

Homes for China

Laurent Gutierrez and Valerie Portefaix

Massive residential tower blocks have infiltrated Hong Kong's territory like a forest, heedless of geography. A look at a map or from the mountain peaks reveals a violent contrast between the dense high-rise developments and the natural island/mountain setting. From this evident juxtaposition, there is no doubt that lack of land and a growing population has provided the perfect context with which to experiment with new forms of densities. In this sense, land use and verticality are not the only vectors that set up Hong Kong's urban condition. Optimization drives the entire system to expand activities and movements at every level of its infrastructure, voids, or building blocks. Compactness draws the flowing crowds of people through an intensive network of lifts, escalators, streets, and mass transportation that runs in all directions. Speculation and the hectic market prices have discouraged agriculture and industry, and forced a hyper-selective urban land use. Through the years, this sectional direction has produced the most fascinating and dynamic form of density that has now reached a new extreme in the latest 72-story private residential model in Tsim Sha Tsui East on the Kowloon peninsula.

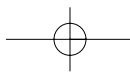
Part I

Nineteenth and twentieth century models elsewhere in the world offers a valid critical frame through which to observe Hong Kong's new living standards. The idea of building housing prototypes in which large groups of people have an improved daily life through density has taken different forms in social reformers', industrialists', and architects' dreams.

The Experience of Living

Living in Utopia

Throughout the nineteenth century, rapid industrialization in many ways participated in establishing a new form of society, changing modes of production, the structure of territories, and standards of housing developments. With the ambition to take care of its own, industry promoted a series of new urban prototypes ranging from the industrial city to factory towns and projected utopian communities. Liberating potential for a radical vision, these transformations generated the possibility of inventing a new and "better," industrial world. Utopian socialists such as Frenchmen Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and Henri Saint-Simon promoted an urban and social alterna-



tive through the development of a nonrepressive society in which conflicts would be resolved by the construction of a rational social order. Introduced in the Enlightenment, their intention combined a progressive idea of history and a commitment to universal liberation from an obsolete authority. In opposition to a liberal capitalistic system, Fourier's philosophy presented a system in which the underprivileged could experience a collective form of happiness. In his essay, *Le Nouveau Monde industriel et sociétaire* (trans: *New Industrial and Shareholder World*) published in 1829, he justified the establishment of ideal communities or *phalanstères* (1822), as structures of a new order.

Projected in a rural area, the phalanstery is described¹ as a miniature town, with interior streets sheltered from adverse weather conditions. In order to be self-sufficient, its economy was to be predominantly agricultural together with some light manufacturing. Fourier saw it as an association of 1,500 to 1,600 people of various ages, wealth, and occupations grouped on twelve million square meters of land:

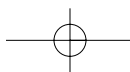
The country should comprise a nice water stream, be landscaped with hills and be suitable for varied cultivation, be built against a forest and little distant from the city, just enough to elude importune.²

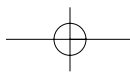
A balanced range of people plus an ideal location were regarded as the ideal ingredients to conceive a "*Palace of Harmony*." An essential element of the system, the phalanx, was a three-story residential linear block with interior street galleries and swimming pools on the roof. Scaled into twenty different prices, the apartments and cells were completed with a series of communal facilities, services, and activities taking place on the ground level, at corridor intersections, and on each floor. These included kitchens, dining rooms of various sizes, ballrooms, theatres, nurseries, and schools, within a structure collectively heated and protected from the rain or other inconveniences.

In 1825, another social reformer Robert Owen (1771–1858) produced plans for a series of ideal communities that he named "*Harmony*," which he failed in an attempt to export to the New World of the United States of America. Thirty years later, a follower of Fourier's theories, French industrialist J.P. Godin (1817–1888) finally made the phalanstery concept a reality with *Familistère*, a complex attached to his factory at Guise (France). Built in 1859 to accommodate the laboring masses, three residential blocks, a crèche, a kindergarten, a theatre, schools, public baths, and a laundry formed a cooperative family living environment in which the more radical aspects of Fourierism proved their feasibility.

