

POWER PROFILE

# SHAPING CITYSCAPES

Benoy’s MD of global design Simon Bee tells **John Cremer** about his urban ambitions

## HIGH-FLYERS

Some people agonise over degree choices and possible career paths, but for Simon Bee there was never a doubt. “As a kid, I was always making models and playing with Lego,” says the managing director of global design for architectural firm Benoy. “Also, my father was a quantity surveyor in the construction industry, so I was used to site works and seeing drawings lying around and, in the school holidays, would go along quite willingly to watch buildings gradually coming out of the ground.”

Growing up in the UK, family days out for Bee often included visits to stately homes or cathedrals and, when his father started planning a new house for the family, there was scope for hands-on involvement. “I got into it in a big way and realised this is what I would like to do full time. Having seen pictures of Japanese architecture and gardens, which I found very inspirational, I wanted the house to have indoor/outdoor spaces. By then too, landscaping and the heritage of British building was in my blood.”

Logically enough, this deep-seated interest led to a five-year degree in architecture at Nottingham University, followed by two years in practice to complete his professional qualifications in 1985. Next came a stint with a firm in Derby, working on industrial buildings, before a position as design and project manager for a huge aircraft maintenance building at Stansted airport, which was later recognised with a national award.

Over time, Bee was increasingly drawn to the scale and ambition of urban regeneration projects and the chance they provide to combine creativity, technical expertise, environmental features and social impact. “It involves a completely different way of thinking about city spaces, convenience and making something really special that will be used by thousands of people a day,” he says. “I also realised that some industrial

buildings are very well put together, but only ever experienced by a few individuals. That could be changed.”

Joining Benoy in 1989 made it possible to pursue this perspective and design for commercial viability. Bee did master planning for the regeneration of London’s White City district, but the real breakthrough was Bluewater, a 1.5 million sq ft retail development. It caught the eye of the MTR Corp, then considering ideas for what was to become the Elements mall in West Kowloon.

“The MTR saw we could do something special, even for a site with a railway station and residential towers,” Bee says, who adds that being in Hong Kong has given him exposure to the whole of Asia and beyond. “The city is a hub and a stepping stone to so many other places that, frankly, it’s breathtaking.”

Currently, he oversees roughly 250 employees in design studios in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore. He is, though, determined not to get submerged by management tasks and to let his love of landscape manifest itself wherever possible.

“For me, it is now fundamental to get more public realm and green spaces into Hong Kong buildings. There is fantastic encouragement in Singapore for this. There is no reason these features have to be at street level or grouped together on one floor. It is up to architects, developers and the authorities to be creative.”

This was a key theme of Benoy’s recent Sky Spaces competition and exhibition, run in collaboration with Swire Properties. It sought innovative designs for a mixed-use skyscraper in Kowloon Bay, which combined functionality with environmental thinking to conceive better streetscapes. “Hong Kong has challenges with the urban density, but there are positive ways of relieving the pressures.”

For the full story visit [www.cpjobs.com/hk/highflyers](http://www.cpjobs.com/hk/highflyers)

## EYE ON THE SKYLINE

**Simon Bee’s advice for aspiring architects.**

- Get out there** “You have to travel, open your eyes and get enthused and excited about the physical environment around you.”
- Be assertive** “If you see a project you want to work on, make sure to put your hand up. Don’t just sit there and assume other people will guess what you’d like to do.”
- Follow the lead** “As far as possible, stay close to the chairman and other senior figures, who will have so much wisdom about the business and how everything works.”
- Go ‘global’** “Everyone talks about globalisation, but you need to have local knowledge too; a good basis for comparison is vital if you want to become a well-rounded designer.”
- Readily relocate** “If your firm offers overseas transfers with the chance to learn new skills, make a play for it; you’ll have no cause for regret.”



Photo: Laurence Leung

## NEWS BITS



**Air France says 180,000 passengers affected by seven-day strike**

PARIS – Air France’s CEO says the company has lost about €90 million (HK\$770 million) in a seven-day strike by cabin crew that has affected 180,000 passengers.

Frederic Gagey said the strike – held in the middle of the summer vacation season – had a “very negative impact on Air France’s image”.

About 10 per cent of domestic flights, and 15 per cent of European flights, to and from Paris Charles de Gaulle airport were cancelled.

Air France’s cabin crew protested against a further decrease in staff numbers and poor working conditions. *AP*



**Saatchi’s ‘fail fast’ boss Roberts steps down after sparking sexism row**

PARIS/LONDON – Kevin Roberts, chairman of Saatchi & Saatchi, quit after sparking uproar by saying a lack of women in high-powered jobs in advertising was not a problem and that some women lacked the “vertical ambition” to make it to the top.

