

ARCHITECTURE OF A49

Architecture of Khun Nithi Sathapitanonda

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DR. TIPSUDA PATUMANON
Department of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University

1. Space Beyond Space: The Sonority of the Quietness

I approach a bridge, an escape from the hard concrete floor of Bangkok, and happen to eavesdrop on the silent call of an elephant herd marching into my perception. It now appears in a forest behind the window of a large wall. The forest spreads deeper and deeper beyond the limit of a brick and concrete surface. The wall transforms into the mysterious rain forest of Thailand - robust, complex and healthy. A beam of friendly sunlight penetrates the air of an open well and greets the floor of the forest, it enters to enlighten all of its inhabitants' hearts. ... As I am immersed in the forest, I hear the chimes of its quietness and come face to face with the herd of elephants, marching into the middle of the place. ... All of the elephants in fact are made of wood, however their skin transcends the form of a hard wooden object for it is now transformed into the breathing skin of real elephants – the mothers of the forest. Wherever is felt the breath of the mother of the forest the place flourishes as a healthy world for all life. Here, I can hear the sonority of the quietness upon a visit to the office of A49, the office of Khun Nithi Sathapitanonda.



Being in touch with the place, the whole space of this studio comes alive. Many models and drawings, a variety of buildings, jump into life for the world to see. I come to a new understanding, a new knowledge of space the space which holds a life of its own, a complex system of man producing projects for living. Architecture is designed through a sensitive process of creation, allowing the space to hold and hide many stories beneath its skin. The architecture being designed is becoming more than the appearance. Flowers may bloom from their little buds; buds may emerge from their hiding places somewhere in

the layers of each plant ... so it is with architecture. The architecture hides some meaning in the layers of its skin which may spring into flowers of life for its inhabitants. Flowers will bloom from here to there ... now and then ... for the people of today and of the days to come. When this awakening occurs, the inhabitants find their lives more meaningful and happy. ... Here, in the studio of A49, I **smell** the fragrant scent of flowers blooming.

2. Time Beyond Time: Celebrating Architecture

Thailand - in Asia - the land wealthy with a special and exotic culture, has been the environment where its peoples' lives draw upon a context rich in meaning. Thai culture reflects people's ways of living, worldviews, hopes, beliefs and imagination, all intensively intertwined to form the richness of the Thai setting and civilization from era to era. Thailand is the land where its people flourish in the dances of their lives through time. Here Thai architects throughout history have fused vocabularies of the place and the climate together with the culture of the people to create a special architecture. The architects describe the tranquility of Thai culture, fragrances, tastes, voices, and textures through their language of forms and materials, impacting strongly upon the people. Thus Thai architecture has always offered a unique vision to the rest of the world, celebrating the lives of various people and the textures of a particular context. The emergence of the wisdom of Thai architecture shines brightly at the eastern horizon of the world.



The soul of Thai architecture flows in the motherland like a milk stream of eternal time. Our ancestors looked after the stream as if it were the mother of life, whose springs brought prosperity to the land. This milk stream flowed to strengthen Thai hearts and sensibility with 'diverse and complex' simplicity. With characteristic Thai delicacy, Thai architects sought to sensitively weave the aspirations of the people and their deeply ingrained feeling for the land into a synthesis of buildings and forms which were special and contextual. The emergence of beauty in the work of Thai architecture awakened in the beholder a new way of seeing and sensing the world. The delicate work of architecture springs from the 'milk stream' of Thai culture. Embedded in a friendly and healthy context at a unique corner of the world, Thai architecture exists here as sustenance for good feeling as well as good health. Being sited in a particular place, each building is cultivated in various ways. It stands as if it is growing from the land, firmly rooted like a tree. We say that we *plook* or plant our buildings. They grow from the earth slowly as they greet the air and look for the sun above. We walk into the building, entering a world where we share in the lives and presence of all the inhabitants as though we are participants in a forest. The shared world is the impetus behind Thai creation. We also say that we *proong* or cook our building. We create based on special recipes for our eyes, ears, nose, mouth, skin and touch ... cook them well into a very delicious mixture of forms for good health and feeling. It is a feeling of which the beholders will not forget the touch; it is the feeling that transcends the limit of time. When we *plook* and *proong* our building, we wish to make it a thriving place for life. Architects of A49 *plook* their architecture for it to grow beautifully contextual, and *proong* it in very delicious ways. Here I can **see** the growth and **feel** the good taste of the architecture specially grounded in the culture of Thailand.

