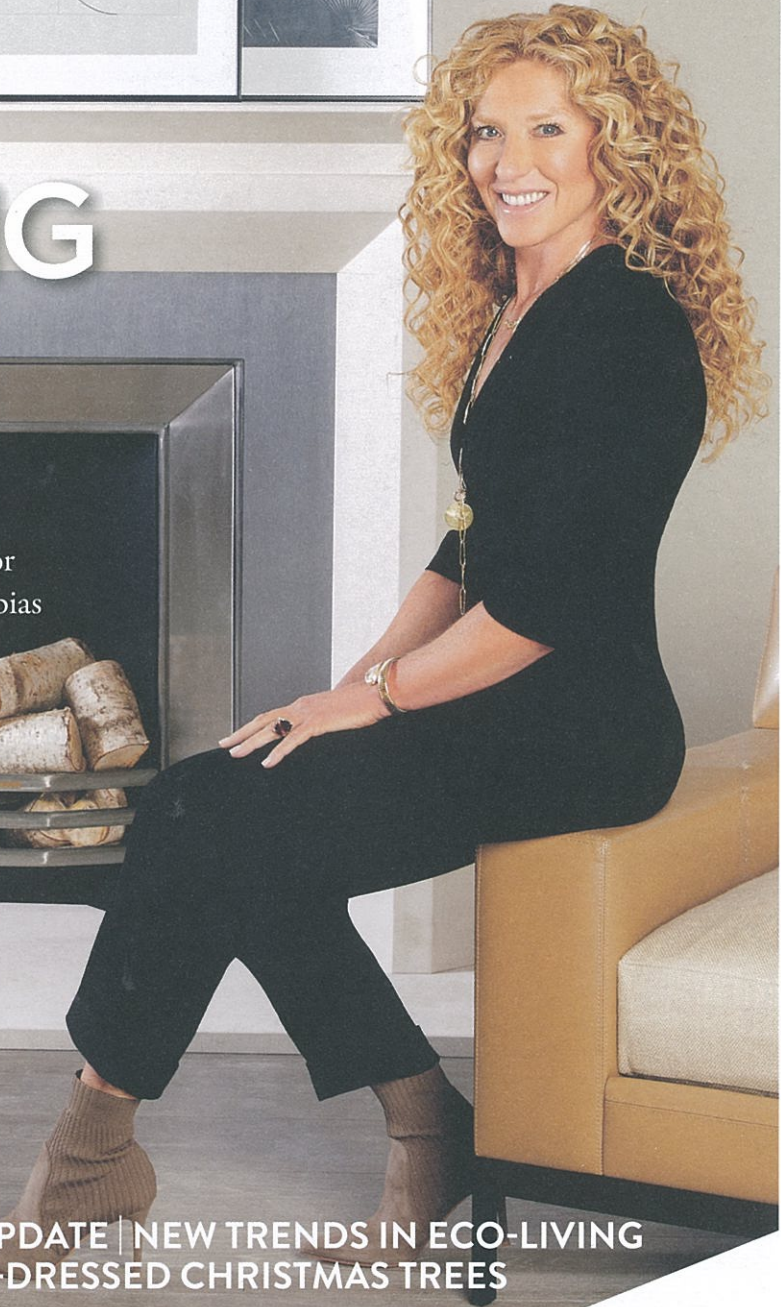


# PERSPECTIVE

DECEMBER 2017

## DESIGNING WOMEN

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# On track

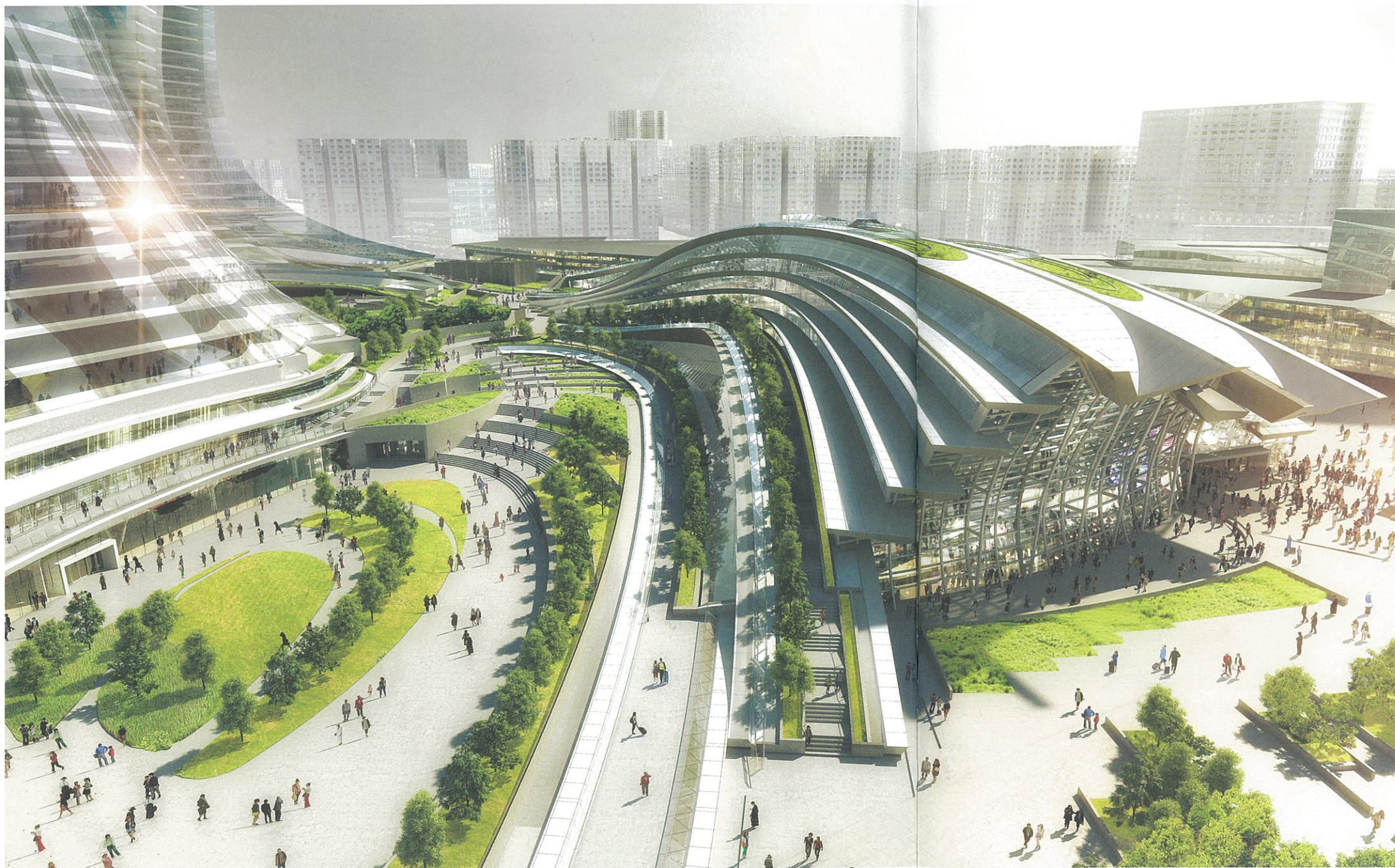
BY CHRISTOPHER DEWOLF

West Kowloon Station is nearing completion. How will the major infrastructure project fit into an area that is already crowded with an eclectic mix of architectural styles?



West Kowloon Station will be the Hong Kong terminus of mainland China's high-speed train network





The designers were determined to ensure the station was civic-minded. Extensive use of glass permits light to enter the station, most of which is up to 30m underground

**I**t has risen from the shores of Victoria Harbour like a beetle emerging from the ground, and now the finishing touches are being put on West Kowloon Station. When it opens at the end of 2018, it is expected to serve more than 109,000 passengers a day, making their way to the mainland on a fleet of new high-speed trains. By now, almost everyone in Hong Kong has heard of the Express Rail Link project, which has been dogged by controversy since its inception in 2009. But few are

familiar with West Kowloon Station, which will serve as the local terminus of a high-speed rail network that extends across China.

“We wanted to do something extremely civic-minded,” says the station’s architect, Andrew Bromberg, a global design principal at Aedas. “It’s a gateway to Hong Kong. We felt that the station should be an extension of that, so when people arrive in the city for the first time, they feel they are in Hong Kong.”



Andrew Bromberg, global design principal at Aedas, says people arriving at the station should feel they are in Hong Kong

West Kowloon Station enjoys a spectacular location with a panoramic view of the Hong Kong skyline, but when Bromberg’s team entered the competition to design it, they encountered a problem: the station is mostly underground, with passenger concourse and platforms 20 to 30m under the surface of the earth. “I was very nervous about the experience people have in below-ground stations, which is they don’t know where they’re at until they get into a taxi and it eventually goes out onto the street,” says Bromberg.

His solution was to create a large volume capped by a shell-like dome that rises from the earth, capturing daylight and sending it deep underground. Even as they stand on the subterranean concourse, passengers will be able to catch a glimpse of Victoria Peak and the city’s tallest buildings. In order to keep the space open and airy, Bromberg minimised the number of columns needed to support the vast atrium. “You obviously want the wow factor – you come in the front doors and you want to be impressed,” he says. His team devised a system in which four to five columns converge and branch out, giving them an organic appearance that complements the sweep of the station roof.