Roberts (pictured) also said that he doesn’t spend any time on gender issues as the gender diversity debate was over in the advertising world.

The row, which cost Roberts his job at Saatchi & Saatchi, comes days after Roger Ailes resigned as chairman and chief executive of Fox News Channel following allegations of sexual harassment. *Reuters*



**Japan June real wages rise the most in six years, but there’s a catch**

TOKYO – Real wages in Japan rose the most in almost six years in June, but the gain was exaggerated by the effect of falling prices, highlighting the government’s struggle to pull the economy out of deflation.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (pictured) seeks to lift the economy out of two decades of stagnation through a mix of big government spending, ultra-loose monetary policy and structural reforms.

Real wages, which are adjusted for inflation, jumped 1.8 per cent in June from a year earlier, the highest level since September 2010. Regular pay, which determines base salaries, increased only 0.1 per cent. *Reuters*

## CASE STUDY

# Stop dismissed employees from doing damage

**The Case**

In a recent decision by the Hong Kong Court of First Instance, an injunction against a former employee who had campaigned against dismissal was upheld. Although the employee sought to have the injunction discharged, the court disagreed.

The defendant, MM, was employed as a sales representative at GMS, a business trading in radioactive and pharmaceutical products. In March 2011, after four months working at GMS, MM was dismissed with immediate effect.

After his dismissal, MM made silent telephone calls to the company; placed unauthorised orders on behalf of GMS with the company’s suppliers; placed false orders with GMS, pretending he worked for the company’s clients; and made

unjustified complaints against GMS to the regulatory authorities.

GMS applied to the court for an injunction, to prevent MM from continuing those actions. Although MM denied the allegations, the court was satisfied that the allegations were substantiated by evidence. The court granted an injunction against MM, restraining him from “assaulting, harassing, intimidating, threatening or pestering” his former employer or any of its employees, suppliers or customers.

In February 2016, MM sought to have the injunction discharged on the basis that four years had passed and, he claimed, the injunction precluded him from competing with his former employer or contacting any of GMS’s customers or suppliers.

The court disagreed with MM’s position, and declined to discharge the injunction. While the court held that it had no jurisdiction in any event to grant the orders that MM sought, it went further to

say that, even if it had jurisdiction to do so, it was not persuaded that there was a case for discharging the injunction.

The court was satisfied that the injunction did not prevent MM from competing with his former employer or having business dealings with GMS’s clients and suppliers. Rather, the injunction served only to prevent MM from assaulting, harassing, intimidating or threatening GMS.

**The Implications**

The court’s approach to this matter demonstrates that the courts in Hong Kong will act to protect employers from disgruntled former employees where there are reasons to believe that the former employee’s acts will have a

detrimental impact on the business. By that stage, however, the damage to the business might already have been done and, at the least, the business will have invested significant time and resources in dealing with the former employee.

Time is much better invested in measures to ensure that the employee’s exit can be achieved in a way that minimises potential animosity and retaliation against the company.

**The Solution**

To minimise the impact that dismissed employees have on the company, start by creating a culture where all employees are treated fairly by their colleagues and managers. Codes of conduct and clear policies should be adopted and promoted regularly to ensure that all are fully aware of the behaviour expected of them.

Managers and supervisors should be encouraged to call out inappropriate behaviour. Managers should see themselves as role models for others and should be encouraged to discuss concerns about workplace issues with employees early, before things get out of hand.

Be alert to signs of employee dissatisfaction, and tackle problems at the first sign of trouble. Employees will not always formally voice their complaints, so it is important that line managers and supervisors identify problems, and are

authorised and encouraged to take appropriate action.

Complaints or grievances should be handled promptly and fairly, and management should report back regularly. Employee complaints are likely to escalate if the employee perceives that his or her employer has not taken the matter seriously or has failed to handle a complaint appropriately.

While it is easy to dismiss the complaints of an employee who has just been told that their services are no longer required, an employee who feels wronged, and no longer has access to internal complaint-handling mechanisms, may be more likely to take their grievance public – or, perhaps worse, take matters into their own hands – as it would seem that MM did.

Also be aware that a departing employee may try to take confidential information with them. Confidentiality obligations should be clearly stated in employment contracts and employees should be reminded of their obligations when the relationship comes to an end.

The information contained in this article should not be relied on as legal advice and should not be regarded as a substitute for detailed advice in individual cases. If advice concerning individual problems or other expert assistance is required, the service of a competent professional adviser should be sought.



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