

SHE'S DARING TO BE DIFFERENT

Top Malaysian stylist talks about her idiosyncratic dress sense

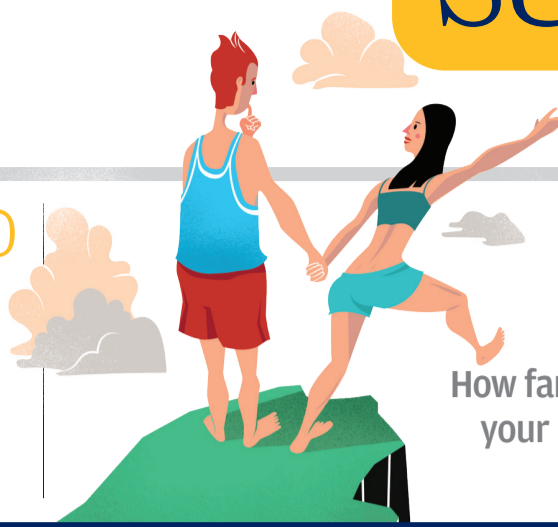
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The sweeping lines of West Kowloon high-speed rail terminus. Photos: Handouts, Bloomberg

It's the rail thing

Partly inspired by New York's Grand Central Terminal, the design of West Kowloon terminus is winning global accolades. We speak to the architect responsible for it

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It was considered vital to connect the station with the surrounding urban context

ANDREW BROMBERG, GLOBAL DESIGN PRINCIPAL AT AEDAS

A sweeping stairway curves up towards the Hong Kong skyline, marked by bold geometric forms, abundant gardens and people congregating on the stairs. The path leads up to a plaza with spectacular views of Victoria Harbour.

This is the arching rooftop walkway on West Kowloon terminus, designed by architect firm Aedas' Hong Kong-based global design principal, Andrew Bromberg, as a place for social connection and greenery in the city.

That image takes pride of place on the website of the architect who, despite having lived in Hong Kong for almost 20 years (he was born in Denver, Colorado), says the year-old high-speed rail terminus was his first major project in a city he loves for both its nature and urban vibrancy.

Bromberg's philosophy of human sustainability – "people's well-being in the public realm" – dominated the near decade-long design process, he says.

The 51-year-old architect emphasises the ways in which the project "maximises civic gestures" inside and out, with a design aimed at drawing people into the urban fabric of Hong Kong. At 4.3 million square feet, it is also one of the world's largest underground train hubs.

The layout, Bromberg says, was inspired by the idea of converging tracks coming into the station, but also "forces converging on Hong Kong" – wind, pedestrian and traffic flow, and tracks entering the station. Nine of the terminal's 15 tracks are dedicated to long-haul trains, of which more than 30 a day bring passengers to and from major Chinese stations, including Shanghai Hongqiao and Beijing West.

But after a sharp drop in the number of arrivals in Hong Kong since citywide unrest broke out

about three months ago, the station is currently underused.

The site's location next to Victoria Harbour and the developing West Kowloon Cultural District dictated a design with a strong sense of public space and "thus the idea of creating the plaza and gardens on the station's rooftop", Bromberg says.

The community interaction it is generating is in line with the architect's wish "to see the station teeming with people", in part by persuading them to climb up to its curved, plant-covered roof.

While the garden rooftop offers three hectares of green plaza for people to enjoy, the interior of the hall resembles a forest, with its leaning steel columns supporting a giant floating roof, he says.

"The structure was built with concrete slabs, steel truss and steel mega-columns, with 4,000

insulated glass panels bringing in natural daylight as well as city glimpses even from the station's lower levels," Bromberg says.

The building's place as a gateway to Hong Kong was his major reference point.

"It was considered vital to connect the station with the surrounding urban context and make the traveller aware of that by announcing: 'You are in Hong Kong,'" he says.

This has been achieved by creating an open, accessible and lively urban space, which allows the largely underground design to flow seamlessly into the bustling city surrounds.

Explaining his objective, Bromberg points to one of the most famous rail hubs in the world: New York's Grand Central Terminal, which opened in 1913.

"Often cited as one of the most inspiring spaces in 20th-century architecture, its main concourse brings people to the very heart of Manhattan," he says.

