





KOREA PROSPECTS

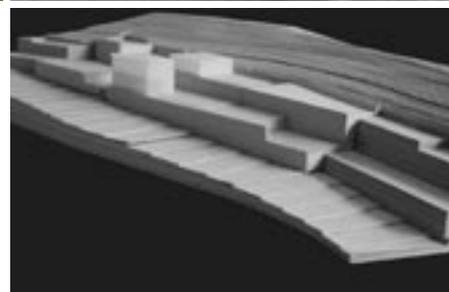
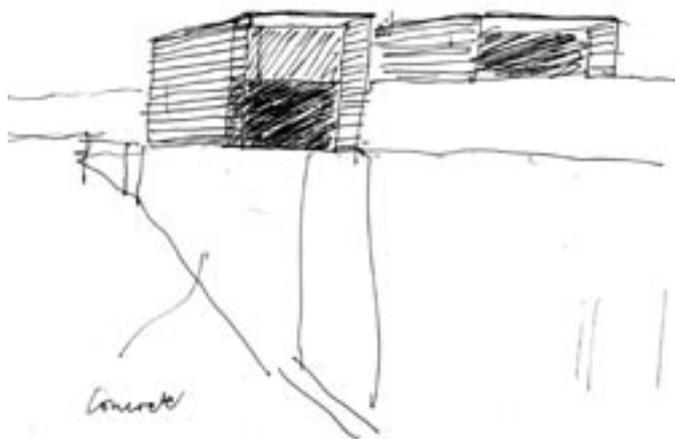
On a terrace in Heyri Art Valley, a new cultural development in Korea, Florian Beigel and the Architecture Research Unit's Pojagi building reflects their thinking about space, materials and landscape, while meeting an unusual brief

By Andrew Mead.

Main photographs by Jonathan Lovekin



Clockwise from top left: Heyri Art Valley before development began; model showing Kim Jong Kyu's proposed 'patch' system; Beigel + ARU's land-terracing design study for their hillside patch at Heyri; a sketch by Florian Beigel of the basic concept for the Pojagi building



Heyri Art Valley in South Korea is a cultural oasis – or at least that's the plan. Quite close to the border with North Korea, it's conceived as an eco-friendly arts colony, with housing, workspace and exhibition areas meant to epitomise good design.

Korean architect Kim Jong Kyu drew up the guidelines for Heyri's development, in a form that reflects the period he spent as a research fellow with Florian Beigel and the Architecture Research Unit (ARU), at what was then the University of North London. Now one of his country's leading architects, Kim invited Beigel + ARU to make more detailed proposals for a section of the valley, which led to them building there as well. With a most unusual programme, that building is now complete: the Pojagi gallery, jazz club, studio and house.

Heyri is an hour's drive north from the South Korean capital, Seoul, on a motorway beside the broad River Han. Housing blocks give way to rice fields in a landscape that stays flat until the wooded slopes of Paju Mountain appear. Here, on ground reclaimed from the river, is the site of Paju Book City, for which Beigel + ARU produced the design guide, and where they built the Youl Hwa

Dang Publishing House in 2004. After a few more kilometres comes the turn into Heyri Art Valley: clearly a landscape in transition, with completed buildings and construction sites, raw red earth and fir-clad hills.

Kim wants Heyri's development to take place on a series of 'patches': irregular strips of land (none quite the same in shape or area), which are tailored to the contours of the valley, given a hard surface, and subdivided into plots. Half of each plot should stay 'green', while 40 per cent of each building should be cultural space open to the public. Scattered among the patches – singly or in loose configurations – are a number of 'object' buildings, while a 'green network' of paths and parks runs throughout the valley, whose creeks and swamps are being conserved or improved.

This strategy resembles Beigel + ARU's 'landscape infrastructure' approach in such schemes as Paju Book City and Lichterfelde Süd in Berlin (AJ 3.4.03). In the latter they subdivided an ex-military site into 'landscape fields' for housing of different types, which can be built incrementally as the market permits. With deference to the landscape's history and ecology, they set parameters for development without being too prescriptive.

