



BUILDINGS TO SHED ALL SCAFFOLDING NETS

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A CITY'S SPLENDOR

Global architects dazzled by Hong Kong, urge rethink on density and safety

EXCLUSIVE

Bonnie Chen

World-renowned architects expressed admiration for Hong Kong's striking blend of nature and urbanism but voiced concerns about its dense living environment and safety risks. They shared their thoughts with *The Standard* during the three-day Business of Design Week summit, which kicked off yesterday.

Among the speakers were Italian design master Michele De Lucchi and Chinese visionary Ma Yansong, joined by around 50 global creative leaders including Carlo Ratti, Ron Arad, Tim Marlow, and designers from Ferragamo and EssilorLuxottica.

Running alongside BODW is the DesignInspire exhibition organized by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, featuring 260 local and international design brands, talks, workshops, and pavilions from French design authority Maison&Objet in addition to the Business of IP Asia Forum.

Michele De Lucchi: jungle behind the skyscrapers

In an exclusive interview, Michele De Lucchi described Hong Kong as a city of

contrasts – a “combination of the wilderness and jungle.” Now visiting for the third time since 2007, he expressed fascination with the city's dense urban fabric and natural backdrop.

“I love the jungle because it is behind the skyscrapers,” De Lucchi said. “And this kind of density between nature and humans is astonishing.” While he noted the rise of glass and metal towers, he expressed a desire to see “more small tiny buildings,” suggesting a preference for more human-scale architecture.

However, the conversation turned somber when discussing urban safety. De Lucchi recounted a traumatic experience surviving a forest fire in southern Italy, where he had to jump into the sea to escape the flames. “It was horrible,” he said. “When you don't have any escape, you feel trapped. When you feel trapped, it is horrible.”

Reflecting on the recent Tai Po fire, he acknowledged the emotional toll such disasters take on survivors. “I don't have any suggestion [for the building environment],” he admitted, emphasizing that sometimes, shared human experience speaks louder than technical fixes.

Ma Yansong: ‘Too dense’

Also reflecting on Hong Kong's urban challenges was Ma Yansong, founder

of MAD Architects, who called the city “very interesting” but difficult for innovative design. Despite past efforts – including several competition entries and a major hotel proposal for the Kai Tak site – none materialized. “It's a bit of a shame ... Opportunities in Hong Kong are inherently few,” Ma said.

He pointed to the city's extreme density as a core issue. “People live too densely. Very tall buildings are right next to each other. This is really ... too dense,” Ma said. He praised the surrounding mountains and sea for their beauty but lamented the lack of space for creative architecture. He briefly contrasted Hong Kong with Shenzhen, which created new space through land reclamation. However, he conceded Hong Kong might have “no great solution.”

Citing New York City as a model, Ma suggested zoning reforms that require buildings to “set back” at certain heights to allow sunlight and ventilation. “The key is to have regulations formulated starting from ‘living quality,’ not just because land is scarce,” he said. Such planning, he argued, could improve both safety and livability.

He also noted that innovation in residential design is difficult everywhere, often constrained by economic factors. Still, he offered a hopeful vision: “With today's advanced AI and technology, should people live in spaces they don't like? The future should still consider human needs.”



Italy is this year BODW partner country, whose flag colors are the theme of pavilion BOTTEGA HONG KONG designed by acclaimed designer Alan Chan Yau-kin at DesignInspire.

language,” aiming for intuitive navigation and a deep understanding of fan culture.

The stadium's facade, which changes with the light throughout the day, was described as “a very elegant kind of form.”

Wightman added: “We spent a lot of time sculpting that form, but it is very simple.”

Kai Tak Stadium: simplicity and culture

Also presenting at BODW was Brett Wightman, senior architect at global firm Populous and designer of the new Kai Tak Stadium. He described the design as using “simple, strong elements that go beyond

Rosanna Law calls for ‘bravery’ after fire tragedy at BODW summit



“Curiosity Ignites Design Innovation” is this year's theme.

Hong Kong remains in deep sorrow but will “bravely confront” the aftermath of the Wang Fuk Court fire in Tai Po, said Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism Rosanna Law Shuk-pui.

Law spoke at the opening ceremony of the 2025 Business of Design Week, a three-day flagship event focused on design and innovation organized by the Hong Kong Design Centre.

She was joined by Ambassador of Italy to China Massimo Ambrosetti, Consul General Carmelo Ficarra, Hong Kong Design Centre Chairman Joseph Lo Kin-ching, and Trade

Development Council Executive Director Sophia Chong Suk-fan.

Law said BODW, debuting in 2002 has grown into a globally acclaimed platform that fosters international exchange and business collaboration. She added this year's edition centred around the theme “Curiosity Ignites Design Innovation” – reflecting how curiosity fuels creativity across arts, architecture, and manufacturing.

The event began with a minute's silence, as attendees gathered in dark-colored clothing to honor the victims.

