

BEIGEL + ARU/ POSITIVE PEOPLE INC.



HE VALUES THE EXPERIENCE OF ARCHITECTURE THROUGH TIME RATHER THAN EYE-CATCHING OBJECT MAKING

By Kim Jong Kyu. Photography by Jonathan Lovekin

Florian Beigel has been director of the Architecture Research Unit (ARU) based at London Metropolitan University, formerly North London Polytechnic, since the 1980s, working in partnership with Philip Christou. Projects by Beigel + ARU include the Pojagi Building in Heyri Art Valley (AJ 05.05.05) and the Youl Hwa Dang Publishing House in Paju Book City, both in South Korea, and the redevelopment of post-industrial and military sites in the former East Germany (AJ 03.04.03).

The new building for a publisher in Paju, South Korea, which Florian Beigel + ARU have just completed, marks the latest stage in developing a city there, on a site 30km north of Seoul. After lengthy preparations beginning in 1988, Ki-Ung Yi and a number of other Korean publishers decided to establish a working settlement for publishing companies in Paju. As well as undertaking extensive land and planning negotiations with government authorities, they went on a number of international architectural tours and had many discussions, in order to create a community spirit for founding the city.

A decisive moment came when the publishers began talking about a city built to a design manual, rather than through the development of each building individually. Generally, the government-led ‘urban planning’ of new cities in South Korea lays down functional road networks first, then divides the fields according to the designated types of uses. Unfortunately, there are practically no planning controls that integrate the individual developments at the urban scale. Although there are basic

development rules and minimum guides, they aren’t specific enough to generate clear and strong urban characteristics. By contrast, the design manual of Paju Book City was meant to be a framework that would hold the individual developments together. Even though the exact content of the developments could not be defined in advance, it would supply the urban spatial orders to integrate them.

Based on the strategic urban and landscape design plan entitled ‘Paju Landscape Script’, which was created by Florian Beigel and ARU in London, the design manual was produced in 1999 by a team including Beigel, three South Korean architects and me. ‘The Paju Book City project is not a landscape-design project, nor is it an urban-design project. It is an infrastructural architectural project on a large scale – just as the table is on a small scale,’ says Beigel.

Prior to the Paju Book City design, Beigel first tested his concept of ‘architectural infrastructures’ in a proposal for regenerating the Brikettfactory Witznitz, in a former coal-mining region near Leipzig in eastern Germany. In *Time Architecture: Selected Architectural Works, by Florian Beigel and Architecture Research Unit*, Iñaki Ábalos explains: ‘The conception of their work as “landscape infrastructure” is designed not to anticipate the final picture but to make possible or rather to stimulate development processes, creating guidelines that allow us to interpret land as a medium for laws of change and transformation that it is not the project’s concern to predict or specify.’



1. The scheme has been conceived as an ensemble of two buildings

Based on his experience of the Witznitz project and several other large urban design projects in Germany in the late 1990s, Beigel was asked by Korean architect Seung H Sang to design the strategic urban and landscape plan for Phase One of Paju Book City. He and I were then commissioned in 2000 to design the Youl Hwa Dang publishing house in Paju Book City. Beigel said at the time: ‘This building is a test case for the new methodology of the landscape infrastructure plan.’ Beigel was subsequently asked to design premises for the publisher Positive People Inc. on a site adjacent to the Youl Hwa Dang building, near the very beginning of the street of publishers.

The Positive People offices not only signal the beginning of the street but acknowledge the street’s change of direction by being conceived as two buildings rather than one. From the beginning of the design process, Beigel used the term ‘urban ensemble’ to describe his proposal. The North Building keeps the order and directionality of the street, whereas the South Building works as the starting point of the street, as well as the focal point – it tilts away from the street edge at such an angle that it discreetly creates an in-between space with the other building. When Beigel discusses Giorgio Morandi’s paintings, he stresses the importance of the leftover space between the objects (AJ 03.04.03). The offices for Positive People contain such a space in between two L-shaped buildings, which are different in volume.