1 Charles Fourier, "Traité de l'Association domestique agricole" (1822) in Marcel Roncaloyo and Thierry Paquot, eds., *Villes & Civilisation Urbaine* (Paris: Larousse, 1992), 66–88.

2 Ibid. 67. Translated by authors.





The Commune House

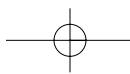
During the 1920s and 1930s, the idea of legitimating residential models for an egalitarian society progressed in a more specific form in Russia. As a part of these social changes, the political equality of women invited reformers to amend their domestic agendas, and allow their participation as part of the labor force. As Hilary French writes,

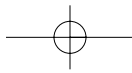
The seeds of the idea of the commune-house may have started when workers were resettled in the nationalized large houses and villas of the overthrown bourgeoisie, where several families would share one big kitchen and use the spacious entrance hall as the communal living room.³

In 1928, the first initiative came from the Union of Contemporary Architects—OSA—which built the Narkomfin Apartment Building, an experimental commune house in Moscow. The idea was to create a hybrid, producing something between a traditional apartment building containing entirely private flats and a new type of communal housing in which a larger social group would share some areas. Used as a laboratory for housing production, the Narkomfin Building incorporated various family units, ranging from the minimum “F-type” unit to the larger “K-type,” a two-story apartment duplex, with two bedrooms—one above the other—adjoining a double-height living space. These types could be used as one, two, or three room units, and the entire complex was made up of the multiplication and encasing of different units. This building contained a full range of social functions such as a kindergarten on the ground floor, kitchen, canteen, dining, and reading rooms, and a gymnasium on the roof level. All communal areas were permanently air-conditioned to encourage collective gathering rather than individual activities.

In England, the idea of building commune houses originated from a radically different type of social engagement. Here, the target was the cosmopolitan British intellectual, and the motivation was to import the hotel life-style into a permanent form of residence. In 1934, architect Wells Coates realized a commune house on Lawn Road, London, a four-story block with twenty-two one-room flats, external gallery access, staff accommodation for a manager, garage space for eight cars, and centralized services such as laundry and kitchen. All flats were supplied with central heating and hot water. Additional services such as bed-making, shoe-polishing, collection of rubbish, and the distribution of laundry completed the package, which included meals that could be ordered and delivered to the flat. Packed like the cabins of an ocean liner, each included built-in furniture and fittings, the ideal configuration for a bachelor with few possessions and no family. A new alternative to large traditional houses, the Lawn Road residential model had all the advantages, and became a standard similar to the Russian commune houses.

3 Hilary French, “Living Together” in *Impossible Worlds: The Architecture of Perfection* Setphen Coates and Alex Stetter, eds., (Basel: Birkhauser, 2000), 33.





Unité d' Habitation

The original housing types designed by OS, shared an apparent continuity in the *Unité de grandeur conforme* (trans: Unity of the Proper Size) prototype developed in 1945 by Le Corbusier. Starting from a standard section, the *Unité* has the addition of two individual apartments ingeniously stacked so that the double-height living room of one unit stood below or above the single-height bedrooms of another. Derived from the “F-type,” the two, interlocked apartment units formed a drawn-out section with an interior street in the middle of the structure. As William Curtis observed, some principles of the *Unité* found an echo in the utopian-socialist prototype:

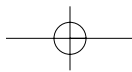
It was no coincidence that 1,600 was the number posited by Le Corbusier as the ideal population for the mini-society of the *Unité*, since the same figure had been suggested by Charles Fourier for his phalanstère over a century before.⁴

Curtis extended the comparison to include the interior street system and the image of the building as a collective, insulated city. Promoting the concept of a collective *machine à habiter* (trans: machine to live in) as a social condenser, Le Corbusier defended this high density as a solution which freed the ground for traffic and nature, to develop a variety of apartment sizes and to provide communal facilities such as a landscaped roof terrace.

