

Reef Snorkel at Park Hyatt, Maldives

ECO-LUXE LIVING

Respecting the environment is a new optimism that's channelling and energising the way luxury properties are being built these days as Philipp Kristian Diekhöner discovers.

Images courtesy of respective property owners/developers.



PALACE magazine looks at the future of luxury properties – residential, commercial, and hospitality. More than just being inhabitable, luxury real estate is moving toward sustainable and experiential spaces. Rapid growth in the Asian luxury sector means there’s no shortage of beautiful facades and interiors, but that’s only scratching the surface of what defines a luxury development. People, story and purpose create distinction. It’s exactly what the modern luxury buyer is seeking. Welcome to the world of eco-luxury, where doing good is good business. Every property is defined by its interaction with the environment. A beachside escape or an urban home needs to harmonise with their immediate surroundings. In the new school of luxury, this goes far beyond pure aesthetics, and involves a thoroughly green and conscious footprint. As design meets an elevated conscience across commercial, residential and hospitality real estates, it creates standout experiences. Here is a curation of projects showcasing how it’s executed.

**PARK HYATT MALDIVES
HADAAHA (HOSPITALITY)
NORTHERN HUVADHU ATOLL,
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES**

From the speedboat ride cutting through smooth moonlit seas, to the absolute quiet of the surroundings greeting guests, an arrival at Hadahaa is one of those moments that can be etched into a guest’s memory. All guests arrive on the tropical wood jetty emerging straight from the islet. Barely

above sea level and framed by its house reef, the island exudes the kind of peace and natural balance its guests may hope to imbibe during their stay here. The regulars love to be cocooned by an air of privacy and seclusion. Its villas offer generously laid out, bath and shower areas that take up much of the space. An outdoor stone bathtub perfect for tanning and stargazing are favourites among guests as the days pass, while the dark earthen tones of the bedroom and its subtle indirect lighting encourage the senses to relax, as if to match the pace of island life. An inviting private plunge pool set to a backdrop of dense vegetation, white beaches and turquoise lagoons complete the picture. Park Hyatt’s restrained, unpretentious island chic is deliberately reserved, as if to avoid drawing attention away from its breath-taking natural habitat. A stellar massage at Vidhun spa is a great intermission to escape the scorching sun. Hadahaa’s casual luxe lodging makes it easy to enjoy the natural splendour of Southern Maldives.

Where is it?

Hadahaa was the first resort to nestle in Northern Huvadhu Atoll, southernmost expanse of the Maldives some 400km from the capital of Malé.

Who goes there?

The property is an aspirational destination for Hyatt regulars and popular option for redeeming loyalty points. Casually-attired corporate individuals and honeymooners also make up the property’s occupancy.

Eco-angles

Besides passing EarthCheck Gold Certification in 2016, Hadahaa raked in numerous awards for conscious design and construction, exemplary waste management, diligent reef preservation and ongoing eco-upgrades, such as the recent substitution of conventional air-conditioning cooling mechanisms with ocean water. The resort reef is so healthy it houses scores of bait fish, used by local fishermen to land their catch. Solar energy is on the table, but the resort owners are concerned about cost and the hazardous environmental impact of battery units that may be required for such a system.

Did you know?

Located 55km from the equator in an area devoid of light pollution, one can see stars from both hemispheres and, at certain times of the year, the milky way itself.

More info: www.hyatt.com

Being an eco-conscious resort was not an idea or practice that was put in place during the resort’s operational years. This concept was the foundation since the island was selected to be home to our resort and this green awareness continues to be a part of our culture and daily lives.



**– Pravin Kumar, General Manager
Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa**



**SONG SAA PRIVATE ISLAND
(HOSPITALITY) KOH RONG
ARCHIPELAGO,
SIHANOUKVILLE, KINGDOM OF
CAMBODIA**

A good twelve years ago, Melita and Rory Hunter fell in love with a small Cambodian fishing village in the Gulf of Thailand. They bought the two nearby islands of Koh Ouen and Koh Bong, locally referred to as boy and girl island, from local fishermen. Inspired by life in this sleepy Archipelago, the idea for a luxury private island resort that would uplift the local community was born. The couple discouraged locals from using bottom trawling and dynamite fishing practices, established Cambodia’s first gazetted marine reserve, started providing economic support and medical care for five surrounding villages and created an eco-tourism island. A decade later, the Koh Rong archipelago is considered a hot destination in Southeast Asia, marked by the arrival of established eco-luxury brands Six Senses and Alila expected to open in 2018.

