



HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION
RENEWING THE CULTURE OF THE HOME

Home Renaissance Foundation

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Home in the Community

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I am very pleased to be able to share with people from around the globe how we create homes within the community in Hong Kong. First of all, I would like to highlight that Hong Kong is very different from other cities because we live in a high-density high-rise environment. We only have 1100 square kilometres of land of which only 25% has been developed – the rest is countryside, parks and hills. 4% of our land goes towards residential uses. We have to house 7 million people in Hong Kong. I work for the Hong Kong Housing Authority where we provide public rental housing for families with a lower income. We provide around 30% of the population with low-cost, rental residential homes. We now have a stock of around 700,000 rental flats and we are building at a rate of about 15,000 new flats per year. On average, the living space is about 12 square meters. Our standard for allocation is only seven square meters. In the past we have sold over 430,000 subsidised sales flats.

We help all families in need gain access to affordable and adequate housing. The Hong Kong Housing policy is that nobody be left homeless so we provide affordable housing for those in need and have cost-effective and rational use of resources. Above all, we have a competence-dedicated and caring culture for our team members and apply our core values (being caring and customer-focussed, creative and committed) to all the work we do. We do this from planning and design to building and all the way through to management. From cradle to grave: we take care of the entire community from the very beginning (from before we build) until after they move in.

How do we achieve this while caring for the environment as well as for people? We know we have to build and develop in a way that enables us to create a sustainable community. We have to balance environmental, social and economic needs in all aspects of our work.

Because we are a relatively humble and poor developer, we have to make the best use of the natural environment. If we are building homes for people with lower incomes, then we have to make the best use of nature the tenants do not possess the economic resources to pay expensive energy bills for their new homes. We strive to achieve sustainability by taking proactive measures in the implementation of our public housing programmes. Throughout the planning, design and construction stages, we give due consideration to factors such as functional performance and cost effectiveness of the buildings, as well as environmental concerns like greening. Our aim is to provide functional, safe and comfortable public housing, thereby raising the living standard of our tenants. We apply a scientific approach, using studies on climate conditions to make best use of these natural environments. We have to achieve better permeability and partition levels. We also create natural ventilation inside the home and in public areas and in the open space. We are able to provide public areas in our designs with a draught of about 1.8 meters per second during the summer.

Consultation and public engagement are also top priorities for the Hong Kong Housing Authority. We have to engage communities from the planning stage and the design stage right through to the occupation stage. We have to listen to their views, not only those of the tenants, but those of the neighbourhood and the community at large. The way we do it is by aiming to enhance social cohesion. We organise workshops, talks and discussions with all groups of people. Sometimes we also use community art and greening to engage the people throughout these processes. “Action Seedling” is an initiative we have started to implement whereby we distribute seedling plants to participants who will nurture the plants at home until they are fit for transplanting into the planters

of the new estates. We carry this initiative out with the help of Estate Management Advisory Committees, local schools and community organizations and apart from creating a greener and more pleasant environment, the programme also helps foster a greater sense of belonging among the residents and the community.

Upon completion, we sometimes invite people who lived in old estates in the past, such as celebrities, to celebrate the new construction. When we plan a park, again, we engage the community and the whole neighbourhood. After completion, if there are comments or views about the design of the estate, we will listen to them and carry out improvement works afterwards.

Throughout all the project stages we work together and we have partnering workshops with our contractors and sub-contractors to make sure we all have a common goal for the projects. I would like to show how we implement these processes through a case-study: Upper Ngau Tau Kok Estate redevelopment, stages two and three. We have created happy homes for a lot of people when they move from the old estate to the new one.

We face two major challenges in the building of new estates. The first is to create a comfortable living environment despite the very high density and maintain social ties between tenants when they move. We generally move people from an old estate to a new, modern one and this has to be done in stages. The first is the reception estate, which usually houses around 4,500 families with a population of about 12000. We try to create a community that can enjoy natural ventilation throughout the central spine by putting blocks on two sides and creating a wind corridor that runs through them. We improved the planning of this estate within this originally very high density living environment and create a better space for them with natural environments. We also determine what would be the best position of the buildings and we use studies to improve the design. We enhance wind circulation in our buildings as well so the building is permeable. For the corridors, we have windows that allow the wind to penetrate although visually it looks like a wall. We have to ensure that tenants can enjoy the environment on the pedestrian level, so where there are some windy spots we provide a window canopy to keep the draught away from the pedestrians. By using passive design for the living space and public areas we enhance daylight penetration which can in turn save up to 15% on energy bills.

Another significant area of work we do is to engage the community when we need to re-establish old ties after people move to new estates. Many people have been living in the old estates for a few decades and when they move to the new estates, they will be rather anxious and not know what to do. From the period of 2002 to 2009, that is the seven years from planning to completion, we have been engaging them in numerous activities, including exhibitions on heritage to encourage them and show them what they can give us through show pieces that they have collected. We also engage them with various workshops. In one workshop, for example, our architects, social workers and tenants jointly build models of the flats to get them to understand how to use their interior spaces and how they can arrange the furniture within the home. After going through these stages, they have a better understanding of what they can expect in the future.

It is also important for our architects and tenants to exchange views because architects may not always be right. Sometimes a design architects delight in is actually an inconvenience for the tenants, so it is important for them to listen to what the tenants will really need. They draw sketches with the tenants to illustrate how they can use the space. The designs, drawings and models they were shown helped them to select their own flats and put in their own furniture. We have video-

clips from various views and angles so that they will know how to move from corner to corner as they manoeuvre through the estate.

Sometimes, as was the case in this case-study, tenants want hand-rails, guided paths and seats so we add them to the design so that tenants can enjoy their open spaces. There is also a shuttle lift in this estate that stops at different levels to meet the needs of the elderly and the disabled. Handrails were also added in all the corridors because about 30% of the tenant population are elderly people. We have a policy of designing with universal accessibility at the Hong Kong Housing Authority which means we have to design for all ages and all abilities.

We also incorporated the views of the tenants for the lobbies by providing a seating area that enables them to sit and mingle between them. In the community workshop, the joint design has led to an exercise area for the elderly and a heritage gallery with a leisure sitting area. We also designed a cafe for the tenant community where they can go and even bring their own food and drink if they like. In the heritage exhibition, the artefacts that they have donated will transform new displays in the estates.

We provide a 30% overall green ratio. This can prove difficult in very densely populated areas, but with forty stories in height we have managed to create an open space with 30% green coverage and we have preserved a tree as well. This reflects the overall aim of our designs: designs with nature and with people. We have been applying this design concept since 1998. It is a design concept that enables people to age in one place because they can live in their homes safely and comfortably from youth to old age.