The Heyri project is the initiative of a 'community' – originally some 30 people, now more than 250 – who purchased the site cheaply from the Korean Land Corporation, and whose members include Yi Ki Yung, the client for Beigel's Youl Hwa Dang Publishing House. It all sounds rather utopian: like an Asian version of Darmstadt's Matildenhöhe, but a century later and on a much bigger scale. In a car-owning culture, the audience for Heyri's cultural facilities is expected to come from Seoul. Already there are several galleries, but 30 are envisaged, along with concert halls, theatres, cinemas, bookshops and studios.

Already, too, there's a sense of architects (and their clients) wanting to do their own thing, which Beigel contrasts with his attempt, at both Paju and Lichterfelde, to establish typologies that buildings should follow. 'But that's easier to do at an industrial estate like Paju than at Heyri, where there are so many personal programmes,' he says. 'Heyri can take it, as long as the patch is present, as a kind of glue, a unifier.'

With long retaining walls that resemble rock strata, Beigel + ARU's patch at Heyri will be terraced into plots for nine houses. Sloping gently from one end to the other,



Clockwise from far left: construction of the Pojagi building; Richard Serra's installation at the Serpentine Gallery; Märkli's Congiunta Foundation – a model for the treatment of the concrete of the Pojagi building; reddish concrete to match the nearby earth in Kim Jong Kyu's Ma Gallery at Heyri Art Valley

as well as being built into the hill, the site becomes a series of broad steps or platforms. In his guidelines, Kim recommends that buildings on patches like this should form a single volume at right angles to the hill, which Beigel + ARU have subverted by splitting their Pojagi building into two. But they justify this by referring to a central tenet of their practice: the primacy of space.

'We see space rather than the object as the *raison d'être* of architecture,' says Beigel, 'and we want to enhance people's lives by the quality of spaces, whether they're the size of a room or a piece of the city.' This harmonises completely with the Korean emphasis on *kong gan* (emptiness or in-between space); the interrupted volume of the Pojagi building creates just such an in-between space.

It's an idea that Beigel often illustrates with still-life paintings by Morandi, in which the space between the bottles and vases is pregnant, but he cites too an installation at the Serpentine Gallery by Richard Serra, whose black paintstick oblongs on two adjacent walls – the paintstick dense and heavy like tar – made the intervening space palpable.

Beigel's clients wanted a jazz club and café, a gallery for showing *pojagi* (patchwork-like

textiles), a studio and a place to live – but were otherwise open to suggestions. What Beigel proposed was in essence very simple: a pavilion on top of a podium. Each element was to have a distinct materiality, with concrete for the podium and polycarbonate for the pavilion. 'We liked the idea of putting ice cubes on the terraces, or really one ice cube split apart. A strong tectonic concept,' says Beigel.

The simplicity and strength of this first idea survive in the finished building. The dark grey concrete walls are blank and emphatically solid; built analogues to natural exposures of rock. They have the aura of something archaic, in part because Beigel rejected the familiar concrete of Ando *et al*, with its grid of boltholes, as 'too mechanical – you could think that prefabricated concrete planks have been screwed into place', and opted instead for the shuttering method used by Peter Märkli at his Congiunta Foundation in the Ticino (see *Architect's Account*).

In the rear wall behind the living quarters, the concrete is interrupted by a cryptic rectangle of masonry, which Beigel likens to 'a blocked-up door or cavemouth', though he'd wanted the stones to be more rubble-like. This conceit is a little fanciful (though it

photographs well). There's a resemblance to some works by the Arte Povera artist Jannis Kounellis, which, if not intended, is nonetheless apt, given that Beigel and Kounellis have much in common in their way with materials: a feeling for their intrinsic qualities and for what happens when they're combined.

In the front wall, which conceals the jazz club, it would have been better to taper the concrete garage doors to fit the sloping site, keeping the sense of solidity intact. Beigel would have preferred the colour of the concrete to match the red earth of the valley – an effect that Kim Jong Kyu has now achieved in one of his Heyri buildings.

