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Three architects and designers receive President's Design Awards



Mr Siew Man Kok ; Mr Franklin Po Sui Seng and Dr Colin K. Okashimo who are all 2015's Designers of the Year. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

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It was the memories of catching insects and playing with his neighbour's ducks while growing up in a kampong that inspired Singapore architect Siew Man Kok to participate in the Housing and Development Board's design competition for Bidadari Estate.

"I wanted to find out the challenges in designing public housing and see whether I could contribute to improving the public housing environment," he says.

The 53-year-old started out by thinking out of the box. For example, even though a new park had been originally planned in the centre of the estate, he proposed a design plan that integrated the housing blocks and roads into the existing park in the former cemetery - allowing for mature trees and the natural terrain to be preserved.

For his innovative ideas, the chairman and founding director of MKPL Architects was honoured with Singapore's highest design accolade, a Designer of the Year nod at the President's Design Awards last night.

Outside of his work with HDB, Mr Siew has also developed semi-detached houses in Eastwood Drive in Bedok and worked on a shophouse project at Cuff Road for the Singapore Gujarati Bhavan in Serangoon.

Jurors noted that despite the wide spectrum of his projects, he is "sensitive to the social, cultural and tropical context of his works, which he explores with passion, rigour and commitment."

Mr Siew said of his win: "I'm very happy and honored. But more than that, I'm encouraged by the young talent in Singapore today. I hope they keep doing great, innovative things even though they're battling a much tougher industry today compared to the one I was in 20 years ago."

The other two recipients of Designer of the Year were sculptor and landscape artist Dr Colin K. Okashimo, 57, of Colin K Okashimo and Associates and principal designer of Tierra Design, Franklin Po, 69.

The trio received their awards last night from President Tony Tan Keng Yam at the Istana .

The annual awards were started a decade ago by the DesignSingapore Council of the Ministry of Communications and Information and the Urban Redevelopment Authority to recognise the achievements of people who are making a difference to the lives of Singaporeans and the global community at large.

Thirteen design projects were also honoured, which included the world's first innovative face mask with micro ventilators, the newly opened National Gallery Singapore and The Oliv condominium at Balmoral, which has dramatic lush green sky terraces.

Fourteen jurors from seven countries, including Singapore, assessed 111 nominations before making the final selection.

Chief executive officer of the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Mr Ng Lang, said of the 13 Design of the Year awards, of which three are architectural projects: "Their projects are unique to Singapore and reflective of our rich and multi-layered history and culture."

A free exhibition showcasing the designers and their award winning projects will be held at the National Gallery Singapore from Monday to Jan 3 before moving to the URA Centre from Jan 5 to 31 and concluding at the National Design Centre from Feb 2 to 29 .

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