The next point to consider is the correlation between a *Unité* and its region. Le Corbusier's original drawings presented a vast plan to redevelop southern Marseilles as a vast park planted with a series of *Unité*, but he only received approval for one single prototype. Built in 1947, the *Unité d' Habitation* at Marseilles explored some of the main themes promoted by the French Ministry of Reconstruction in the post-war years. Conditions of its construction were dependent upon factory produced units, and each apartment was slotted into the overall structural frame of the building—like wine bottles in a rack. With seventeen stories raised on colossal *pilotis*, it contained twenty-three different apartment types ranging from those for single individuals to a type for a family with four children. Half of the seventh and eighth floors contained a small restaurant, an eighteen-room hotel to accommodate the tenants' guests, a small shopping center, and a few offices (mainly architectural firms). On the seventeenth floor roof terrace, a nursery and kindergarten were set up as a natural open space for kids to play on. With a 300-meter running track, pool, gymnasium, performance stage, and solarium, the roof could be seen as an echo of the surrounding Provençal Mountains, and the Mediterranean sea and sun. Seen from a distance, it now stands as the singular manifestation of some heroic age, living its own life. Visiting the *Unité*, one can still observe the idealism of its origin:

It is interesting to visit the *Unité* between five and six in the evening in the autumn, when it is still hot enough to wear

⁴ William Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1982), 441.



shorts and thin cotton dresses. People flood in from work and school, leaving their cars under the trees; they dawdle by the banks of cypresses, or play tennis, or shop in the upper street. On the roof terrace, old men chat, catching the last of the afternoon sun while their grandchildren splash in the pool.⁵

Part II

Density, connectivity, intensity, speculation, and new living conditions are largely the results of the last fifty years of Hong Kong's public housing policy. With barely 3.5 million people, about half of the population, living in public residential blocks or estates, the government has resolutely directed the vertical rise of housing developments. The more modest of recent developments now typically include eight towers clustered together, each with between forty and fifty-two floors. With eight flats to a floor, and four people to a flat, one of these developments can house up to 12,000 people. And with a typical site area of between two and three hectares, that means a density of up to 6,000 people per hectare. This can be compared with the 250 people per hectare in Haussmann's Paris, and 500 in Singapore, and is twice as dense the most densely populated part of Hong Kong, Mong Kok. (Figure 1)

Life at Hyper-Density

Living in Harmony

The extensive public housing program originated a few years after the end of WWII, when the growing squatter problem found a tragic end in the disastrous fire of Christmas Eve 1953 that wiped out 50,000 homes in the Shek Kip Mei squatter camp overnight. Starting with "temporary safe housing of a minimum standard,"⁶ initial efforts were to provide collective, basic services around a

5 William Curtis, *Le Corbusier Ideas and Forms* (London: Phaidon, 1986), 174.

6 Public Housing Development, *Rising High in Harmony*, Hong Kong, HKHA, 1993, 16.

Figure 1

Bloc 2: Private high rise housing development in Cahi Wan, Hong Kong island. "Lack of land and a growing population have provided the perfect context with which to experiment with the forms of density. Today the highest residential development counts 72-stories."

© 2003 Gutierrez + Portefaix



Figure 2

Homes plan—Harmony 8/8 Flats “With 8 flats to a floor and 4 people to a flat, these developments are home to 12,000 people.

© Gutierrez + Portefaix

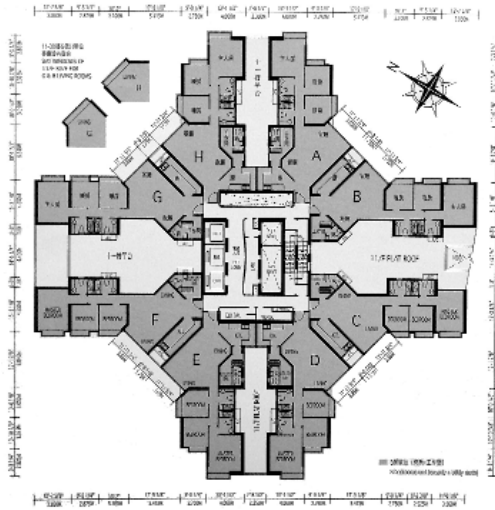


Figure 3

Homes scenario—Celebration 1. “To alleviate the stress of a dense urban living environment, each enclave is equipped with a full range of services. These facilities replicate the style and organization of a palatial hotel to offer what promoters call ‘VIP therapy.’”