All guest that set foot on the island will comfortably ease into the natural surroundings.

Song Saa’s laid-back comforts and positive energies create a refined and unusual experience. The two-bedroom overwater villa, crafted almost entirely of wood and framed by a gorgeous terrace and plunge pool, was the perfect invitation to leave smartphone and laptop in the safe. A fully-stocked

pantry, organic Bodia amenities and generous bath area are some of many good reasons to stay in, yet the islands themselves are gems worth exploring. Walking on the island is an encounter with nature – none of the resort gets in the way of the natural ecosystem, keeping its natural beauty perfectly intact.

Where is it?

Found several miles off the Cambodian coast in the Gulf of Thailand, Song Saa is naturally sheltered by the inhabited Koh Rong island, a popular dive site. Sihanoukville is home to Cambodia’s only deep-water port, making it significant as a mineral oil terminal and logistics hub.

Who goes there?

Guests visiting Song Saa tend to have a heightened awareness for eco-tourism, sustainable development and green products. Main markets for the resort include the US, UK as well as Singapore and Hong Kong. The resort is also popular with social media celebrities and influencers. Most guests appreciate its privacy, space and dedication to environmental preservation.

Eco-angles

During the construction planning phase, a team of surveyors spent months micro-adjusting blueprints to avoid harming even a single tree on the island. Wood flooring for the villas is

made of recycled housing materials stemming from Cambodia and Thailand, pools are clad in tiles produced in locally sourced stone and many of the island’s structures are derived from decommissioned fishing boats and driftwood of surrounding islands – a textbook upcycling effort deserving special mention. Song Saa Foundation runs community and environmental programmes to positively impact people and environment. One-eighth of its funds are contributed by resort.

Did you know?

Song Saa means “Sweethearts” in Khmer. It refers to the relationship between boy and girl island. Since the resort’s completion, this connection is more than just symbolic. A footbridge now links the two islands for guests to explore Koh Bong’s essentially untouched tropical vegetation. More info: www.songsaa.com

I took inspiration from the local surroundings; by way of easily accessible, locally sourced materials, all to ensure that the design has a sense of place.



– Melita Hunter, Co-Founder and Creative Director of Song Saa



**DD DIE DENKFABRIK
(COMMERCIAL) BREMEN,
GERMANY**

DD Die Denkfabrik is Northern Germany's first eco-conscious office building. Visitors are greeted by an airy atrium with two rivers of custom-cut blue granite, framed by a white granite shores that form a kind of giant floor mural. Each stream represents a source for the river Weser that runs through the city-state of Bremen. Eventually, the rivers transition into a blue granite ocean housing a bistro-style pantry with giant window panels exposing lush species of garden flora. By night, a dense maze of optical fibres worked into the flooring illuminates the ground in blue-white hues, mesmerising like a starlit sky. The pantry's centrepiece is a giant custom-made table resembling a ship, yet another subtle reference to the city-state's historic significance as a marine trading hub.

Grey high-gloss varnished doors framed in black wood give the interior an air of timeless luxury, harmonising with its playful creativity and its focus on natural elements. Iconic Bauhaus furniture and walls finished in pastel brush patterns achieve a sense of calm sophistication. A massive planter with trees and a skylight forming the building's natural centre anchors the ground floor and visually connects its three levels, which continue the design theme to create airy spaces of quality materials and imaginative details in harmony with nature. Outside, a red brick and glass façade eventually meets a fully greened roof. Its silhouette

resembles a circle inside a square, paying tribute to the owners' passion for "squaring the circle" and out-of-the-box thinking. Finished in 1997, the property looks like it was handed over yesterday, owing to intelligent design and meticulous German engineering.

Where is it?

DD Die Denkfabrik was among the first office buildings in a newly developed Technology Park designed to promote and cluster high-tech R&D activities in the state of Bremen. Its neighbours include two universities and one of few global free-fall towers for testing aerospace components in zero gravity environments.

Who goes there?

In an area purpose-built for progress, it's no surprise that Die Denkfabrik houses two tenants at the forefront of technology and engineering. One is the owners' venture, DD Die Denkfabrik, an expert technology and engineering innovation firm founded in 1976. It helps SMEs and MNEs create industry-leading products, implement Industry 4.0 and digitise. The other tenant is Fraunhofer Institute, one of the country's most decorated research institutions.