Whenever the Thai make a house, they make it to enter into the hearts of its inhabitants. The symphony of Thai architectural design is embedded in very delicate moves of space and time ... of the people and their beloved land ... slowly, intensively and gracefully. The sonority of the quietness chimes of its sweet tranquility ... as dancing leaves greet the sweet pleasant breeze. Here, I **feel** the nice breeze in the air of the architecture of A49, the architecture of Khun Nithi.



3. Meaning Beyond Meaning: The Emergence of Spirit

I gaze at the entrance of a house, beautifully portrayed among lovely surroundings. I can feel the pleasantness in the air of this house. The most impressive element winks at me, it is a pair of sandals laying calmly on a wooden floor before the entrance door. Never before have I seen a drawing of a residence that included a pair of sandals. As I peer into a window, the sandals again call my attention. There must be someone who left the sandals and is now in the house. This is the house of a real person.



Upon seeing this, the house comes alive ... the sandals become a vehicle that brings me to touch upon the life of architecture. The heart of the architecture finds its beat under the light of this drawing portraying the presence of the sandals. Whenever the Thai are at home and need to enjoy the outdoor space they wear sandals to wander about their house. They remove the sandals when they enter their home for they do not want any of the dirt. Through the picture of a pair of sandals, I come to realize that this is not a show house but a home for living.

Khun Nithi, who designed this house, delicately inscribes his sensitivity and imagination into making the design with each line of his perspective drawings. The book, **Lai Sen**, a special collection of Khun Nithi's drawings and designs shows how from white sheets of paper, the previsualization of his designs come to light. He will not leave any details of life untouched or undesigned regardless of the size. I have visited many buildings designed by Khun Nithi. I have seen the 'sandals' in every inch of his designs and in his various methods of including nostalgic elements as evidence that the buildings belong to special individuals and particular situations. Here I touch the spirit of the architecture.

4. Dialogical Architecture: The Emergence of Life

Through ‘space beyond space,’ ‘time beyond time’ and ‘meaning beyond meaning,’ Khun Nithi describes and inscribes the heart of the people into his work, it is an act of sensitive creation. Layers and layers of meanings of the lives of the inhabitants have been wisely laid by him into the extrinsic forms of the buildings, as well as the air circling intensively and intrinsically into the heart of the architecture. He draws into his delicate designs all the intricacy and integrity of the situation and place. In the milieu of a contextual whole, the architecture welcomes anyone who will come face to face with it, enjoy a wonderful discourse and experience this dialogical architecture. After many years of serious work, Khun Nithi has produced much dialogical architecture for the world to behold. Here I can **speak** with the architecture.



5. Prolific Architecture: The Emergence of Beauty

When we *plook* and *proong* our architecture, does it stand like a frozen object? In fact, authentic architecture transcends the limit of its visual form. It welcomes us and echoes in us its intrinsic quality. ... In Khun Nithi's delicate drawing of *prasaht-hin*, the moon in reality is very small, as normally perceived. The moon rises little above the roof of *prasaht-hin*; but in the large pond the mirrored image is incredibly more bright and wonderful. The moon in Khun Nithi's heart grows and glows as he visualizes the moment. The moons of *prasaht-hin*, one in the air the other in the water, confront each other, revealing the enigma of his drawing. The whole of the picture echoes, and is touched. Khun Nithi as an artist has revealed the secret of the beauty of the drawing; as an architect, he loves his work to resonate with reflections of the deeper meaning.

Those who touch Khun Nithi's work will be able to see the reflection of reality shining at the horizon of their heart as well as the reflection of beauty in the pond of their soul. Here the creation of architecture transcends the limit of geometry and brings the design beyond into a prolific realm of being. Here I immerse in the immensity of 'being beyond being' of the architecture created by Khun Nithi, our national artist.