© Grand Del Sol, Sun Hung Kai Properties Lt.



modest private living space. Yet even in the first permanent blocks, tenants still had to share water and only had access to toilets or cooking facilities on the communal balconies. Shops on the ground floor and a kindergarten on the roof usually completed the elementary planning. From these original “Mark 1” factory-shed schemes to the latest cruciform towers known in Hong Kong as “Harmony” blocks, the thorough and well worked out organization of collective amenities always has served to counterbalance the obvious lack of individual space and privacy. To implement such large-scale plans, the public sector immediately developed prefabricated, factory-made components for cost-effective construction. This created a series of standardized models that rapidly spread throughout the territory. (Figure 2)

Recently, the private sector has adopted similar typologies, but with a range of programs that go far beyond the original basic prototype. Derived from a highly competitive context, their planning directly reflects the fickle demands of the real estate market. Cleverly packaged with a marketing concept, Hong Kong’s private housing producers have demonstrated their singularity and superiority by inventing a new utopia for living. (Figure 3)

Figure 4
Homes scenario—Celebration 2.
© Royal Peninsula, Sun Hung Kai Properties
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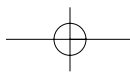


Figure 5
Bloc 1 Private high rise housing development
in Chai Wan, Hong Kong island.
© 2003 Gutierrez + Portefaix.

Living in a Villa

In the arena of private housing speculation, architecture is no longer the art of designing buildings, but rather a means of expressing an exclusive concept or a collective fantasy. Advertising brochures and showrooms certainly gather more attention than the products they sell. Aggressive promotional campaigns start simultaneously with the development's foundations, meaning flats are sold long before their physical completion. Architects often are engaged to design a "show-flat," although they are not involved in the main building. Perfected with "classic" or "modern" furniture, the latest TV plasma screen, reproductions of masterpieces, and a large number of mirrors, the show flats absorb and reflect a collective dream. In the same way its fake windows support the image of a colorful landscape, an improbable view considering the density in and around the residential complex. But this is hardly the point. Like the original, it presents a specialized residential niche and tightly packages the local environment and lifestyle. (Figure 4)

Each residential development forms a group of towers mounted on a podium in which a highly diverse range of communal activities takes place, from shopping to restaurants and sports clubs. These complexes are developed along a unique structure which is repetitive, complete, closed, hermetic, autonomous, and perfectly coded. Each development presents a range of choices that varies from one to three bedrooms, with the top floors reserved for duplex units. Each residential dwelling unit, or cell, on offer is more or less the same, but pretends to be different. These sixty story giants with 12,000 residents are presented in marketing campaigns as if they were colossal "homes" which somehow have managed to preserve the refined atmosphere of a private villa, therefore stretching the private format of the apartment to absorb the public. (Figure 5)



Living in a Theme

To a certain degree, the podium has become the major selling point. Unfolded as an experimental field, it is the place where the theme applied to the whole development is disclosed. As in theme parks, the basic structure is camouflaged behind a thick crust of screens, walls, lights, mirrors, water, and sounds—decorative elements that refer to both fashionable style and to images of luxury. Strategically, the theme is an opportunity for the global economy and the local market to confront each other, forming Hong Kong's most successful recipe: "global style—local trade."⁷ Developers lure buyers with images of a Hawaiian resort, utopian garden, medieval castle, antique Greece, Spanish atmosphere, renaissance and baroque sculptures.⁸ The marketing vocabulary flatters the potential client further. In its brochure, the Castello promotes "a Royal sentiment, an Imperial attention, an Aristocratic enjoyment, the Envy of Royalty, a Noble style, a Royal residence providing luxurious living fit for a King."⁹ This is to remind and reinforce the potential resident's class and status, with all the prevalent clichés.