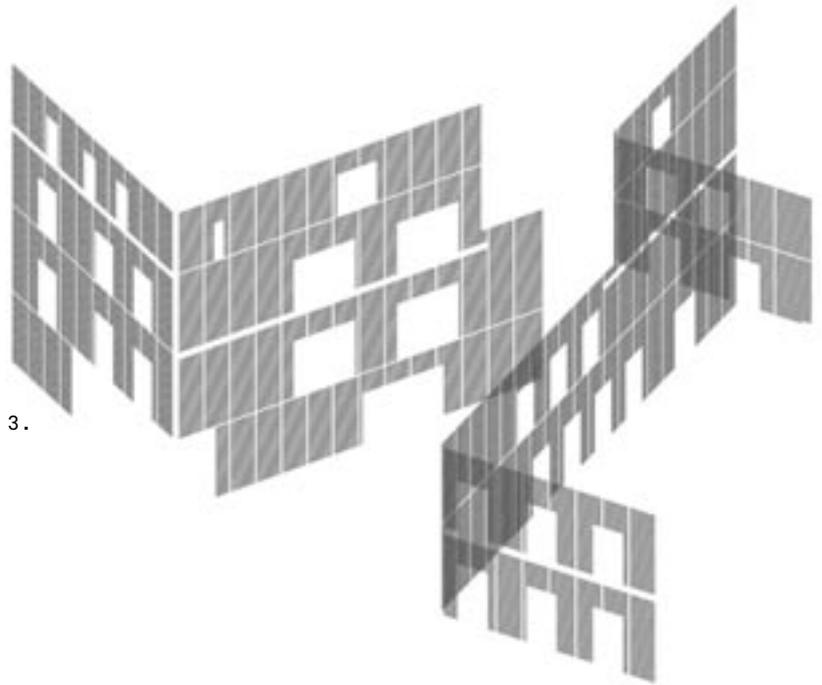
In Korea, the large void space between buildings is called ‘Ma-Dang’, and is perhaps the most essential characteristic of

Korean architecture. Traditionally the ‘Ma-Dang’ was deliberately created between buildings to accommodate various domestic activities and act as an ‘outdoor living room’, whereas the patio sited between the Positive People buildings is simply an in-between space. This subtle difference is similar in nature to the difference between Morandi’s paintings and traditional Korean painting. The true sense of ‘Ma-Dang’ has not been realised in modern-day Korean architecture, mainly (and unfortunately) due to the modernisation of the Korean lifestyle. ‘We are bored with object fixation. Instead we are interested in what happens between objects, in the void, in emptiness. We still think the *raison d’être* of architecture is space not object,’ says Beigel, – a point that is a meaningful enough one to ponder whether one is in the East or in the West.

Examining Spanish architect Ábalos & Herreros’ Casa Mora project, which eliminates corridors and treats the house as an assembly of juxtaposed rooms, Beigel says: ‘Programme is not allowed to dominate design. The programmatic descriptions are put into the plan of rooms as a testing procedure of a construct of architectural character achieved by considerations of proximity. The architectural character of this house is a complex matter. But the complexity is not manifested in the technology. It never becomes a matter of the architects expressing more than there actually is. It is calculated architecture, a bit like a Bach fugue. This is an exciting house. It would make one go on one’s toes, any moment expecting the unexpected, a room-by-room discovery,

