The second building for Youl Hwa Dang publishing house is set back from the street to provide a publicly accessible yard.

PROJECT TEAM **Architects** Architecture Research Unit at London Metropolitan University in partnership with Network in Architecture, Seoul (NIA). ARU: Florian Beigel, Philip Christou, with Thomas Gantner, Bumsuk Chung. NIA: Choi Jong Hoon with Yang Ki Wook, **Engineer** TNI Structural Engineering

Body building

Ellis Woodman admires the latest of three buildings that Florian Beigel and Philip Christou's ARU has designed for South Korea's Paju Book City

Pictures by Jonathan Lovekin

There is always something especially revealing about sites that have been shaped by an architect over the course of successive commissions. As in the case of Mies's IIT campus, the artistic trajectory that is exposed is not necessarily a happy one. And yet consider the encounter between Asplund's national romantic woodland chapel and the avowedly modern crematorium he built alongside it a couple of decades later, or that of Siza's Boa Nova tea house and Leça de Palmeira swimming pool — buildings realised within just three years and a couple of hundred metres of each other but which mark distant points on their author's creative journey. For the visitor, such places offer a privileged insight into an architect's capacity for self-analysis and reinvention.

A decade has now passed since the Architecture Research Unit led the team that formulated the masterplan for Paju Book City. Developed with the aim of consolidating the operations of the South Korean publishing industry on a single site, the scheme has proved a fantastic success, now comprising more than 100 buildings. Among them are works by excellent Korean architects and a number by major figures from Japan, Europe and the US. However, altogether the most compelling are the three ARU has designed itself.

The first, the headquarters of the Youl Hwa Dang publishing house (*Works* June 18, 2004), occupies the first plot on Bookmakers' Street, the long road that runs parallel to the elevated highway which forms the site's western boundary. While the Paju masterplan imposes no requirement on the architects building within it to adopt a particular material palette or formal vocabulary, it does make certain morphological demands. On Bookmakers' Street, the key requirement is that the buildings should comprise two stacked parts — a two-storey base that rises to the height of the highway and a two-storey pavilion of a smaller footprint that sits on top. This edict has fixed a vivid relationship between buildings and topography, while still allowing the street to support a wide range of formal expression.

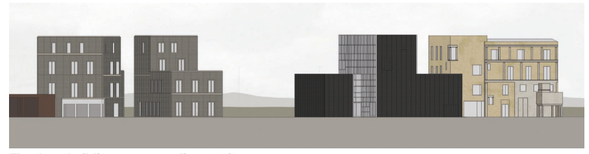
One encounters a sense of hierarchy here which makes for an altogether more urban experience

Few of the architects that have built here have proved shy in exploiting that licence. In designing the Youl Hwa Dang building, however, ARU resisted developing a signature vocabulary, presenting it rather as an archetypal embodiment of the base and pavilion type. That impression is enforced by the structure's exceptional level of abstraction. It is conceived as a unified volume from which a series of courtyards and terraces have been subtracted. Black-stained weatherboarding provides its outer skin while the surfaces exposed by the cuts take the form of full height curtains of translucent glazing. This is an architecture that communicates at two scales — that of the individual cladding unit and that of the volume as a whole, all features of an intermediary dimension having been suppressed or excised.

The reductivism of the Youl Hwa Dang vocabulary made the building that ARU subsequently designed for the next door site all the more startling. Completed in 2007, the headquarters of the Positive publishing house shares the notched morphology of its neighbour but employs an altogether more articulated language. ARU's primary move was to conceive the project as an ensemble of two stand-alone pieces rather than as a single building. Both are of in-situ concrete faced in dark brick, a treatment that is elaborated by ▶

The 2004 Youl Hwa Dang building.

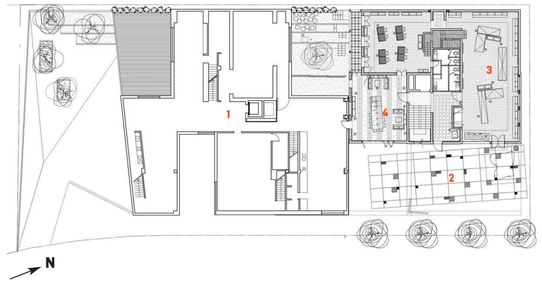
The 2007 Positive publishing house headquarters.



