

## Value of Transformations

Eungee CINN, Associate Curator

The urban framework of today's Seoul has rooted in the rapid urban expansion. Standardization of design due to quantitative expansion seemed to bring homogeneity into urban landscape, however if one tries to walk around the streets of Seoul, he can find more of diversity than homogeneity. The diversity comes from the residents. For the purpose of securing extra square meter, buildings keep equipping themselves with new architectural solutions and end up exhibiting a new design different from the original, usually defined by laws, institutions and economic feasibility. This extension process crossing the line between legal and illegal would worsen the living environment, but could add the qualitative value, a storytelling of people on the quantitative frameworks.

The 36 architects' works embodied this transformation into each architects' own design language. Because most of them are small sized multi-family houses and retail buildings, they are not so fancy or glamorous. But based upon the efficiency and economic feasibility, they are attempting to find extra spaces containing the storytelling of people's lives. Balconies, rooftops and attics which were reinterpreted by the residents of mass-produced housing units, have now transformed and appeared as more practical, aesthetical and integrated beings by the architects. Feeding on efforts to gain some more living spaces within a private premise, those extra spaces help to build residents communities and enrich urban streetscapes by giving more depth to the boundaries between architecture and city. They are containing the DNA of existing mass-produced buildings in our cities, abundant narratives of the lives of residents and, at the same time, architecture's obligations and responsibilities for city and society.

A city in which all sorts of people are living together always shows different faces. And when architectures and cities, even though they are built upon principles prioritizing quantitative values or systems, start to display scenes of daily life, and when we come to experience them, we will see each section of their spaces disclosing its own face. The 36 works is capturing such diversity and reproducing it in a refined form in city. However, these outcomes will be translated again into another form by residents, and then architects will continue to develop new solutions under the given circumstances. After all, architectural creativity comes out of such mutual interactions.

## About analyzing 36 buildings of the FAR Game

Keehyun AHN, Associate Curator

Analyzing and interpreting design process and its methodology of a building with a single perspective, the FAR Game, is not an easy task. In a design process, not only intention(will) of the architect but also ever changing requests from the client, limited budget and time, various regulations, compromises due to the collaboration with contractors and all other things are involved as independent variables. Moreover, such variables don't just come in order but simultaneously and repeatedly, so it seems almost impossible to explain a design process with a single perspective.

Nevertheless, under the title of "The FAR Game", we tried to analyze and interpret 36 buildings designed by architects. Constructed at the most typical residential area within the last 10 years, these 36 buildings are well explaining about changes in the Korean construction market (the decline of apartment construction and the present trend demanding diversity) and about other phenomenon triggered by architects (especially young ones) who is stepping into the market which originally has been led by builders.

But there are more important things which have drawn our attention. The first one is that the 36 buildings are not promoting themselves as a piece of artwork of architects but as a very practical and ordinary building. The second is they are used as a medium controlling and reliving the desires of client with a design which is meticulously and fiercely calculated considering both FAR and other extrinsic variables. And the last thing is various gestures reflecting architectural values (quantitative and qualitative) embodied by architects into those buildings. Focusing on these three aspects, we analyzed the 36 buildings and came to realize that those aspects were the very factors which have shaped all sorts of buildings in Korea just as they are now.

As it's mentioned above, this attempt is close to impossible and vulnerable to errors, but it will give us good opportunities to come up with varied agendas and discussions on changes in the Korean architectural scene (led by changes in market due to the beginning of the age of austerity, the emergence of young architects and etc.). At the same time, because our work well corresponds with the theme of this year's Venice Biennale, 'Reporting from the Front', we believe that it will help to introduce the uniqueness and universality of Korean architecture to publics/architects/professionals from all around the world and so to have a discussion with them.

## Mining Meaning from Bunch of Data

Seungbum KIM, Associate Curator

Dealing with a huge pile of data is not that elegant job. The situation gets even worse especially when dealing with data processed by human hands. And correcting numerous defects in data in advance of a full-scale analysis work is like a mining work drilling down into a bottomless pit without knowing if there is any gold ahead.

The building account data used for this exhibition was the exact case. It was surely an attractive work that there is a public data of 600 thousand buildings in Seoul. But the data was not in a useable condition. First, 50% of the buildings didn't have information about FAR, and also the cells for other items including site area, BCR and total floor area were heartlessly left blank like a leaf eaten away by devouring worms.

Some errors were very common but they could make a huge difference. They were the misuses of commas and decimal points. In many cases, wrongly applied in place of a decimal point, a comma made figures 1,000 times or 10,000 times larger. For example, according to this data, a small apartment complex in Seoul has a 'secret underground city' disguised as a carpark. Its area is up to 90 million square meters that is as large as one sixth of the sum of the total floor area of the entire buildings of Seoul.