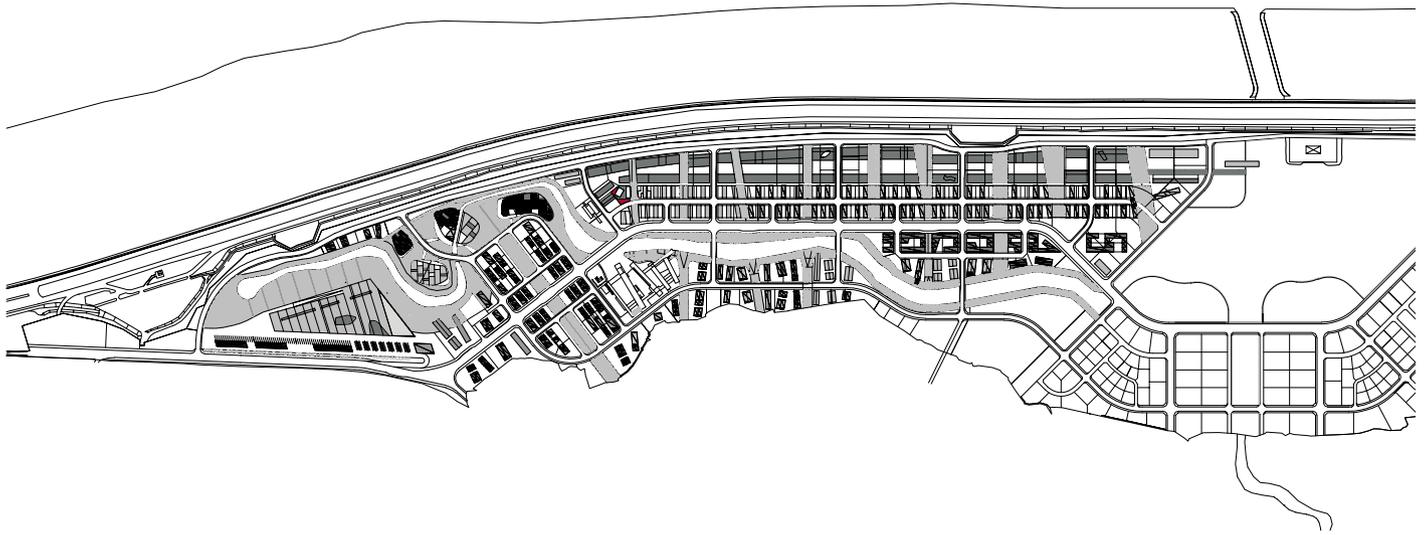


2.



3.

2 & 3. The two buildings are situated at a point where the street in Paju changes direction. The South Building (on the left) makes a half-turn to acknowledge this, while the North Building remains firmly aligned with Bookmaker Street and the adjacent Youl Hwa Dang publishing house (as seen in the drawing on page 29). Beigel stresses the importance of the void between the North and South Buildings, comparing it to the public space created by the three elements of Alison and Peter Smithson's Economist Building



4. Site plan, Paju Book City



featuring escapes and encounters, including slightly awkward, even irritating ones. [It is] a cultural condenser.’

Beigel’s attempt to realise his own ‘cultural condenser’ can be seen in his Positive People offices. The earlier Youl Hwa Dang project contained some of these ideas, but this scheme is mostly composed simply as a vertical arrangement of spaces, whereas the Positive People offices utilise both horizontal and vertical arrangements.

Beigel had intended to use a structural loadbearing brick-wall construction for the whole building, but this changed during the design process because new seismic standards came into effect in South Korea. To continue with a solid masonry building would have resulted in a substantial rise in cost, so Beigel opted for a reinforced-concrete wall with brick and steel cladding.

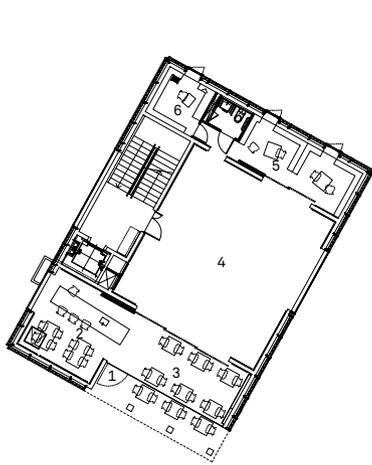
Brick was deliberately chosen to give a feeling of ‘solidity’ and a ‘monolithic’ quality, intensifying the experience of the in-between space. The steel framework around the brick panels was chosen for ‘tectonic’ reasons, while the various types of windows are positioned to be independent of the module of the facade steelwork, further stressing the building’s ‘solidity’. As perforations in a solid mass, they project the characteristics of the interior space, forming a ‘family of windows’. In his book *Constructing Architecture*, Andrea Deplazes writes: ‘The character of the architectural space depends on how things are done and for that reason it is determined by the technical realisation and by the structural composition of the substances and building materials used.’

