

John Wong: Making Cities Livable

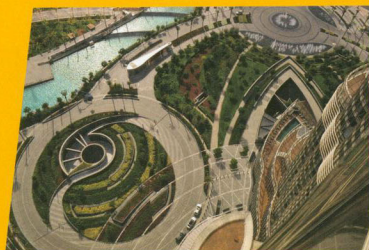


As managing principal and chairman of SWA Group in Sausalito, John Wong is an internationally renowned landscape architect with an impressive portfolio of prominent and sustainable projects throughout the world, from new communities and cities to public plazas and gardens. He is most recently recognized for his expertise in designing the grounds for super-tall structures—an area that now comprises over half of his practice. In addition to creating the ground planes for the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa in Dubai, and the Shanghai Tower, scheduled to complete in 2016, he is also currently working on designs for Kingdom Tower in Jeddah, which will rise to an estimated 1000 meters in 2017.

Designing for tall buildings poses a unique challenge; to connect an imposing structure with the existing fabric of the surrounding area to create an interactive environment that makes people's lives better. Wong is a strong believer in the sustainable benefits of high density, multi-use tall buildings with habitable open areas. He views sustainability in both ecological and human terms and sees landscape architecture as the discipline that can have the most profound impact when it comes to solving one of today's biggest problems—how to make cities more livable.

In his winning competition proposal for the Suzhou Industrial Park Central Business District, Wong highlights not only the beautiful natural location, but also the connection between ecological and social environments. The project is organized along a central urban axis, Suzhou Corridor, surrounded by five distinct rings of landscapes and pedestrian walkways that unify the landscape and the architecture while providing intimate encounters with the environment. The design links dispersed neighborhoods and creates a lively outdoor mall connecting commercial and residential developments.

Wong was attracted to the field of landscape architecture because of its holistic approach to solving today's environmental and urban problems—connecting a variety of disciplines including architecture, engineering, urban planning and



Whether it's designing a garden or the groundscape for one of the world's tallest structures, for John Wong (B.A. Landscape Architecture, 1974) there are three things that characterize the role of landscape architecture: creating a space where people can interact, inspiring sustainable innovation and defining a sense of place.

transportation with an understanding of natural systems. As landscape architects are called upon to bring ideas to life on a much larger and more complex scale, he feels this collaborative approach will become increasingly important. And as sustainability continues to demand innovation, this is where landscape architecture can have the greatest impact.

Wong's design for Guthrie Green in Tulsa is a showcase for sustainable innovation. With the idea to create a beautiful "outdoor living room" to encourage rejuvenation of the emerging mixed-use neighborhood, SWA transformed a 2.7-acre truck loading facility into a vibrant community gathering space for artists, urban professionals, students, and visitors. SWA took advantage of the natural geothermal energy and abundant sun to create a high-performing system including photo-voltaic panels and a grid of 500-foot deep geothermal wells that help offset the park's energy demands and provide heating and cooling for adjacent buildings.

As the 100th anniversary of Landscape Architecture at UC Berkeley approaches in 2013, Wong appreciates what he gained from his experience there and what he sees the college continuing to provide: a big picture, multi-disciplinary approach that opens the mind and brings a fuller understanding of the challenges and possibilities for the future. As a new Cal parent—his daughter is at the College of Natural Resources—he's pleased that she'll be exposed to these critical thinking skills that will be even more highly prized in the future.

TOP LEFT: Suzhou Center Forest Ring-Sky Garden & Sky Terrace

ABOVE: Burj Khalifa aerial view, Photo by David Gal, SWA Group

BOTTOM LEFT: Suzhou Center Illustrative Plan

BOTTOM RIGHT: John Wong, Managing Principal & Chairman, SWA Group