Eco-angles

Behind the scenes, things get really smart. Thanks to full-scale green roofing connected to a smart ventilation system, building temperature in summer is kept in the low twenties without any need for air-conditioning. In winter, excess

waste heat from a nearby power plant provides warmth. A 360-degree parapet of solar panels offers shade and generates a sizeable chunk of energy, keeping utilities cost enviably low. Water-saving appliances and stringent waste separation and recycling are the norm. The result is a space that is environmentally sensible and extremely nice to be in. DD Die Denkfabrik bagged its owners a sustainable entrepreneurship award two years in a row in 1996 and 1997.

Did you know?

Thanks to a 360-degree ring of solar panels providing shade for the building's top floor, it produces over 6 Megawatt hours (MWh) of electricity per year, which feeds back into the local grid. Most buildings surrounding DD Die Denkfabrik emulated this iconic design. Die Denkfabrik is German for "think tank" and refers to the cutting-edge knowledge work happening inside its walls.

More info:

www.denkfabrikgruppe.de/english

The owners sought a building that would retain its value over time and serve as a testimony to a different way of thinking.



- Jörg Buchhorn, Teamgeist Architects



**GAYSORN URBAN RESORT
(COMMERCIAL) BANGKOK,
THAILAND**

Many of the Bangkok's novel and fresh concepts are increasingly geared towards eco-friendliness. Dozens of new developments meet LEED Gold and Platinum standards, one of the world's most important green building benchmarks. Gaysorn Urban Resort occupies levels 19 and 20 of Gaysorn tower, a LEED Gold certified mixed-use skyscraper built right besides one of Bangkok's first road junctions. The Srivikorn family behind the property was responsible for putting Bangkok's inaugural shopping mall on the map, among other firsts, and has historic ties with the location. The idea for Gaysorn Urban Resort was born to counteract the inevitable anonymity of many modern urban spaces and the ambition to reinvigorate the area as a gathering place for communities. Core to this is creating a space that invites people to linger, seek inspiration and find time for creative expression. Visitors are greeted by unusually high ceilings and a sea of beige tones accentuated with black and green touches. Combining several purpose-built spaces in one open-plan design is ambitious. Few properties are so evidently adventurous, and it gives the place a

special atmosphere. A large alfresco space right opposite the entrance, serves as an event venue. Lined by water and trees, it lends the project the resort-like feel its owners are aiming for. Inside, one finds a co-working space that visually resembles a mix of library and airline lounge, a bar and café accessible to the public and several seminar rooms. A design language that would not look out of place in a luxury hotel unifies these and creates a sense of relaxed hospitality throughout.

Where is it?

Located in the heart of Bangkok in Ratchaprasong, Gaysorn Urban Resort is within walking distance of Chit Lom, Ratchadamri and Siam BTS. It is part of the larger Gaysorn Village with Central World, Erawan Shrine and Grand Hyatt as its neighbours, finding itself amidst an eminent urban landscape attracting over 400,000 visitors daily.

Who goes there?

Gaysorn Urban Resort targets change-makers and creatives but also offers a wide range of facilities for corporate events, meetings and special occasions. Its co-working space is geared towards entrepreneurs and freelancers seeking

a luxurious centrally located office surrounded by abundant lifestyle, lodging and entertainment options.

Eco-angles

Gaysorn Urban Resort is LEED Gold Certified, uses local and recycled materials in its design and construction and provides spaces for the community to productively interact.

Did you know?

The architecture and design of the building draws inspiration from Thai artisans and craftsmanship, using familiar patterns and local wood to create a modern interpretation of Thai design.

