

Project name **The Metropolis**

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The Metropolis
City connections

by Angela Tam



A mini-city has emerged on a traffic island along the eastern shore of the Kowloon Peninsula, ready to capture a major slice of the cross-border travel and business market.



In the late 1980s/early 1990s, the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) asked the government for a 5 ha piece of reclaimed land near Hung Hom Station to use as a freight yard. When the neighbouring area was identified for property development, the KCRC applied for a change in lease conditions that would allow it to develop property above it. The application was approved, but only for the development of commercial property which would not be as susceptible to the traffic noise generated by the main artery through Hung Hom.

The requirement proves ideal. The footbridges linking it to the railway station and the Hong Kong Coliseum mean a commercial development would cater to the needs of both tourists and businesspeople en route to and from China. It

would also prove a boon for those who currently find it hard to kill the time before and after shows at the Coliseum because of the lack of facilities in the area.

The site, however, proved a challenge for the architect, Ronald Lu & Partners (HK) Ltd; as the presence of Princess Margaret Road meant only 3 ha of the site could be used for building development. This generated a linear design for the Metropolis, as the complex is called; with a long, five-storey retail podium/car park supporting an office tower, a 600-room hotel and two serviced apartment towers.

To minimise the block effect of four towers standing side by side, the architect created four buildings of different shapes that step down towards the sea. Two serviced apartment blocks



stand between a 16-storey elliptical office tower and a 12-storey high, roughly U-shaped hotel with window bays angled to capture the best view. Above the towers, undulating features mask the plant rooms and allude to the waves lapping the shore nearby. Neon lights fitted under the eaves of the roof features heighten the sense of lightness by visually floating them above the buildings. Equipped with dimmers, the neon lights can be operated by a computer program to

produce more than 200 colours according to sequence.

The different functions of the buildings are not only distinguished by their shapes but also their cladding. The office tower is clad in a curtain wall while the serviced apartments are tiled. A metallic tile was chosen for its texture, which is similar to a curtain wall when viewed at a distance but costs less.

"We carried out many studies to find the





combination of tile and sizes that would achieve the effect we wanted. In the end we picked a square tile which was ideal because from a distance it looks like aluminium cladding but at close range it adds relief to the exterior," Ronald Lu & Partners associate director Patrick Chui explained.

The hotel's external appearance is driven by the bays that make up the guestrooms and suites. Serration was used to maximise the view and

add interest to the facades, allowing guests to look out in two directions. Stones in creamy, soft colours were selected to address the grand entrance without clashing with the strong silvers and greens of the facades.

To make the most of the excellent pedestrian links in the area, the car park is tucked under the retail podium so that the latter is lifted to the same level as the three footbridges leading to Kowloon Station and the Hong Kong Coliseum.



Vehicular access to the 132,218 sq m commercial/retail development has been directed to the roof of the podium, where a ring road provides separate dropoffs for the serviced apartments and hotel, presenting the architect with an opportunity to create a grand entrance for the latter. A landscaped garden provides a green outdoor environment on the rest of the podium roof.

A five-storey high transparent glass box highlights the pedestrian linkage, creating a dramatic entry into the complex. The glass box is rotated so that its corner faces the key footbridge, thus giving the retail podium twice as much exposure through two see-through facades. It is shielded by metallic eaves fitted with special lighting that emphasises the simple yet dramatic geometry.



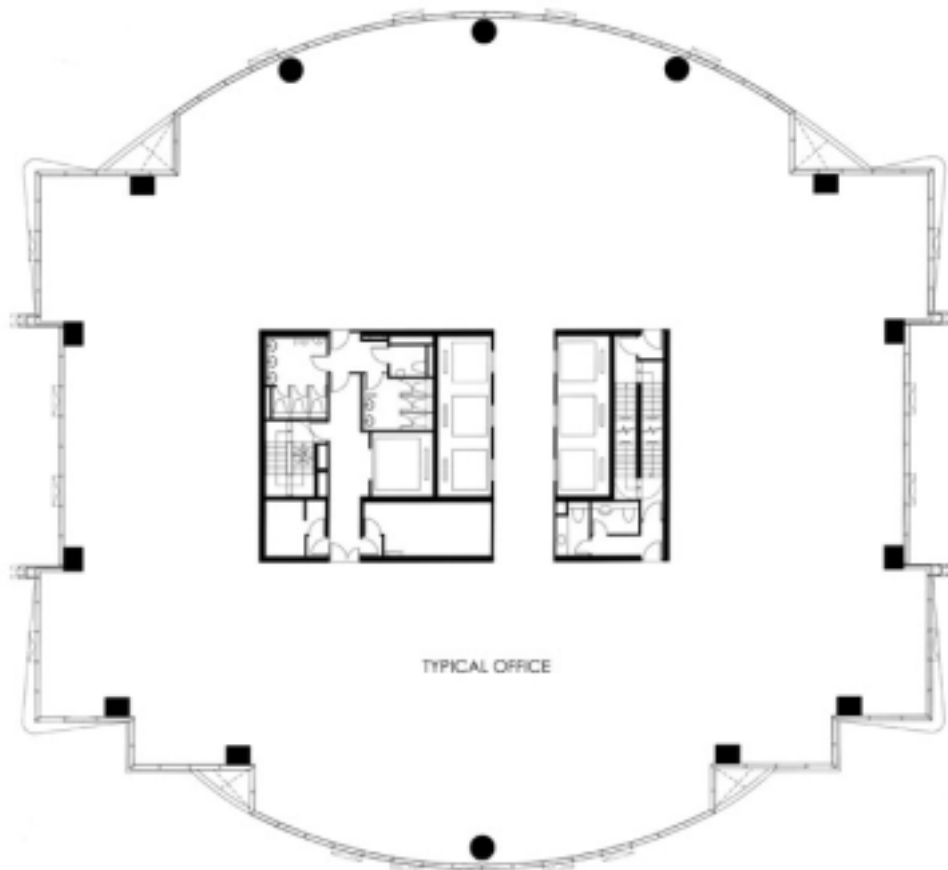
Capitalising on the prominence of the project's main entry point, a 40 m by 40 m space equipped with a mobile stage has been set aside for performances and exhibitions. Balconies on either side of this area open the activity on all levels to view and allow shoppers on the upper levels to watch performances.