Banners and screens were also displayed in black and white. In her opening address, Law reflected on the profound impact of the tragic fire, expressing that she had “come here with a heavy heart.”

However, she was “comforted” to see that the city is not facing its challenges alone, highlighting the shared support within the community as a source of strength. Before closing her remarks, she expressed heartfelt gratitude to everyone for their friendship and care shown to Hong Kong. JUDY CUI

Editorial



Various designs are showcased at Tiny Studio created by artist Chilai Howard at DesignInspire, organized by the HKTDC.

Hong Kong's design edge: turning density into destiny

In an era where global cities are defined not just by commerce but by creativity, Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment. The city must actively strive to solidify its role as an international design hub. This mission transcends aesthetics – it is a practical pathway to solving Hong Kong's own urgent challenges, particularly its intensely dense living environment, while creating a valuable export service for markets across the border.

Design as a solution for density

Hong Kong's compact urban fabric is its greatest design challenge and opportunity. The mantra "form follows function" has never been more critical. The city cannot simply build taller; it must design smarter. Innovative spatial design, smart home integration, and human-centric architecture are essential to improve livability,

safety, and well-being within limited square footage. Some local talented architects have long demonstrated this ethos, earning international acclaim. Their work proves that Hong Kong's design industry is poised to turn spatial constraints into world-class innovations in high-density living – a knowledge set with global demand.

The Northern Metropolis: a canvas for human-centric design

The development of the Northern Metropolis presents a rare and transformative opportunity. Moving beyond pure maximization of density, this vast project demands visionary design that prioritizes human needs, ergonomics, and community. It is a chance to build a model sustainable and livable district from the ground up, integrating green spaces, efficient transport,



and holistic planning. Success here would be Hong Kong's most powerful design statement, showcasing an ability to create large-scale, future-ready communities.

Exporting "Made in Hong Kong" design to the region

Hong Kong's strategic advantage lies in its proximity to and understanding of the mainland market. With ample land and significant capital, especially among tech giants in the Greater Bay Area building iconic headquarters, there is a growing demand for sophisticated, world-class design services. Hong Kong designers offer a unique blend of international perspective, professional rigor, and cultural fluency. The confidence in the "Made in Hong Kong" brand

– synonymous with quality, innovation, and reliability – is a formidable asset. By exporting architectural, interior, and urban design services, Hong Kong can transform its creative sector into a major economic driver.

Ultimately, becoming a recognized global design hub is not about competing with the historical legacy of Italy or France. It is about leveraging Hong Kong's unique identity as a hyper-efficient, cosmopolitan city where design is a vital tool for problem-solving. By focusing on its strengths in high-density innovation and seizing the opportunities in the Northern Metropolis and the regional market, Hong Kong can design its own prosperous and sustainable future.

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Rex Lai, left, and Brave Chan. SING TAO



Chan Pui-leung, left, and Simon Lam. SING TAO



Maurice Kong, left, and Jonathan Leung. SING TAO

Marco Lam and Cheng Wong

Legislative Council election forums resumed yesterday following a suspension caused by the Wang Fuk Court fire.

All four forums were modified in light of the tragedy. Participants also observed a one-minute silence before each session to honor the victims.

The first session featured candidates from the functional constituency representing deputies to the National People's Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and other related parties.

Rex Lai Tat-shing, who declared no political affiliation,

LEGO CANDIDATES PLEDGE BEFORE SUNDAY ELECTION

highlighted the strong presence of young people assisting in Tai Po and urged continued support for youth, saying they could bring change and hope to Hong Kong. He also advocated for technology in strengthening disaster response.

Incumbent Brave Chan Yung pledged to work with the government to prevent similar tragedies.

He also expressed support for the government's plan to establish an independent committee to review the incident.

The noon session featured candidates from the insurance functional constituency.

Chan Pui-leung of China Taiping Insurance (HK) highlighted the industry's role as an "economic shock absorber" and "social

stabilizer" during major accidents and vowed to boost transparency in medical fees.

Simon Lam Yat-tung of China Pacific Life Insurance (HK) outlined plans to position Hong Kong as a global reinsurance hub, tackle medical costs, and promote cross-border healthcare.

In the third session, catering sector candidates Maurice

Kong Chi-hang, chairman of the Institute of Dining Professionals Association, and Jonathan Leung Chun of the Liberal Party, and a district councillor discussed how the industry can contribute to disaster relief.

Kong pledged to promote the "Flavors of Hong Kong" concept internationally, while Leung stressed the need to embrace

technology, drive digital transformation to enhance competitiveness.

The last session was joined by education sector candidates Ray Cheung Chak-chung and Lawrence Tang Fei.

Cheung vowed to safeguard teachers' rights, establish work guidelines, and secure fair educational opportunities for children.

Tang said he would establish a task force within Legislative Council committees to address issues, including the well-being of teachers and students.

From Saturday, 51 sports centers will close to support Sunday's election.

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