

# perspective

January/February 2016

INSPIRING ARCHITECTURE &amp; DESIGN

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## A LIFE ALOFT

Hidden away in Cape Town's Hout Bay, South African fashion and interior designer Jenni Button's eclectic, light-filled home is a celebration of different influences and textures



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**Pinnacle Award winner**  
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HK\$48  
 US\$18  
 €15

**Company:** Davidclovers  
**Project:** Butterfly House  
**Client:** Undisclosed  
**Location:** Poyntelle, Pennsylvania, USA  
**Design team:** David Erdman, Clover Lee, Jason Dembski, Damien Hannigan, Nick Benner

Butterfly House is designed as seasonal home for two artists based in New York City. The design centres on three elements; mass, light and colour. These three elements are 'pressurised' into more or less coherent relationships; depending on the season or the time of day.

The 'butterfly' name was derived from the counter-intuitive and complex relationships formed between the custom-coloured, stainless steel cladding, the building's profile and contour lines, the interior and the surrounding environment.

Working from a standard rectangular plan, the form shifts subtly in two and three dimensions to pull the landscape inward along the north and south edges. The north edge is opaque with a deeply inset front door. The south edge is transparent forming an amphitheatre-like patio space.

Inside, a long, sliding, translucent, screen-wall separates the bedrooms from the living and dining areas – and the entire house can be converted into a single room.



**Company:** Neri&Hu  
**Project:** Das Haus  
**Client:** IMM Cologne 2015  
**Location:** Germany  
**Design team:** Lyndon Neri, Rossana Hu, Dirk Weiblen, Gao Rui, Brian Lo, Chen Xiaowen, Zhao Yun, Li Ximi, Christine Neri, Poeng Litien, Ren Siwei, Xin Haiou, Zhao Lei, Guo Peng, Zhu Anqing

Neri&Hu was invited to design Das Haus for IMM Cologne 2015, one of the most important furniture and furnishing fairs worldwide. The idea is to present a design concept consisting of the outer appearance of a house and the interior design through the architects' own products and selected products from the exhibitors at the fair.

Originally conceived from the spatial experience of a typical Shanghainese lane house, the installation begins with a box structure as a formation of 'containment as cage', provoking the idea of home as a refuge but at the same time a cage for our possessions and living rituals. A central spine in the form of a solid bridge takes the observer through various rooms, allowing forced views into the curated settings displayed within these living cages.

A double-storey structure houses five tall rooms, closed on all sides, creating an ensemble around a large interior courtyard, conceived as a semi-public living space.



**Company:** Tsushima Design Studio  
**Project:** 5L Office Landscape  
**Client:** Beijing Vanke  
**Location:** Beijing, China  
**Design team:** Toshio Tsushima, Qiong Ni, Leroy Merks, Winnie Wing Yi Tam

The 5L Office project aims to construct a habitable, evolving environment; a living architecture to keep up with the fast-changing pace of our lives. Nowadays, work has become a fulltime part of our lives, but with the help of information technology, we can work anytime, anywhere and through any channel.

Breaking the traditional office mode, the designers created the 5L Office, comprising five qualities: Livable, Linked, Liberal, Lively and Landscape. These qualities are achieved through architecture, landscape, and interior, generating a new working space for the 21st century.

The role of landscape is especially important in this project. Nature not only provides a calm setting for the project, it is also key to breaking down the sterile environment of the typical office space.

The designers say they are ultimately creating a brand, a philosophy that can be duplicated, thereby marking the evolution of the Office typology.

