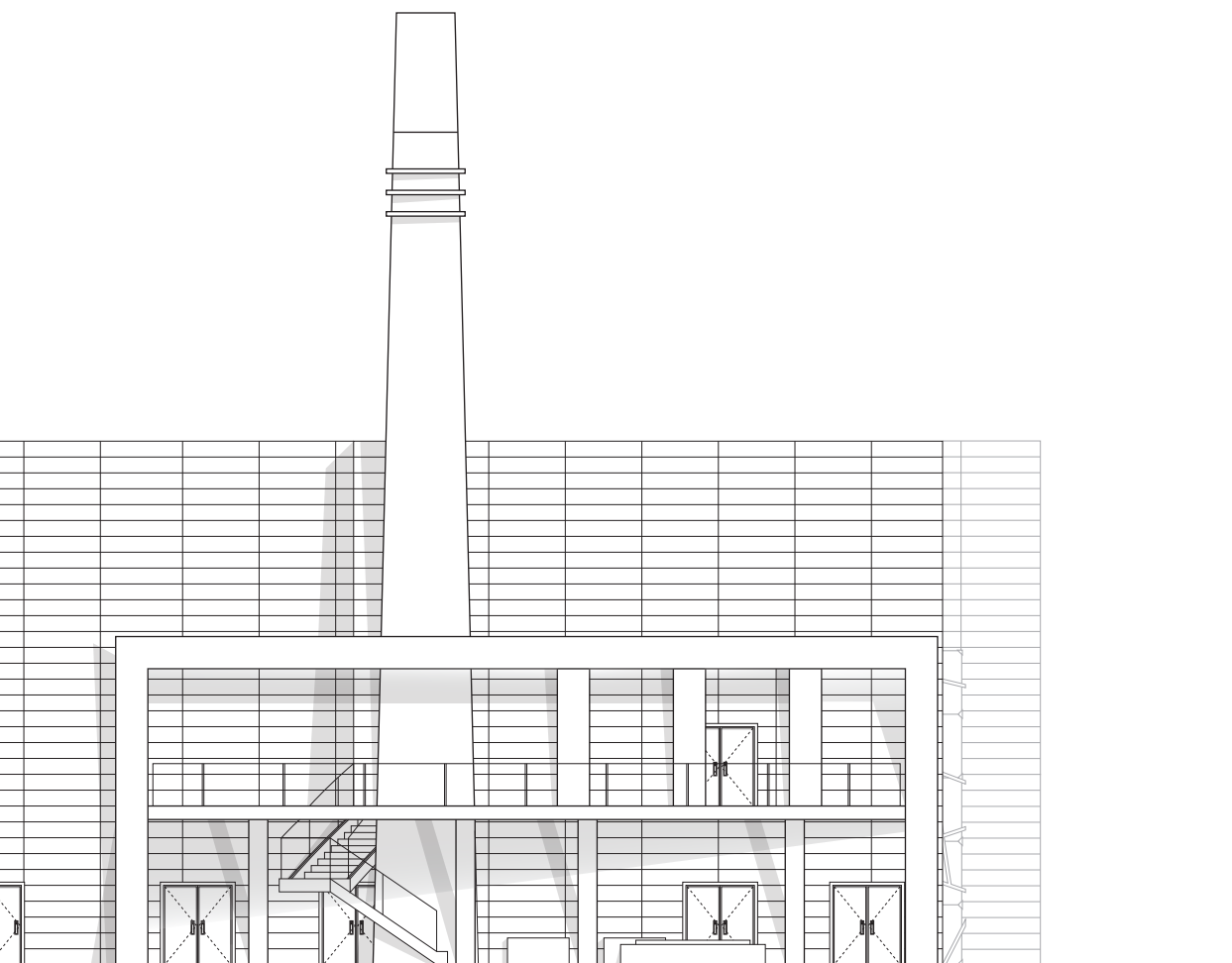
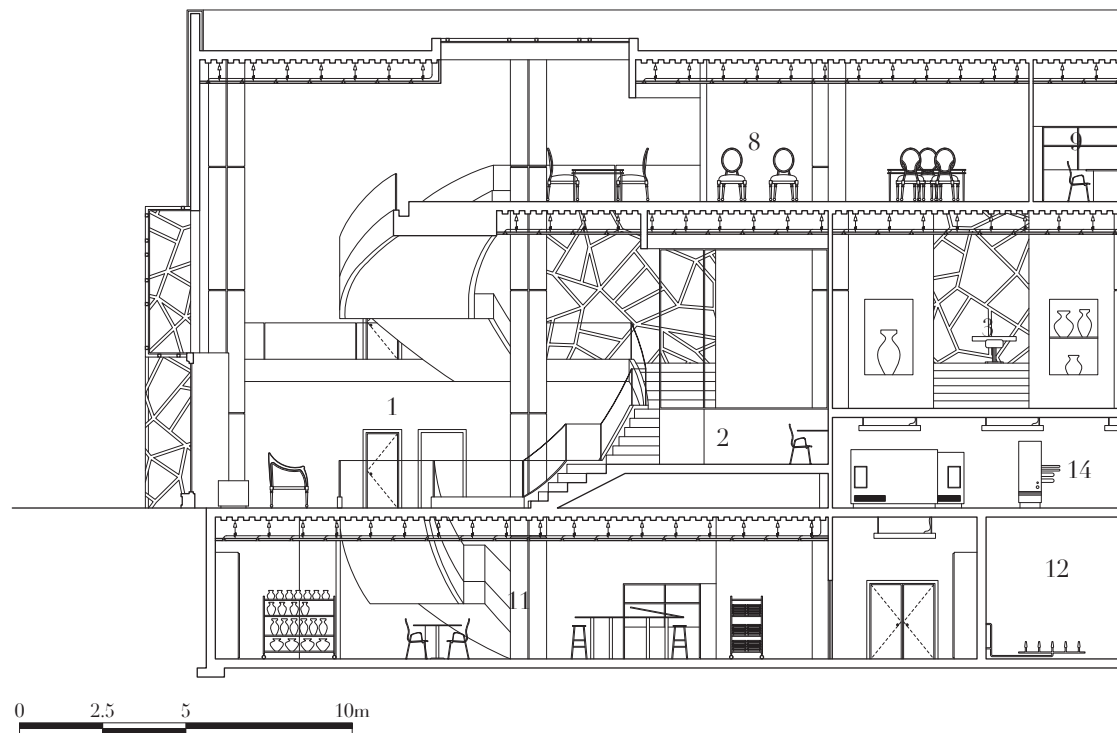
