

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

HOW TO USE THIS NOT-SO-TYPICAL BOOK

This book is a signature of my rebellious nature. It stamps my declaration of being a disruptor as well as a constructor. I aim to disrupt the long-standing approach to Architecture and Design, which focuses either on functional performance, or on the idolisation of aesthetics and/or imagery. Instead, I aim to construct a conduit that will be the super-highway between experts who know so much about the mind and those who conceptualise the spaces where we dwell every day.

This book is intended to nudge you to look at your life and to understand how it is shaped by the physical environment. It empowers you to make changes, small tweaks here and there, that could transform your life. Because attaining a higher state of well-being, both physical and mental, is a f**king big deal! Only then can you become perpetually on the journey of becoming happier every day.

To truly benefit from it, you need to play full out. You have to process the words, and also take actions. Whatever amount of time commitment you can invest. For yourself and no one else. At the end of each chapter, there are suggestions and also a page to pen your personal insights. Make good use of it.

This wide margin is specially designed for all your personal notes.

The end goal: to become happier every day. More joyful than in the 24hrs before. Because this will truly bring you other layers of success, however you define it for yourself.

READING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGY

I encourage the reader to progress through the book from beginning to end. However, being a rebel, and also understanding that this might not be the most convenient or preferred journey, the chapters are also organised to work for anyone who wishes to jump back and forth or only delve into portions which relate to you on any particular day.

If at all possible, I would also recommend you revisit chapters after you have reflected upon their contents. Your mental processing, circumscribing the topic(s) relating to your own personal experience, combined with a re-read, will reveal to you newer insights. If this sounds unbelievable, just try it once, and you will relish the magic.

ARCHITECTURAL WORDS

I have deliberately kept technical jargon and fancy architectural words to the bare minimum because this is not a book to celebrate architecture *per se*. Instead, it is a work intended to anchor the field

of design as a medium and conduit through which we can make changes that can affect our states of being.

TWO BOOKS IN ONE

We live in challenging times. Although technological advances and today, AI, seem to outperform us at most tasks and reduce the time we need to perform any task, it seems like we could all do with 36-hour days.

Therefore, I have experimented with writing a book for readers without design training and fused it with another for the architects and designers. In this way, I am building a bridge that links architecture and design with the topics of well-being and happiness. This is a book packed with nuggets of knowledge shared from my personal experiences, and my aim was to blend enjoyment with the pursuit of happiness through the facets of E, G and M (hook here for you to find out more in the book).

FINAL SUGGESTION

Read this book with an attitude of being present. Dedicate small chunks of time but give the words and thoughts your full attention. No multi-tasking. Avoid reading, and then realising that you had not read, and so needing to re-read. This robs you of the happiness of reading.



PHOTO: ANNUAL MAYPOLE DANCE AT THE LONDON N21 WINCHMORE HILL VILLAGE GREEN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BRITISH SUMMER.

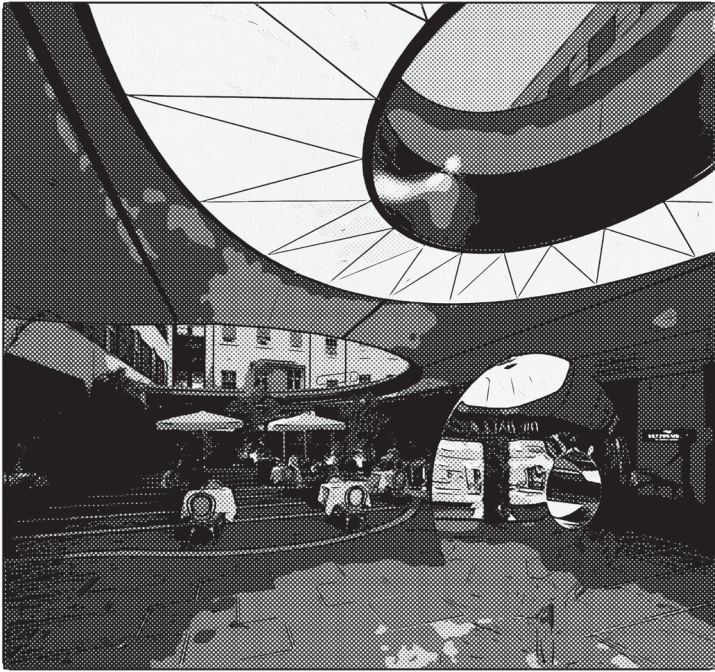


PHOTO: CURVES AND NATURED-INSPIRED GEOMETRIES IN THE DESIGN OF THE COURTYARD SPACE OF THE BILTMORE HOTEL, MAYFAIR, LONDON.

