

THE SUSPENDED ARCHITECTURE OF SOO CHAN

Soo Chan 的悬空建筑

Soo Chan cuts corners. He refuses to let rooms remain stable spaces. He creates mirrored versions of the same house next to each other and builds whole neighborhoods by fitting courtyard compounds, open spaces and roads around each other in meandering patterns. He slices the sides off rooms so they are open to the flows of modern life, and he puts stairs, beams and other protrubances in the middle of what should be open expanses. You would think that this would make the work seem ungainly or uncomfortable, but it only enhances the sense of its rightness.

Chan 总是切掉房间的角，去打破房间传统的稳定空间。他会建造相邻的对称房屋，并用蜿蜒排列的庭院、开放空间和道路构建整个街区。他切掉房间的边，让现代生活的气息流入空间。同时，他把椅子、梁柱和其他有棱有角的物体放在本应留空的区域中心。然而，这些做法非但没有让设计显得别扭或不雅，反而增强了作品的和谐感。

The easiest explanation for why Chan does this (and clichés become so because they have at least some element of truth) is that his work intersects Eastern and Western influences. He was born in Malaysia and trained in the USA, but works in Singapore – where the concept of globalization seems a natural part of the social and cultural landscape – and draws on Eastern and Western traditions. His houses, stores and apartment buildings look like those Modernist structures that tend towards a dissolution into white planes, glass and exposed concrete. Yet their detailing pulls them into the context of the South-East Asian region: sloping roofs appear, as do wood shutters, and the rooms are open to each other to encourage the breezes to cut through the humid warmth. In this sense, Chan’s work is part of an emerging ‘Pacific Rim’ consensus about using globally perfected building technologies and aesthetics developed by Western architects in an idiom, compositional array and material realization that derives from the local geographic, geological and climatological realities.

对 Chan 设计方式的最简单解释（大家普遍这样认为，多少有些真实性），是他的作品受到了东西方理念的共同影响。他出生于马来西亚，在美国接受教育，但是就职于新加坡——一个全球化概念自然深入社会和文化景象的地方，一个融合了东西方传统的国度。他设计的住宅、店面和公寓楼趋向于使用白色平面、玻璃和裸露混凝土这些现代主义结构元素，但是装饰细节则将作品拉回东南亚地区的语境：倾斜的屋顶和木质的百叶窗若隐若现；对开的房间改善通风，缓和了湿热的气候。从这个角度来看，Chan 的作品是新兴的“环太平洋派”的一部分，它们将西方建筑师在全球发展及完善的建造技术和审美，通过本土化的构图排列予以运用，并采用由当地地理、地质和气候情况衍生的建筑材料。

It is worth noting that Chan, however, was not trained in the mainstream Modernist tradition. He Studied architecture at Yale during the heyday of Post-Modernism, when the thin, minimalist and revelatory methods of high Modernism were distinctly out of fashion. He chose to study with proponents of neo-classicism such as Thomas Gordon Smith and Rob Krier and went to work for one of the most rigidly retardataire practitioners of that mode, Allan Greenberg. Even when he graduated to corporate firms, he chose to find employment with Kohn Pedersen & Fox, who were at the time applying the narrative, referential and metamorphical appendages of Post-Modernism to otherwise meaningless office buildings.

然而值得一提的是，Chan 的专业并非是主流现代主义建筑学。他在耶鲁大学学习时正处于后现代主义的全盛时期，细微、极简、启示性等极端现代主义派已经不再流行。他选择师从托马斯·戈登·史密斯（Thomas Gordon Smith）和罗伯·克里尔（Rob Krier）等新古典主义的拥护者，并为新古典主义最坚定的实践者之一艾伦·格林伯格（Alan Greenberg）工作。即使在毕业之后，他也选择了在 KP&F 事务所工作。KP&F 在那个时期，一直运用叙述性、参考性和质变性的后现代主义附属物，来丰富原本单调的办公楼宇。

Upon returning to South-East Asia, he specialized not in the design of new structures, but in historic renovation. Strangely enough, he seems to have immediately abandoned the stylistic

accoutrements of the manner in which he had worked. What he retained was a flexibility about how he used forms and appearances in his work. In this sense, it would be safe to say that Chan is a Post-Modernist. He is a ruthless and effective scavenger of whatever organizational principles he thinks are appropriate for the situation in which he finds himself working. He believes that the memory contained in certain modes of construction are valuable ways of grounding new structures. Yet he also believes that architecture must respond to technologies that are mass produced and global, and understands that he works for a clientele that understands their world as much through CNN as through the stories their parents told them.

