

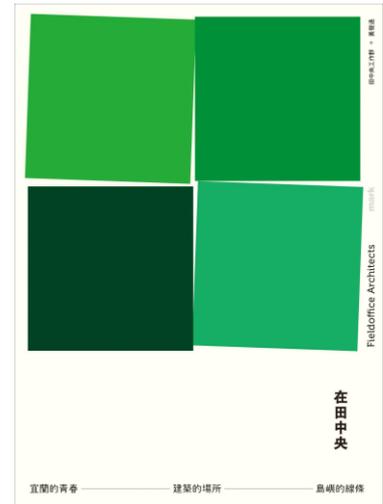
FIELDOFFICE: A PLACE FOR YOUTHFUL MINDS, ARCHITECTURE, AND THE LINES THAT SHAPE AN ISLAND

在田中央：宜蘭的青春．建築的場所．島嶼的線條

Fieldoffice Architects, led by the internationally renowned architect Huang Sheng-Yuan, is recognized within the Taiwan architectural community for their award-winning public buildings and uniquely free work culture. In this book, Fieldoffice employees recall the process, ideas, and inspiration behind some of their best-known works.

Led by renowned architect Huang Sheng-Yuan, Fieldoffice Architects are an outlier in Taiwan's architectural landscape. Their offices are not housed in a metropolitan office tower, but in the open fields of Yilan County. Their work is celebrated around the world, but they do not accept high-paying commercial projects, instead spending most of their energy on public buildings with limited budgets and strict requirements. This book, their first collaboration with the publishing industry, consists of in-depth interviews that reveal the firm's working philosophy and creative process.

In casual conversation with three Fieldoffice architects, the first chapter lays out the characteristics of the firm's unique organizational culture: principal architect Huang Sheng-Yuan's ability to draw out the hidden talents of others, an egalitarian organizational structure without a defined hierarchy or roles, which allows even interns to freely suggest creative solutions to problems, and Huang's tendency to act less like a boss, and more like a mentor,



Category: Design, Memoir

Publisher: Locus

Date: 1/2017

Rights contact:

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Pages: 438

Length: 138,705 characters
(approx. 90,100 words in English)

or a friend, to his employees. The interviewees are candid about the challenges and joys of working in this unorthodox manner, while also unveiling the details of how cases are handled within the office.

The chapters that follow provide in-depth introductions to eighteen of Fieldoffice's architectural works – including Cloud Gate Theater (seven years in the making), Shih-fang Yang Memorial Garden (six years), Kamikaze Aircraft Shelter as War Museum (eleven years), and Cherry Orchard Cemetery Service Center (nine years) – followed by interviews with more than twenty Fieldoffice employees who give first-person accounts of the moving stories and unexpected twists that occurred behind the scenes.

Each project represents Fieldoffice's aspiration to propose an alternate vision of society within the medium of space, and the intention to provide end-users a venue for open-ended thought and reflection. In a society that values efficiency, Fieldoffice's blatant disregard for timelines may strike some as foolish, but if critics were to enter one these buildings, they might find themselves unwittingly engaging in a dialogue with design. This is why Fieldoffice has managed to patiently carry on for so many years with such dedication to their principles – and if this book facilitates an authentic encounter between Fieldoffice and like-minded readers, the seven years spent on its production, like the long years spent on so many of their works, will not have been in vain.

Fieldoffice Architects 田中央工作群

In the twenty-something years since the founding of Fieldoffice Architects, the young people who have arrived to work on the firm's projects constitute a confederacy of common ideals. Their work has won numerous awards, and earned them invitations to countless international exhibitions in Europe and the United States. A number of them have gone on to become influential architects in their own right.

Huang Sheng-Yuan 黃聲遠

Born in Taipei in 1963, Huang Sheng-Yuan, the founder of Fieldoffice Architects, holds a masters degree in architecture from Yale University. He believes that the design of a work of architecture

continues to evolve after the building is put into use, and this is the concept that inspires all of the work of Fieldoffice.



FIELDOFFICE: A PLACE FOR YOUTHFUL MINDS, ARCHITECTURE, AND THE LINES THAT SHAPE AN ISLAND

By Fieldoffice Architects, Huang Sheng-Yuan

Translated by Elliott Cheung

Chapter 1: Freedom

1 FIELDOFFICE | A Story of Some Silly Folks – Can We Do It Like in Yilan?

On July 9, 2015, TOTO Gallery Ma, the leading Japanese architectural design museum, held an opening for the “Fieldoffice Architects – LIVING IN PLACE” special exhibition. Luminaries in the architectural field as well as well-known celebrities were present, among them Naito Hiroshi, Kojima Kazuhiro, and Fujimoto Sou, as well as Nanjo Fumio, the curator of the Mori Art Museum. All of them were listening closely to the guided tour provided by the chief architect of Taiwan’s Fieldoffice Architects,¹ Huang Sheng-yuan. The exhibition was supported behind the scenes by the museum’s “Project Management Committee”, with Ando Tadao serving as special advisor. The committee members responsible for evaluation were designer Hara Kenya and architects Naito Hiroshi, Kishi Waro and Erwin Viray.