In its lightness and translucency, the polycarbonate that surrounds the gallery above the jazz club, and the studio in the living quarters, contrasts strongly with the concrete. So the building has a dual identity. Whereas the concrete seems to be immutable, the polycarbonate is alive, responding to any changes in the light and weather. The sheets are fluted, which blurs reflections, making them more 'atmospheric' than a mirror image. In the right conditions, these pavilions really do evoke the 'ice cubes' Beigel mentions. Seen from a distance when illuminated at night,

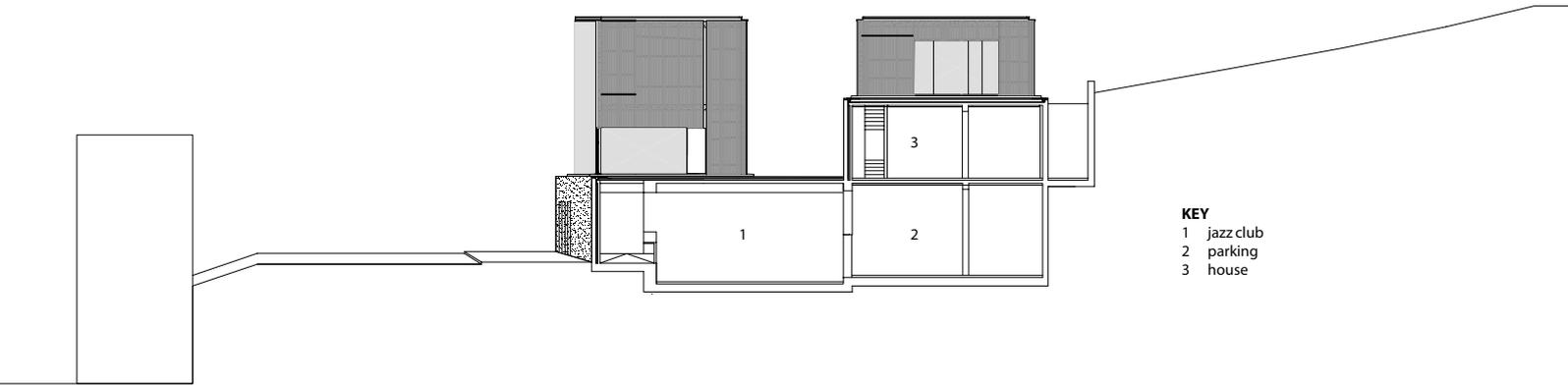


JONG DHKIM

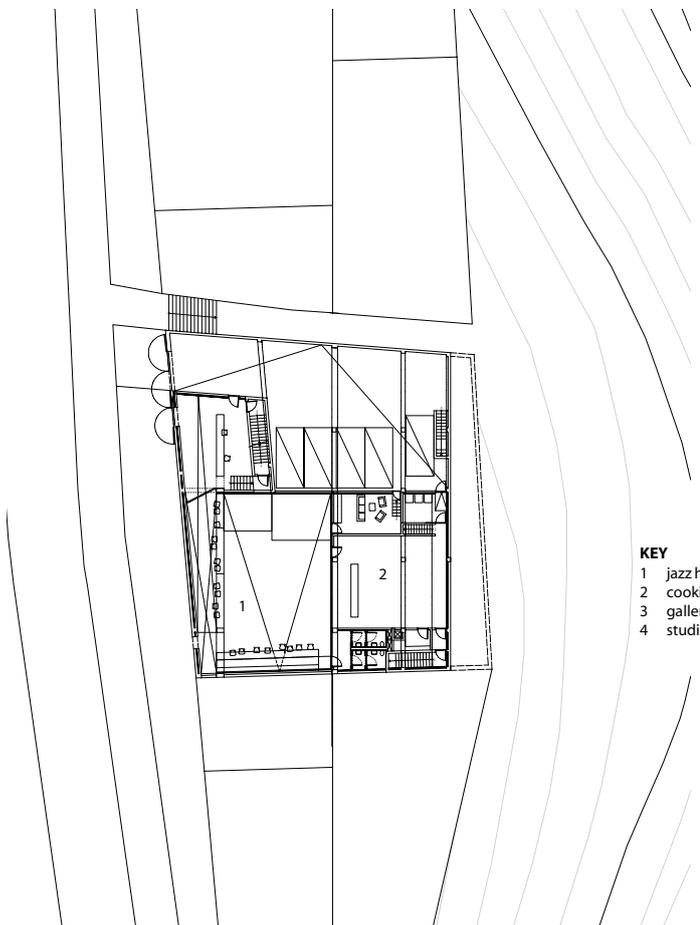
Above: the west facade of the gallery, with its neon sign for the jazz club. Right: the gap between the house and the gallery pavilion. Below: evening view of the front elevation, taken from the building across the street



