



Singaporean architect Edmund Ng (left) and interior designer Peter Tay (far left) say their showing at the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale has been an eye-opening experience. PHOTOS: MATTHIAS HO FOR THE STRAITS TIMES, JOHN HENG, EDMUND NG

# Their very own biennale space

Edmund Ng and Peter Tay take the initiative to fly Singapore's flag at the Venice Architecture Biennale

**Natasha Ann Zachariah**

After sitting out the last edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale, Singapore has made a return to the prestigious festival, though not with a country pavilion.

Unlike four previous editions when Singapore would join other countries in putting on an exhibition showcasing the city's architecture and design, two Singaporeans have set up their own installations.

Architect Edmund Ng of Suiyng Metropolitan Studio and celebrity interior designer Peter Tay are showing their past works at the Time Space Existence exhibition, which is part of the biennale.

Organised by Dutch non-profit group Global Art Affairs Foundation, the theme requires participants to look at the current state of architecture while explor-

ing its relation to concepts such as time and space. The exhibition, which has brought together more than 100 architects from 40 countries, takes place at Palazzo Bembo and Palazzo Mora. It started in June and will end on Nov 23.

Mr Ng, 42, a partner in his firm, was asked to participate by an acquaintance who is part of the biennale's organising committee. He says: "It's sad Singapore's not represented on a country level, so I thought why not participate with my own entry. At least there will be some sort of Singapore presence and continuity."

Up to 2010, Singapore has put on four country pavilions in Venice. But for the current and the 2012 editions, local architecture and design organisations have not set up one.

When he was interviewed two years ago about Singapore not participating in the 2012 edition, Mr Jeffrey Ho, executive director of DesignSingapore Council, the main organiser of the Singapore pavilion, told The Straits Times the council chose to focus on other events such as the annual Milan Furniture Fair, Paris-based Maison et Objet, which now has a yearly Singapore edition, and New York's International Contemporary Furniture Fair.

Singapore Institute of Architects' president Theodore Chan also said then that the institute, which worked on the 2010

pavilion with the council, was not submitting an entry as events closer to home would benefit architects here more. Plus, it was an expensive affair.

Mr Ng's foray into this year's event is on a smaller scale. Last November, he submitted his plans for an installation in a 26 sq m space. Featuring One Rosyth, a 17-unit condominium in Yio Chu Kang Road, he did away with the familiar cardboard models. Instead, he layered acrylic panels to create a hologram-like presentation of the condominium.

The largest acrylic block is 1.6m long by 1.2m, while there are three smaller blocks, each the size of a sheet of A3

paper. He created the blocks in collaboration with the Singapore University of Technology and Design, which had the know-how to laser-cut and process the material.

Another highlight of the installation is the rice paper screens around the space, which is meant to recreate the dreamy, white facade the actual building has.

Mr Ng says: "I chose this project because I wanted to highlight the screen which clads the building. When I was designing it, timber screens as shields for windows were popular but they were hard to maintain.

"This aluminium panel, which has been perforated with holes of three sizes, was a solution I adapted from acoustic sound barriers I saw in China and Thailand. And I used the holes to create a design of a forest on it."

He asked Mr Tay to join the show at the biennale too.

The interior designer, who graduated from the Architectural Association in London in 2000, picked his projects which showed how architecture and interior design can work well together, rather than treating them as separate genres.

His installation has a small enclosure that is placed in the centre of the space and encased with tinted acrylic walls. Inside, he created a serene garden filled with tiny pebbles and six log stools designed by Italian furniture maker Gervasoni and constructed from sections of tree trunks. The stools are sponsored by home-grown furniture retailer Xtra.

Outside the enclosure, the walls of his exhibition space are darkened, and the room dimly lit, to create the impression of moonlight streaming through.

The furthest end of the room is decorated with mirrored panels and a bench is placed on the other side. On each end of the space, an LCD screen is mounted,

playing laterally inverted images which mirror each other - much like a reflection, which is the theme of his installation. The images are of his past works, such as a house in Sweetenham Road.

Mr Tay was initially apprehensive about showing his work at the biennale, a architecture-centric event. But the 43-year-old, who published his monograph last year, says: "It's been 14 years since I graduated from the association and I've reached a point where I want to reflect on what I've done so far.

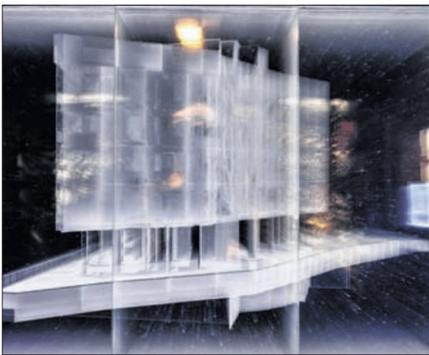
"I've always loved the idea of reflections and the way layers of vertically aligned glass create duality between the exterior and interior. I've experimented with that in my work and I'm still exploring the ideas behind how architecture and interior spaces can go hand in hand," says Mr Tay, who has designed homes for Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi and home-grown singer Stefanie Sun and actress Zoe Tay.

Each space cost about \$80,000 to put on and rental cost for six months alone took up about half of that sum. But Mr Tay and Mr Ng received some funding from DesignSingapore Council and well-wishers such as the developer of One Rosyth, Mushrooms Realty, in Mr Ng's case. They also put in some of their own money.

For Mr Tay, it was money well spent. "Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas curated the whole biennale and he's someone I respect because he's experimental. The whole atmosphere is great because you get to see what others are doing too."

Mr Ng adds: "There's no monetary gain for us going to the biennale. And it's not just about me and my project. I hope we show the ideas that have come out of Singapore, to show what the city has to offer architecturally."

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Mr Ng's installation features acrylic panels layered to create a hologram-like effect of the One Rosyth condominium (above) and Mr Tay's work includes an indoor garden (right) within an enclosure flanked by tinted acrylic walls.



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