To some extent, this superficial interpretation of a theme and the reservoir where styles are endlessly combined together has formed a new aesthetic in response to a new delocalized condition. The theme becomes a true world, meaning the one in which you have chosen to live. Today, when Venice and Paris are in Las Vegas, it is no surprise to find Hawaii and Athens in Hong Kong. The former are casinos, yet much more: the latter are super-dormitories—but not only that. Both support the architecture of events, and their special effects are more important than their functional imperatives. They offer an appropriation without risk in which the décor matches what is found in publicity campaigns, brochures and showrooms. In that sense, the dislocation of time and space is not perceived as false, but as the clone of a perfect world. Seeking immediate recognition, their design consists of (re)produced atmospheres to be instantly appropriated by the public:

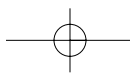
Bringing a Caribbean holiday home is not too much to ask for. At Caribbean Coast, you can have this dream come true. Caribbean Coast houses the most comprehensive and best equipped residential clubhouse in Hong Kong. Renowned Architect and Landscape Architect—Hsin Yieh and Belt Collins—have turned Caribbean Coast into a magnificent Central American resort with an extensive selection of water sports facilities. Vivid colours and decorative details are everywhere to enhance the mood of the West Atlantic and the British West Indies.¹⁰

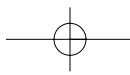
7 © Castello. Sun Hung Kai Properties.

8 They appropriate stereotypes of travel posters, art movements and time periods.

9 "The dominant forces of globalization are weakened by powerful Chinese commercial operations that control the world's biggest factory. Like anywhere else, Hong Kong gently absorbs Italian, Parisian, and Japanese fashions. However, ten times that volume is simultaneously produced and sold on the streets as cheap copies." Gutierrez and Portefaix, "Global Style, Local Trade" in *Mapping HK* (Hong Kong: map book, 2000), 5–21.

10 © Caribbean Coast, Cheung Kong (Holdings) Limited.





Island Culture

Bridges

Private residential developments usually are built on prized sites. Special value is allotted to isolated yet well connected locations. In the advertising brochure, the ideal situation is reinforced by the propagandist image of a solitary block raised in the middle of a rural jungle. Regardless of location, each development competes for both the best natural scenery and the fastest connection:

Situated on the coast of Castle Peak Road, the views from the property can be described as heavenly, and not to be found anywhere else. Mountains and oceans gently wrap themselves around the entire property. Gaze towards the north and see the beautiful Tam Lam Chung Reservoir and Tai Lam Country Park. And if you enjoy plane or car spotting, the airport and the North Lantau Express way is right in front of your eyes.¹¹

Bridges or pedestrian elevated networks, allow almost all of these enclosed developments to be directly plugged into major transportation hubs and commercial centers. With sophisticated calculation, developers strive to demonstrate the proximity to the centralized infrastructure and prestigious educational institutions. Ultimately, the apartment price will largely depend on these physical links. Public transportation or private shuttle facilities will invariably take less than half an hour—23 minutes seems the magic length of time to reach any important center in the territory. *Villa Esplanada* advertised itself as being:

Close to the Tsing Yi Airport Railway station—At Lai King Airport Railway Station you can change to the MTR—Connects with Lantau Island—Takes you straight into Kowloon—Connects with Hong Kong Island ...¹²

Dislocation

Becoming part of the “new transportation hub,” these new centers and/or gateways propose new territorial strategies fully supported by the government. The multiplication of centers along natural (mountain or seashore) or artificial (transportation infrastructure) lines constitutes an effective strategy with which to colonize remaining parts of the natural countryside. On TV, a commercial shows a running train that has the capacity to change rice fields into a collection of concrete jungles. The mass railway transportation system and terminals are the essential elements in reproducing this model to the furthest limits of the territory. This expressive vision confirms the actual strength of a few private corporations. As railway lines move forward, new centers emerge:

Tsing Yi is the prime spot for new developments. With the town’s infrastructure, key NAPCO project and community

11 © Grand Pacific Views. Sun Hung Kai Properties.

12 © Villa Esplanada, Sun Hung Kai Properties.