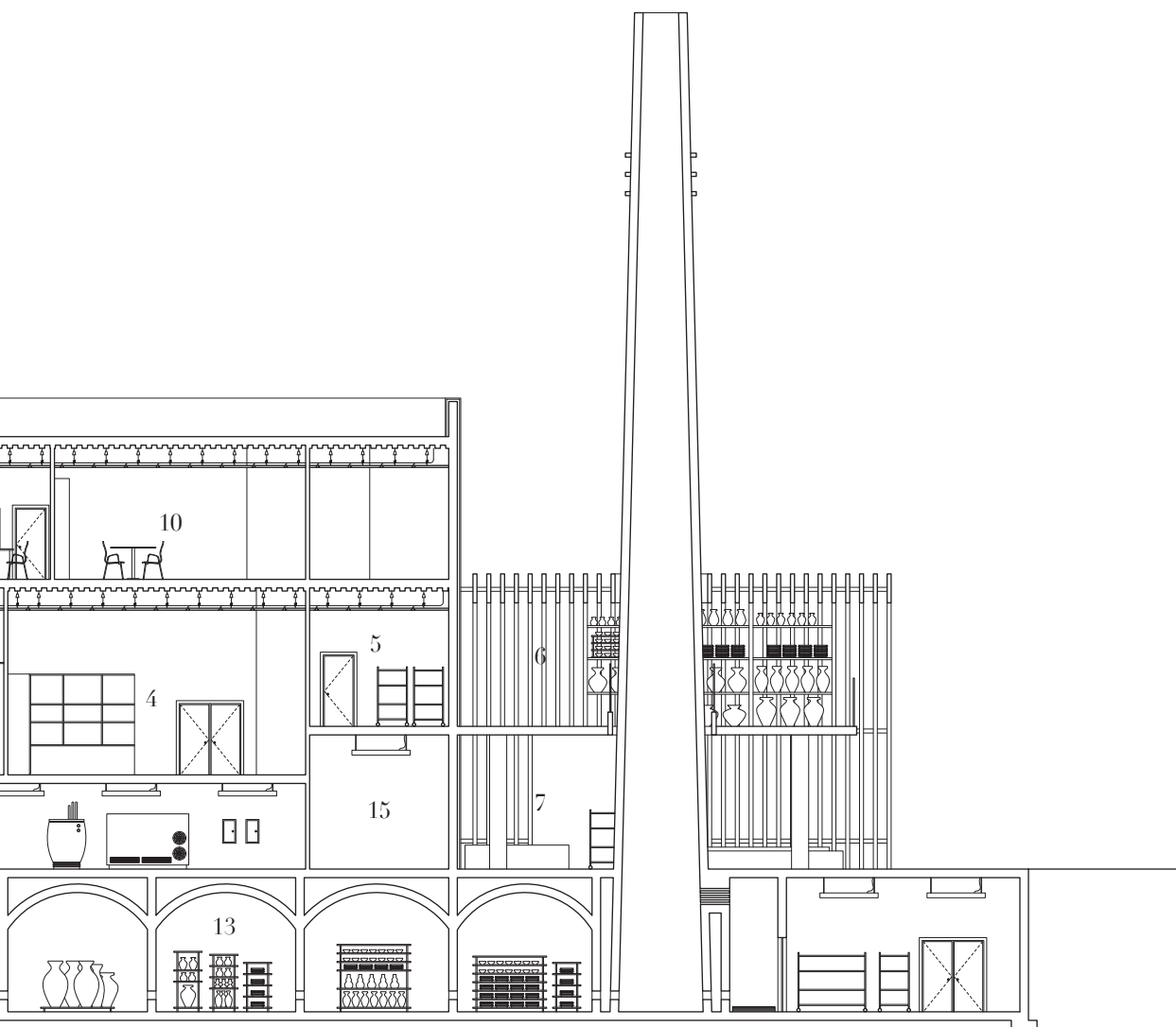