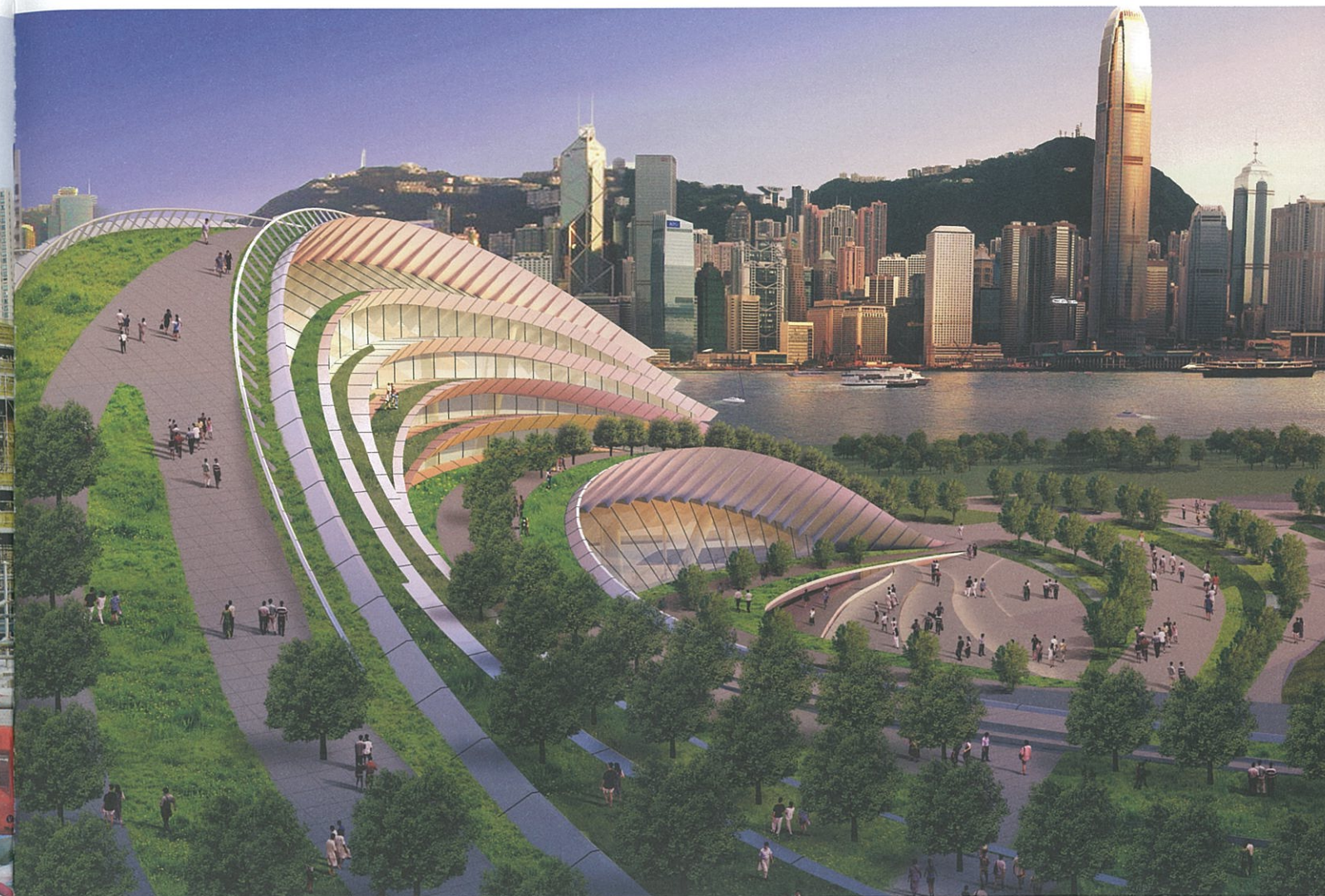




The construction scene of West Kowloon Station, photo taken on 6 October 2017. When it opens at the end of 2018, the station is expected to serve 109,000 passengers a day

## “WE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING EXTREMELY CIVIC-MINDED”

But the main concourse is only a portion of the 400,000sqm development. “It’s a complex station,” says Bromberg: It has separate floors for arrivals and departures, immigration facilities for both Hong Kong and the mainland, and a secure departure area that lies beyond immigration and security, similar to an airport. Bromberg dealt with this complicated programme by creating a vertical hierarchy of spaces. “There’s four steps that go down,” he says. “By the time you get down to the



Public plazas will be built over Austin Road to provide pedestrian access to the harbour waterfront

departure hall, that space becomes more contained. It has an intimacy to it.”