Endo Nobuyuki, the head of Gallery Ma, remarked that three years ago, he had presented a picture snapped on his phone camera to this very jury to convey the unique flair he had seen in Fieldoffice’s work in Taiwan. Rooted in Yilan for over twenty years, they had largely kept to designing public infrastructure works, from the smallest pedestrian walkway to larger structures. At the close of the presentation, the jury found themselves unanimous: “Yes, let’s put this exhibition on as soon as possible!”

Prior to Fieldoffice, other architects had been invited to exhibit at the gallery, including Alejandro Aravena, recipient of the 2016 Pritzker Architecture Prize, akin to the Oscars of

¹ The predecessor of Fieldoffice was Huang Sheng-yuan Architects, established by Huang in Yuanshan Township, Yilan County in 1994. At the time, the law required an architects’ office to be opened under one’s own name. Fieldoffice Design Inc. was subsequently established in 2005. The name, chosen by company accountant Tu Shu-chuan, had first belonged to the office baseball team. In 2008, the concept for Fieldoffice Workgroup took shape. In 2012, the cluster within the workgroup changed its name to Fieldoffice Architects, with Huang as partner and chief architect. The other partners included Tu Teh-yu and Chen Ja-sheng. This book will refer to this workgroup as “Fieldoffice”.

architecture; Renzo Piano, architect for the Pompidou Arts Centre; Jean Nouvel, who designed the Arab World Institute in Paris – countless names one would see in textbooks, as well as Sejima Kazuyo, Kuma Kengo, Ito Toyo, and other widely acclaimed masters of architecture in Japan.

It could be said that Endo's curatorial team understood two truths at first glance: one, Fieldoffice were not content to set down concepts and actions for a single building, and two, their strength was cultivated through "making friends with time".²

The news that Fieldoffice had an exhibition in Japan was only reported by two domestic newspapers (one a local edition), and one magazine. Fieldoffice and Huang Sheng-yuan have never been granted the moniker "Glory of Taiwan". After all, public buildings and small-scale infrastructure are built over many years, and are not exactly a hot topic. After returning from Gallery Ma and two special lectures at Waseda University, Huang and his colleagues felt like nothing had happened at all, with Huang saying, "this is in the past now." This differed little from his attitude before the exhibition, when he once said, "Let's get to work, because nothing will change." After returning home, he and his "associates"³ once again took up their "backpacker's hostel" lifestyle in Yilan.

In any case, something's been happening in Yilan for the past two or three decades and has even begun to germinate further afield. Now, more than a few heads at the county and township levels might say to their contractors, "Can we do it like Yilan?"⁴

A group of Yilaners, and a succession of rooted, loyal die-hards at "Silly Folks Architects", finally succeeded in coining the term "Lanyang Architecture"⁵.

This is the story of those silly folks at Fieldoffice.

2 ARCHITECT | Young People Should Shoulder Great Responsibilities – A Discussion/Tell-All With 3 Fieldofficers

Chou Ming-yen – Member of Fieldoffice from 2005-2011, hereafter "Black".

Chang Wen-jui – Member of Fieldoffice from 2007 to present, hereafter "Wen-jui".

Huang Chieh-erh – Member of Fieldoffice from 2001-2009, hereafter "Egg".

Black: Huang Sheng-yuan was part of the committee for my graduation blueprint at Tamkang University's Department of Architecture. After my evaluation, he came to ask me

² Reference: "The Anthropologists of Architecture" special issue, *Business Weekly*, August 24-30, 2015.

³ Huang has stated that he never uses the word "employee" to describe a colleague at Fieldoffice.

⁴ Excerpted from a speech given at the Symposium on the Modern Regionality of Taiwanese Architecture, November 2013. Relevant records and arguments will be collected in a volume co-edited by Wang Chun-hsiung, Wang Wei-jen, and Lin Sheng-fung, forthcoming from Spatial Mother Tongue Arts and Culture Foundation.