Figure 154. Section A - A



- 1 Retail Showroom
- 2 Design Studio A
- 3 Design Studio B
- 4 Storage
- 5 Transfer Cart Storage
- 6 Drying Area
- 7 Clay Production Area
- 8 VIP Showroom
- 9 Office
- 10 Staff Room
- 11 Illustration Room
- 12 Gas Intake
- 13 Kiln Room
- 14 Mechanical Room
- 15 Garbage and Recycling



---

Figure 155. Section B - B



- 1 Retail Showroom
- 2 Design Studio A
- 3 Workshop B
- 4 VIP Showroom
- 5 Illustration Room
- 6 Glazing Room
- 7 Crawl Space

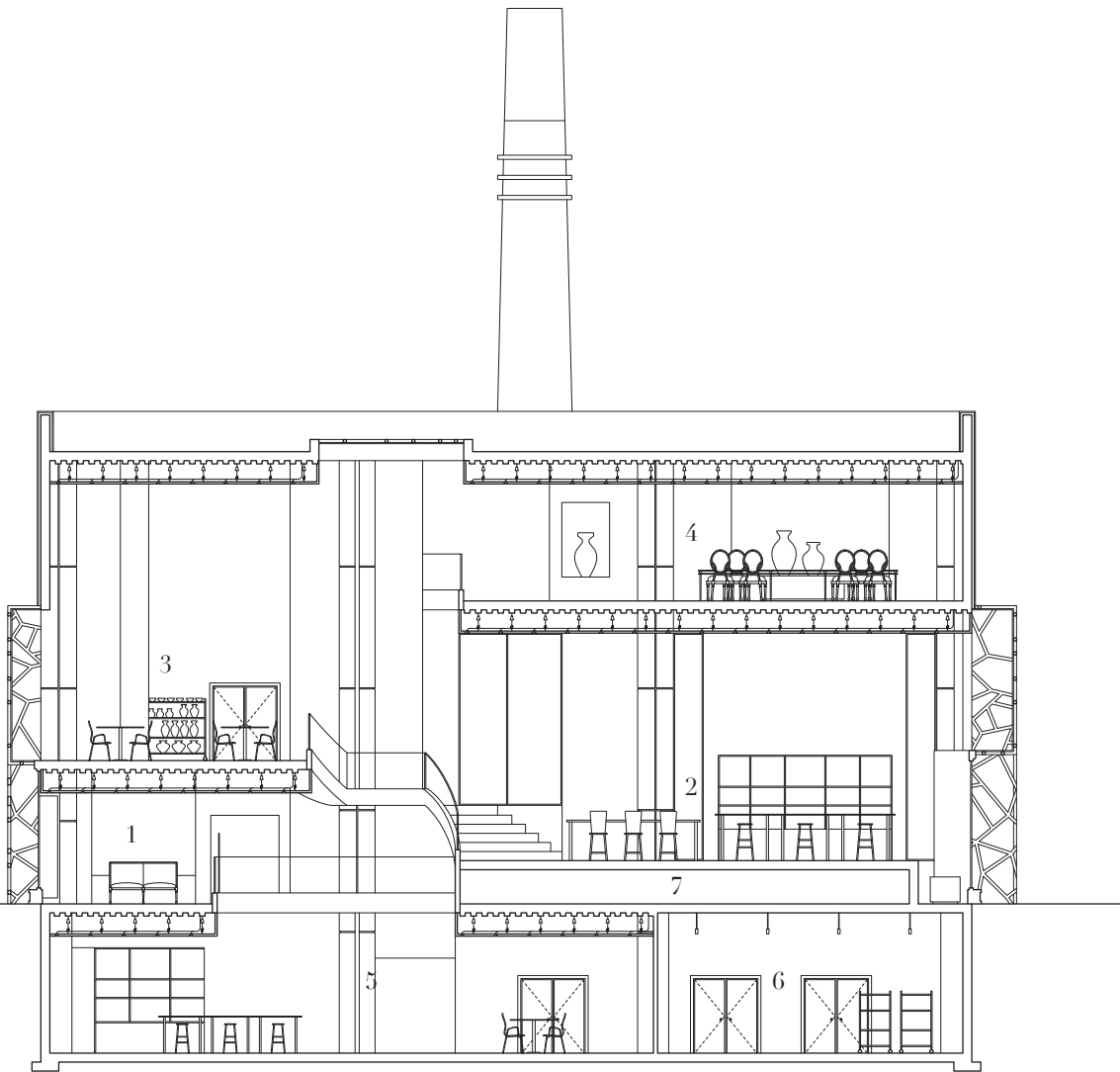




Figure 156. Exterior view from the Pearl River







Figure 157. Retail Showroom









Figure 158. Design Studio A







Figure 159: View from Central Staircase







Figure 160. Illustration Room







Figure 161. Workshop B







Figure 162. Nighttime view from the Pearl River





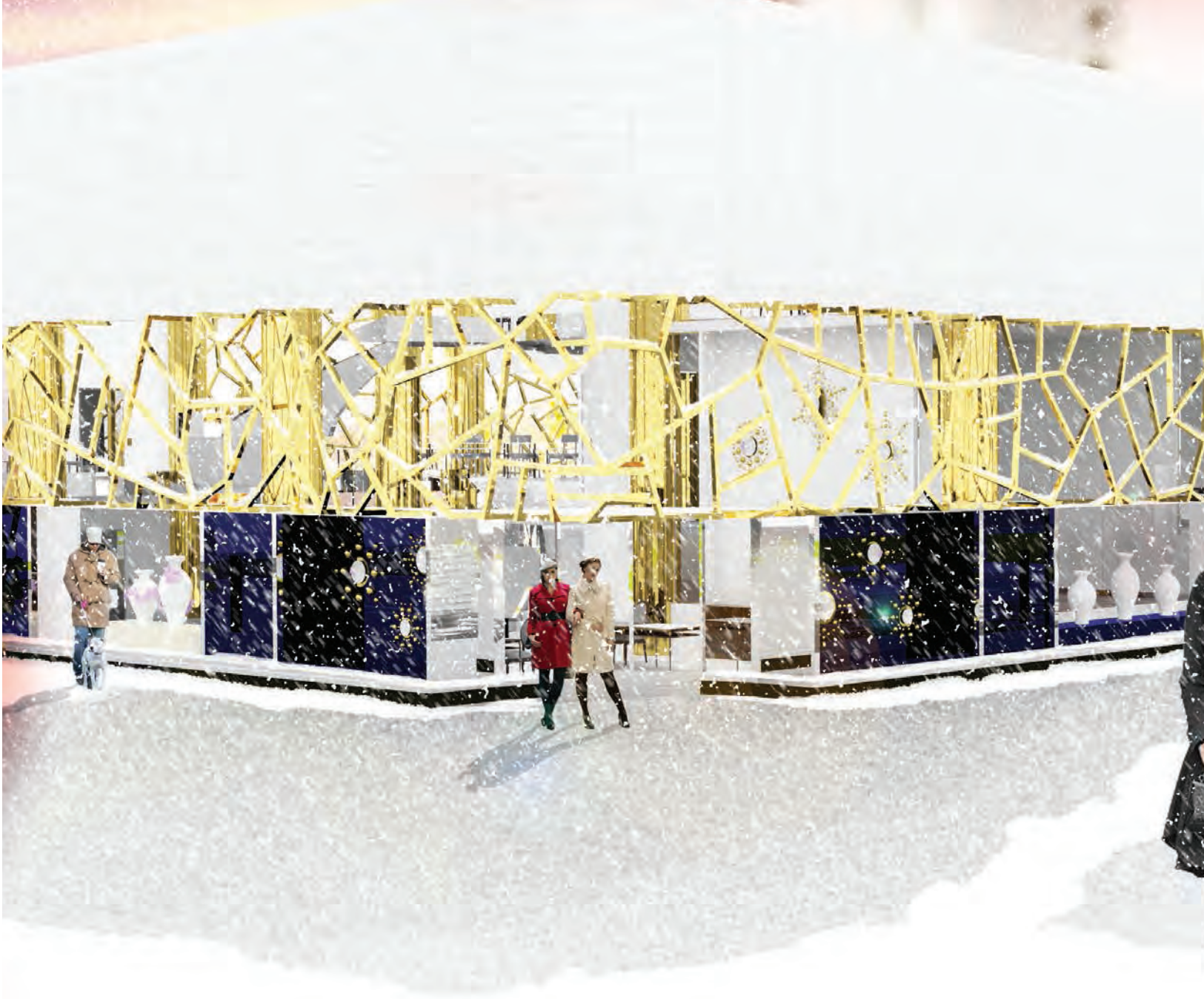


Figure 163. Exterior view during the winter season







Figure 164. Exterior view of Clay Production and Drying Area







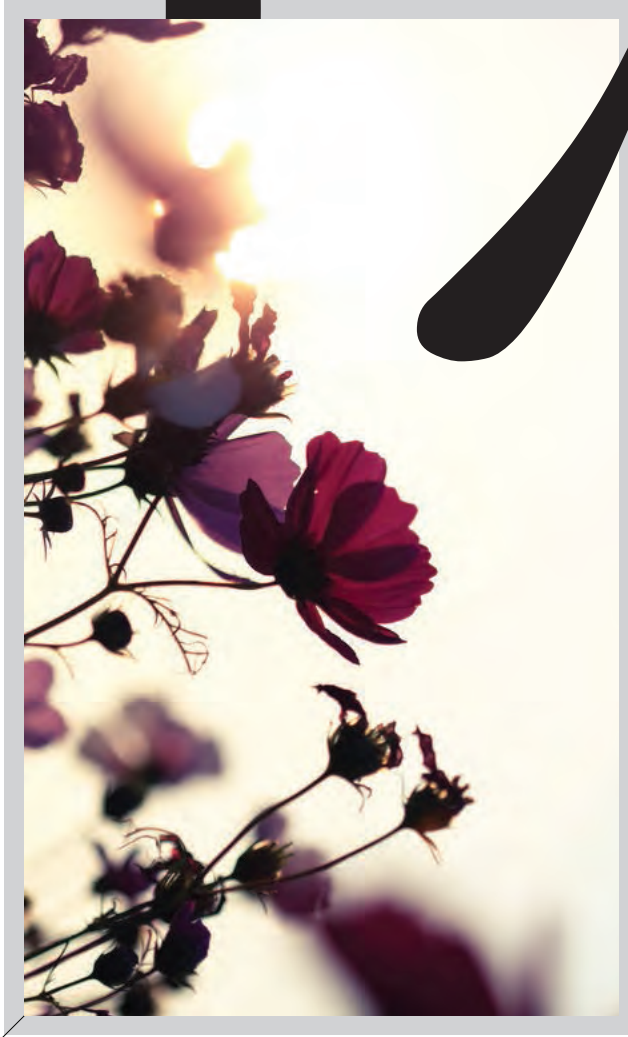


Figure 165. Blossom Tree

## Conclusion



## Conclusion

Responding to Conspicuous Consumption as Architectural Proxy has proven difficult at times. However, this thesis has, through research, investigations, and experimentations with the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory, presented a potential means to relieve many of the concerns that lie in conspicuous architecture and the successes that may arise from well-informed design. It has been found that cultural identity through architecture is one of the greatest and most lasting physical manifestations of societies everywhere. Though current consumer lifestyles make it difficult to construct architecture that is socially aware and culturally acute, conspicuous architecture that is steeped in rich, unique qualities/ characters of culture is possible. Countries like China have in many ways conjured up a false sense of accomplishment through the superlative nature of competition on the international stage. However, architectural proxy should not be a measure of one society against another, but a cultural appreciation of that said society. The case of the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory does not represent a moment of architectural trends and technologies. It does not stand as a critique of what architecture should be in emerging economies; instead, it