"Initially we considered putting a big void in the centre of the podium but eventually we developed a double-loaded corridor with a smaller void in the middle, which makes orientation easier," Mr Chui explained.

The simplified layout divides the podium into two halves, each of which is marked by a side atrium with a slanted glass wall that offers views of the shops from outside the complex. The food court is located at the northern end while access to the hotel is located at the southern end.





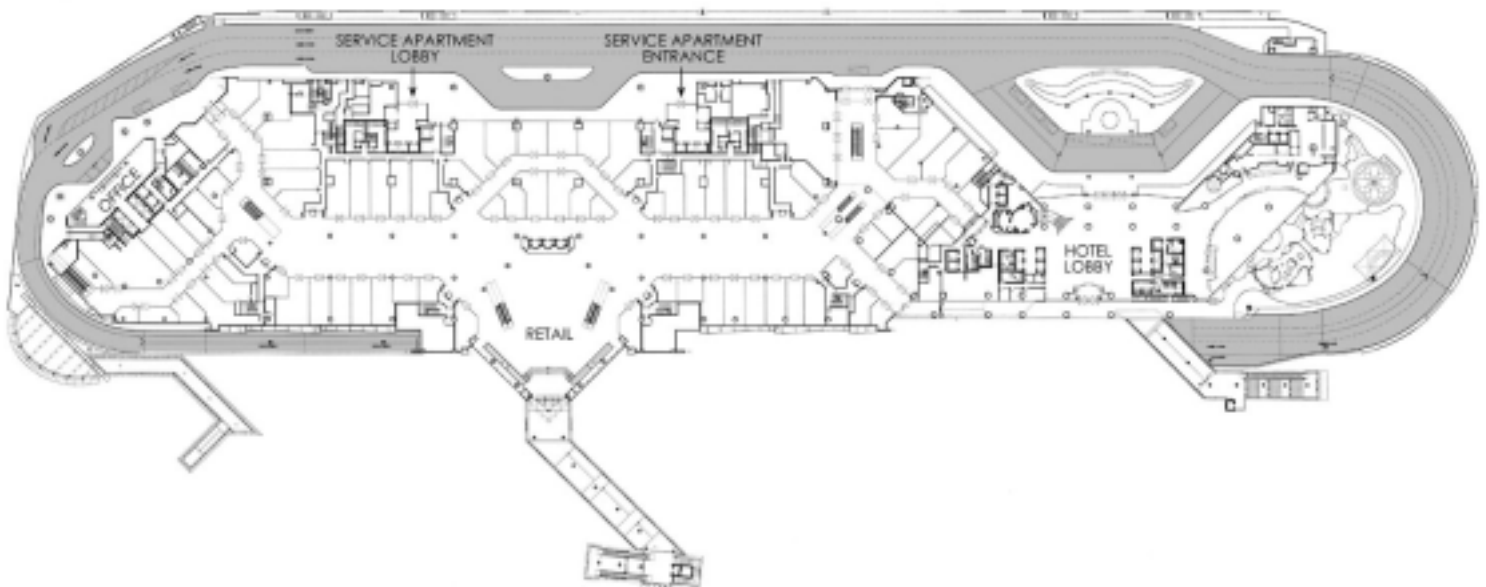


Externally the podium is clad in a combination of laminated glass and supergraphics flanking the transparent glass-clad void in the middle. This produces a self-explanatory retail podium which, with strategically placed light fixtures, shines like a lantern, revealing the buzz of activity inside and enticing pedestrians and motorists to visit.

According to Mr Chui, the retail podium


would be integrated with existing traffic nodes as far as possible to ensure its viability. Round-the-clock usage is encouraged through the design of a mixed development above the 33,700 sq m podium to make the complex self-sustaining.

The office, hotel and retail portions of the Metropolis were completed in June 2002. Fitting-out of the serviced apartments is to be completed by mid-2003. To meet the challenges presented





by today's property market, a strategy of maximum flexibility has been adopted in the design and layout of the serviced apartments. For long-term visitors they can function as serviced apartments, with furnished rooms and cleaning services. However, they are also equipped like homes and available for sale, with spacious living rooms, fully fitted pantries, individually controlled split-type air-conditioners and lobby security. All guests also benefit from the facilities available in the hotel.

Given their location next to the railway station, the serviced apartments may well prove a hit with businessmen running between offices in Hong Kong and factories in China. 

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