⁵ Regarding the uniqueness of Yilan architecture, see "The Realities of Romance – An Exhibition of Postwar Architecture in Yilan", ed. Wang Chun-hsiung, Lanyang Museum, 2011.

whether I'd be interested to work at Fieldoffice. At the moment, I thought, "Am I that exceptional, that he saw something in me?" Because I was quite laid-back at school.

Wen-ji: What's remarkable about Black is that no matter how rushed the design, he will punch out at midnight and return at 6 in the morning to work. Everybody else would work through the night.

Egg: He's absolutely the type your parents would frown upon.

Black: When Huang came to me, I thought, "I'm taking it so easy here, if you want me, does that mean I'm some kind of genius?" But I didn't decide on the spot, I told him I'd consider it. If you didn't know Huang, you would think his architecture was all about modelling. All of his works were narratively very strong. But that's not what our academic education demands.

Because many of my classmates were preparing to go abroad, I went to Xingtian Temple and asked for a divination. It said, it will be very good for you to go to Fieldoffice. But I forgot to ask whether I should go abroad. Afterward, I told Huang that I had decided to take him up on his offer, "because I got a divination at Xingtian Temple." His expression was like, "why did you decide based on the divination results and not me?"⁶

Later on, we heard Dr. Wang⁷ had asked Huang, "Are you sure you want Chou Ming-yen? That's not the best idea!" True, I wanted to leave after some three or four years in Yilan. Later, I ran into Dr. Wang, and he told me, "Looks like you've cleaned up your act enough to go abroad."

Egg: We suspected that Dr. Wang would send students with potential, but rough around the edges, to Huang. I remember when Black was at Tamkang, six experienced architects from Fieldoffice were invited to lead an assignment for them in the format of a hackathon. They chose a worksite at the St. Camillus Center for Intellectual Disability in Sanxing, Yilan. That was one of the design projects I participated in while at Fieldoffice, but Black was completely nonchalant about it. I was leading six or seven students, but Black just kept pacing back and forth, his expression saying "let's knock off class already". My first impression of him was tanned, lanky, and a little full of himself.

Wen-ji: And Black was still willing to come to Yilan?

Black: I initially came to Fieldoffice for a change of scenery, to pad my resume a little. I don't think I wanted to learn anything in particular.

Recently, something struck me. I have an underclassman who was the spitting image of me in my first days at Fieldoffice. He hated communal living. I once thought there was an invisible hierarchy at Fieldoffice, but now because of generational differences, that's been done away with.⁸ I'm quite rebellious to be honest; when Huang initially asked me to go swimming, I said I didn't want to, and he stopped inviting me after that. This underclassman's situation was very similar

⁶ Huang later explained that he was glad "the heavens" gave him this friend.

⁷ Referring to Associate Professor Wang Chun-hsiung of the Department of Architectural Design, Shih Chien University. At that time he was associate professor at Tamkang University's Department of Architecture.

⁸ Huang Sheng-yuan commented that the "communal" way that Fieldofficers support each other is demonstrated by the fact that they can each do their own thing while functioning within a larger group. Fieldofficers have never taken a liking to uniform "collectivity".

to mine upon first arriving in Yilan, dissatisfied and nonchalant about everything, but now he's ended up staying five or six years!

I think there are some things with Fieldoffice that need to be slowly discovered and experienced. At least in Yilan I learned to appreciate what Huang can bring out of people. I've become more willing to listen, to understand what others are thinking. But I'm still critical.

Wen-jiu: I think you're more accepting of "diversity" as a concept.

Black: I think I wanted to maintain a distance from Huang. I came to Yilan not to ride the coattails of a "master", but to maintain my own autonomy; I'm not going to wear sandals just because he wears sandals. However, we worked exceptionally closely in work matters. Since we spent so much time together, it felt like we maintained a family-like relationship, like how you'll tell your own father off sometimes, and it's ok.

Egg: Black's personality is such that the more Huang wanted to talk to him about something, the more he would avoid it.

Black: Back then, Huang really loved doing home visits. When he came to my place, I told my grandfather, this is my boss. Huang said I was the first one to tell their family he was their boss and not their teacher. I thought I would 'fulfill' his visions out of his being my superior, to help fulfill his impulses in some way. He was 'part teacher, part boss' to me, so I couldn't speak that freely with him.

In some cases, he worked at too fast a pace; he would jump from thought to thought, always the type of person who'd help you map out your life plan. Because of this, I felt it was best to keep my distance from him. "You stay out of my business, and I'll get the job done for you." Back then Huang would call me in the middle of the night sometimes,⁹ and I'd think, "I wouldn't even pick up for my dad at this hour." I thought then that I was still young; did I really want to take the path he was leading me down? Or was that what he wanted?