presents the possibility of architecture that is informed by the context in which it is situated. The aesthetic qualities of the design surely may fade, just as fashion change each season, but it is what the factory represents that will remain. The architectural proxy here is a measure of cultural intuitiveness. This is what will make it a lasting monument to its city. It is conspicuous architecture that is informed by the immediate context, the functionality, and the transcendence of past and present cultural traditions, beliefs, and their resilient environments. As the city grows and eventually becomes stronger in its socio-political and economic agendas, the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory is an example of a building that has outlasted the trends. It is a representational model of architecture that in many ways is conspicuous, but that has a worth that arises from appreciation of the underlying social order, the locale, and the culture that inspired its design.

It is important to consider that the strategies presented and the specific tactics that may arise (depending on a site) are not the result of a society's identity alone. Nowadays it is very difficult for just one example of architecture to represent everything that conspicuous consumption involves, or to express societal issues through the built environment alone. It is in fact the culmination of projects like this that may later on begin to reveal themselves to society and that will be lasting examples of accomplishments that transcend our current conception of conspicuous architecture. It is then that the design of buildings such as the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory may stand for the identity of emerging economies, ones driven by inferiority complexes, or that are just trying to prove something.

At the dawn of this new century, the sensitive issue of cultural identity and the way its foundations are steeped

in architecture should be shaken and readjusted according to the demands of the time. In fashioning a uniquely polemic, contemporary work of architecture, this thesis presents an instance where one is able to rethink architecture in the context of socio-cultural and technical imperatives of modernity — reformulating architecture according to formal, progressive, and contextual factors. In spite of the concerns that may remain regarding conspicuous consumption as architectural proxy, the strategies demonstrated through the example of The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory present a response to the current state of architecture. They are suggestive of a return to built environments that are responsive to a unique culture, to site specificity, and to the lifestyles of societies everywhere. Their overall goal is to communicate cultural identity and “worth” in the built context rather than just producing symbols of obsession, power, and status.



