

Australian Stories

Architecture Australia asked seven architects to share their personal stories of working on projects in Asia and the Middle East. From the idyllic mountains of Ji County, China, to an island in Abu Dhabi, the locations are varied but the sense of adventure is the same.

Image Courtesy of Decibel Architecture and Durek Visualisation



↑ Hanoi Lotus, a cultural centre in Hanoi, Vietnam, by Decibel Architecture.

01 — Dylan Brady

Conductor Decibel Architecture

Over the past fourteen years I have been privileged and honoured to design (many) and actually build (about ten) major projects throughout South-East Asia. The opportunity to work in Asian cultures and communities has been truly life, and practice, changing – from the Australian Pavilion at the World Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan (my first commission that kickstarted Studio 505), through to Decibel Architecture’s current project for a major new theatre and cultural centre in Vietnam’s capital, Hanoi.

One consistent element in these cultures, one trait that is eminently transferable and deeply effective, is that relationships must be built and maintained. It is impossible to “make it” on your own – architecture has a long, complex and tentative fuse at the best of times. When confronting completely skewed costs in labour and materials, when exploring and floundering about in new building codes and culturally opaque politics, one has

to work with and trust in the networks and friendships forged along the way.

Communication can often be tangential to the message or objective outcomes and this manner of description, of instruction and implication, is one that must be well comprehended and interpreted. I never travel without a close and true interpreter. I can generally collect an osmotic smattering of local language, but I would never presume to actually converse meaningfully. A great thing I try to learn in any language I am working in is “practice makes perfect.” It is something you can try to say over and over before people get it, and then the joke is shared and a great icebreaker. Translators can translate specific words that are said, but they are most useful when they also interpret the overall meaning.

Opportunities and challenges in Asia are mind-boggling. Even today we are forging new projects and city-changing investments that would simply be impossible to consider or realize in Australia. This work is neither simple nor easy. It requires patience, temperance and vision to realize those enthusiastic and hopeful icons of place and a better future that I remain blessed to be involved in creating.