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## SOUTHEAST ASIA

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—  
VIETNAMESE  
VERNACULAR  
YOUNG ARCHITECTS  
GET INSPIRED



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### CHUA YHEU-SHEN

To have the chaps from Foster + Partners knock on your door, after barely two years on an Architectural Association scholarship, you'd have to be some sort of design prodigy. Chua Yheu-Shen is one of the youngest architects ever to charter with the Royal Institute of British Architects. Having served at Foster + Partners upon graduation, he went on to join Kohn Pederson Fox, where he worked on high-rise projects and, as project architect, delivered one of London's tallest and newest landmarks, the South Bank Tower – all this before the ripe old age of 30.

Now on his own, his designs are reflective of inquisitive and contrarian thinking; gestures are simultaneously unorthodox yet succinct, interspersed with fenestrated details found in his earliest student designs to the joint-won MBAM design contest (in collaboration with CY Chan Architect), which features a massive gravity-defying frame supporting a host of spaces above. With a penchant for the mega-scaled, you'll find in his portfolio art platforms, cultural hubs and mass housing, among others.



Dramatic intersecting planes of structure frame the fenestrated space modules of Chua's winning MBAM headquarters entry.



## V I E T N A M

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LE HUNG TRONG  
Le House

HUYNH ANH TUAN  
KHUON Studio

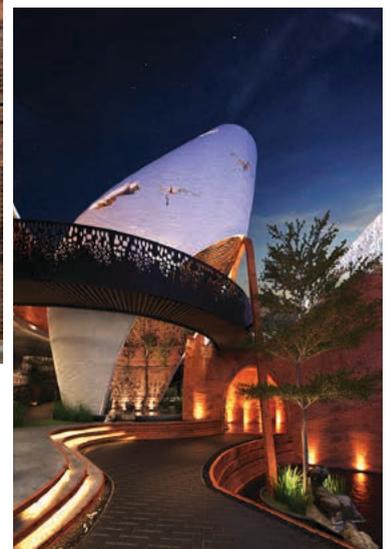
MY AN PHAM THI  
MM++ Architects



### LE HUNG TRONG

Founded in 2015 by architect Le Hung Trong, Ho Chi Minh City-based studio Le House has completed a handful of outstanding modern F&B projects that incorporate traditional Vietnamese design elements such as rustic brick walls, courtyards, and plenty of greenery. These include An Garden – a three-level café in Hanoi inspired by hanging gardens, and No. 1986 Café – a striking cafe in Haiphong City with a bold, glass and perforated brick façade. With residences such as Ha House in Hanoi's Old Street, Le applies the philosophy of "wabi-sabi" to harmonise modern architecture with the historic cityscape.

"To be creative, designers should not be bound by definitions. When I design a living room for instance, I try to forget or dismiss living room 'rules' that say where the furniture items should go. This allows me to create new and interesting layouts," says Le who is currently working on a vegetarian restaurant in Quang Tri City, that's inspired by Champa architecture.



No. 1986  
Café in  
Haiphong  
City (left);  
a new  
vegetarian  
restaurant  
in Quang Tri  
City (right)