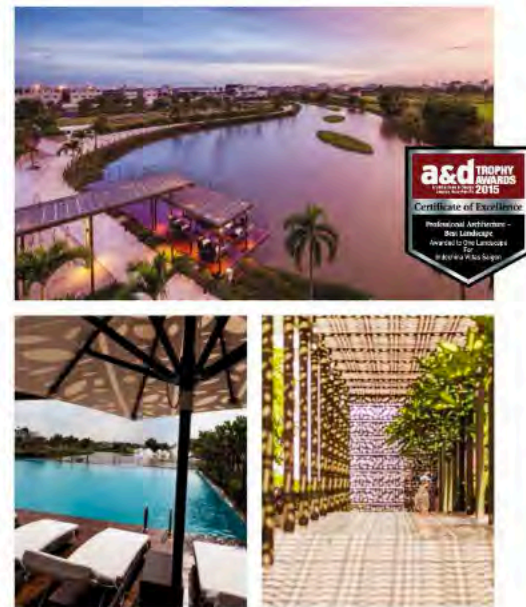


**Company:** One Landscape  
**Project:** Indochina Villas Saigon  
**Client:** Indochina Land  
**Location:** Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
**Design team:** Viraj Chatterjee, Emma Law, Andrea Banaag, Saman Chau, Peeraphol Sangthongjai

A boutique waterfront residential project, Indochina Villas Saigon is a high-end villa development situated in District 9. One Landscape, as the winner of the invited competition, was asked to transform the site and fulfil a number of objectives.

These included revitalising the residential development with a resort feel; enhancing and celebrating the natural features of the local landscape; developing a safe and attractive neighbourhood with safe public realm; and creating a residential enclave with a strong sense of community and liveability with lush environment in relation with the tropical climate of Vietnam.

Aiming to create a new benchmark for waterfront community living, a major part of One's concept was to find a design linking with Vietnam's cultural landscape dominated by paddy fields – this further resulted in the shape of rice being the micro integration of the extended theme.





© Pedro Figenau

Neri & Hu designed both the exterior and interior of Shanghai's The Waterhouse Boutique Hotel at South Bund; known primarily as interior designers at the time, "It was a client who was willing to take a risk," says Lyndon Neri



Lyndon Neri

## In his own words

*At the International Design Furniture Fair in Hong Kong late last year, Perspective sat down with Lyndon Neri, co-founder of renowned Shanghai-based practice Neri & Hu. Together with his partner Rosanna Hu, the firm designs architecture, interiors, products and more, all with considerable thought and precision*

TEXT:  
Sophie Cullen  
PHOTOGRAPHY:  
Courtesy of Neri & Hu

**Your firm refers to itself as a 'Design and Research Office'. Tell us a little bit about why you felt it was important to use the word 'Research' when naming the company...**

I think that designers and architects often get so caught up with designing, so fast and so intuitively, that it's almost borderline acceptable for us to not spend a lot of time thinking.

I need to have some time to think about what I'm drawing because... you could be extremely facile and be very good at what you do and what you draw, to a point where it could be quite beautiful, it could be seductive; it could be very convincing – even to clients – and things could get built and you would look back in history and would be like, "What did I do?!"

We have a responsibility in everything we design. When there is meaning in the things you do, naturally, your work becomes not just more interesting, but you can truly give something back to society. Research is important because it tells us certain things that help us rethink the whole process of design.



From top  
Neri & Hu re-interpreted Arne Jacobsen's iconic Series 7 chair on its 60th anniversary for Republic of Fritz Hansen, with a design representing the idea of duality, and the singular becoming the community

Inspired by the utilitarian approach of the movement for which it is named, Shaker is a dining chair that speaks to the beauty of simplicity

In 2013, for Wallpaper's *Handmade with Jaguar* exhibition, Neri & Hu created 'Wild Feast', which reconsidered the traditional British picnic basket by injecting a selection of Chinese elements

**So, then, that leads into the question of how would you define the concept of 'good design'?**

Well, that leads me to say when I look at a project, I don't necessarily say, "Oh. That's ugly." I am aware that aesthetics are very subjective. What was ugly 20 years ago is cool now.

So, as designers, who are we to say, "This is ugly!" or "This is unacceptable"? I ask, "What's your initial concept, what's your idea behind this – some people are more successful in executing their ideas, and I judge 'good design' on, first, whether or not the idea is appropriate to begin with – within the parameters they are working with – and, second, whether that concept was executed all the way.