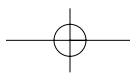


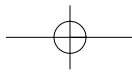
Figure 6
 Tsing Yi station transportation map. "23 minutes is the magic interval between home and work, airport."
 © Villa Esplanada, Sun Hung Kai Properties, Ltd.



facilities in their final stages, a new metropolis is about to be born. Because of Tsing Yi's unique location, it has been cited by the Government as the centre of Metroplan, one of the largest projects to be staged in the history of Hong Kong. Metroplan, a multi-billion dollar venture involving both the public and private sectors, is aimed at boosting Hong Kong's economy to unprecedented levels. Creating the perfect environment for all.¹³ (Figure 6 Tsing Yi Station transportation map)

Competition to create a center, and then to become a new locus, informs developers' strategies. Two major transformations recently have given Hong Kong new directions for territorial development. The first was the construction of the new airport at Chek Lap Kok, on an artificial island, linked with Lantau Island and the New Territories by a series of gigantic bridges, a special MTR (Mass Transit Railway) express line which connects the airport to Central in twenty-three minutes, and a series of new stations/centers in between. The second will be the West KCR (Kowloon Canton Railway) line, which will connect the western part of the New Territories to Kowloon and the eastern line. These two extensions have engaged a series of natural islands and villages to become part of the development battle. The connections oblige them to support heavy developments, meaning either their complete disappearance or dislocation into another theme park.

13 © Villa Esplanada, Sun Hung Kai Properties.



Fortress Island

The height of the perimeter walls and the successive security gates, inspired by the medieval fortress model, increase the feeling of being isolated and well protected. As an extension of the wall, private, closed circuit surveillance is monitored from a central control room and can be viewed on residents' TV sets. Inside the electronic-gated system, each residential block lives as a bloated private enclave where the program of pleasures is engaged in a hostile relationship with the outside world. As Jeremy Rifkin suggests in *The Age of Access*,¹⁴ the concept of property moves towards the notion of access to create new boundaries for clearly defined communities. New scenarios of living are about inclusion and exclusion since control, restrictions, and rules reinforce segregation. From the traditional notion of the production of a community through civic engagement, we now become agents in commercial transactions in order to become members of a selected community. This means sharing the same living conditions, prepackaged into a superior lifestyle:

Residents at Grand del Sol enjoy a superior lifestyle, with the help of state-of-art innovations such as the Grand del Sol contactless smart card, which allows you to pass freely through the main entrance, clubhouse and car park, and the Perimeter Defense System, which enhances your security.

Additional benefits at Grand del Sol include special garbage treatment facilities and an LED display board for the most up-to-date traffic and weather information.¹⁵

The VIP Society

24-Hour Service

To alleviate the stress of a dense urban living environment, each enclave is equipped with a full range of services for its hyper-refined residents. These facilities replicate the style and organization of a palatial hotel in order to offer them what the promoters call *VIP therapy*. These 24-hour services generally include baby-sitting, maid, laundry, emergency home repair, newspaper and magazine delivery, clubhouse, limousine, car park, maintenance and car wash, and a shuttle bus service. Some of the latest developments even go a step further with their complete exclusion and autonomy from the immediate urban area, employing a team of doctors and tutors to look after residents. With a special hotline, they can centralize each service to their apartment:

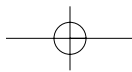
Royal Peninsula revolutionises luxurious residential living enjoyment, with the avant-garde "Concierge-Plus Home Services" surpassing 5-star hotels. Through the unique **Royal Touch®** hotline, residents can access over 30 services with the touch of a button.¹⁶

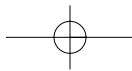
For Rifkin, the tendency to multiply services appeared with the passage from conventional ownership to leasing. The formula—

14 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access* (London: Penguin, 2000).

15 © Grand del Sol, Sun Hung Kai Properties.

16 © Royal Peninsula, Sun Hung Kai Properties.





“Everything is a service”¹⁷—has encouraged developers to augment their profit from selling a flat with the trade of innumerable services. Management and membership fees, usually up to ten percent of the monthly rental value (rental value: HK\$50,000, and fees of HK\$5,000 with a year-equivalent deposit), establish a long-term relationship with developers. Even buyers to some extent exchange their positions as owners to become eternal customers.

