

# surface <sup>asia</sup>

FASHION / DESIGN / ARCHITECTURE / ART / CULTURE

07

## THE AWARDS ISSUE

THE BIG WINNERS,  
STANDOUT DESIGNS AND  
BRIGHTEST IDEAS FROM:  
DESIGN FOR ASIA AWARD

+  
SINGAPORE ARCHIFEST

+  
PRESIDENT'S  
DESIGN AWARD

+  
BOMBAY SAPPHIRE

PLUS  
GREAT SHAPES:  
A MEN'S FASHION  
SPECIAL



© 890 (incl GST) AUD 895 (incl GST)  
D 60 NZD 935 (incl GST)  
P 300 JPY 750  
R 75,000 KRW 10,500  
T 300 NTD 260  
F 1990 USD 195  
C 130,000





## BUILDING BLOCKS

AN ACRONYM FOR 'INTEGRATING DESIGN INTO NATURE', IDIN IS ALSO A GROWING THAI ECO-ARCHITECTURE FIRM. WE SPOKE WITH FOUNDER JERAVEJ HONGSAKUL ABOUT THE TROUBLE HE HAS CONVINCING CLIENTS TO GO GREEN.

WORDS SIMON OSTHEIMER

In Thai, the word 'Idin' is used to describe the natural phenomenon when soil releases a beautiful scent after rainfall. Seven years ago, Thai architect Jeravej Hongsakul founded his Bangkok-based firm IDIN, an acronym that stands for 'Integrating Design Into Nature'. According to Jeravej, it's much easier today to convince people of the importance of the environment and nature than it was in 2004. "Then it was much more difficult to ask someone to live without air-conditioning, or pay more for architectural features such as a double roof or double wall, or any kind of low-embodied energy material. In addition, today's clients are more aware about their surroundings, and the project's impact on the local community than before."

IDIN projects, including tourist landmark the Phuket Gateway, Zensala, a resort in Chiang Mai, and shopping centre Indra Square in Bangkok's Pratunam district, all feature rectangular shapes and straight lines, though Jeravej sees no conflict between his ordered designs and nature's chaos. "The 'nature' in our name does not necessarily refer to the ecological, but the world around us." What this means is that the site surroundings and local communities define the shapes he uses. "For example, to design an eco-car doesn't mean we have to design a car in the shape



of a leaf; rather it's about making an engine that should work efficiently and save energy."

As with any architectural practice, cost is usually the main consideration in IDIN projects, which limits the materials and techniques his firm can employ. However, as they have become more established, they have found increased freedom with their designs. "When we started out, clients came to us with many conditions and requirements, but now they often leave the design to us. That said, working without any restrictions can be more difficult than not having them – tackling challenging problems often leads to more interesting outcomes."

Still, the major difficulty they have faced bringing their designs to reality is convincing the client of the validity of their ideas. "Many people in Thailand still don't really understand what architecture

is," says Jeravej. He adds that those who do know are often only concerned about the cost and use of area; the two main issues all Thai architects face. "I can say that these people just want a building, not architecture. I have to convince them if we have to give away something for an aesthetic design, and to respond to the environment socially or ecologically."

To give an example, a few years ago IDIN was commissioned to renovate the facade of the 1960s-constructed Indra Square shopping mall in Bangkok. The client had expressed a desire to replace the old facade with aluminium cladding, so as to be modern in the eyes of the general public, but Jeravej felt the nearly 50-year-old structure was beautiful and should be kept. "The facade was the symbol of the building, and people had been familiar with it for nearly half a century. I had to put all my efforts towards convincing

(CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT) The Phuket Gateway project involved considering the island site, location, climate, and culture; IDIN founder Jeravej Hongsakul values locations with stories or backgrounds, as they create many more dimensions to his work.



the client how beautiful the old façade is and how removing it would cause huge waste. Plus, the aluminium he wanted to use for a new façade was high-embodied energy material." Eventually, a compromise was found that retained the old façade, but created a new look by adding distinctive colouring, although this was not because of any sentimentality on the part of the owner. "It is funny and a little sad that the client finally agreed to my design not because of any attachment to the existing look, but because of the cost – half of what it would have been to replace it with aluminium." Still, Jeravej believes that sometimes the most important aspect of architecture is deciding what to keep, not what to build.

While half of IDIN's projects have been in Bangkok, Jeravej has worked on commissions across Thailand. "I always like working in the provinces, because I love travelling and it opens up my experiences – I also have many ideas while travelling. That

said, most important to me are areas or locations with stories or backgrounds, as they create many more dimensions to my work."

At one such project, Zensala, a resort in Chiang Mai, the land covers a long and narrow area by the Ping River, which fell under national regulations regarding construction on the riverbank, as well as local regulations that require a local roof style for the buildings by the river. IDIN ended up designing a building 120-metres long at an average of six metres wide. Each part of Thailand often has its own regulations or constraints that have to be reconciled and turned into a design.

While well-intentioned, his work necessarily strays from his design ethos of 'integrating design into nature' at times. The undertaking that has perhaps come closest to his core values is Phuket Gateway, a meaningful project that involved considering the island site, location, climate, and culture. The challenge was to



create a gateway for visitors to Phuket Province, crossing over the bridge from Phang Nga, which would also serve as a public space, contemporary building, and landscaped garden.

"I love many features of this project," says Jeravej. "We designed the sculptures in a way that allowed visitors to participate with them, while the pattern also represents the Sino-Portuguese architecture found in Old Phuket Town. The buildings behind the sculptures were inspired by the local southern vernacular architecture, and the materials selected represent the importance and origins of Phuket." In terms of 'integrating design into nature', the open design allows rain and daylight into parts of the innermost spaces. "We are always concerned how users perceive the space, how the building reflects the context physically and

socially, and how it supports and relates to nature. You can find the answers to all these questions in the Phuket Gateway."

Considering the thought that went into representing Phuket in the Gateway project, does he think a Thai approach to design exists? "Yes, definitely; but in terms of having a Thai essence, not an identity of Thai shape and form." Where possible, he applies features of traditional Thai living to his designs, such as the common areas under homes used for relaxation and storage. Ultimately though, he believes that architecture has to adapt with the modern world. "While traditional Thai architecture was suited to times past, I have to design architecture that is most suitable for this day and age, by applying the best features of tradition to my modern works." [idinarchitects.com](http://idinarchitects.com)

(CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT) Jeravej fought to preserve the 1960s façade of Bangkok's Indra Square shopping mall; at Zensala, a resort in Chiang Mai, the land covers a long and narrow area by the Ping River; W House, an innovative two-bedroom weekend house in Khao Yai, north of Bangkok; the Tea Cafe in Chiang Rai is scheduled for completion in 2012.