



The Hong Kong West Kowloon Station has given the city three hectares of landscaped open space

ALL ABOARD

BY REBECCA LO

The West Kowloon Station by Aedas has been designed as a gateway to Hong Kong, but its landscaped roof is also proving popular with the locals

Hong Kong has a long-standing love affair with rail. After the Kowloon Canton Railway opened in 1910, its original terminus at the tip of Tsim Sha Tsui was the last stop for intrepid travellers arriving from China. One century later, the Guangzhou Shenzhen Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) brings back that connectivity with a new terminus designed by Aedas in the reclaimed West Kowloon area. The opening of the Hong Kong West Kowloon Station in September 2018 means that mainland China, Russia and beyond are now a little closer. XRL's high-speed carriages brings Guangzhou within 45 minutes' reach of Hong Kong, while cities such as Xiamen can now be considered for a weekend getaway. And though undeniably politically controversial, the railway is a physical strengthening of the bonds between mainland China and Hong Kong, as the 50 years of autonomy draws closer to its halfway mark.

Photos: Paul Warchol | Virgile Simon Bertrand



Aedas' Andrew Bromberg



Bromberg wanted a building on which people could walk, and created the roofscape as a park with stepped greenery



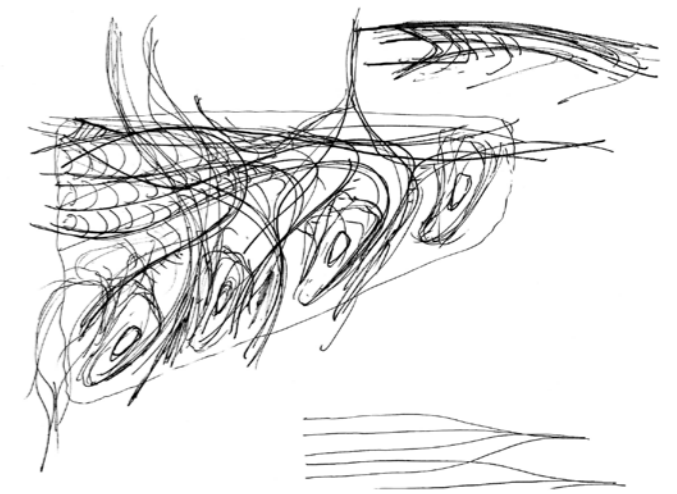
The ground-hugging building is in contrast to the surrounding high-rise, the defining typology of Hong Kong



The sweep of the station embraces views south to the Central skyline and The Peak

Aedas' winning bid for the project had much to do with making the terminal – XRL's first and only station within Hong Kong – a statement piece: nothing less than a gateway to the city. With most of the building underground, reaching to a depth of 25 metres, its sheer scale – 400,000sqm (4.3 million sqf) of usable floor space – puts it on par with the world's biggest and busiest airports. Its monumental proportions are intentional, a major hub in response to the increasing rail traffic in China. Andrew Bromberg, global design principal at Aedas, designed an arcing volume that reaches 25 metres into the sky while sweeping around to embrace views south towards the Central skyline. With a carpeting of stepped greenery covering the structure's roof laid out like a welcome mat for public enjoyment, the station aims to attract both travellers and locals alike. "The forms were a direct result of harnessing and redirecting all of the surrounding contextual connections toward and through the station toward Victoria Harbour and The Peak," says Bromberg. "The merging of these flows is seen as analogous to how train lines would merge into a terminus station."

Featuring a predominantly white palette, the interiors form a forest of angled steel columns crowned by a floating roof broken by swathes of skylights reaching 45 metres above the central void. Some 4,000 glass panels allow daylight in and a glimpse out to the city, while the low-rise



Bromberg's sketches show the curves integral to the project

form makes the large structure more welcoming and human in scale. "The intent for the floor finish is gradient earth tones that radiate out from the big void of the departure hall to the perimeter," Bromberg says. "The soffits of the roofs are deliberately white so that the varying daylight and shadows through the skylights and clerestories are what animate the project."

The great central void provides natural wayfinding and easy orientation, while providing glimpses of Hong Kong



Skylights and clerestories provide natural light and reduce the need for artificial lights, while cool air flows downwards

The structure's central void further helped resolve the controversial arrangement of having both Hong Kong and mainland Chinese customs officials within the same premises. "By stacking the immigration halls, we were able to make them extremely efficient," says Bromberg. "This efficiency afforded the design an opportunity to have a big void down to the departure hall. That big void was essential to the success of the project – it allows natural wayfinding and easy orientation for all visitors. You always know where you are in the station relative to the void. Most importantly, you always know you are in Hong Kong, with the views out of the station towards Central District and The Peak visible to the south."

The ground-hugging building contrasts strongly with its neighbouring skyscrapers: the half-kilometre high, 118-storey ICC is a mere stone's throw away to the west. Bromberg knew that he wanted a building on which people could walk – one they could experience personally. "The exterior finishes of the green plaza and sky walk were intended to be more of the 'ground' and less of the building, to help distinguish the roofscape more as a park," he notes. "The expressed architectural components that are visible on the exterior are cooler silver tones to help soften the forms against the green foreground."

For Bromberg, sustainability was a key element in the station's design and it has been incorporated into many of its facets. "The green roofscape, beyond providing a valuable open space to the West Kowloon Cultural District, also absorbs rainwater and uses it to irrigate the hundreds of trees and shrubs on site," he says. "The green roof limits the amount of solar gain into the station. The interior of the station uses the skylights and clerestories for natural daylighting, reducing the need for artificial lights. Cooler air is always supplied close to floor levels for user comfort, so the majority of the volume in the space is actually not conditioned. The cool air, which flows downwards, can then drop naturally from one level to another, and eventually fall into the departure hall – further reducing the amount of air-conditioning required."

Now that the 10-year-plus project is born, Bromberg is justly pleased with his new baby. "The public engagement of the project has given me great pride," he says. "Watching visitors climbing onto the roofscape to experience the beauty of the site and the beauty of Hong Kong – this will only improve as the trees mature and more shade is given to the three hectares of open space the station provides." ■

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