E-Living

Developed for command and control, the e-network is another key feature added to enhance the home package:

Laguna Verde makes effective use of modern technology to make your life completely hassle-free. With our e-living service, residents have ready access to a wealth of knowledge, news and entertainment fed directly to their home through fibre optics. Our Smart card system allows easy access to the entrance lobby and car park and can also be used to pay your management fees. Clubhouse facilities and Lifestyle Plus services are also available through the online reservation system.¹⁸

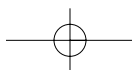
The overall idea of e-living is its unlimited capacity to give access, and provide and record data, all for the exclusive use of residents. The feeling of being connected certainly intensifies the belief in being one of the fortunate few, thus creating another social group. In addition to a totally controlled environment, another apex is formed by the use of mobile phones as remote control devices to organize and manage every single aspect of daily life. “You’ll never truly be away from home,” the motto of Villa Esplanada, does not mean that inhabitants work at home. It is not about a possible blurring between office and home, but about the capacity to be in constant interaction with your home—to control lighting, temperature, and music before you open the door. This electronic network also gives access to additional services such as e-shopping, e-banking and e-entertainment.

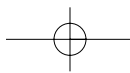
The Clubhouse

The relationship between recreation and living places the clubhouse at a key position, as an articulation between the podium and the apartment. Open only to members, it emphasizes the notion of a luxury hotel as a model for mass housing, with recreational programs and sports—meaning physical culture and relaxation. Detached from the street level, the podium’s roof is designed as an outdoor theme park, where a variety of recreational activities are organized, focused around its dominant feature, the swimming pool with its perfectly controlled atmosphere. Indoor activities are connected from the landscape garden to specific additional components or to the podium’s inner bowels. Simulation and virtuality often are

17 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access*, 73.

18 © Laguna Verde. Cheung Kong Property Development Limited.





used to compensate for an evident lack of space for wider activities such as skiing or golf. Through technology, it now is possible to reproduce all situations, from the most natural to the most artificial. The Belcher's advertising brochure gently unfolds this peaceful dream:

When your busy days draw to an end, you may revel in the delights of the all-weather deluxe clubhouse and landscaped gardens. Occupying a total area of 190,000 sq. ft. The Belcher's Club house offers all the amenities you would ever dream of. Sit on the deck and work on your tan. Take a dip in the 25m indoor swimming pool and wash away your life worries. Soothe yourself in the bubble-lounge spa or Jacuzzi. Let daily pressure evaporate in the sauna. Life could not be more relaxing. If you're looking for something more invigorating, give your body a boost in the gym, unique covered tennis court, putting green or the indoor multi-purpose hall.¹⁹

Platform for the clubhouse, interior gardens, swimming pools, and parking garages, the podium can accommodate any form of program. Its simple structure allows maximum flexibility in generating and intensifying the fantastic juxtapositions of its activities. An opaque cubic base, the podium inner-space unfolds a fictional adventure for its select players. Similar to theme parks, it belongs to an emerging tradition of architectural dream-worlds.

Swimming Pool

The swimming pool is the key feature of the development. As an essential element to the dream house concept, it commands a significant place in real-estate brochures. Negating existing water conditions in Hong Kong, Caribbean Coast recently has pushed the water theme to its limits. Its first clubhouse contains, among other activities:

A landscaped deck with 120-metre artificial beach, an outdoor swimming-pool, two children's pools, a Jacuzzi, a 25 metre indoor swimming-pool, 5 Japanese Spas, 2 Health centres, several Japanese timber steam cabinets, a foot massage area, sand baths, a therapeutic health system.²⁰

As a major location for social activities, the swimming pool refers to the resort and to the impression of being on holiday 365 days a year. It receives particular attention in terms of design—its shape, the choice of decorative motives, the color of its tiles, and the surrounding landscape are ingeniously selected. In Caribbean Coast, an art deco architectural style in New York or a Roman classical swimming pool, are among the promises on offer to the occupants.

19 © The Belchers. Sun Hung Kai Properties.

20 © Caribbean Coast. Cheung Kong Property Development Limited.