Source: Author's own collection

INTRODUCTION

I am an Architect. In 2010, I was recognised as one of the 20 Architects under the age of 45 who was going to make an impact on the built environment in Singapore and the wider region. Through my professional work, I gathered excellent experience in all scales of urban architecture and spatial design, and hold all the skill sets and credentials to tackle the realm of well-being as a topic.

The technical knowledge is now combined with lessons I have learnt through my own battles with mental challenges. My life's purpose now is to combine these two fields of experiences I have gained, and create the conduit that can serve a much bigger cause: to teach everyone how spaces can impact and help us attain well-being.

RECENT JOURNEY SINCE 2015

In early 2015, my second daughter, Iris, was born, and my family of four relocated back to London from Singapore. That started the second stint of my professional career, and I grew the London office of DP Architects from just one (myself) to a team of almost 12. The growth of the company reflected my ability as an architect and my leadership skills.

THEN THE PANDEMIC STRUCK.



**DRAWING: MY TWO DAUGHTERS AND I AT THE AIRPORT
WHEN WE VISITED FAMILY IN SINGAPORE AFTER THE LONG PERIOD
OF LOCK-DOWN AND TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS.**

The entire period of my greatest career success started when I was close to 40 years old, with me leading and directing an architectural office of 250 in Singapore. This was in 2011, the same year that Ella, my elder daughter, was born. It lasted until the COVID lockdown at the beginning of 2020. These life events spanned a period

of about 10 years and coincided, I realised later, with a long period of chronic depression and self-imposed anxiety.

During this journey, I was constantly investigating how I could contribute to society and trying to balance this with my professional expertise. My focus was to search for ways to figure out how to expand this journey of life, to make it something much bigger and more meaningful.

With the backdrop that I was on the verge of much greater success, becoming a notable person in my industry, the lockdown came and brought me to my worst state. In short, I was suicidal. After having tried all kinds of treatments other than medication, I had no choice but to seek medical assistance. It took about six weeks before I felt like a healthier person – the person who I was, feeling capable of accepting situations, and of facing reality. This was in November 2020. I felt I had the capacity, at last, to sit down and spend time with my daughters.

Gradually, a more balanced mental state became the norm for me, and I conceived the idea of “Small but Big.” Today, I describe this experience as like waking up from my longest nightmare.

WAKING UP FROM THE DEEPEST AND DARKEST NIGHTMARE

It felt like I had stood at the edge of a cliff, and taken half a step towards the void. Something pulled me back, and I am now journeying back towards the lush green fields. Two particular heroes helped me start moving on this journey in the dark troubling months at the end of 2020: Vishen Lakhiani and Jim Kwik. Neither of them would know how extensively their online teachings had equipped me to transform my mental makeup, literally dissipating the dark clouds that had previously occupied my skies. The energy I gained through their wisdom and generosity also nudged me towards the state of “unfuckwithability.” I have described it - and I really visualise it - as the letting go of layers of worry about how others think of me.

This awakening led me to rediscover that I had the ability to feel joy and to be comfortable that not everything was going to go well. And I was okay with this. Something strange also happened: I started to develop this determination that I was going to use this energy that I had re-composed and channel it, via some method that I had yet to figure out, to spread joy. This was the beginning of the WHAD (Well-being and Happiness through Architecture and Design) movement, which is my effort to increase awareness about how happiness intricately connects with architecture and design. My life journey’s twists and turns also led me to think about the possibility

that each of us is not meant to just exist, but is meant to serve and support every other member of humanity.

Whatever role or social status we currently hold, I believe we have a strong obligation to contribute towards the betterment of others. We can be a little light that ignites another person's flame and bring warmth to everyone in the room. However, many of us are either not paying attention to this possibility, or are paying too little care to ourselves.

One of the important lessons that I learned through the many episodes of battling with depression and coming out of it, was this: if I allow my own cup to become empty, I would have no love to give to my most loved ones and no chance to serve others. Nothing can be poured from an empty cup. I decided, therefore, that it was just as important, if not more important, for me to always fill my own cup first. We all need to work on this, so that we can then pour forth from our cups.

Why did I write this book?

"I realised that my architectural expertise cannot be limited to the building commissions I take on ... That would be too limited, and fall short of my desire to make a positive dent in the world. The right thing to do is to share my knowledge as widely as I possibly can. Reveal the secrets: What has worked for me can also work for many others."



PHOTO: WORKDAY IN CENTRAL LONDON WITH MY LABRADOR RETRIEVER ROXIE.