## Appendix A

### Top 25 World's Tallest Buildings

Rank	Building	City	Height (m)
1	Burj Khalifa	Dubai	828
2	Makkah Royal Clock Tower Hotel	Mecca	601
3	Taipei 101	Taipei	509
4	Shanghai World Financial Center	Shanghai	492
5	International Commerce Centre	Hong Kong	484
6	Petronas Tower 1	Kuala Lumpur	452
7	Petronas Towers 2	Kuala Lumpur	452
8	Nanjing Greenland Financial Center	Nanjing	450
9	Willis Tower	Chicago	442
10	Kingkey 100	Shenzhen	442
11	Guangzhou West Tower	Guangzhou	440
12	Trump International Hotel and Tower	Chicago	423
13	Jin Mao Tower	Shanghai	421
14	Al Hamra Tower	Kuwait City	413
15	Two International Finance Centre	Hong Kong	416
16	23 Marina	Dubai	395



Rank	Building	City	Height (m)
17	CITIC Plaza	Guangzhou	391
18	Shun Hing Square	Shenzhen	384
19	Empire State Building	New York City	381
20	Elite Residence	Dubai	381
21	Tuntex Sky Tower	Kaohsiung	378
22	Emirates Park Tower 1	Dubai	376
23	Emirates Park Tower 2	Dubai	376
24	Central Plaza Hong Kong	Hong Kong	374
25	Bank of China	Hong Kong	367

(Deskarti, 2013)





## Appendix B

### List of Guangzhou's Industrial Sectors

- 1 Aluminum
- 2 Animation
- 3 Applications Environment
- 4 Armaments
- 5 Automotive
- 6 Biomedicine
- 7 Biotechnology
- 8 Cement
- 9 Coal
- 10 Computer Technology
- 11 Consumer Electronics
- 12 Electronics
- 13 Fashion and Apparel
- 14 Fertilizer
- 15 Health and Medicine

- 16 Information Technology
- 17 Iron
- 18 Jade and Semi-Precious Stones
- 19 Machinery/ Tool and Die
- 20 Material Carving
- 21 Material Science
- 22 Mechanical
- 23 Methanol
- 24 Navigation
- 25 Ore
- 26 Petro Chemicals
- 27 Petroleum
- 28 Pharmaceuticals
- 29 Porcelain
- 30 Pulp and Paper
- 31 Steel
- 32 Telecommunications
- 33 Toys
- 34 Zinc

(Excel Guangzhou, 2013)







## Appendix C Glossary of Tactics



### *Tactics for Context Consciousness*



### *Balanced Scale*

The site is surrounded by many high-rise developments, and the *Balanced Scale* tactic is an effort to maintain a respectable scale amongst the existing typology. The aim is to reduce the scale, if possible, in order to allow for a more welcoming presence for pedestrians.



### *The “In-between”*

Too often designers ignore the “in-between” spaces (property between buildings). The “*In-between*” tactic aims to create external environments that are appropriately responsive to new and neighbouring buildings.



### *Re-introduce Industry*

As it has been previously mentioned, China is a thriving industry-based country that has always excelled in the field of production. Guangzhou specifically has witnessed an inordinate reduction in the number of buildings that are industry-based. The tactic to *Re-introduce Industry* is just that: a movement to re-invigorate the leading industrial cities that over the years have propelled China into its current position as one of the largest emerging economies.



### *Sustainable Initiatives*

The city of Guangzhou in particular has introduced a sustainability initiative in the countless new developments being proposed there. Therefore, this

project will aim to take *Sustainable Initiatives* in order to help reduce some of the concerns around the new proposals. For instance, since the project will implement a chimney rather than the traditional wood-burning kiln, the kiln in the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory will run off of gas in order to help reduce emissions.



### *Tourist Destination*

Since Guangzhou has slowly become a metropolitan city in China, another tactic is to ensure that the building, heavily focused around industry, will also become a *Tourist Destination* that will allow visitors and locals to view and understand the production processes of factories. This would entail the factory having an open environment that would permit visitors, clients, and locals to view-in, and possibly interact with, the different programs within the building. interact with the different programs within the building.



### *Internship Opportunities*

Creating a building that is programmed to allow for *Internship Opportunities* will help educate local and foreign artisans, labourers, etc. on the workmanship behind the production processes. As the Sun Yat-sen University campus is directly southeast of the site, the Guangzhou

Porcelain Factory presents a great opportunity for students to intern there and to take part in the craft and in the long-lasting tradition of porcelain production in China. Moreover, the Guangzhou Museum has a Department of Porcelain Studies, which could potentially be affiliated with the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory.. Moreover, the Guangzhou Museum has a Department of Porcelain Studies, which could potentially be affiliated with the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory.



### *Extend Pedestrian Thoroughfare*

As urban centers in China are quickly developing, there are fewer pedestrian paths within the dense city cores. *Extend Pedestrian Thoroughfare* is a tactic that welcomes any existing pedestrian-oriented pathways, roads, gardens, etc. onto the grounds of the proposed building. It is an attempt to not only offer citizens a place to interact with, but also to allow the building to merge with the city itself and with its “in-between” spaces.



### *Natural Light*

*Natural Light* is a tactic that addresses both the Context Consciousness and Tradition and Transcendence as it aims to introduce natural light into the congested city core, and to allow entrance of natural light into the interior of the building. Production rates are proven to increase

with comfortable environments, and natural light is an important component of comfort.



*Local Materials*

As countless buildings are erected in and out of city cores, the purpose of the *Local Materials* tactic is to initiate a movement to begin using just that: local materials produced within China rather than imported ones. This tactic will allow for a strengthening of the economy and more job opportunities for local labourers and businesses.