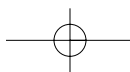




Figure 7a and 7b
Large and small apartments floor plans. "The private apartment appears as the last refuge from massive development."
© Gutierrez + Portefaix

1/8 Harmony

The Apartment

The private apartment appears as the last refuge from massive development. It no longer matters if the dwelling space is minimal, since each inhabitant is free to use the entire complex as an extension of his/her own space. As a result of the maximum optimization of the tower plan, the 1/8 harmony cell is the minimum unit capable of being systematized in any scheme, like eight individual houses tacked onto a central core on each floor. The logic of the plan is very simple. A typical apartment layout comprises a living/dining room, kitchen, one or two bathrooms, two or three bedrooms—all accommodated within approximately 550–800 square feet. (Figure 7) Efficiency rates of floor areas are maximized by the reduction of circulation and living spaces. The Royal Ascot advertisement brochure clearly describes the harmonious coherence from outside to inside:

Spaciousness is a distinguishing aspect of Royal Ascot. Expansive views are complemented by gracious, uncluttered interiors. Quality fittings and finishes create an atmosphere of tranquillity and refinement. Unique architectural highlights accentuate the airy spaciousness of a more than 300 sq. ft. living/dining area and a master bedroom of more than 200 sq. ft. With an efficient usable floor plan of up to 87%, here is an environment to be savoured and filled with happy moments of harmony and delight.²¹

This ratio assumes that the gap between public and private residential development has widened since the former is still based on 70 sq. ft. per person. With an average of 150 sq. ft. per person, the private sector offers quite generous apartments by Hong Kong standards, but still inferior to the 200 to 250 sq. ft. per person in China. The use of the façade as an effective limit to support an alveolar thickness is seen as another space expanding strategy.

21 © Royal Ascot. KCRC and Sun Hung Kai Properties

Figure

Belcher homes "The height of the perimeter walls and the successive security gates inspired by the medieval fortress model, increase the feeling of being isolated and well protected."

© The Belchers, Sun Hung Kai Properties, Ltd.



A Showpiece

The living/dining area is regarded as a showpiece. In addition to expensive materials, imported brand-name products are used for fixtures and settings, becoming the final touch of a luxurious modern life style. The Belcher's advertises the meticulousness of its architects and designers:

Stepping inside your apartment you will experience an unparalleled combination of splendour and elegance. Each apartment is fitted with 18K gold plated tiles and the Belcher's is reserved for the most discerning few.²² (Figure 8)

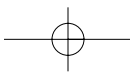
Theatrically coded elements of décor complete the show. A decorative golden grid with lion head, sculpted door locks, a maximum of mirrors, crystal luster, aquarium, and plasma screen, all are introduced to make the living room more substantial. Conventional wisdom has disappeared in order to promote the image of a stereotyped Western culture, both delocalized and atemporal. Usually assuming the function of entrance and centralizing the distribution of the entire flat, the living/dining room is the interface between public (image provided for the collective) and private (family members).

The Bedroom

The master bedroom—a private capsule that articulates multiple services, hi-tech comfort, and sensorial gratification—is the ultimate private space in the complex. With the bed representing the most irreducible place, the concept of a cocoon becomes real: "Far removed from a work-weary world the peacefulness of your new home brings harmony to your life."²³

22 © The Belchers. Sun Hung Kai Properties.

23 © Villa Athena. Sun Hung Kai Properties



Conclusion for the New Strategic Living

These new design concepts for residential tower blocks have rendered the conventional role of the architect redundant. Perpetuating the illusion of “home” is big business for real estate developers. They have stretched the private boundaries of the house to absorb the public in a collective realm. The private sector cleverly manipulates the social pattern of Hong Kong, making the one-child family a model for sophisticated living. The fashionable vertical living environment, with its cloned family stereotype, functions as a mechanism of consumer society, offering a standard product with remarkable packaging to justify its exorbitant price. Insufficient land and mass production are not simply real estate issues. Homogeneity and collectivity, versus diversity and individuality, these oppositions exemplify China’s political strategy—how to combine communist and capitalist systems. Chic ghettos for very rich families—where the only criteria is money—are spreading through the urban landscape, enabling a new set of speculative battles.

