

The future is already here thanks to projects like the Alibaba Central China Headquarters in Wuhan

# MIPIIM Asia protagonists assemble!

With the MIPIIM Asia Awards now in its 15th year, **Isobel Lee** tracks the evolution of Asia Pacific real estate through some of its most pioneering projects

ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2006, the doors of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre opened to a newly assembled crowd of delegates. Local real estate investors and fund managers from much further afield joined city representatives, brokers, architects and marketing experts for the pre-opening of the first ever MIPIIM Asia. Little did they know that they would be paving the way for years of high-level networking as they gathered to discuss the region's outstanding fundamentals — and pick up prizes for a slate of prestigious projects.

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*François Trausch*

Some 15 years on, MIPIIM Asia is back in Hong Kong after a brief hiatus, with delegates eager to meet once again. As well as the usual mix of panels, conferences, stands and networking opportunities, one of the jewels in the summit's crown will once again be the MIPIIM Asia Awards, representing an opportunity for the industry to spotlight trends, talent and innovation.

This year's jury chair, François Trausch, global CEO of Allianz Real Estate, says: “MIPIIM Asia Awards is a truly pan-Asia contest. Like the MIPIIM Asia conference, it fulfils a need to bring together players from all over the APAC region. While the majority of submissions still come from China, we see a regular flow of projects from ASEAN, Japan, India, Australia, Korea and Singapore. For the Chinese submissions, MIPIIM Asia Awards also provides a ‘window to the world’ and an opportunity to showcase the projects internationally.”

For the MIPIIM Asia Awards 2021, 33 property developments have been recognised by a jury comprising prominent property leaders across Asia-Pacific. Under Trausch, the jury panel of 16 industry experts studied close to 100 entries. The final winners come from 10 countries, and spotlight not only architectural excellence: key trends such as environmental, social and governance (ESG) concerns have also been acknowledged, as well as the originality of the concept. “ESG is increasingly prevalent in the submissions whether in the ‘green category’ or outside of it with emphasis on recycling, water, re-usage of materials and operational sustainability,” Trausch says. “The projects are also more sustainable as they try to better fit in the immediate surrounding and environment.”

For Dr Ping Xu, founder and design director of PH Alpha Design, awards have an important place in real estate. “We always appreciate recognition from the industry and the MIPIIM



**François Trausch, global CEO of Allianz Real Estate**

Asia Awards are simply iconic,” she says. As the architect behind Hong-kong Land's Yorkville – The Ring, one of this year's best retail developments, Xu sees awards as architectural benchmarks. “Awards encourage the industry to move forward and to innovate; to uncover new ideas, and push the boundaries of what is possible in the world of design.”

Awards also track the evolution of the built environment in its service to society. The workspaces of today are unrecognisable in comparison to a clas-



**Benoy designed the magical Seazen Suzhou Wuyue Plaza in Suzhou, China**





# MIPIM ASIA AWARDS 2021

sic office block from 15 years ago, as evidenced by another winning project this year — the Alibaba Central China Headquarters in Wuhan. Spotlights as one of the best Futura Mega projects, this innovative design covers a massive 300,000 sq m, combining two eco-office towers and a new retail commercial hub. “The project aims to implement Alibaba’s concept of building a hybrid digital ecosystem, and to enhance Alibaba’s presence in the central region of China by driving the transformation of its brick-and-mortar businesses,” says Qin Pang, director, head of Shanghai Studio for Benoy, the architects behind the Alicampus concept. Benoy has picked up three awards this year, receiving recognition as well for the refurbishment of the David Jones flagship in Sydney, Australia, as well as for the design of the Seazen Suzhou Wuyue Plaza, in Suzhou, China. Gregory Kovacs, design director for Benoy responsible for the latter scheme, says that it was conceived as a “quality micro-resort” and is inspired by the town’s heritage. He adds: “The indoor retail street, inspired by the Old Town, provides a year-round destination to experience the unique urban qualities of Pinjiang Road under any weather condition.” The project takes the fight to the e-commerce trend, Kovacs says: “Shopping centres are the key to offline basic consumption and an

integral part of the urban fabric.”

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For Edwin Chan Chi Wai, senior project director, project management at New World Development Company, awards drive industry cohesion. “It’s not just about us winning something. They’re an opportunity for the whole industry to share innovative ideas. Whenever we have a new idea, we take it through R&D and then share the results with our peers. It’s about taking the industry forward as a whole.” New World’s King Lam Commercial Development, an ambitious scheme in Lai Chi Kok, an old industrial district in Kowloon, Hong Kong, is also one of this year’s best Futura projects. Chan says: “Hong Kong is an extremely dense city so your neighbours are extremely close. With the King Lam Street project, we focused on place-making in one of the few remaining industrial districts in Hong Kong.” He

adds: “We didn’t want it to just be a lone office building, we wanted to relate to the primary school next door, the office blocks on the other side, and the second-generation shopping centres nearby.”

Trausch adds: “Like the previous year, we are seeing a bigger focus on qualitative projects, as well as urban rehabilitation projects — such as former industrial sites - as well as re-tooling of shopping centres. Thinking of China again, people in the country do not have the luxury of doing things slowly and they are already onto generation two or generation three of previously built office and retail complexes.”

Above all, for Trausch, this year’s awards represent a triumph in the face of adversity after a complicated couple of years. “What struck me this year is the large number of submissions coming from China,” he says. “One would have thought that in a year of COVID, with border closures and restricted international travel, a lot of the projects, many of which require international co-operation, would have stopped. On the contrary, many developers and architectural offices have switched to remote cooperation and, at least for the Futura and Mega Futura categories, might have used the ‘idle’ time in terms of execution to work on planning future projects.”



MIPIM Asia celebrates its 15th anniversary this year