JONG DHKIM



- KEY**
 1 jazz club
 2 parking
 3 house



- KEY**
 1 jazz hall
 2 cooking
 3 gallery
 4 studio



jazz club level plan

podium level plan





PHILIP CHRISTOU



Clockwise from top left: view towards ramp from the jazz hall; the foil-covered wall in Andy Warhol's studio; a detail of the aluminium foil used in the jazz club; plan of Álvaro & Herreros' Casa Mora, Cádiz; the Korean paper floor and mobile furniture in the Hampstead apartment

they're as glowingly insubstantial as one of Noguchi's paper lamps.

Veiled but visible through the polycarbonate are its supporting steel frame and a 'lattice' of timber battens. Like the patterns of the *pojagi* on show inside the gallery, and which give the building its name, the geometry of the lattice is irregular. *Pojagi*, used for wrapping and covering things, are often made from patches of leftover cloth – squares or triangles – which are stitched together into new asymmetrical wholes. The timber battens are arranged in much the same way, though Beigel had to persevere to use wood not steel, because it seldom figures in Korean construction and had to be engineered in London.

This unorthodox timber frame hints that something interesting is happening inside – it intrigues; but the jazz club's solid wall gives nothing away. Behind the club's heavy concrete door, a ramp descends immediately on the right to a bar along the end wall, from where the jazz-hall floor slopes gently in the other direction.

Beigel remembered a photo of Andy Warhol's studio, in which the walls and ceiling were covered in aluminium foil, which appealed to his client, so he has done

the same here – the shiny, silver, crinkled surface of the foil offsetting the matt concrete by the ramp.

'I don't think that a precise room for jazz is right,' says Beigel. 'The foil blurs the corners of the room and is better for the experience of the music.' At present, he is still fine-tuning the sound, intending to reduce reflection from the concrete with fabric stretched on an insulated wooden frame (the fabric decorated with photos of jazz musicians).

Poised above the club, the two-storied gallery gains warmth, character and intimacy by the use of plywood on its walls and ceiling – it's not just neutral space – while the evenly diffused light through the polycarbonate is good for displaying the *pojagi*, which can be hung on the timber battens, if desired.