West Kowloon terminus provides a similarly dramatic sense of arrival and departure. Both stations, he says, provide a terrific public space with their vast open centres. The enormous void at the heart of the West Kowloon terminus rises to a height of 25 metres, but also sinks 20 metres below ground.

"The resulting space is a 45-metre-high [space] whose energy and focus are directed towards the south facade, Hong Kong Central skyline and Victoria Peak beyond," says Bromberg, who also wanted to achieve Grand Central Terminal's otherworldly effect at West Kowloon terminus. The architecture, he says is elevated by combining utility with abstract beauty.

"If you go at it with a purely functionalist attitude... you wind up with a mediocre shopping mall," he says.

Clearly, his philosophy is striking chords, as nominations for design awards with strong sustainability and community leanings keep rolling in.

Indeed, the station has just won two awards – for "transportation" and "green architecture" – in the prestigious American Architecture MasterPrize 2019 in Los Angeles.

And Bromberg is winning accolades for creating a light-filled building of sweeping curves, soaring volumes and organic forms, in which architecture and engineering are masterfully fused.

Recognised at the Cross-Strait Architectural Design Awards in June, the West Kowloon project is now a hopeful in the transport category of the World Architecture News Awards, to be announced this month in London. The station's 25-metre-high "civic plaza", green roofs and sculptures have been underscored in the nomination.



4,300,000 sq ft

Size of West Kowloon terminus, making it one of the world's largest underground train hubs

The interior of the hall at West Kowloon terminus (left); and an aerial view of the structure.



markable engineering at the World Architecture Festival awards and is up against, among others, Swirling Cloud – a bamboo pavilion built for Beijing Forestry University's 2018 garden festival; Jewel Changi Airport – a retail and entertainment complex encompassing an indoor rainforest and waterfall in Singapore; and Milan's CityLife residential and commercial project, which brings eco-sustainability and a green lung to the city's centre.

In the forward to a book about West Kowloon terminus, published by Rizzoli last month, US-based English architect Michael Webb hails it as "a manifestation of the second golden age of rail travel" – wherein Bromberg, unlike his predecessors, has been able to incorporate both imaginative architecture and unconventional engineering into the landmark building.

"It's an heir to glorious urban terminals such as St Pancras in London, the Gare de Lyon in Paris... Their soaring, light-filled train sheds and concourses rivalled the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages as triumphs of engineering and inspiring places of assembly. But steel and glass were too austere for contemporary tastes, and architects hid their nakedness behind dignified masonry facades," the book states.

"Public taste has caught up and architects have embraced the engineer's vision, revelling in the beauty of expressive structures."

Webb points to West Kowloon terminus' organic forms, mimicking those of Victoria Peak on the other side of the harbour, and its bifurcated steel columns "as dramatic as any work of art", supporting the three principal roof trusses. "The sweeping curves of the concourse and roof canopies and the steps that ascend to the landscaped roof bring the spirit of nature into the urban grid," he says.

Kwan foresees such connected public spaces as the future of Hong Kong. "That idea of 'giving back' nature to the people, as Bromberg would put it, through the roofscape and open plaza, is a desirable one," he says.

West Kowloon terminus has also been shortlisted for both the "transport-completed building" category and the "engineering prize" at the World Architecture Festival in Amsterdam in December, at the same time making it to the 2019 long list of the Dezeen Awards in the "civic building" category.

Furthermore, the station is up for a prize at the ABB Leaf Awards in Berlin this month – an annual award recognising outstanding architecture from around the globe – having been shortlisted for the "best public building project" and "best achievement in environmental performance project" categories.

Hong Kong-born architect Timothy Kwan is one of the 148 judges representing 68 countries at December's World Architecture Festival awards.

Kwan, the founder and lead designer of Beijing-based firm AIO, praises the "bold and expressive form" of Bromberg's design, which, though not in harmony with its surrounds, still emulates the setting in a lyrical fashion.

"It is clear he wanted to make a statement, in this case an attempt to poetically mimic the natural hilly landscapes of Hong Kong, but it also physically offers public green areas and views to the Victoria Harbour... hence it is contextually responsive," Kwan says.

Bromberg's building is one of seven nominees honoured for re-