

# WORLD ARCHITECTURE

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Text by  
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# Urban visions in changing times

## *Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*



**B**oth Hanoi, which is 1,000 years old, and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), which is celebrating its three-hundredth anniversary this year – present different challenges to the architect in terms of style, scale and urban continuity. Whilst common visions of Vietnam's urban fabric might be the beautifully planned French district of Hanoi and the tree-lined streets of HCMC, these elements comprise only a small part of the architect's consideration when discussing urban regeneration projects. When analysing the two cities one can see the direct influence of Chinese, Japanese, French, Soviet and American building types. In the period between the reunification of Vietnam (in 1975) and the 1990s most of the influence has come from the Soviet Union and many of the architects practising here today were trained in a system somewhere between the Beaux Arts and Soviet schools.

From the Japanese invasion in 1945 until the cessation of border conflicts with China in

1: View from the top of the Saigon Trade Centre towards District 1, the administrative and commercial centre for HCMC.

2: The Opera House, renovation by the Urban Heritage Conservation Program HCMC and the Caravelle Hotel, renovation by Andrew Lee King Sun Architects.







- 3: Saigon South Masterplan by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) showing transportation spine. Yellow areas are residential
- 4: SOM's proposal for "Saigon South" a new 2,600-hectare community directly south of Ho Chi Minh City

1980 Vietnam was a country constantly on military alert. As a result, the vast majority of the country's resources were committed to military spending and not domestic improvement projects like infrastructural works and town planning. Until only a few years ago Hanoi maintained essentially the same urban fabric as it had in the early twentieth century. However, since the implementation of the *doi moi* (economic renovation) policy in 1986, the rate of growth – thanks largely to investment by foreign parties – has created new pressures on urban areas. Initially much of the investment was from Asian sources and more likely to be directed at industrial and manufacturing development. In the past five years there has been a great increase in the number of urban commercial projects.

Unlike other cities in the region, like Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Manila, where the "modern" city has become a cultural icon for economic success, the Vietnamese urban fabric presents a more delicate texture due to a lengthy history and culturally multi-layered past.

Some of the main factors affecting the design and planning of regeneration projects are the large and rapid increase in urban population, a strong preservation/conservation movement and the emerging nature of building and planning regulations.

The population increase in the past decade in Hanoi has been estimated to be as high as 400 percent and the current population is around 2.5 million. In HCMC the estimated population





is around 4.8 million and may reach 7.5 million by 2010. The existing infrastructure networks in the cities are functioning at present but it is evident that another strategy for housing the urban population must be implemented soon. The effected outlying districts are now being supplied with the necessary infrastructure to facilitate large scale urban development.

The foreign solution is epitomised by two projects: Saigon South in HCMC and Hanoi New Town in Hanoi. Both these developments, one Taiwanese and one Korean, are for new towns directly adjacent to the existing Central Business Districts (CBD). They are approximately 7,000 hectares and 20,000 hectares respectively. The Saigon South Project, which is masterplanned by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, won the 1997 AIA honor award and was noted as a comprehensive plan which will help HCMC manage its physical expansion while safeguarding its cultural and natural assets.

In Hanoi there are several groups who are trying to exert pressure on the local community to preserve the character of the city. These include the Friends of Hanoi, the Hanoi Planning and Development and Control project (HPDCP) and the Architecture Research Centre. The HPDCP, sponsored by AusAid and the Australian project fund, is a collaboration between the Architect-in-Chief's office and Australian Advisers. Some of the goals of this project include institutionalising the building regulations in the Ancient and French Quarters, implementing management control systems and creating sustainable local structure plans. Finding the correct balance is critical. There is a need to both supply a higher standard of living and maintain the romantic character of the existing fabric. Hai Ba Trung and Ly Thuong streets are being developed as main boulevards and commercial strips in a



1: Saigon Centre in HCMC by Denton Corker Marshall

2: The Shared People's and International School, HCMC







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3: Behind a typical hotel development, the Kotobuki Tower and Landmark Tower by Peddle Thorp Architects in HCMC

4: Ho Tay Tower by Energo project in Hanoi

5: Press Club Centre by Agence Guillaume Cochin Architects, Hanoi

fairly orderly fashion. The concern is more for other adjacent areas where development is proceeding in a less orderly manner. Some notable restoration and preservation projects are the Metropole Hotel, the restoration of the Australian embassy and the Opera Houses in both Hanoi and HCMC.

Due to the external economic forces and the level of technology available to these Vietnamese firms, the first wave of development could be considered to be 100 percent foreign-designed. Therefore, while design approval must come from individual municipalities, the work of the local architects has merely provided the "stamp".

There are three main groups of architects and planners working in Vietnam: 100 percent foreign practices; co-operation practices and 100 percent local practices. Particularly notable projects by foreign architects are: the Ho Tay Tower, Hanoi by Energo project; the Landmark Tower and Saigon Tower, HCMC by Hong Kong's Peddle Thorp Architects; and the Saigon Centre, HCMC, by Australia's Derron Corrier Marshall. Co-operation offices include Vinatex (Taisei Corporation) and Versus Office (O'J), who are working with a number of local architects.



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