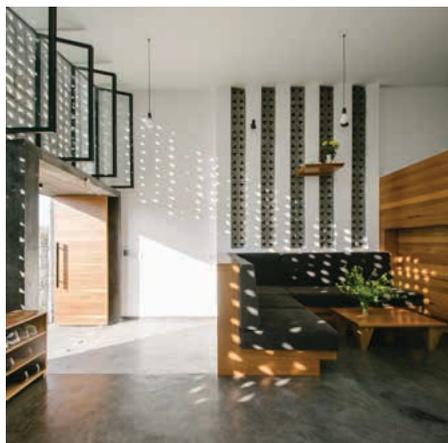


**HUYNH ANH TUAN**

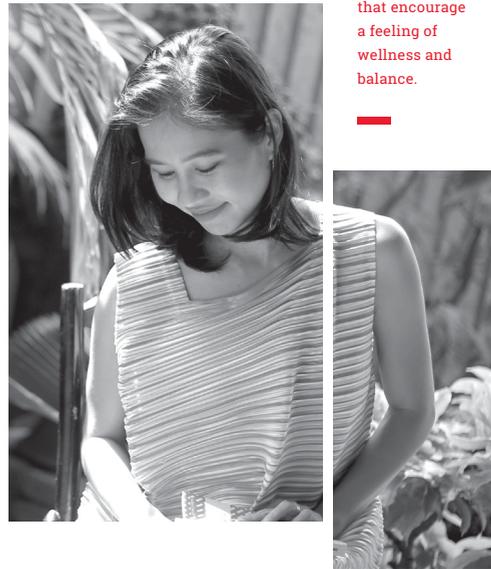
Established in 2015 by architect Huynh Anh Tuan, Ho Chi Minh City-based practice KHUON Studio's intriguing projects include 2.5 House, a modest 2.5-by-6.5-square-metre residence that satisfied all its owner's living requirements. Its success won KHUON Studio many more clients who were looking to maximise their small plots.

"We completed other similar projects in Ho Chi Minh City – such as 18 House in an alley in Ho Chi Minh – with a consistent focus on the optimisation of functional space in Vietnam's characteristically cramped urban sites," says Huynh who is currently working on several small residences in Ho Chi Minh.

Fascinated by the contemporary works of architects from the 1960s such as Ngo Viet Thu, Huynh explains that one particular feature of Saigon buildings from that period was elaborate breeze bricks. These have become a signature element in KHUON Studio projects, such as Kon Tum House with a façade constructed with more than 2,000 blocks.



Kon Tum House in Vietnam's Central Highlands.



My An Pham Thi prefers to create spaces that encourage a feeling of wellness and balance.

**MY AN PHAM THI**

In 2009, Hanoi architect My An Pham Thi teamed up with French architect Michael Charruault and founded MM++ Architects. Based in Ho Chi Minh City, their works are influenced by context, spatial experience, and Vietnam's tropical climate.

"Each of our projects has a 'story' made of these elements that we manipulate. The truth is, we would love to live ourselves in every house we have designed," says My An, who is responsible for the initial drawings and visuals.

"We try to avoid being overly demonstrative, and prefer to create spaces that have longevity, and that will encourage a feeling of wellness and balance for our clients," says Charruault.

Their works, which include houses with vertical green walls and grass roofs, are often a celebration of modern, tropical living. "When we work on renovation projects, we like to see how far we can go with changes and alterations to improve a home," says Charruault.



# HOME IS WHERE THE PAST IS

With contributions from different regions and ethnic groups, the highly practical, traditional vernacular architecture of Vietnam has shaped some of the country's most attention-grabbing residential projects.

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A HOTCHPOTCH OF ARCHITECTURE STYLES – INCLUDING CHINESE AND COLONIAL – EXISTS IN VIETNAM, BUT IT IS THE VERNACULAR STYLE THAT IS INFLUENCING SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST PROMISING, YOUNG ARCHITECTS.

Traditional Vietnamese homes are usually single-storied, and composed of huge timber frames, with heavy, steep, flat-tiled roofs that offer protection from sun and typhoons.

Interiors often consist of parcelled spaces, courtyards and patios that encourage cross breeze, and include

plants and water features. Bricks, stone, tiles, straw, earth and bamboo are materials that are commonly used in the construction of these local homes.

Because the characteristics of traditional Vietnamese houses are not merely decorative, but energy efficient, functional, and ideal for the Vietnamese way of life too, a number of local architectural practices – such as Toob Studio, Tropical Space, and AHL Architects – have looked to the country's vernacular architecture for inspiration for their modern residential projects.



Hillside House by Toob Studio is inspired by the traditional stilt houses of the Muong people

Folder  
Roof House  
by Toob  
Studio has a  
pagoda-like  
roof that's  
pulled down  
low to create  
a large,  
shaded  
verandah



Folder Roof  
House's large  
eaves ensure  
its interiors are  
kept cool during  
the day

"The typical Vietnamese sloping roof with terracotta tiles is an effective way to reduce heat absorption and increase the height of the interiors," says Nguyen Hong Quang of Hanoi-based Toob Studio.

