

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

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During 2020, Ho Chi Minh City-based green architect Vo Trong Nghia saw his environmentally friendly bamboo structures propagate throughout his native Vietnam. Vo, who studied architecture at Japan's Nagoya Institute of Technology and the University of Tokyo before opening his eponymous firm in 2006, added to his "House for Trees" collection—residential projects that are home to both plants and people—including the award-winning Bat Trang House in Hanoi. He embarked on the Dong Na Villas, a residential master plan replete with roads

and restaurants outside Hoi An. But perhaps most arresting are three ambitious new bamboo buildings: the Vedana Resort Restaurant in Ninh Binh, the Huong An Vien Visiting House in Hue, and the Grand World Phu Quoc Welcome Center on Phu Quoc island. He expands upon those projects and more.

Vo Trong Nghia

CREATIVE VOICES

Clockwise from top left: The namesake principal of Vo Trong Nghia Architects, who puts bamboo to modern use, stands in his Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, studio. Grand World Phu Quoc Welcome Center's bamboo framework lashed together with ropes. The multipurpose events space still under construction on Phu Quoc Island. Ninh Binh's Vedana Resort Restaurant, which is almost 52 feet high, Vo's tallest completed bamboo structure. The undulating forms of the Huong An Vien Visiting House—a place for quiet meditation in a Hue cemetery—inspired by the nearby river.

Your bamboo structures have attracted international attention since your Vietnam Pavilion at Expo 2015 in Milan. Why bamboo?

Vo Trong Nghia: I'm drawn to it for many reasons. First, it's endemic and abundant in Vietnam, two key elements for any sustainable building material. Second, bamboo grows quickly; I'm able to harvest it after just five years. Compare that to a tree, which needs decades before we can cut it down and use it for construction. Third, bamboo's pliancy makes it easy to shape and mold, which means that I can be really creative with it. Finally, bamboo still retains a very natural appearance, even after it's been treated, which is very important to me.

Crafting a natural aesthetic seems to be a recurring theme in your designs.

VTN: That's right, I want all my buildings to connect humans with nature. I believe in biophilia, that people have an innate fondness for the natural world, and I want to exploit this in my designs. This is crucial for sustainability; if people form an emotional attachment to a space, then it's less likely to be torn down. This is especially important in a fast-developing country like Vietnam where we are in

this untenable cycle of destruction and construction.

How have you harnessed biophilic design concepts in your bamboo buildings?

VTN: I like to think that my bamboo

ideas can build calm and mindful environments. It also has no windows, walls, or doors, allowing for the wind to ventilate the space. I think that harnessing natural light and ventilation is crucial for successful biophilic design. I also believe that biophilic design ideas can build calm and mindful envi-

Can you describe how you treat the bamboo for construction purposes?

VTN: In Vietnam, we've been using bamboo for generations, and my treatment process is adapted from the traditional techniques used by my ancestors. First of all, I immerse the bamboo fully in water, which speeds up the aging process. This is a kind of expedited rotting, which changes the chemical composition of the material, making it inedible for insects that would otherwise devour and destroy it. After soaking it for many months, the bamboo is smoked for two weeks using rice husks. This dries it out and replaces the oils lost during submersion. Then I polish it, giving the bamboo its earthy yet shimmering appearance, a simultaneously traditional and modern aesthetic. —Joshua Zukas ➤



buildings are biophilic not just because they are built using a natural-looking material. The Vedana Resort Restaurant has a large skylight at its apex so that sunshine can illuminate

ronments. The Huong An Vien Visiting House sits within a cemetery, and is conceived to be a place of quiet reflection before and after paying respects to the dead.