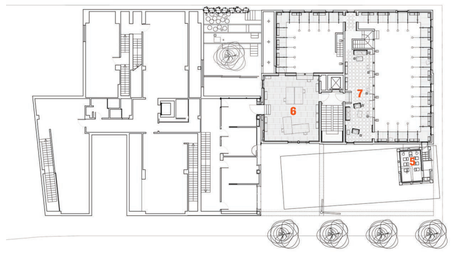
The three buildings occupy adjacent sites.

WORKS: ARU

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



1 Youl Hwa Dang HQ
2 Art yard
3 Bookshop
4 Café
5 Tea room
6 Office
7 Reading area

the use of a bespoke method of connecting the two layers. Instead of employing concealed ties, ARU mounted a grid of painted steel T-sections to the concrete. The leading edge of each T projects forward of the brick, inscribing a net of fine lines across the facades — a visual as much as a physical structuring device.

Sited in artfully coincidental relationship to this geometry are punched windows that vary in width but are of a consistently door-like height. They therefore offer an insistent register of the dimensions of the human body. Crucially, ARU's Florian Beigel and Philip Christou characterise the change of direction evidenced in the Positive building as one from an abstract architecture to a figurative one. The new language certainly offers a more finely demarcated gradation between the scales of the individual and the landscape. One encounters a pronounced sense of hierarchy here — both spatial and tectonic — which contrasts with the fundamentally shed-like expression of the earlier building and makes for an altogether more urban experience. If Paju is to grow from being a no doubt remarkable business park to become the city that its name suggests it aspires to be, that is a distinction that it will need to learn to recognise.

While the Positive building remains an enormously engaging project, it is no longer possible to view it in quite the way that we might have done on its completion. This is because ARU has now realised a third scheme at Paju Book City, a building that reveals the earlier language to have been a transitional moment in a creative inquiry that still had some distance left to run. Although formally and programmatically distinct, the new scheme is actually an extension to the Youl Hwa Dang building. Its lower two storeys are occupied principally by an art bookshop, a commercial operation but also a cultural facility serving the whole Paju community.

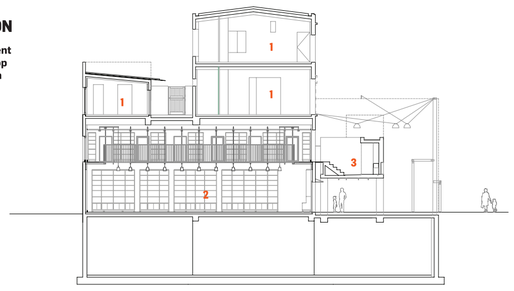
The bookshop's principal room.

Ranged across a suite of beautifully proportioned rooms, the two largest of which are double height, it closely adheres to the image of a traditional library. In characteristic ARU fashion, a pronounced distinction between the structure's shell and the means of its inhabitation is maintained. The walls are massive and in exposed insitu concrete, while everything within them is as light and mobile as possible. The steel, wall-hugging gallery that connects the rooms together at first floor level is therefore reduced to an almost alarmingly spindly affair while the books themselves are housed in free-standing ARU-designed cabinets rather than on wall-mounted shelving.

Upstairs are two apartments, one of which has been occupied by Youl Hwa Dang's president, Yi Ki-Ung, and the other by his son. The proximity to the highway doesn't make for the quietest living environment but the view of the Han river which lies beyond offers some compensation. Each suite comprises a diverse selection of very decent rooms for which ARU has again provided free-standing furniture, including a series of floor-standing lights that suggest miniature versions of the Bookmakers' Street base and pavilion building type.

Of course, a criticism that could be levelled at Youl Hwa Dang 2 is that it ignores this typology. By breaking with the pattern of the neighbouring buildings, the project does, however, succeed in providing something that none of the others do — a publicly accessible yard. This is a space that the small ground floor café can colonise, in which art can be displayed and where, in however modest a way, the population of Paju might begin to engage in a public life. Its creation represents a real act of largesse on the part of Yi Ki-Ung, a figure who is also, significantly, the chairman of the association of publishers that has guided the construction of Paju Book City.