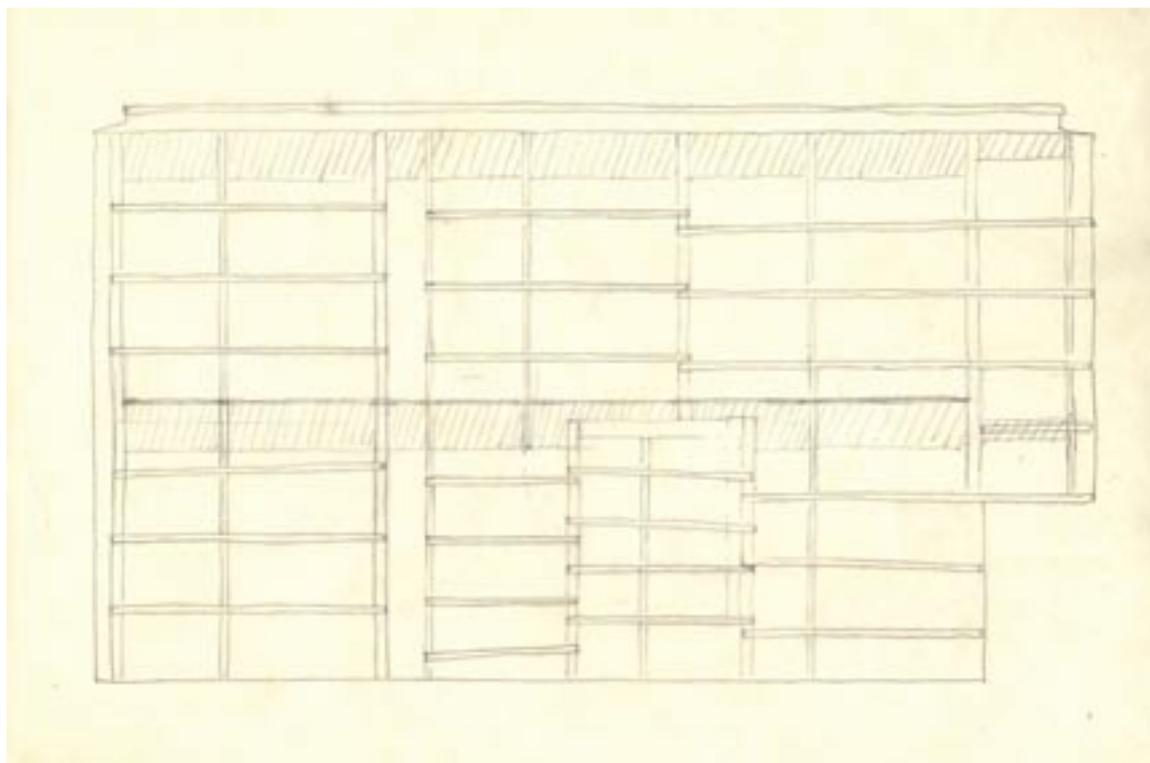
In organising the living quarters of the building with his clients, Beigel had in mind Álvaro & Herreros' seductive plan for the Casa Mora, Cádiz (sadly still not built). This offers an alternative to both the Modernist free plan and the more usual corridor-and-rooms, by treating the house as a group of juxtaposed rooms (some unroofed), which lead directly one into another and become more private the further you move through the house. At

the centre is an exaggeratedly long room with no designated function, which you would cross continually in the course of a day.

'A house like this has many routes and geographies,' says Beigel. 'It's a bit like walking through a very small city. And though each room has its own particular character, that character isn't dictated by a specific use, so the house can easily accommodate change.'

Beigel has already explored this concept, though on a much smaller scale than Casa Mora, in a Hampstead apartment (2003), where rooms are differentiated not just by size and proportion but by their floor materials – American white oak, steel plate, and Korean paper – and where beds, cooking facilities, showers, etc, are all mobile ('they're visitors to the space, they can come and go').

Though again on a modest scale and less radically than Casa Mora, the *Pojagi* house also reflects this idea. Immediately on entry, there's a long hall-like room off which all the others open, and while their uses are currently clear – a studio, a living room, two bedrooms (which Beigel prefers to call 'personal rooms') – one could envisage them being rethought in the future, at least to a degree. At a pivotal place in the whole scheme



Below left: a typical example of a Korean hand-crafted *pojagi*, made from small pieces of thin cotton, which are stitched together in abstract compositions. Left: a sketch by Philip Christou of the north facade of the gallery, showing the timber battens in a *pojagi*-like pattern



ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

Park Chan Min and Kim Chang Sook are more patrons of the arts than clients. Mr Park is one of Korea's outstanding experts on jazz music – when we first met we gave him a recording of Thelonious Monk, which was a good start. We are very fortunate to have been recommended to them by our Korean architect friend Kim Jong Kyu (JK) and by Mr Yi, the chairman of the Paju Publishers' Association, who also owns a house in Heyri. It's a relationship of mutual trust that we treasure.

The brief was to design a jazz café, a gallery for fabrics and a house – a typical brief for Heyri. I'm looking forward to seeing the new public realm unfold in this example of the dispersed city. It is an impressive experiment in building a community where coexistence prevails – a special case in the international debate about diversity and communality in architecture. JK has designed a topographical pattern of building 'patches' that have maximum planning envelopes associated with them. The plan determines where *not* to build in this landscape. There is ample scope for individual interpretation of these design guidelines.

Our building is on a stepped patch of nine houses on the north-facing slope of one of the

hills. In designing the terracing of this patch we have kept close to JK's design guide. Two of the other eight houses were nearing completion when I last visited. There is more diversity than communality and it remains to be seen if the newcomers can be persuaded to adopt the design guidelines more wholeheartedly.