The charm of Beigel’s design lies in the fact that it was built to fundamental rules of construction and realised with delicate details. Mentioning architect Walter Segal, a pioneer of self-build housing, Beigel says: ‘He liked to use a few good things. His timber houses were gazelles compared with some of the clumsier versions of his followers. Segal, however, never felt the need to “express” this efficiency. It remained at ease with itself. It never shouted about itself.’

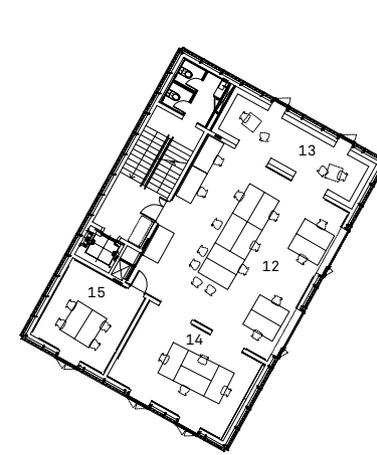
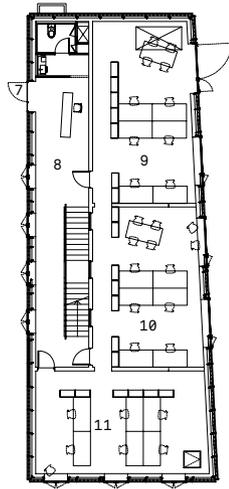
The same is true of the works of Beigel. They feel natural, as if they have always been standing. The interiors are a series of neutral spaces, their relationships diverse but not complicated. The spaces are waiting to embrace the occupants’ daily activities while retaining an open-ended use.

The han-ji rice paper internal walls which are mounted on the reinforced-concrete structure look like an art installation, and they work as a calculated ‘interior infrastructure’. The spaces between the han-ji wall panels are tailored to be filled with bookshelves for the publishers. Therefore, each space will be able to change through time to meet the specific requirements of the users, leaving the original intention of the architect intact. This can truly be called ‘specific indeterminate space’. For this, Beigel proposes an ‘inhabitation strategy’, which also exemplifies his affection for daily life.

To me, Beigel’s work can only truly be understood by experiencing its result rather than just by reading a description of it. His affection for architecture cherishes the experience of the



5. Ground-floor plan



6. First-floor plan



building through time rather than simply creating eye-catching objects. Despite the fact that Beigel's work process is extremely calculated and precise, dealing with a huge number of inter-related elements within the given circumstances, his genuine concern about the people who will use the building remains at the heart of it.

The resulting construction is extremely well executed, particularly when one considers that in South Korea we often still suffer from a lack of high-level architectural workmanship based on a fundamental understanding of the intentions of the architect. While the pace of technological development is extremely fast in this country, unfortunately because of the shortness of its modern history, building workmanship is often not quite up to the level it should be. I would like to note, however, that a tremendous effort has been made on this scheme by Jong-Hoon Choi of Network in Architecture, ARU's partner architect in South Korea, to realise Beigel's delicate design intentions within the constraints of the local building industry.

