

UNDER ONE ROOF

Bangkok is witnessing a proliferation of mixed-use commercial spaces. Designed to bring people together, the latest projects have plenty to offer, from aesthetic appeal to fun and functionality.

WORDS
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Open House in Bangkok is a vast but organised and visually-appealing space, made up of restaurants, lounges, bars, galleries, stores, pop-up stores, libraries and workspaces.

IN RECENT YEARS, THAILAND'S CAPITAL HAS SEEN THE SPROUTING UP OF MIXED-USE COMMERCIAL PROJECTS CATERING TO DINERS, SHOPPERS, LEISURE-SEEKERS AND CULTURE VULTURES ALIKE.

Warm, spacious and inviting, these modern village-like spaces are drawing people in and giving them good reason to stay awhile.

"I think people were getting tired of hanging out in run-of-the-mill department stores and malls," says Sivichai Udomvoranun, managing director of Bangkok-based architecture firm AOMO and the architect behind Market Land Village near Suvarnabhumi Airport.

"We found that many people, especially the younger generation, prefer spending time in places that look unique and have character, like buildings that have been converted from old factories, for example.

"The style of these new spaces is also in line with the new-generation businesses we are seeing, that sell interesting products. And many of these spaces feature exhibition and activity areas, since that is also what people seem to like these days."

COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE

Because they are communal spaces, the latest mixed-use projects are all about being cool and comfortable, with plenty of room to move and relax in.

Take Open House, for instance, which was conceptualised by architects Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham, of the Tokyo-based Klein Dytham Architecture.

Located in the Central Embassy Complex in Bangkok, this 4,600m² venue comprises restaurants, lounges, bars, galleries, stores, pop-up stores, libraries and workspaces that all seamlessly fit together, making the comfort factor crucial.

Astrid Klein
and Mark
Dytham,
Klein
Dytham
Architecture
(Photo:
Brian Scott
Peterson)



Says Klein: "We wanted to create a place where people could spend their day and not feel bored. The initial space looked like an aircraft hangar – vast, cold and uninviting – and we didn't want people to feel like ants in a big universe. Our challenge was to make it cosy and welcoming, and one way we addressed that was with plenty of warm lighting."

Another challenge was making the massive space navigable. "We asked how we could break it down into an understandable and seamlessly connected village, so we developed a series of towers for each of the restaurants," Klein adds.

"The towers act like totems, making the restaurants visible from a distance. There are clear pathways between the towers, so people know where to walk. It was important not to confuse or frustrate anybody, but instead, make moving within the space something one didn't have to think about."

In the case of Market Land Village, one of Udomvoranun's primary concerns was keeping the place cool and dry at all times.

"An extension of an existing open-air market, the project was built to utilise natural ventilation as much as possible, as well as provide sufficient shade and protection from the rain," he explains.

"Our design added glass louvre panels to a typical warehouse or factory roof. When the southern wind sweeps through the building, it rises towards the panels, which move all the hot air out."