This kind of relationship with Huang is hard to conceptualize in the context of other architects' offices. I once wondered what I would write to him in the event of his death, but I still don't have an answer.

Wen-jiu: That means he still holds an important place in your heart.

Black: I left Fieldoffice after five and a half years, the reason being lack of human resources support. Now the structure of the office is changing, because in the past there was no (departmental) "head" to take care of these things.¹⁰ Take, for example, the design for the Cherry Orchard Cemetery. I thought it was a case nobody wanted to take part in, so I had to ask people to help out. At that time Huang wasn't doing any division of labor. You had to have good relationships with your colleagues, so you could ask them to help draft and do models.

Wen-jiu: Now Tu (Tu Teh-yu, Executive Director) handles all that.

⁹ With regards to the late-night calls, Huang commented he would only do this with certain colleagues, expressing the closeness of their relationship.

¹⁰ Huang said, many people are unsure what he's thinking. In fact, he treats everyone differently, and hopes that everyone is forced to think about life in someone else's shoes, encouraging one another and oneself, and searching for the road not taken. However, he's not sure if this is the right approach...

Egg: You won't find any trace of management or money in Huang's brain.

Black: Looking back on it, perhaps this kind of training was useful. I had to understand how much progress we'd made, find resources, find people to help fulfill the targets. Though I was dissatisfied in the moment, and even now thinking back on it I feel dissatisfied, but this really can change your life for the better. In the Cherry Orchard Cemetery case there were some loose ends with some of the government ministries that required patience to resolve. Aside from making decisions about the design and on-site, things like whether the blueprints were clear enough, the pressure of resolving issues on-site, how to befriend the contractors, and the alterations that Huang would make to the design from time to time... all of it had to be taken care of simultaneously.

Thinking back on it, it was a positive experience where I grew a lot. Maybe at other firms, or working on other design cases, I wouldn't have had this holistic experience. One reason for this is Huang gives us a great deal of freedom and trust, as well as tolerance. There are ups and downs, for sure.

Egg: At Fieldoffice, you have to take on significant responsibility as a young person. Sometimes that's hard to wrap your head around because our life experiences are given by our parents. We're always training within a safe environment. While I was still at the firm, I would often hear people say, I didn't take this case, the firm did, so why do I have to ask my colleagues to help? There was no guarantee that anyone would help, and Huang wouldn't step in to handle it. That's when you realize that to get something done, you need more than professional ability. The key lies in how you go about looking for resources and resolving problems your own way.

All of us at Fieldoffice have gone down this path and had our rough patches. But once they leave, many people realize how much the competencies you gain from this kind of training can actually help you!

If you look at this from Huang's point of view, maybe he doesn't have time to consider these issues. However, Huang is the head of the firm; if there's an issue, he's the one who has to face it, and pay an even greater price to get it settled down the road. If he's clear on this point, and yet still offers us this environment in which to learn, he's a very great man. Maybe Fieldoffice does need to correct course a little in terms of management, or else it might not make it into the future.

I think now it's a different point in time, when Fieldoffice has gone from six to eight people, then to twelve, and at one point had thirty-some members (twenty-seven at the time of publishing). Its current state and generational characteristics are different, so the old ways might not be completely applicable anymore. It's hard to imagine how they'll make it through.¹¹

3 WORK | Brought into this World as if Building a Home – Tamsui Cloud Gate Theatre 2008-2015

¹¹ With regards to survival, Huang believes: "helping each other find new insights is more important than survival."

In the beginning of 2008, Fieldoffice went through a season of “more time spent with lawyers than with structural technicians,” said Chen Ja-sheng, an architect who had just started working here.

Until the early 21st century, Fieldoffice made bids primarily for the design of public architecture, which began to bear fruit with cluster after cluster of works completed in Yilan, such as the Jin-Mei Parasitic Pedestrian Pathway across Yilan River, Cherry Orchard Cemetery Fly-over Bridge, and the Scaffolding at Luodong Cultural Working House, and some architecture prizes to boot. No one would have thought that after the Yilan government changed hands in 2005, the Working House was stymied by conflicting views among the project’s administrators. Unable to successfully advance the works agreed upon under contract, such as the Phase 4 Sky Gallery and the Cultural Market, it was possible that the contract would be terminated.

A lawyer friend couldn’t stand it any longer and stepped in to help.