*Tactics for Function can inForm*



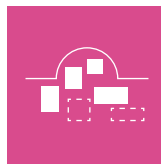
*Balance Consumerism and Industry*

The tactic of *Balance Consumerism and Industry* aims to create a program that responds to both the industry-typology that has projected China to its current economic position, as well as to the current growing consumerist lifestyle of its citizens. As it does so, this program that is usually thought of as banal captures the attention and interest of the consumers who purchase the finished products that are the “nitty-gritty” of the industry.



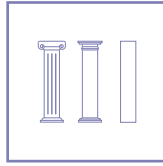
### *Devise Program Relationships*

It has been stressed already how countless proposals are battling with the infamous “Form follows Function” mantra, where buildings are designed in appearance prior to figuring the critical programming that is essential to the success of the building’s functionality. *Devise Program Relationships* is a tactic where a designer takes on the role of a worker, manager, specialist, etc. to understand how products are created, the relationships between spaces and processes, and the hierarchy of programs. In this respect, functionality becomes the driving force behind design and the program inside the building could influence form.

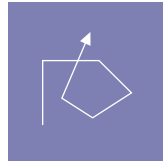


### *External Programs*

As part of The “*In-between*” and *Extend Pedestrian Thoroughfare*, the tactic of External Program is to provide citizens, pedestrians, and neighbouring residences with open programming that allows them to interact with the city and the outdoors in the already congested urban core.



### *Tactics for Tradition and Transcendence*



### *Procession Through Space*

The tactic of *Procession Through Space* is a design feature in much traditional Chinese architecture that is common to the organization of spaces; in it, narrative plays a major role in the experience of the building. Procession could be thought of as an orderly ceremony where every programmatic space in the building is thought of as critical to the finished product. This will be the driving force behind both the appropriation of spaces and their relationships, and the celebration of each space as a separate, but unifying entity within the building.

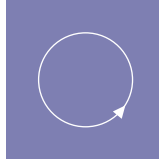


### *Blurred Boundaries*

Unlike Japanese architecture where there is a clear definition of outdoor and indoor environments, Chinese architecture does not have a definitive distinction between indoors and outdoors. There are many instances where transparency is viewed through screens; patterns are created along the interior and environments are merged. This tactic of *Blurred Boundaries* could be used between



programmed spaces and façade treatments.



*Full Eternity*

Chinese society often upholds the concept of eternity, as a thought that time is non-existent with no limits in the past, present, and future. To incorporate an infinity or eternity design feature within the building alludes to an important lifestyle component of Chinese societies and could help with the flow of programs and their relationships.



*Traditional Elements*

Without conforming to traditional assemblies, architectural features, and the like, using *Traditional Elements* in the design of buildings may inform fixtures, treatments, assemblies, external programming, landscape design, etc.



*Folklore*

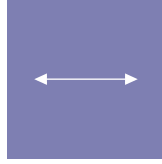
As previously mentioned, folklore consists of legends, stories, songs, poems, etc. that are used to pass on important events onto future generations. *Folklore* could be

used to in the design of building features, finishes, ornamentation, and treatments. In this way, visual implications of buildings that are often divorced from the program could be derived from aspects of cultural traditions and beliefs. Therefore, using folklore as a design generator can influence planning and aesthetic qualities to the surroundings that create for a much richer articulation of culture in the built form.



### *Courtyards*

In traditional Chinese architecture, a significant design feature is the courtyard, also referred to as skywells, of a house or complex. *Courtyards* are conceived of in many variations across the world. They began as a small opening in the roof that allowed either for smoke to escape when burning wood to warm a house, or that were used for such ventilation purposes as cooling a house in warmer seasons. Eventually the small opening in the roof grew to include small gardens, places for cooking, playing, and even a place to keep small animals. Aside from the aesthetic appreciation it engenders, the courtyard introduces a leading design strategy that begins to inform functional purposes within architecture. Many examples of Chinese architecture feature a courtyard, aside from a place for gardening or playing in. The courtyard begins to create a localized central area where people can not only communicate and interact with one another publicly. It also serves as an organizational feature for all the satellite spaces around it. By creating a central core and branching supporting spaces from it, the building offers a more productive environment.



### *Accentuate Horizontality*

Countless city cores around the world have placed great emphasis on building taller. This is the most suitable design for cities with a steady increase in population size. If the proposal and site allows for the building to *Accentuate Horizontality* the building would be tremendously reduced in scale as well as feature a traditional design element in Chinese architecture: emphasis on horizontal breadth.



### *Semiotics and Metaphor*

*Semiotics and Metaphor* plays a major role in many projects around the world. This tactic will play in subtle design features in the interior and exterior design of the building that make subtle gestures to traditional Chinese architecture and lifestyle.



### *Perception of Spaces*

In traditional Chinese architecture the *Perception of Spaces* is a critical feature when designing associated spaces within the building. Working with the tactic of *Balance Consumerism and Industry*, the intention of the

building is for consumers and the like to become aware of spaces and their relative positions to other critical programs that inform one another. Perception of space provides cues that are important also in the movement, orientation, and organization of interior environments, similar to *Procession Through Space*.



## Appendix D

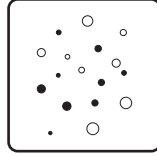
### Process of Making Porcelain

As *Function can inForm* is the driving design strategy behind the conceptualization of the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory, it was imperative that the process of porcelain was studied in order to create the most efficient work environment and *Eternal Narrative* of the space sequencing inside.



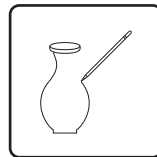
#### *Retail Showroom*

As the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory is a high-end, bespoke factory where fine China is custom-made to exquisite precision for clientele, the retail showroom has been designed to accentuate the feeling of elegance and class. Most important, however is the huti staircase, which begins the process of creating porcelain from the showroom floor. The building has been organized in such a way that those standing in the retail showroom area are able to see into the design studios A and B, workshops A and B, the VIP showroom above, and the illustration room below.