- 1 SOUTH BUILDING PORTICO ENTRANCE ON BOOKMAKER STREET
- 2 SMALL SQUARE ROOM, BOOK CAFÉ BAR, WITH VIEW TO BAMBOO GARDEN
- 3 SMALL RECTANGULAR ROOM, BOOK CAFÉ, WITH VIEW TO MOUNTAIN
- 4 LARGE SQUARE ROOM, BOOK GALLERY, WITH VIEW ACROSS TO NORTH BUILDING
- 5 SMALL RECTANGULAR ROOM, BOOK LIBRARY, WITH VIEW TO CHERRY TREE
- 6 SMALL DOUBLE-HEIGHT ROOM, BOOK TOWER LIBRARY, WITH VIEW TO CHERRY TREE
- 7 NORTH BUILDING ENTRANCE
- 8 LONG THIN ROOM, STAIR GALLERY ROOM, WITH VIEWS ACROSS TO SOUTH BUILDING AND THROUGH INTERNAL WINDOWS INTO ADJACENT ROOM
- 9 LARGE RECTANGULAR ROOM, OFFICE STUDIO, WITH VIEW ACROSS TO YOUL HWA DANG
- 10 LARGE RECTANGULAR ROOM, OFFICE STUDIO, WITH VIEW ACROSS TO YOUL HWA DANG AND THROUGH INTERNAL WINDOWS INTO THE ADJACENT ROOM
- 11 LARGE RECTANGULAR ROOM, OFFICE STUDIO, WITH VIEW TO MOUNTAIN
- 12 LARGE SQUARE ROOM, OFFICE STUDIO ROOM, WITH VIEW ACROSS TO NORTH BUILDING
- 13 SMALL RECTANGULAR ROOM, BOOK LIBRARY, WITH VIEW TO RIVER
- 14 MEDIUM RECTANGULAR ROOM, MEETING ROOM, WITH VIEW TO MOUNTAIN
- 15 SMALL SQUARE ROOM, OFFICE ROOM, WITH VIEW TO MOUNTAIN



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10.

7. View from large square room on the first floor of the South Building, looking west through the small rectangular room towards the river. The han-ji paper lanterns were designed by Beigel + ARU

8. Small rectangular room on the first floor of the South Building, due to be used as a library

9. Large square room on the ground floor of the South Building, looking across to the North Building

10. View down the length of the first floor of the North Building, looking east towards Bookmaker Street



11.

11. One of Bernd and Hilla Becher's photographs of industrial buildings



12.

12. Public space at the Economist Building

ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

The design has a number of distinctive features that question some of today's widely accepted architectural expressions. It teases some of the holy cows of Modernity, such as horizontality and object fixation and the idea of the infinitely flowing space of the open-plan office. We are very fortunate that our partner architect in South Korea, Jong-Hoon Choi, has appreciated and supported these things. A wonderful sense of mutual respect has developed between us.

URBAN STRATA AND VIEWS

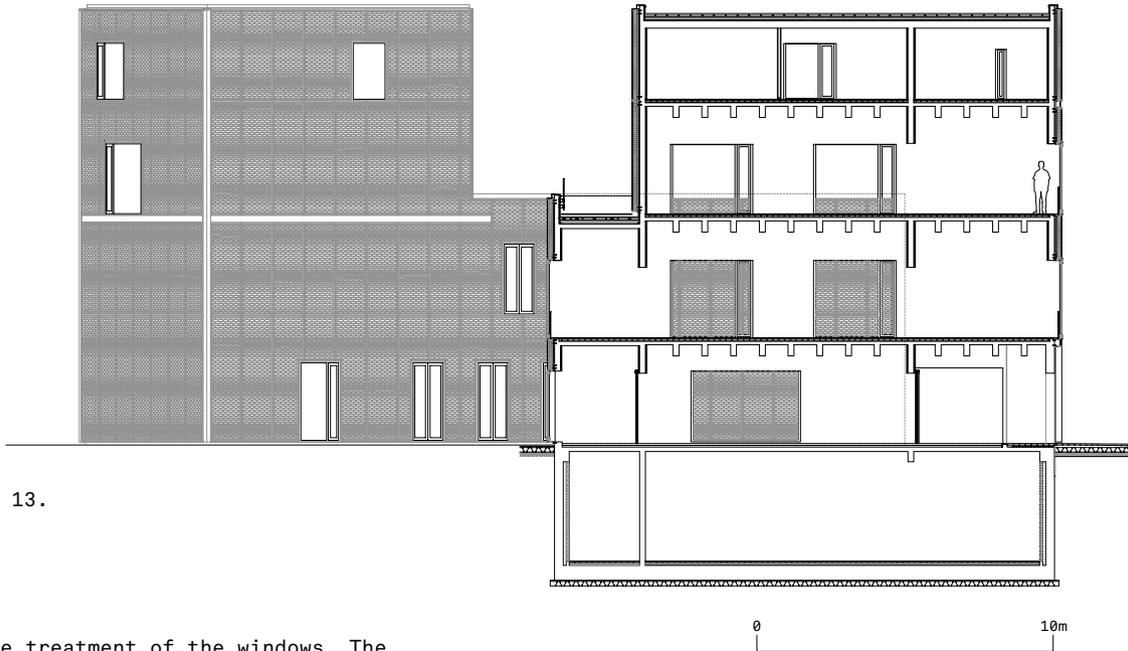
We think the building should tell a story about the place and the landscape in which it is situated. The urban landscape structure of Paju Book City has been shaped by the character of the place: by the views of the Han River and the mountain ranges on the horizon; the Sim Hak Mountain next to Paju; and, perhaps most importantly, by the 10m-high flood-protection dam on the motorway that runs between the site and the river's edge. Paju is an urban wetland – with reeds and urban structures. The Paju Design Guide specifies an urban datum made by the existing 8m-high motorway embankment (particularly on Bookmaker Street). The buildings have two-storey podia lining the street, making a higher-density city below the urban datum level, and a further two storeys placed on top as a lower-density strata with views of the horizon. In the design for Positive People, one can find these landscape imprints again, in the buildings' stepping forms.