"Large doors and windows improve air circulation. Building with local materials minimises construction costs and time. Buffer spaces such as porches and interior courtyards reduce sudden changes in air temperatures during the colder winter season and the hotter summer months.

"Mahogany, padouk, and iron wood, which are commonly used in traditional houses, are ideal because they are highly water and heat-resistant. Terracotta tiles, which are often used for roofs, are waterproof, fire resistant, and durable."

#### REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Because Vietnam is home to 54 different ethnic groups, elements from indigenous architecture, such as the 30-metre long sweeping straw roofs of the Ba Na 'rong' houses, or the elongated houses of the E De tribe, also contribute to the vernacular style, as do the



Long An House by Tropical Space is a red brick home inspired by southern-style stilt structures.



topography and climatic differences in the various parts of the country.

"In the north, it can get very dry and hot, so Northern architecture has evolved to accommodate this harsh climate with large eaves, sun-sheltering features, thick walls, and ventilation-enhancing leaf roofs that reduce heat absorption," says Nguyen, who has completed two northern Vietnamese residential projects that employ passive cooling features.

"In the south, temperatures are high in the day, but low at night, and there is much more heavy rain, so keeping water out with features such as stilts or water resistant floors is often a priority."

Inspired by the traditional stilt houses of the Muong people, Toob Studio's Hillside House was constructed mostly by Muong workers, using northern Vietnamese materials such as slate stone and yellow laterite in combination with a roof of palm leaves, and a bamboo curtain system.

Toob's more modern Folder Roof House has a pagoda-like roof that's pulled down low to create a



Woven into Long An House are traditional elements such as a large central courtyard with a rectangular pool.



Termitary House by Tropical Studio is similar to the houses of the Tay people, with a large gathering space in the centre.



large, shaded verandah, which helps keep indoor temperatures low during the day.

The eastern part of Vietnam is delta terrain, but is also comprised of many mountains and plateaus. This results in different building materials being used in the Eastern and Western parts of the country too.

"Bricks, tiles, clay, mud and straw, which are available along the rivers, are most commonly used in the Vietnamese and Champa architecture in the East, while in the mountainous West, indigenous people such as the Tay or Ede use wood and rock bamboo to build their homes," says Tran Thi Ngu Ngon, co-founder of Ho Chi Minh City studio Tropical Space.

#### **BUFFER SPACES**

According to Tran, most traditional Vietnamese homes are built with buffer spaces such as porches or courtyards on the outside and within the house, and big communal gathering spaces at heart of the house.