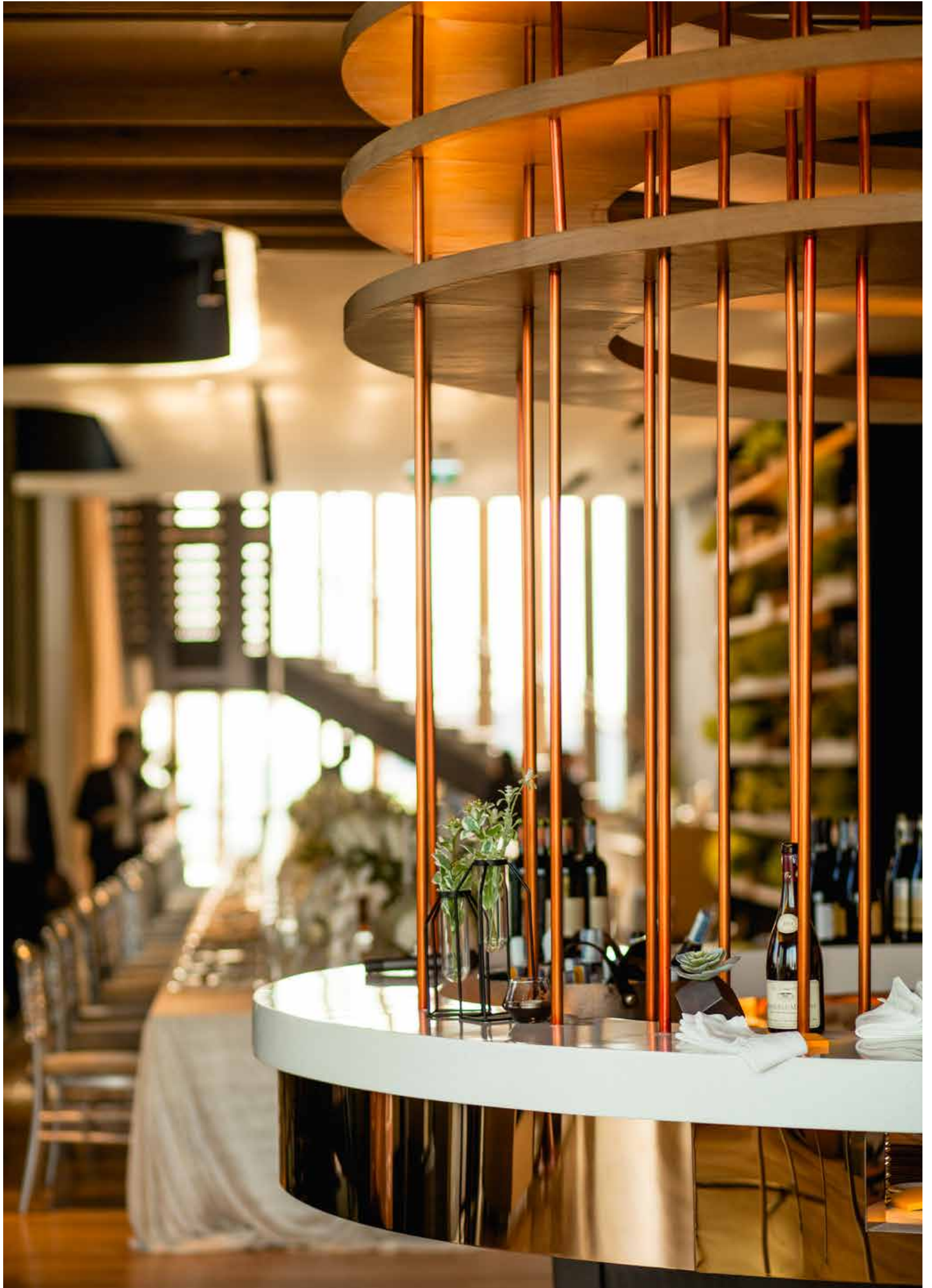
More info:

www.gaysornurbanresort.com

Sharing is a joy to embrace creativity



*– Charn Srivikorn, Chairman Gaysorn
Property Group*





ECO 260 (RESIDENTIAL) LOWER HIRAFU VILLAGE, NISEKO, JAPAN

Nestled around the foot of Mt. Annupuri and framed by mesmerising views of Mt. Yotei, Niseko is arguably Japan’s most cosmopolitan ski resort. The area is blessed with abundant top-quality snow, and polished dining and lodging options. Boutique hotels like Zaborin and Kimamaya set the tone. In the near future, Park Hyatt Hanazono Residences (2019) and Ritz Carlton Reserve (2020) will create new options for luxury travellers geared towards seasonal residents. Even those who will find it hard to match ECO 260, one of Niseko’s most luxurious and simultaneously eco-conscious homes. The 10,000-square-foot mansion uses geothermal heat and solar energy to power its airy interior framed with giant, custom-made glass panels. Niseko’s abundant hot springs are perfect not just to comfort the body, but also to keep the building toasty. As ECO 260 is quite large for a residential home and primarily made of glass, using renewable energy sources prevents outrageous utility bills and gives the architecture freedom for expression without having to overly worry about environmental impact and operational cost. It’s the first private

residence in the area to house a pool, which by itself takes up forty square meters and is made entirely out of stainless steel. Illuminated by LEDs and set under a two-storey high ceiling, it overshadows pretty much every other element of the property. Living and sleeping areas are located on the top floors, a common design for Niseko.

