

CREATING NEW LAYERS OF PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH ELEVATED WALKWAYS

Ester van Steekelenburg (Urban Discovery)

Home to Swire's operations for the last 100 years, Quarry Bay, located in the eastern part of Hong Kong Island, has developed from an industrial area into a vibrant business district that hosts more than 300 international companies in nine office towers. Taikoo Place is the name of this 7 million square feet commercial complex. When completed in 2022, the majority of its towers will be connected by a network of elevated walkways, providing over 30,000 office workers with a safe escape from Hong Kong's hot and humid climate.

By creating one of the largest privately-owned walkway systems in the region, Swire Properties — a subsidiary of Swire and the primary landlord of the area — has been able to make a bold place statement. Taikoo Place's system of walking bridges has created an additional layer of public space



to the city's urban jungle; an air-conditioned alternative to street level. The ingenious planning solution is also tailored to the context of Hong Kong where real estate is more expensive than in almost any other place in the world and public space comes at a premium.

FROM INDUSTRIAL DOCKYARDS TO OFFICE DISTRICT

The history of Taikoo goes back to the early 20th century when Hong Kong East was an industrial district with a dockyard, factories, a large sugar refinery and its own worker's village. In the 1970s, as port activities relocated to more remote parts of the city, the dockyards were replaced by tall residential blocks and a shopping mall, the Taikoo Shing (or 'Swire City') housing scheme. By the late 1980s, the district had become an ideal location for commercial real estate and Swire Properties began redeveloping the old, steel-framed warehouses and sugar refinery into an office complex. Together, Taikoo Shing and Taikoo Place have since transformed the eastern part of Hong Kong Island into an attractive, mixed residential-commercial neighbourhood.

Just like the dockyards were, in a way, a company town, Taikoo Place is designed to become a new urban community within the city. To achieve that goal, Swire Properties has put 'places' and 'people' at the heart of their property development approach. These P's are also two of the five key pillars of the company's 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (the three others being 'Partners', 'Performance — Economic' and 'Performance — Environmental'). At Swire, placemaking is not an afterthought, but at the core of business, which is unusual in Hong Kong's competitive real estate environment.

In 2018, the company began exploring how to measure 'great places,' identifying key metrics and performance indicators and developing a framework for measuring and reporting on placemaking.

CREATING AN ADDITIONAL STREET LEVEL

The walkways have become Taikoo Place's signature, linking new and existing buildings with MTR stations, as well as giving a fresh identity to what otherwise would have been an anonymous commercial complex. Over 340 m (upon completion in 2022) of transparent air-conditioned space with amenities, art and seating makes it more than a place to get from A to B and creates a fluid transition between work and play. The capacity is impressive; during peak hour, the Devon Bridge handles an average of 7,000 people per hour, giving an important boost to walkability in Hong Kong's dense urban environment.

Although privately owned, the walkways are connected to public spaces and complement what happens at street level. Observing the pedestrian flows, they not only serve commuters going to their offices but also local residents doing their daily shopping or visitors who are attending an exhibition or event. The walkway system is accessible for less mobile people and connects to open office lobbies with public seating elements.

The company has similarly invested in quality public space at ground level. Thanks to a series of landscaping, paving and pedestrianising efforts, Hong Kong East has a distinctly different feel to its surrounding neighbourhoods. It's visible in the fundamentals, like the width of the sidewalks, the abundant use of greenery, the generous size of open spaces and the absence of intrusive barriers. It is also present in the details like

the fluidity of form and the design of railings, wayfinding and street furniture. The result is an entire ecosystem of high-quality spaces both on the street and elevated level.

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More than a place to get from A to B, the walkways are a minimal and fluid ribbon in complementary contrast to the verticality and the mass of the towers they link together.

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**HUGH DUTTON,
(NEW) WALKWAY ARCHITECT
& CONCEPT ENGINEER**

FROM PLACEMAKING TO PLACEKEEPING

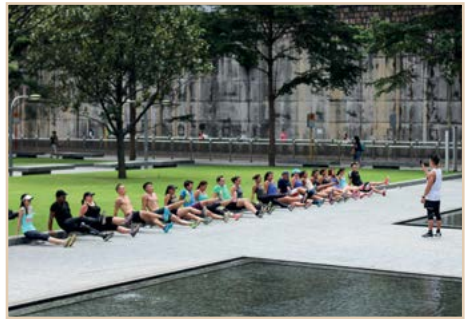
Taikoo Place is currently undergoing re-development. In 2022, when the project is completed, the complex will include some 70,000 square feet of new public space, unparalleled in Hong Kong. The walking bridge will be extended, and even more open space will be freed up at ground level.

Placemaking matters not just at street level, but also in the connective tissue of the vertical urban fabric: in lift-lobbies, underground parking facilities and in walkways. By constantly reinventing space, Swire Properties is designing public spaces of the future, a firm commitment not just to placemaking but also to placekeeping.



THE HYATT REGENCY ASIA

HONG KONG



DO'S

What are some of the placemaking principles that make up Taikoo Place's design philosophy?

- **Design the walkways beyond its functional role:** when the refurbishment is complete, the walkway will appear like a floating, transparent promenade. Hanging gardens will act as natural wayfinding paths and provide connection to green space at street level.
- **Organise initiatives for community engagement:** 'Hometown Heroes' is a collaboration with cafés and restaurants in the district which hosts art and food workshops to give office workers a behind-the-scenes peek into the places they pass by on a daily basis.

- **Reserve ample space for functions that create footfall and bring in different audiences:** the 'new street level' at Taikoo Place offers both retail and café space. The office complex hosts a co-working space, a members' club and ArtisTree — a 7,000 square feet independent multi-purpose venue.
- **Host activities to bring life to the district on quiet days:** a year-round calendar of cultural activities and in- and outdoor performances keep the place vibrant. Examples include a weekly Sunday Market with artisanal products and street food stalls, and 'Project After 6', an event that brings art, sports and music events to the work environment.
- **Invest in quality public art:** In a city with limited infrastructure dedicated to art and culture, Artwalk, Taikoo Place's collection of indoor and outdoor public art provides a critical podium for artists. It also attracts passers-by and encourages spontaneous interactions.

DON'TS

- **Don't only focus on hardware:** the combination of hardware and software is key. For example, the bridges are designed for optimal pedestrian traffic flow, especially during rush-hour. Meanwhile, the use of curved forms and tactile materials bring human scale and originality.
- **Don't only invest in the present, reach out to a new generation for a more sustainable impact:** In 2019 Swire Properties launched 'I am a Dreammaker': a youth empowerment scheme that invites students from six local universities to design, manage and run the district's annual Christmas Street Fair. The students were mentored by industry professionals at the Swire Properties Placemaking Academy.

ABOUT SWIRE PROPERTIES

Established in Hong Kong in 1972 as a subsidiary of Swire - a highly diversified group - Swire Properties develops and manages a portfolio of large-scale mixed-use property investments across Hong Kong, Mainland China, Singapore and the US. Download the Places Impact Report for free from the website: <https://www.swireproperties.com/-/media/files/swireproperties/publications/2020-places-impact-report.ashx>.