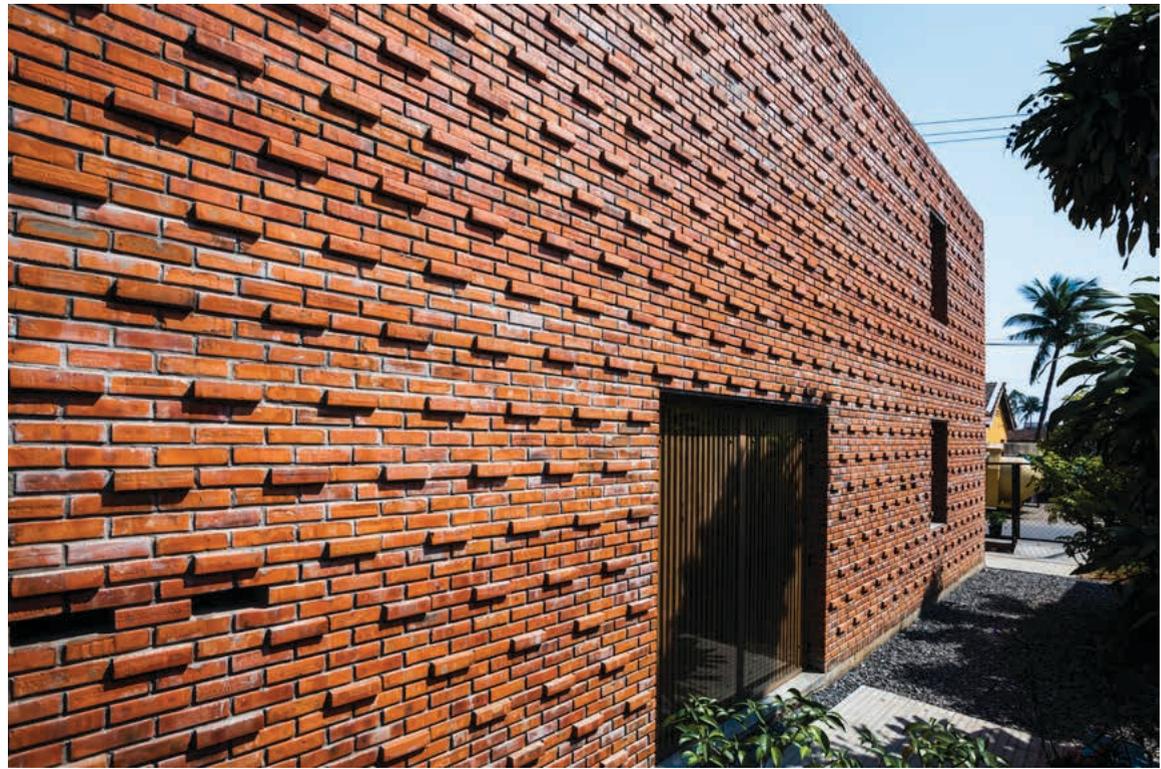
One of Tropical Spaces most striking projects is Long An House, a red brick home in the province

of Long An in southern Vietnam, that's inspired by southern-style stilt structures.

With Long An House, Tran and her partner Nguyen Hai Long weaved traditional elements such as a large central courtyard with a rectangular pool, and a front porch with clay brick flooring into a modern, perforated, red brick home.

The courtyard and pool improve air circulation, and keep the house cool, while the clay brick floors drain rainwater and reduce heat that would otherwise be emitted into the air within the home.

Multiple layers of perforated brick walls draw air and light into all areas of Termitary House.



In Danang, they designed Termitary House with a floor plan that is similar to the houses of the Tay people, with a large gathering space in the centre surrounded by a kitchen and other functional spaces.

Inspired by the dwellings of termites, it was designed with multiple layers of perforated brick walls that draw air and light into all areas of the house. The outer walls also serve as a "second skin" that protects against strong winds and rain during the stormy season.

When renovating Hopper House, Hanoi-based AHL Architects celebrated traditional northern architecture by incorporating thresholds, an interior garden, patios, and roofs with proportions similar to those of traditional northern Vietnamese dwellings.

They also built a gabled, village-style, wooden "house" structure next to the kitchen, which contains a small bedroom.

AHL Architects' founder Dao Hung says that Vietnam's vernacular style grew from the people who lived on the land, and has evolved through time and circumstances to serve the habits and culture of the Vietnamese people.



The proportions of Hopper House by AHL Architects are similar to those of traditional northern Vietnamese dwellings.





Hopper House celebrates traditional northern architecture by incorporating thresholds, an interior garden and patios.

"The form may change. The lifestyle of the people may change, but we think that the design of the traditional Vietnamese house is still relevant today," says Dao.

"Features of the traditional home such as large patios can protect residences from the strong sun, while interior courtyards connect residents with nature while still providing privacy.

"We do not want to simply copy elements from traditional homes, but use them as inspiration to analyse, arrange, and create new and innovative projects."

Adds Tran, "Our traditional architectural language was born out of many years of experience. A long process of adaptation has enabled the traditional Vietnamese home to work within different terrains and climatic conditions.

"By incorporating time-tested features into contemporary homes, younger generations of Vietnamese will be able to enjoy modern conveniences, but still remain connected to the folk culture of their ancestors."