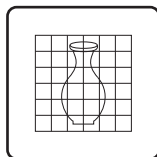
### *Clay Production*

To create fine porcelain, the process begins with the production of clay. The clay production area features 2 clay baths and a wedging platform; where Kaolinte is mixed with clay and then is either hand or foot wedged to remove pockets of air. The final wedged clay is then transported above to workshop B where it is stored in a room with controlled temperature.



### *Design Studio A*

Design Studio A is where the initial ideas, sketches, and drafts are conceived for the eventual porcelain wares. Design Studio A features drafting tables and a large working surface, along with computer stations, and a large format printing for eventual transfer.

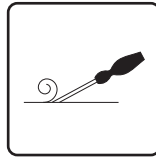


### *Design Studio B*

Design studio B features a large working surface where iterations of the final product are conceived of out of scrap clay to begin formalizing the final ware(s).



Moreover, Design Studio B acts as a satellite studio for Workshop A for the drafting of bronze pieces and plaster molds.



*Workshop A*

Workshop A is geared towards bronze metal work and plaster mold creations. As many wares feature enamel inlays, bronze metal work is designed to sit atop the ware to eventually be filed in. Thus, the workshop has several workman's benches and polishing wheels. Also, in many cases, plaster molds are created to produce consistent quality of wares in mass quantity. Adjacent to Workshop A is a room with a plaster bath and small kiln to create those plaster molds.



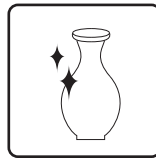
*Workshop B*

Workshop B is where workers physically begin shaping and molding the wedged clay on potter's wheels and into plaster molds. Workshop B also has slip and carving stations for creating more intricate designs and ornamentation on the molded clay. The finished clay wares are then transported across into the drying area under the trellis, outdoors.



*Drying Area*

Traditionally and now, porcelain is dried outdoors for a slow and steady curing of the clay. Once the clay is dried, wares are transported below to the lower level for buffing and polishing.



*Buffing and Polishing*

In the buffing and polishing room, workers rid clay wares of any imperfections and sharp edges in a buffing vat; they are then smoothed on the polishing belts. From here, the wares are transported to the illustration room.



*Illustration*

Polished wares are transported to the large illustration room where workers are able to begin transferring prints, hand illustrating, gold foiling and painting, enamel inlaying, and ornamenting the clay wares. Once completed, the wares are transported to the glazing room to seal off the exquisite illustrations.



*Glazing*

The glazing room is where porcelain wares are coated to seal in the illustration, either through machine, hand, and/or spray glazing. From the glazing room, wares are transferred to a seal room in preparation for final curing in the kiln.



*Kiln*

The kiln room is the largest area in the factory; it has been designed like the traditional imperial kilns. Since Guangzhou has taken on sustainability initiatives, this kiln does not feature a traditional wood-burning chamber, but a gas-powered one. The heat is transferred through the 4 fire boxes, where the emissions are then expelled through the chimney. Once the wares are cured, the porcelain is transferred to the cooling area where pieces are individually inspected in the quality control room. Once approved, porcelain pieces are transferred to the retail and VIP showroom completing the eternal narrative.



## Appendix E

### Guangzhou Porcelain Folklore

The story behind the origins of crackled porcelain started during the Tang Dynasty in Guangzhou. The story tells of two brothers who were artisans following their father's profession as lead porcelain artisan of the imperial kilns. The older brother was constantly praised for his superior porcelain wares with their resilience and quality. His younger, jealous brother, in an attempt to learn the secrets of his brother, waited one night to open the hot kiln to discover what made his brother's porcelain better. As the younger brother opened the kiln, the temperature within had not cooled completely and the tension caused from the extreme heat and cool temperature differentials caused a natural crackled pattern between the clay and glazing layers. This type of porcelain is now highly valued and its patterns serves as an aesthetic façade treatment of the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory.

(Chow, 2012)



## Appendix E Program Brief

**The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory** **48,997 s.f.**

**No.** **Room Name** **N.A.S.F.**

### Ground Floor

	<i>North Entrance</i>	
	<i>South Entrance</i>	
01	North Lobby	827
02	South Lobby	538
	<i>Show Windows (5)</i>	
	<i>Digital Displays (4)</i>	
	<i>Built-in Displays (4)</i>	
	<i>Vitrines (6)</i>	
03	Sales	490
04	Sales with POS	96
05	Floor Manager's Office	120
06	Packaging Room and Parcel Room	430
07	Clay Production Area (Outdoors)	2,153
	<i>Large Storage</i>	
	<i>Clay Baths (2)</i>	
	<i>Wedging Platform</i>	
08	Design Studio A	1,614
	<i>Drafting Tables (6)</i>	
	<i>Working Surface (for 6)</i>	
	<i>Light Tables (2)</i>	
	<i>Computer Station (2)</i>	
	<i>Large Format Printer</i>	
	<i>Supplies Storage</i>	
09	Design Studio B	1,076
	<i>Working Surface (for 6)</i>	
	<i>Supplies Storage</i>	



No.	Room Name	N.A.S.F.
<b>Ground Floor (cont'd)</b>		
10	Workshop A <i>Workman's Benches (8)</i> <i>Polishing Station (2)</i> <i>Supplies Storage</i>	1,090
11	Plaster and Bronzing Room <i>Working Surface (for 2)</i> <i>Plaster Bath</i> <i>Small Kiln</i>	484
12	Large Supplies Storage	475
<b>Second Floor</b>		
13	Workshop B <i>Potter's Wheels (6)</i> <i>Slip and Carving Stations (8)</i> <i>Working Surface (for 8)</i> <i>Workmen's Benches (2)</i> <i>Supplies Storage</i>	2,690
14	Wedged Clay Storage	380
15	Large Supplies Storage	490
16	Transfer Cart Storage	432
17	Drying Area <i>Drying Shelves</i>	2,152
18	Outdoor Workshop <i>Working Surface (for 16)</i>	548
<b>Third Floor</b>		
19	VIP Showroom <i>Built-in Displays (2)</i> <i>Vitrines (8)</i> <i>Large Item Podium Room</i>	2,152
20	Private Sales	135
21	POS and Safe Room	97
22	2 Offices @ 140 s.f.	280
23	Staff Room <i>Kitchenette</i> <i>Lockers (24)</i>	1,614
24	Large Storage	217