The main challenge he had with the existing building

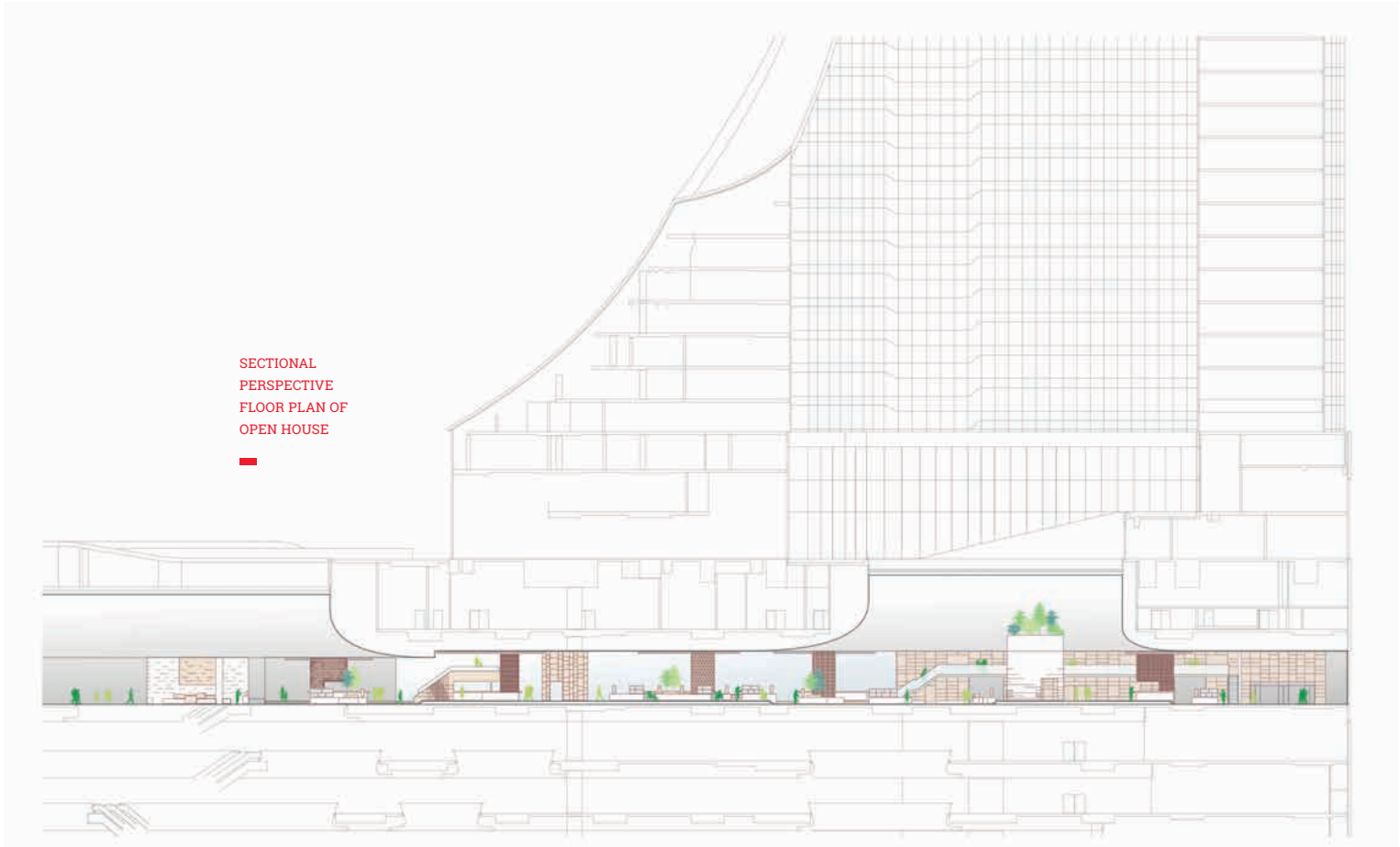
was its complex roof form. But instead of interfering with it, Udomvoranun created a simple horizontal roofline, continuing with his new roof from there.

And to keep customers happy while they browsed, Udomvoranun positioned the food-centre in the middle of the project and separated the fresh market from the retail zone.

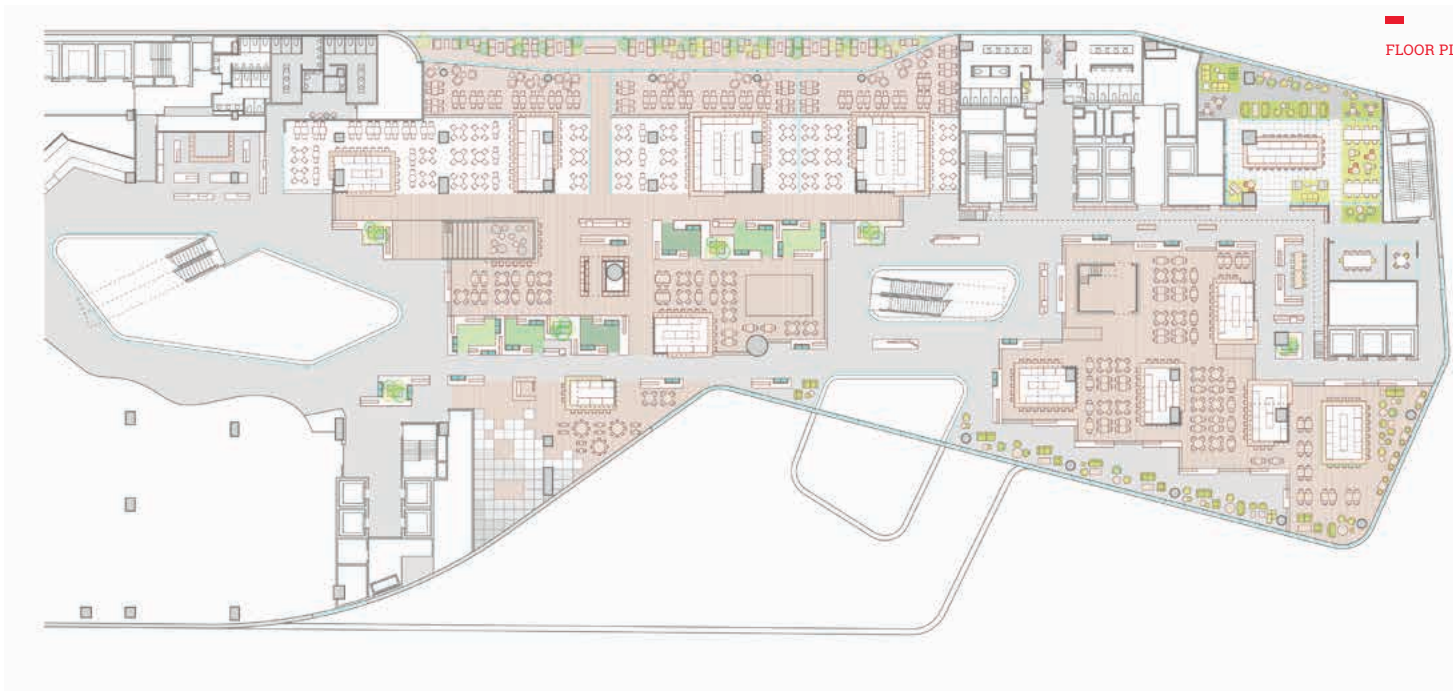
"This makes it easier for customers to locate what they want to buy, and, in case of any future changes, we put in simple and flexible electrical and mechanical systems," he adds.