Where is it?

Located in Niseko Hirafu village, ECO 260 is surrounded by primarily low-rise buildings. Part of Hirafu’s appeal is its varied architectural landscape mixing contemporary designs with traditional buildings.

Who goes there?

ECO 260 is the brainchild of entrepreneur Bernard Gauthier. Growing up in humble surroundings in Paris, he made his fortune in textiles and is based between Hong Kong, Switzerland and Japan. Conceptualised, designed and even partially constructed by the Frenchman, ECO 260 is a seasonal base and dream come true for him and his family.

Eco-angles

ECO 260 features 54 solar panels, 20 geothermal bore holes of 115m depth

each, providing power for the entirely building and warmth for the pool, jacuzzi and floor heating.

Did you know?

ECO 260’s name stems from the 260-degree view offered by the living area, unadulterated thanks to giant glass panels weighing in at half a tonne each. The owner-architect’s background in carpentry shines through in the property’s quality interiors and custom fittings.

More info:
www.nisekoresortholdings.jp

I designed everything in the house because I know what I want. I don’t want to live in a house of an architect, I want to live in my house that I designed



- Bernard Gauthier, Owner-Architect



**FINAL WOODEN HOUSE
(RESIDENTIAL) KUMAMURA
VILLAGE, JAPAN**

Eco-luxury seeks intimacy with nature and its creations. Stripping away the opulence and inevitable noisiness inherent in our definition of modern luxury may reveal a purer, quieter and more satisfying form of pleasure. This is perhaps why so many of the well-heeled among us seek retreats in places like Bhutan, far away from the pleasures and pains of contemporary urban life. A pure connection with nature is probably the most genuine form of joy there is out there, luxurious in its authenticity and ability to remind us of our own nature. Final Wooden House lives and breathes that connection. In a mountainous part of Kyushu island near Kyusendo railway station, Sou Fujimoto Architects fashioned a bungalow structure made almost entirely of 350mm cedar wood beams stacked on top of each other. Open, natural and abstract, it reinterprets architectural connection with the environment in a raw, sophisticated structure. The interplay of solid timber blocks and the man-made skill sculpting them into an artificial structure achieves an extremely interesting contrast. Its design blurs the lines between façade and interior and between wall space, floors and furniture. This departure from expected divisions creates a

versatile space that invites anyone to make it theirs.

The project is a love declaration to life's simple pleasures. Appreciating this fundamental connection is at the core of eco-luxury. It's a guiding principle for creating and consuming true luxury experiences that maximise our enjoyment and minimise its negative side-effects. Final Wooden House materialises the core message of eco-luxury in a minimalist form.

Where is it?

Located in Kyusendo Recreational Village in Ashikita district, Final Wooden House is characterised by mountains and the Kuma river flowing through hilly terrain right by its side. Known for its cedar trees, it's hard to decide which is more delightful – the structure itself, or the pristine nature surrounding it.

Who goes there?


Final Wooden House is designed as a community space for locals and visitors. Every part of the design and its Jenga-esque wooden beams is utilised for multiple purposes: Working, taking a nap, spending time with friends or simply watching the world go by.

Eco-angles

Final Wooden House is made almost entirely from locally sourced timber, giving it an exemplary environmental

footprint. The remainder of the structure is made up of glass, and a concrete foundation.

Did you know?

The project was commissioned by Kumamoto Artpolis, an urban planning project conceived in 1988 inviting Japanese architects, some world acclaimed, to design structures spanning the entire prefecture. These include government buildings, museums, private residences and even public restrooms, and many others. Since its completion in 2008, Final Wooden House has received attention and praise for its concept.  More info: www.sou-fujimoto.net

Here, people are distributed three-dimensionally in the space. Inhabitants discover, rather than being prescribed, various functionalities in these convolutions.

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– Sou Fujimoto,
Sou Fujimoto Architects