SECTION



1 Apartment
2 Bookshop
3 Tearoom

The size and proportions of the yard approximate those of a stage and, indeed, the space is imbued with a distinctly theatrical spirit. Its backdrop is a four-storey-high wall of in-situ concrete, the composition of which feels at once quite startlingly original and profoundly archaic. ARU's newfound readiness to break down the wall surface into subdivided parts is again on show. This time, however, the practice hasn't felt the need to substantiate that decision by appealing to a laboured constructional alibi. Instead, it has simply divided the elevation into three distinct but related compositions — a full-height vertical element that stands to the left; and two horizontally oriented parts which are stacked on top of each other alongside. If one subscribes to the notion that all elevations are either grids or faces it should come as no surprise to learn that the practice's figurative concerns have led it towards the latter type. Each of the three panels sports its own unique constellation of openings; highly eccentric in the case of the two that sit on the ground, coalescing into symmetry in that of the crowning element. They are made more particular still by mouldings that have been introduced into the concrete. The two horizontal parts are capped by vestigal cornices while shallow manipulations of the wall surface isolate certain openings and corral others into family groupings.

Ensuring that the parts not only operate as local compositions but also attain a cumulative effect has quite evidently demanded many iterations of the design. This looks like architecture that has been sweated over, and is all the stronger for it. That the facade coheres at all has a lot to do with the fact that every opening is a punched hole and all but two of them are of person height. Even those exceptions, the pair of small windows that light the staircase, are of door-like proportion, again ensuring that a sense of the figurative is maintained. Indeed, there is a strong implication that each opening is primed, like the panel of an advent calendar, for someone to appear behind it. It is really this characteristic that lends the yard its theatrical quality. While the compositional sophistication of the new elevation is much the greater, the quasi-urban facades with which ARU framed the performance area of its 1985 Half Moon Theatre present themselves as an obvious precedent.

The Youl Hwa Dang yard may be a stage, but it is not an empty one. ARU has populated it with a pair of structures that are the scheme's most explicitly figurative components. The first, which the architect dubs "the giraffe", is a gangly timber tripod that holds one end of the cables from which the external lighting is suspended. Its friend is a tiny, concrete building, which stands on four columns half a metre forward of — and at a slight angle to — the main frontage. Its purpose is two-fold, providing a portico-like articulation to the bookshop entrance and housing a traditional hanji-lined tearoom for the use of Mr Yi and privileged guests above. This little room is daylit by a projecting roof-cowl — which, in figurative terms, provides the structure with its "head" — and by a couple of low windows from which the room's floor-seated occupants can monitor the yard. Its proportions are markedly squatter than those of the host building, suggesting an alliance with an eastern architectural tradition to which the scheme otherwise makes little reference.

That neglect might be considered problematic but, in truth, the architecture that has been built in South Korea since its relatively recent industrialisation is all but indistinguishable from that of an average North American city. The monuments of the nation's architectural history are almost exclusively complexes of single-storey pavilions. Quite what lessons an architect tasked with designing a multi-storey structure in an urban situation might draw from that culture is not clear.

The steel, wall-hugging gallery is reduced to an almost alarmingly spindly affair

Without doubt this is a heroically peculiar building and yet I am going to stick my neck out and suggest that before very long it will prove to be a highly influential one. While we are all familiar with the fact that over the past 30 years, the opportunities available to architects have become increasingly restricted to the articulation of a building's skin, there remains a striking lack of discussion about what rhetorical role we might expect a facade to perform.

One could well imagine that the only choice available in designing an elevation today lies between a treatment that is impassively laconic and one that is jazzily arbitrary. The Youl Hwa Dang 2 facade is something else — a composition, admittedly a free composition, but one that is none the less considered for that. If the effect does seem radically at odds with the concerns of recent architecture, it is by no means unknown to us. An architect like Mackintosh would surely recognise the sensibility at work. Look at the elevations of his Glasgow Art School and we find buried within them highly asymmetric compositions of house-like dimension that register independently while also contributing to a grander whole. Youl Hwa Dang 2 is an enormous achievement in its own right but it also unlocks a room we seem to have forgotten we owned.

The smaller of the bookshop's double-height spaces.