AN ENSEMBLE OF BUILDINGS

Positive People is an ensemble of two buildings, rather than one. It offers an extension of the street's public space in front of the temporary café (now a museum of book printing). The Smithsons' Economist Building in London comes to mind: a family of three buildings each with a similar external treatment, making a powerful and generous public place in the voids left between them. The North Building aligns with the Youl Hwa Dang Building to the north and the directionality of the street, while the South Building turns halfway towards the geometry of the 'Urban Island', the dense part of Paju Book City. We wanted the buildings for Positive People to be delicate and gentle figures, with a sense of dignity and quietness.

STEEL AND BRICK CURTAIN WALLS

This is a wall building with windows, not a glass building. The building is composed of a main structure of reinforced concrete walls and floors with external curtain walls of steel and brick. Today, brick buildings usually give an impression of solidity and timelessness. This is an illusion. In most cases a single thickness of brick is used as an external veneer that is tied invisibly to structural walls or frames made of other materials. The curtain walls of the Positive People buildings are made of steel frames attached to the structural concrete walls behind with brick infill. The frames are too thin to support the floors and the roofs of the buildings. The vertical modulation comes from a desire to avoid the use of brick ties or



13. Note the treatment of the windows. The basement room in the South Building will probably be used for lectures

expansion joints. In essence, this construction is not unlike that of a conventional curtain wall of glass supported with steel frames. This concept is similar to Mies' Illinois Institute of Technology campus in Chicago, and Bernd and Hilla Becher's photographs of industrial buildings with steel and brick curtain walls were also an inspiration for this scheme.

COMPOSITION OF WINDOWS

The various arrangements of windows played an essential part in forming the character of the building. They are designed in relation to the proportions and qualities of the room interiors, as well as the composition of the exterior walls of the buildings. We think of the windows as large pictures of the outside world that stand on the floor, offering specific views of the mountain, river and the patio space between the buildings. They have a figurative quality, standing on the floor and never reaching the ceiling. There are two general types: the large, almost square studio windows, and the tall outward-opening portrait-like French windows. The external facades are composed of groups, or families, of windows. The sizes and proportions are varied. Window groupings are generated in relation to urban landscape spaces at different scales, and by considerations of formality to the public space and informality to garden and patio space. Window openings occupy a relatively area, to maintain the wall's integrity. We think it is important that the compositional order of the windows remains independent of the order of the brick and

steel curtain. The windows should not be 'framed' by the facade steel, but, as they are part of the fabric of the curtain, they are in the same plane as the brick. The facade is divided by wider lines of horizontal steel, making houses on top of houses, such as double-storey facades on top of each other or a single-storey facade on top of a three-storey facade.