During this time, the landlord of an old fabric factory was planning to sell the property. Fieldoffice lost several bids in succession. Fieldoffice once jokingly called itself “the largest architecture firm in eastern Taiwan”, but by that time Huang was already discussing with the manager of operations, Yang Chih-chung, whether they should close down the firm. One of the architects, Pai Tsung-hung, once even saw Huang squatting outside the restaurant with a cigarette in hand. “The last time I’d seen him do this was five years ago.”

That same winter, on February 11, 2008, Cloud Gate’s corrugated-steel rehearsal studio in the shadow of Mt. Guanyin, Bali, New Taipei, largely burnt down in a fire. The only props that survived were two or three masks and several dozen flower petals that had previously been fireproofed. However, in March of that same year, Cloud Gate 2 was slated to perform “Spring Riot” in Taiwan, with a special performance at the Guggenheim Art Museum in New York in April.

Both the Fieldoffice and the dance studio were nestled in simple rural warehouses, with both employees and dancers sharing their meals communally. Each team, along with their founders, were pioneers in their fields – Fieldoffice and Cloud Gate were simultaneously experiencing their own bitter winters.

Three days after the Cloud Gate fire, the two groups were connected by a single phone call. Lin Hwai-min, the founder of Cloud Gate, and his entourage paid a site visit to the old Tamsui Central Broadcasting Station, to see if it would be suitable as a new studio site. Lin asked Huang Yung-hung, chairman of the Cloud Gate board, who had accompanied him, and who happened to be an architect, what his thoughts were. He recommended Huang Sheng-yuan and made a phone call to his old acquaintance on the spot.

“In fact, when the firm received the call, I really hoped that Huang Sheng-yuan would agree immediately, but you have to keep up appearances,” said Executive Director Tu, half-jokingly.

Were we really that in need of a pick-me-up?

What happened next proved one fact: Cloud Gate and Fieldoffice were like fraternal twins that just happened to work in different fields and locations. Defying gravity as well as the establishment was their common pastime. The first time Fieldoffice Architects visited the site at

the Tamsui site, there was clearly an interest in the terrain as well as the military base-style architecture of days past. Cloud Gate didn't bother contacting any other architects. Just as Huang Sheng-yuan might say, "All encounters are just delayed reunions."

A Work Outside Yilan is Still Very "Yilan"

Whether there's an opportunity to generate "communality" is a core tenet that Fieldoffice holds itself to. Tamsui's Cloud Gate Theatre has it in spades. At the very moment when big changes were underway in Yilan, Cloud Gate's shared love of the environment was doubtless a steady companion and support. In any case, when Taiwan's architecture community found out that Fieldoffice were the ones invited to design the Cloud Gate Theatre, it was met with surprise by some. Didn't Fieldoffice say that they would only take on projects in Yilan within a thirty-minute drive? Didn't Huang Sheng-yuan always say that architects should make on-site comparisons to their models when making design decisions?

It wasn't hard to get Fieldoffice over the hurdle of leaving Yilan, or, should we say, there was nothing to hurdle. The practical move was to rent out a hostel for those participating directly in the Cloud Gate project, ensuring easy access to the site. Other colleagues could simply make the two-hour commute from Yilan to Tamsui.

Occasionally stepping out of comfortable Yilan and allotting an equal portion of attention to Tamsui Cloud Gate allowed Fieldoffice to enter an era Huang Sheng-yuan had sometimes spoken of: "A Fieldoffice gradually without Huang Sheng-yuan". This is because, many detailed adjustments during the construction process needed to be decided on-site by Tu Teh-yu, manager of operations Yang Chih-chung, and supervising architects Tu Hsin-yin, Chen Yo-chung, and Yeh Lien-kuang.

The "official explanation" for Fieldoffice's willingness to venture outside Yilan was: Huang Sheng-yuan has always said, "Yilan" doesn't designate a county, but a state of being. He once explained this in an interview with *Taiwan Architecture*: "(Yilan) allows Fieldoffice to work well. The wind, the water, the environment, human relations, all of these can be handled authentically... In Yilan, people know each other. If you want to get something done, you have to sincerely get to know people you didn't know before, believe that others see things more clearly than you, believe that you and I are not so different. That recognition takes an entire team."

"That feeling of 'Yilan' has to do with people being able to trust each other." From the time of the Cloud Gate project to the present, this kind of mutual trust amounted to an almost mystical experience, where design and user experience went completely hand-in-hand. Huang has said, "With the Cloud Gate team we had zero adjustment issues from beginning to end. When we interacted with any of their departments, their attitudes were very similar to our usual stakeholders in Yilan. And Cloud Gate naturally has a smaller population than an entire city, so their opinions were more stable."