We very much like JK's design attitude to the built landscape. This patch is a stepped podium type, with material differentiation between the earthbound elements and the elevated ones. Perhaps we accept gravity a bit more than him. We are content with the land walls/terraces, with pavilions perched on top of them. It is a topographical architecture.

Our only variation from the guideline was to divide the pavilion in two and sit them down on the terraces. Making a twoness out of a oneness is for us the first move from architecture to city.

We see the little buildings perched on top of the land-wall terraces as buildings of light – lanterns in the landscape. Their hazy wrappers reflect the daylight and give you a blurred image of the timber sticks (*pojagi* pattern) and the plywood inner walls. At night the spatial volumes behind the wrappers become more clearly visible. The size of the lanterns is small

in relation to the terraces, and they are slightly set back from the edge, as is the minimal roof parapet. The gap between the upper 'light house' and the lower one is 'a positively charged void', like those of the Economist Building in London.

We wanted the concrete of the land walls to say 'wall' and not 'mechanically fastened panels'. We are not very fond of the notion of architecture as a machine. That is why we have chosen a concrete shuttering similar to Peter Märkli's lovely La Congiunta, house for the sculptures of Hans Josephson, in the Swiss Ticino. We have painted the clipped-off metal ties in a doughy colour. They look a bit like stitches in a patchy wall, an association we prefer. The shuttering of the concrete doors picks up the pattern of the rest of the walls.

We have been extremely fortunate that JK's office has been our partner architect. It is somewhat frustrating not to be able to make a stronger personal contribution to the design process on site, so one has to find ways of working with these limitations. One strategy is to refer to architectural precedents that both the partner offices admire. This makes communication faster and easier.

Florian Beigel



is the dining table, placed strategically in the long room by the shutters that open onto the timber-boarded terrace, and with a view onto the private courtyard as well – a dual connection between inside and out.

To cut cost, there's less material distinction between the rooms than Beigel had anticipated – more white-painted plaster and less plywood. But, while the floors are epoxy throughout, there's some variation in colour (though not quite the Morandi shades seen in ARU's early model).

As for the integral 'in-between spaces', the little courtyard between the living room and bedrooms is already a true outdoor room, its open side framing the boundary wall with its puzzling masonry insertion. The space between the gallery pavilion and the house, which then opens out as a roof to the jazz club, is somewhat undetermined at present, though that should change once the outdoor jazz café is in action, and Beigel's clients begin annexing this area in whatever ways they choose.

Was it wise to light these in-between spaces with Lewerentz lamp standards, straight from Klippan? They're so personal to him that they risk being alien or unintegrated, even in a scheme by an admirer. Beigel explains this as

a way to specify at a distance: 'It's a bit cheeky, but I knew that they would look good and that Mr Lewerentz wouldn't kill me for it.'

In Beigel + ARU's approach to this Korean project, one can't but be reminded of the Smithsons. For Beigel + ARU, as it was for them, architecture is about thinking, researching and writing as well as building, which means that when a commission does come, what they build has a gravity that much other work lacks. It embodies ideas.

Like the Smithsons too, Beigel consciously situates his practice, not just in an architectural context in which certain forebears and contemporaries are an acknowledged source, but in a broader visual culture, in which artists supply a constant stimulus. Both deal with the dimension of time, accepting change and letting occupants make their own mark. The Smithsons tried to encourage 'the art of inhabitation': Beigel too, though more overtly, provides a frame for others to fill.

Just as with the Smithsons, there's a wish to accommodate building to the landscape as deftly as possible: 'to treat the landscape kindly', as Beigel puts it. Moreover, there's the same emphasis on the space between buildings: the

title of the Smithsons' *oeuvre complète*, *The Charged Void*, makes that clear.

But notwithstanding Beigel + ARU's stress on space rather than object, their Pojagi building has a most distinct presence. Without any attention-seeking gestures, it commands attention nonetheless, through its composure, reticence and studied materiality.

However things turn out in Heyri, and whether or not Kim's patch system keeps development there cohesive, those qualities will surely still make themselves felt.

CREDITS

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Opposite page: a corner of the patio at the south of the house. Above: view from the roof terrace, looking towards the upper pavilion of the house and the hillside garden beyond. Left: a 'personal room' beside the patio