NOBLE FLOOR

The Positive People buildings are like large city houses. They are designed as a plan of rooms of varying proportions, directly connected without corridors. When the client came to London to discuss the design, we visited the Georgian houses in Bedford Square. The floor-to-ceiling heights in the Positive People buildings are similar to those proportions of an English Georgian house, the first floor being the noble floor with good views of the public life of the street and the city below. It can be used for ceremonies, lectures and meetings. Tectonic rice paper (han-ji) figures are arranged on the interior of the exposed, cast in-situ, concrete walls of the building. Similar to the window openings, they stand on the floor and do not reach the fair-faced concrete ceiling with its regular array of beams. The han-ji figures are like an inner shirt to the concrete, giving the cast concrete wall a renewed dignity. As a complement to the han-ji figures, special han-ji paper lanterns were designed for the noble floor, visible from the street at night.

Florian Beigel and Philip Christou, ARU



14. Looking towards the North Building from the large square room on the second floor of the South Building

PARTNER ARCHITECT'S ACCOUNT

This story is not about the building but about the people, the episodes and the valuable memories I have had during the building process. The client is the owner of a book company that publishes a magazine called Positive Thinking, which tells touching stories of the lives of ordinary people. The editor and his staff make the magazine with the belief that positive thinking makes people beautiful and their lives peaceful. I thought this philosophy might be key to understanding the building, and this proved very important in the end. I think the process of bookmaking is very similar to the process of building-making. In fact, the framework of thinking and the methods of working are also similar. This helped the client and architects to understand and treat each other in a kind and generous manner. It was possible to maintain the fundamental concepts of the original design despite many unexpected changes, thanks to this well-established bond and the trust there was from the beginning between the two parties. The same type of mutual understanding was also important for the collaboration between the design architects in London and us, the local architects in Seoul. Active and regular communication between the architects continued throughout the design stage as well as the construction stage. The architects in London fundamentally understood the conditions of the building site, Paju Book City, and they wanted the completed building to make kind and gentle relationships with its surroundings. It was made possible because the design architect truly understood the local culture and sentiment, in some ways better than a local architect could. There are a number of cherishable memories in my mind regarding the work process: the moment the client was so delighted at our first presentation; the moment the design architects got so excited when first seeing the structural concrete buildings on site; and the many exchanges of useful opinions communicated over the Internet with the design architects in London. Now this architectural experience remains not only as a built product and the stacked piles of documents and drawings, but also in our memories of exchanges and conversations, and in the mutual respect that has grown between us. The architectural process has not ended.

Jong-Hoon Choi, Network In Architecture

Credits

Tender date

April 2006

Start on site date

12 May 2006

Contract duration

52 weeks

Gross internal floor area

1,734 m²

Main contract arrangement

South Korean standard contract

Total cost

1,620,000,000 Korean won (₩880,000)

Client

Positive Thinking

Architects

Architecture Research Unit (ARU), London: Florian Beigel, Philip Christou, Ahn Jong Hwan, Nicholas Lobo Brennan, Stefano Ciurlo Walker, Thomas Gantner, Kalle Soderman. Network in Architecture (NIA), Seoul: Jong-Hoon Choi, Yang Ki Wook, Ryu Sam Yeol, Kim Eun Ah

Structural engineer

TNI Structural Engineering

Building technology consultant

Professor Dr Ing Helmut F O Müller, University of Dortmund

Services consultant

BOW MIE Consultants (facilities), Chung Song ENC (electrical)

Specialist consultants

Kwon Nia (landscape), Sunjin Engineering (window system)

Contractor

DongNyok Construction

Subcontractors and suppliers

Han-ji interior lamps ACE Lighting; *fluorescent steel channel lights* AL Electric; *internal precast-concrete floor* ST Lite; *external hanging lights* Disano; *windows* CNK System; *window hardware* Häfele Korea; *brick manufacturer* Hankook Toheong Wajon; *elevator* Mitsubishi Elevator Korea; *concrete pigments/external works* Wooshin Pigment/Bayferrox