在回到东南亚之后，他没有专注设计新结构，而是着重历史建筑的重建。说也奇怪，他似乎即刻摒弃掉了之前的工作方法，唯一保留的是对作品形式和外表使用的灵活性。从这个角度来说，Chan 可以被认为是一位后现代主义者。他无情而有效地将自己认为合适的组织原则运用于项目之中。他相信，某些建造模式中储存的信息可以为新结构提供宝贵的基础。然而，他也认为建筑一定要对大规模和全球化的生产技术做出回应。他明白，自己的客户群从 CNN 获取的建筑资讯和从父母辈那里听来的一样多。

The first few major free-standing structures Chan designed, such as the Bishopsgate House of 1996 and the Fifth Avenue House of 1998, mixed bits of stone, wood columns, traditional courtyard floor plans, pitched roofs and a sort of minimally detailed, planar set of walls that one might expect in a completely different kind of house. They were referential and then undercut the stability of the structures to which they referred with flowing, contrapunctual floor plans and pinwheeling planar compositions.

Chan 最初设计的几个主要独立结构，包括 1996 年的 Bishopsgate House（住宅）和 1998 年的 Fifth Avenue House（住宅）等，都混合了稍许石材、木质柱体、传统庭院平面设计、斜坡屋顶和极简装饰的平面组墙等诸多完全出乎意料元素。它们具有参考性质，另外削弱了结构的稳定性，取而代之的是流动的对位平面图和针轮旋转式平面构图。

The Fifth Avenue House in particular kept these pieces so beautifully in balance that none of the associations one might have with these different elements intrude on one's experience of the whole. The trick seems to have been Chan's discovery of a new kind of spatial suspension that keeps one's understanding of the relationship of the different pieces to each other at bay. The courtyard here is a heavily planted pool, around which one circulates through rooms whose walls in some case start on the second level, as if they were floating on wood columns. Rooms such as the study and bedroom lift up towards sloping ceilings that rise above wood louvres, giving the interiors a similar sense of suspension.

尤其是 Fifth Avenue House（住宅），它完美地平衡了多种元素，以至于与某一元素的碰撞完全不会干涉到对空间的整体体验。个中的技巧似乎在于 Chan 独创的新式空间悬隔方式，使得各种元素互不干涉。这里的庭院是一个周边种满植物的泳池，房间绕此而建；有些墙壁起建于二层，仿佛凌空驾于木柱之上。书房和卧室的天花板从木质百叶窗向上倾斜延伸，赋予室内空间一种类似的悬浮感。

As Chan began to edit down the palette with which he worked, the cuts and elongations became more compressed. The East Coast House of the following year is a compressed box that is completely closed to the outside. Here the courtyard has turned into an empty living room whose off-center focal point is a sunken seating area. Light washes in along the walls in a pattern that emphasizes them as planes and denies the constructional logic that might give them a clear reference point. Just as one might think that Chan was after an effect of weightlessness, however, beams connecting the ceiling plane to the rear wall and a spiral staircase squeezed into a small slot insert a sense of structure and form. Neither an abstract loft nor a figured room, the space hovers. The highly refined detailing, which rob stair treads in beautiful local wood and precious onyx of any visible means of support, furthers this almost uncomfortable sense of a house poised between nothingness and presence.

随着 Chan 对自己设计风格的精简，空间中的剪切和延伸也日渐浓缩。来年的 East Coast

House 是一个完全与外界隔绝的压缩盒。在这里，庭院成了空荡的起居室，其焦点为偏离中心的下沉式座位区。墙体在光线的沐浴下显现特定的样式，突出了墙作为平面的特性，且避免了任由构造逻辑给出具体参照。然而，正当你觉得 Chan 想要创造一种失重的效果时，连接天花板与后侧墙壁的横梁，以及被安置在狭小空间中的旋转楼梯又营造出一种结构和形式感；空间悬停在那儿，既非抽象式的阁楼，也非具有完整形状的房间。楼梯踏板由极其精美的本地木材和珍贵的缟玛瑙构成，并撤走了任何可见的支撑，从而深化和凸显了这一介于虚无和存在性之间、近乎让人不安的设计感。

In the Sennett House, Chan achieved this same sense through the simple doubling of the home. The house is really two versions of the same design side-by-side. This duplicate form was the result of programmatic considerations, as the structure houses two families (a brother and a sister, and their respective spouses and children). The effect is striking. The houses turn twin facades, whose wood shutters and free-hanging planes already dematerializes them above a low wall, toward the street. The courtyard between the structure that follows behind this split face flows into the kitchen and living room areas with glass walls that slide out of sight. Sitting on the couch in one living room, one looks back across at a duplicate space. The come-back effect is much more powerful than what Chan achieves upstairs with more cantilevered stairs and suspended glass bridges.

在 Sennett House 中，Chan 通过简单的房屋复制来达到这种效果。这个住宅完全就是同一个设计两个版本的并肩存在。这种复制的形式是程序化思考的结果，因为该结构需要容纳两个家庭（兄弟姐妹二人，以及他们各自的配偶和孩子）。效果是令人震惊的。被木质百叶窗和悬空的平面隐藏于住宅矮墙之上的两个相同立面面向街区，在一切为二的立面后方是一个庭院结构，它与厨房和起居空间相连；其中的玻璃墙可滑动隐身。坐在一间起居室中的沙发上，可以回头看到对面复制的空间。这种效果给人的感觉，比 Chan 在楼上建造的悬臂楼梯和悬浮玻璃桥更令人震撼。

In addition to designing a series of such highly refined houses, Chan has also created retail spaces and apartment buildings. In the former, he used scrims and obscuring glass to play a game of both hiding and revealing the items to be sold. In the latter, he confuses our reading of the height and proportions by grouping floors together, by emphasizing structural elements seemingly at random, and by undercutting the different planes whenever he can.