The change in scale between levels is reflected in the station’s palette. The main concourse is bathed in white and other neutral tones. “It has a strong response to natural daylight – to mitigate it and become a really enjoyable diffused light,” says Bromberg. As passengers descend further below ground, the colours become earthier. A large green wall will bring natural vegetation into the departure area, while artworks from a mix of local and overseas artists will be scattered throughout the complex, a nod to the West Kowloon Cultural District, which is taking shape along the waterfront next

to the station.

Bromberg says the station’s location was the departure point for his design. “We wanted it to potentially be a catalyst to encourage a kind of civic gesture,” he says. That includes an 8,900sqm public plaza in front of the station, part of which will be built on a platform over Austin Road, providing unobstructed pedestrian access from the station to the waterfront. Most remarkably, the public space will extend up and over the station’s roof. “The civic square gently steps up,” says Bromberg. “Eventually there’s a ramp system that allows you to access the roof itself. You’re ending up being 25m above ground, but the journey is quite relaxed and inviting.”

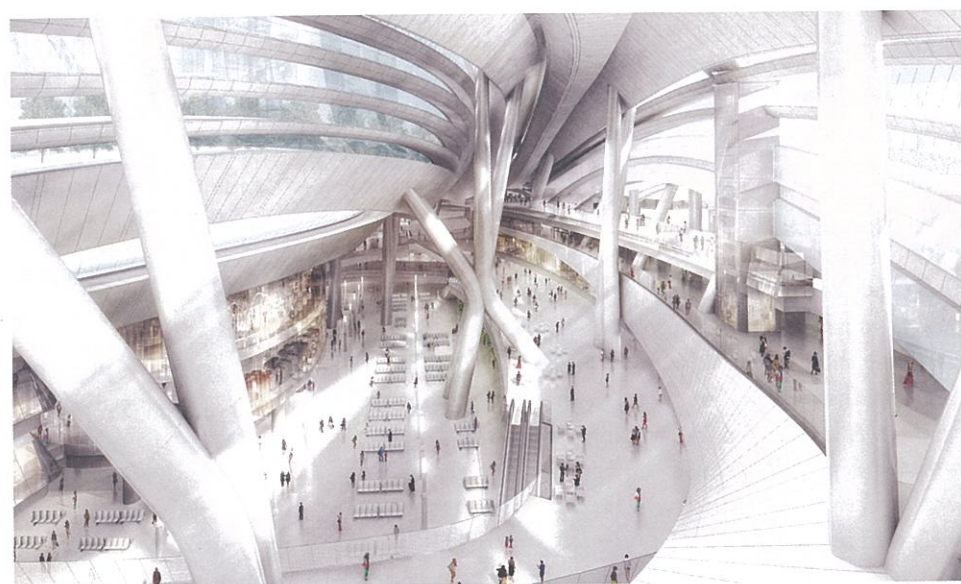




Open public spaces were intended as a civic gesture but also a link to the diverse neighbouring developments and facilities



Pathways from the civic square continue up and over the roof of the station providing views of the harbour and Kowloon



The number of columns in the atrium was minimised to keep it light and airy

The view from the roof will reveal just how complicated the station's surroundings are: a collection of superblocks and megaprojects, each conceived independently without any context to which they could respond. To the west is Kowloon Station and the self-contained Union Square complex of hotels, offices, shops and apartments. To the east, Austin Station. Bromberg says he intends the West Kowloon Station to reconcile these diverse elements through its public spaces and multiple entrances, which include the plaza-level main entrance, underground access for vehicles and a bus terminus on the north side of the station.

Some critics remain sceptical of whether the station will have a positive impact on West Kowloon. "The area [around it] is infrastructure-heavy, with developments like separate islands," says urban-planning critic Paul Zimmerman. He is concerned that the station's overrun

facilities are located underneath the West Kowloon Cultural District, which requires a number of exhaust outlets and emergency exits that will serve as obstacles within the cultural district. "I can't see the area becoming a convivial space," he says.

Bromberg says he is confident the station will quickly develop a life of its own – not just as a transit point, but as a place where people come to enjoy the view from the roof, to gather in the restaurants that will populate the station concourse, or simply to revel in the voluminousness of the station's atrium. "We designed this nine years ago and when I go visit it now, I honestly don't feel myself in it anymore – I experience it almost like a tourist," he says. "It's far more powerful than any of the [renderings] we had. When it opens, it's going to be something you enjoy." ■

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