Somehow, after many twists and turns, all preparation for our analysis work had been done. And that very moment was like was the moment of discovering a vein of gold. So what can we see there? Individual lines of data, which is each individual building reflecting small desire of individual persons. Lots of these desires come together and turn into a macroscopic flow of society. The interesting part is that some strict regulations have worked ironically as a construction stimulating measure before their implementation. 13% of existing detached houses in Seoul have been built in a single year of 1990. It is because, from 1991, constructing parking lots was to become mandatory for detached houses with a total floor area of 200m<sup>2</sup> or over.

This is just one small example of meanings extracted from the pile of data. Let's find together small and large meanings created when individual freewill converges on each other.

## New Title

Isak CHUNG, Associate Curator

It's a story when I was offered a renovation work for a multi-family house in Yeonnam-dong, Seoul. The client asked to me while explaining about his purchased site and house. "Anyhow, you do take this kind of job too?"

The offered building to design was a red brick multi-family house built by house sellers in 1991. Such multi-family houses were constructed upon a very similar style in every residential area all around Seoul during the 1990s. But on stepping into the 2000s, part of this multi-family residential area was turned into so-called 'hip place'. House owners rapidly transformed their red brick houses or constructed new buildings corresponding to the changing demands. House sellers and interior workers helped this transformation at the request of the building owners, following the taste of market. As they didn't receive a proper architectural education, they drilled, demolished and added a new skin upon their own safety standards and construction methods learned from experience. The result was a reckless development. Witnessing the situation, architects criticized about it, but didn't see that particular area as their work field.

I accepted the job. I wanted to treat it as a heritage of our housing culture of a specific era. As if I were working on a restoration project, I tried to understand everything about the building including the original intention of design as well as its changes in use and alterations in form. And taking that understanding as grounds, I wanted to examine its inherent capacity on structural modification and the feasibility of new program. I made every part of the building into a record. Not only the room sizes, ceiling heights but also the detail of window frames or moldings under the eaves, I studied every inch of the building.

Structurally weak points or excessively modified parts were turned back into their original status or amended into more stable forms. Existing claddings such as the floor of staircase and exterior red bricks were cleansed to have them recover their original colors. The illegally extended balcony was legalized by writing it into the official floor area, and the space itself was reformed as a shop window. Existing equipment were reused as much as possible to minimize damage to the building. Then, to fill a lacked floor area ratio, I added a new mass which satisfies construction regulations.

At the right front of the Korean pavilion, as a reference for the medium-sized housing type of Korea, this Yeannam-dong building model will be exhibited in an original form before the renovation. Our team wants it to be used as a sort of index introducing the target of this exhibition. In Korea, there are young architects who have just begun to reach out to the ordinary living environment which was originally in the hands of house sellers, construction

companies and the government. I hope this banal building in Yeannam-dong can report about such a moment of Korean architecture toward a new front of that changing territory.

## **Elbow of Building**

Da Eun JEONG, Assistant Curator

Sash frame can be found in many buildings all around Seoul. There is sash frame in most of apartment balconies. On the contrary, a house having no sash frame in its balcony makes us to see it a second time. There are many other materials including sandwich panel, polycarbonate panel and tarpaulin, but sash frame is the most popular one. Sash frame is systematic, solid, openable and transparent thanks to its glass plane, so it sounds like a very versatile material.

In consideration of changing climates delivering yellow dust, rainy season and heavy snow, it's hard to deny sash frame is very useful in many ways. In fact, sash frame is not required only to deal with ever changing weathers. Something important and necessary yet not in use for now automatically goes to the 'sashed space'. After all of this, it's impossible to ignore its usefulness for our daily lives.

As this 'sashed space' doesn't belong to living space according to building codes, its use can be determined by personal preference, but it's hard to name it as private space. And as the sashed space is positioned close to the outside of a building, local landscapes take up large part of it. This temporal and flexible space shows different faces by residents of that building. It's the same not only in other residential housings but also in general buildings that can be seen in our neighborhood. A space defined by sash frame can be renovated into any forms regarding user, function, trend, relationship with commercial areas, rent and land value. You can get rid of its structure itself and build it again.

Most of this flexible space doesn't count toward a taxable area. Either it doesn't belong to a floor area ratio recorded in building account data, but it creates a physical volume. Depend on how we use this space, intervals between building masses can be changed.

To this space, I gave a nick name. Elbow. The 'Elbow of building' shall be the name of this space which enables to adjust intervals between surrounding buildings according to its use. Elbows can be stretched or bent by moving a joint connecting their upper bones and lower bones (can be open and closed). So I would say if this space allowed us to choose our own attitudes toward our surroundings on the border of inside and outside of the building, it's already 'elbow-ish' enough.

Let's give elbows to buildings so that they can wriggle. The elbow-ish space shouldn't always have to mean an extended balcony space. It can mean a space which can make a direct response to changes or defend itself with a poker face. It seems important for buildings to be used perseveringly by making themselves relevant to changes in city. Then, if they are

lucky enough, they might be able to receive some compliments as a somehow useful space.