在设计了一系列如此雅致的住宅之外，Chan 也建造了很多零售空间和公寓楼。在前者的设计中，他运用纱罩和半透明玻璃来隐藏或展示店内的商品。在后者中，他通过突出那些看似随意摆放的结构元素和尽可能地削减不同平面，进而将不同的楼层组合，以混淆我们对高度和比例的解读。

In these larger structures, and also in multiple dwelling projects, such as the housing development outside Shanghai that is currently under construction, Chan brings out the structure behind the suspension. It is a form of 'L' that can work horizontally as a combination of living room and kitchen for instance, or as a relationship between entry and living area. It can act vertically, as interlocking double-height and single-height spaces stacked up in apartment buildings, or it can appear in a large scale, as in the interlocking rows of houses in China. It can also work in physical structure, when plane and beam seem to grow out of each other. In all cases, there is a confusion of class or kind, as disparate scales, functions and spaces are melded together. What Chan keeps separate is material, so that the confusion gains by the inarticulation of the different textures, colors and associative elements.

在这种大型结构和多住户项目中，Chan 将结构从悬架后面带出来，目前正在建的上海郊区住宅项目就是一例。结构为 L 形状，横向空间可以作为起居室兼厨房，或者玄关和起居室的纽带；纵向空间可作交叉的双层和单层空间叠落在公寓楼里；或者以中国交叉式排屋这样更大的规模呈现；当平面和横梁看似融为一体时，它则以物理结构出现。在所有的例子中，因为完全不同的比例、功能和空间被结合在一起，从而产生类别或类型上的混同；此外，Chan 会分隔材料，通过不同的表面、颜色和相关元素的模糊表达来制造混同感。

Why does Chan do this, and does he do so consciously? He claims not to use these methods deliberately, and prefers to speak both of his love of Modernist painting and his desire to respond to local conditions, such as solar, wind direction and topography. These are logical explanations that one should take seriously. Perhaps one can also, however, see his architecture as emerging out of an intersection between a Western aesthetic and Asian conditions, but it might not be that easy to move from local conditions and global technology to an integrated response. There seems to be, rather, a kind of uncomfortableness about his situation that he makes productive. Working in Singapore, where English is spoken in the tropics, the whole island is about to become a city as well as geographic entity, and trade, commerce and shopping are the main industries. There is a sense that he is operating in a kind of suspended artifice that slides into the jungle and away again on the next container ship or jumbo jet. To make something in Singapore you cannot be too definite, and Chan is a master of suspended disbelief.

为什么 Chan 要采用这种做法？他是有意识的吗？他声称自己没有刻意使用这些方法，转而讲述自己对现代派绘画的热爱，以及应对地区情况，比如太阳能、风向和地形等的渴望，这些都是应该被重视的逻辑性解释。然而，我们也可以看到，他的建筑作为西方审美和亚洲语境的交汇，试图整合当地情况和全球科技可能并没有那么容易，可以说情况有些尴尬，但 Chan 倒是把这些尴尬变成了生产力。新加坡这个热带的英语区既在把整座岛屿发展成城市，又日趋将其转变为以贸易、商务和购物为主要行业的地理实体。Chan 似乎在管理着一种悬浮的表象，它时而滑进丛林，时而又随着下一艘货船或喷气机离开。在新加坡，做事情不能过于自信，而 Chan 就是个质疑大师。

Of course, this is only a sense one gets after a glide through Chan's buildings. His work has been limited in its scope and in its situation. That, however, is now changing as he is currently designing a columbarium, a toy museum, a retail village and a school. It will be interesting to see how his approach develops, not just in its sophistication and mature response to its context, but also in sites as disparate as India and Connecticut, USA, where he is currently designing projects. This writer senses both a suspension of disbelief in the compatibilities of many different traditions and technologies, and a belief in the certainties that architecture can provide. It seems like one can waft quite comfortably and elegantly through this suspension.

当然，这只是在简单浏览了 Chan 的建筑之后的一种印象。他的作品一直都受项目范围和环境的局限。不过，这个情况已经开始改变，这从他目前设计的一些项目，包括骨灰龕场、玩具博物馆、零售村和学校中可见一斑。他未来设计方法的演化将是个有趣的课题，不仅关乎对环境精细缜密的回应，也有地理差异问题的处理，比如他目前分别在印度和美国康涅狄格州的项目。笔者从建筑作品中同时嗅到了 Chan 对不同传统和科技间兼容性的一丝怀疑，和对建筑可靠性的深信不疑。由此可见，建筑师似乎可以舒服而优雅地游走于设计的不确定性之中。

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