**In that case, when was the last time you saw a building or a product that encompassed that concept? Does that happen often?**

Often. Yes, and I get really upset and I feel like quitting architecture. I think, 'I should be the one doing this!' I do – all the time I get really depressed! *(laughs)*

But I recently had the opportunity to visit a lot of Le Corbusier's buildings – and as much as people talk about it, and as much as architects we don't want to talk about it any more because it's so overused – yet when I went to the space I thought, 'I now understand why people really talk about this now.' It is really moving.

You know, people like Louis Kahn or Pritzker Prize-winner Peter Zumthor, who's in his 70s right now and lives in the Swiss Alps and just does really small projects, (their) concepts are so rigorous and so strong... You can't help but admire projects like that.

“ I judge 'good design' on, first, whether or not the idea is appropriate to begin with – within the parameters they are working with – and, second, whether that concept was executed all the way ”

Neri&Hu gave the Eames elephant the ability to rock in a charity project organised by designjunction last year, in which 21 designers added their own spin to the classic toy – proceeds from the auction went to Teddy's Wish





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known purely as interior designers, even though we are both trained as architects – that the world was looking at us and saying, “We’ll see if they can do architecture.”

And they allowed us to do the architecture, the interior, the furniture inside, and also the graphic component. That project allowed us to have a break through even within ourselves personally, within ourselves professionally, but also the society in China saw how this kind of multi-disciplinary project could move forward.

#### Do you still sketch then, just for the sake of it?

I do, I do. When we didn’t have projects, I used to go around the city in Shanghai... I have a habit of looking at buildings that don’t work and I will redesign them. And I redesign the floorplan, so I have sketchbooks full of drawings of how I think we could change these buildings.

Rosanna always says, “Lyndon, this is a waste of resources!” She says I should make them into a book.

#### You should!

Maybe we will... *(mutual laughter)* That really would be great.

#### Now, I want to know why, in your eyes, fairs like IDFFHK are so important for burgeoning design centres like Hong Kong?

Well, these platforms, be they in Hong Kong, Beijing or Shanghai, are important because obviously there is a commercial aspect to it but, hopefully, through that initial commercial intent there is an underlying educational platform here. Walking around here and seeing a chair and being able to sit on it is very different from just looking at it in a magazine. ●

Named 2015 Designer of the Year by Maison & Objet Asia, Lyndon Neri and Rossana Hu were lauded for celebrating the essence of Asian culture and their roots with an international approach in their work



© Andrew Cowart



© Dieryck Memere

The architectural concept behind Neri & Hu’s award-winning renovation of an old Japanese army HQ into The Waterhouse Boutique Hotel on South Bund rests on a clear contrast of what is old and new

#### Obviously, Neri & Hu does more than just architecture. Why is it important to blur the lines between the classifications of design?

I think it’s not important; it’s imperative. Otherwise, as city-states and as a society we will die. We are not meant to do things one-dimensionally – that’s not the human being.

You know, people often say there’s a stereotype that ladies tend to multitask more than men... That’s probably why you guys live longer, and you do things so much better in so many ways.

The problem is, we need to bring back the Renaissance, you know? If you asked Michelangelo, or if you asked Bernini or if you asked Borromini – they understand not just how to draw, they know how the structures work, they even know how the procession of church patrons would walk along the buildings. They know where

the stone they intend to build with is cut, so they become more sensitive, knowing they can’t use so much of it because it will deplete that particular mountain, it will cause erosion – it’s just not even a choice anymore, I believe it should be a mandate.

There are buildings everywhere, and cities just turn into concrete jungles. People just build for the sake of monumentalism. Architects with big egos just want to do this. People will often say to me, “So, Lyndon, is there an iconic building that you have done?” and I will say, “None!” and I pride myself in saying that because architecture should be silent. It’s about the spatial quality and the movement that it allows, not the object.

#### We know that your background was originally in art, and that you didn’t tell your father that you were an art major. Could you tell us about a project that allowed you to really harness your artistic side?

Wow! You are guys are one of the only ones who know about this! *(laughs)*

About six years ago we had the opportunity to be given a project on The Bund, a historic building, a warehouse. It was a client who was willing to take the risk, which was The Waterhouse, and that was the first time – we were