No.	Room Name	N.A.S.F.
<b>Lower Level</b>		
25	Buffing and Polishing Room <i>Buffing Vat</i> <i>Polishing Station (2)</i> <i>Polishing Belt</i> <i>Working Surface (for 2)</i> <i>Supplies Storage</i>	2,176
26	Illustration Room <i>Working Surface (for 16)</i> <i>Drafting Tables (6)</i> <i>Light Tables</i> <i>Supplies Storage</i> <i>Spray Booth</i>	4,305
27	Glazing Room <i>Glazing Machine</i> <i>Working Surface (for 4)</i> <i>Spray Booth</i> <i>Supplies Storage</i>	2,152
28	Transfer Room	142
29	Kiln Room <i>Gas Supply/ Allowance</i> <i>Boxes 1-4</i> <i>Chimney</i> <i>Combustion Chamber</i>	5,381
30	Inspection and Quality Control Room <i>Working Surface (for 4)</i>	1,076

#### **Support Spaces and External Program**

Fire Stairs (2)  
 Service Elevators (3)  
 Shipping and Recieving  
 Extra Storage  
 Garbage and Recycling  
 Washrooms  
 Mechanical Room  
 Telecommunications Closet  
 Boiler  
 Chiller  
 Generator  
 Custodian's Room  
 Parking (for 20)  
 Reflecting Pond  
 Extended Boardwalk  
 Hardscaping  
 Landscaping  
 Garden Promenade



## Appendix G The Hybrid

One consideration in the design of the factory was that floor areas had to be assigned for each programmed space (Appendix F). Also, in the conjecturing of the hybridized commercial and industrial typologies it was important to create a successful environment that would accommodate the porcelain production processes portion of the building at the same time as it allowed for commercial functions and public interaction. While it was essential for the program to inform the overall design of the building, it was equally as important not to place the production spaces and the commercial/ public sector of these spaces within a hierarchy according to importance.

When approaching the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory, the chimney-stack, gold cage, trellis, and the columns inside serve as a prominent feature of the complex. At first glance it may seem as though the use of gold here is a sarcastic jab at stereotypical Chinese ornamentation; however, the material palette here was driven as a feature that addressed present commercial (consumerist) growth and industrial/ factory typologies, at the same time as it remained informed by several of the tactics. Use of gold in the factory has two purposes. The first is that it serves semiotics – gold in Chinese culture

symbolizes wealth, divinity, happiness, and consciousness; it is in many ways a feature that represents cultural beliefs in working environments that seldom use such rarified materials (aside from hotels, casinos, etc.). The second purpose for its use is to represent the balance between the growing commercial lifestyle in Guangzhou and the normally banal factory interior and exterior environments. The placing of gold columns in the production spaces represents the merging of often-polished retail environments and “nitty-gritty” factory spaces. It provides order, rhythm, and balance to what could have become a chaotic interior workspace.

In the retail showroom, clients, the public, and workers enter into an expansive, open environment that is quite refined and elegant and that resembles a typical manicured, high-end retail space more than it does an informative space. As the huti (central staircase) allows for rooms to be projected off of it, the public is able to have a view into an area that is usually sealed off. It is seldom the case that the public is immediately aware of how a product was produced/created when they purchase material goods. In the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory, they are made immediately aware of this as they have direct views into the design studios, workshops, and illustration room. The huti and retail showrooms that house all the finished porcelain wares become organizational features that affect the entirety of the building—these kinds of balancing typologies are often set apart from one another. In subtle ways, they create a relationship between the public and cultural artifacts and draw attention to the design of the building which is steeped in cultural intuitiveness. The herringbone/ chevron pattern of the porcelain tiles in the retail space are a homage to the herringbone/ chevron patterning of stone paths and hardscaping in rural Chinese complexes. The rich tones of wood display units against the

clean white walls and mirroring chrome finishes that creep their way through the entirety of the building demonstrate the refining of this factory that fits into the ever-present consumerist lifestyle in China.

Furthermore, the design studios, workshops, and illustration room have been designed as open environments where the clientele is able to look into the talented minds and hands of the workers. Space is provided to house the necessary equipment (tables, chairs, workmen's benches, storage, potter's wheels, etc.) and further ample space is given to enable moving around large porcelain wares and transfer carts. Since it is important that the Guangzhou Porcelain Factory does not separate the consumer and industrial typologies, adequate space is provided for the public to interact with the often private quarters of such buildings. The circulation moves along the huti, but there are many moments where the public is able to traverse into the invisible boundaries of the production spaces. From the large transparent voids along the exterior and interior, the public is able to observe and become informed regarding the culturally significant, unique, and rarefied product that this seemingly banal factory processes.

Clients are even able to interact with those rooms that are sealed off for the purpose of confining dirt and dust; visitors take the same route as the porcelain wares. The production of porcelain progresses through each space in an eternal narrative; the public moves along with it.

Outside, the clay production area, the drying area above, and the chimney-stack make their presence known to the public. They symbolize the harmony between the commercial and industrial design features. In direct view

to the water's edge to the north, the city core to its south and neighbouring buildings, the exterior programmed spaces allow for the public to become better aware of production processes. The drying area and clay production area typically are located outside of factories under plastic tarps and in dark corners. Here, however, the spaces are present at public scale, attracting attention from passers-by. They are celebrated with a gold trellis that highlights each space. The polished gold dips down into the drying area to carry the rough porcelain wares. The chimney-stack is surrounded by a trellis that blurs views looking out and looking in; it also lights up the chimney-stack that is symbolic of the industrial typology that had been becoming depleted along the shores of Guangzhou.

The programmed rooms work as rooms in a factory typically do; however, hybridization of the commercial sector differentiates these factory rooms from the norm. The Guangzhou Porcelain Factory by its transparent separations, its flooring, polished ornamentation and overall design layout, achieves the blurring of the lines between commercial and industrial in an effortless transition.







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