SECTIONAL
PERSPECTIVE
FLOOR PLAN OF
OPEN HOUSE



FLOOR PLAN



Market
Land Village
utilises
natural
ventilation
as much as
possible, and
was designed
to protect
customers
from the rain
and scorching
sun.



Sivichai
Udomvoranun,
Managing
Director, AOMO



WORK WITH WHAT YOU'VE GOT

Architect Duangrit Bunnag too, had to work with already-existing structures for two of his projects, The Jam Factory and Warehouse 30, both of which are located by Bangkok's Chao Phraya River.

"One was an old factory, and the other, an abandoned warehouse," says Bunnag. "Nobody wanted them, so, instead of demolishing them and constructing something new from scratch, we decided to revitalise them and see how we could make them fresh and fashionable."

Bunnag and his team didn't have to do much to the buildings apart from ensuring the structures were still sound, seeing as they were both old (Warehouse 30 was once a WWII ammunition store).

"Much of the wood was still strong so we looked at how to reinforce it," Bunnag continues. "In the case of the Jam Factory, we replaced the dilapidated wooden frames with metal rods and poles, and added glass frames and doors, a wood fibre cement board for the wall panelling, and an insulated steel roof. And we retained the original walls of Warehouse 30, adding just the wood flooring."

Today the Jam Factory, which measures 3,056m², is a design and creativity hub housing Bunnag's architecture firm, restaurants and cafes, a furniture showroom, a bookshop and an art gallery.

Warehouse 30 is a creative lifestyle destination, comprising stores and cafes. Both also feature open "creative" spaces that can be used for performances and events.



"Adaptive reuse is cost-efficient and eco-friendly," says Bunnag. "It's an excellent way to modernise a structure while still preserving its history and aesthetic appeal."

EASY ON THE EYES

The latest mixed-use projects are also built to look good, not just on the outside but on the inside too.

In designing Open House, Klein Dytham Architecture's Klein wanted the bookstore element to stand out, but instead of confining it to a large square

At Market Land Village, the food centre is kept separate from the fresh market and retail zone, making it easier for customers to shop.



box, she made it linear such that it weaves its way through the venue.

There are rest spots along the way for people to pause and read. "The bookshelves are a visual treat," she points out. "People love being surrounded by them."

The Central Embassy complex is in a leafy area of Bangkok. Wanting to extend this notion of greenery inside, Klein suggested a huge canopy of leaves for Open House.

To achieve this, professional and student artists hand-painted 9,600 leaves on the white ceiling – a task that took six weeks.

"When you look up at the ceiling from the ground floor, you can't help but go 'wow,'" Klein adds.

Clad in a family of different timber fretwork patterns, the towers in Open House are also a sight to behold.

The variety in these patterns serves to change the way light passes through the towers as one moves through the space.



Rather than demolish this old factory by the Chao Phraya River, architect Duangrit Bunnag chose to revitalise it for a new generation of Bangkok residents.

Duangrit
Bunnag,
Director,
Duangrit
Bunnag
Architects
Limited



The Jam
Factory is a
good example
of adaptive
reuse, where
a series of
actions were
taken to
spruce up the
space to turn
old to new.



Once a WWII ammunition store, Warehouse 30 today has grey walls and orange steel doors that bring out the character of the original building.



During the day, the towers seem more solid while at night they dissolve, creating interesting layering effects and moiré patterns.

Mirrored panels on the ceiling around the towers make them appear to extend beyond the space and also break down the immensity of the ceiling.

Don't underestimate the power of colour to bring a space to life. To complement the existing wood and other materials, Bunnag selected simple but precise colour schemes for both the Jam Factory and Warehouse 30.

"For instance, I chose grey to highlight the orange steel doors at Warehouse 30. The colours bring out the character of the original building and allow the structure to blend seamlessly with its surroundings."

With so many considerations that go into designing one of these mixed-use commercial projects, it is no wonder that they are crowded every day of the week.

It also explains why brick-and-mortar retail in Bangkok is far from dead – and these lessons are something the Thais can afford to export to cities around the world.