

/ WORDS EILEEN WONG & ONG YING YING

IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

Two students share their impressions of architecture by Andrea Palladio, as well as the Italian master's 21st century successors.

Fourth-year students at the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) typically sign up for a design studio to gain practical knowledge. This year, one of them is the Palladio Studio, led by Rene Tan and his senior colleagues at RT+Q Architects.

It aims to explore the tripartite relationship between the:

1. Study of history through Andrea Palladio's (1508-80) works;
2. Experience of history through travelling and visiting Palladio's buildings; and
3. Application of history onto current affairs through reinterpreting Palladio's "old values" and designing with them in the context of new challenges today.

In June this year, the students in the Palladio Studio travelled to Italy and visited buildings designed by the groundbreaking architect in Venice and Vicenza. They went to see, evaluate, understand, enjoy, be overwhelmed, sketch and, most importantly, learn to apply the design principles of the great Italian Renaissance architect to design today. Although he lived in the 16th century, Palladio's oeuvre still remains very relevant today.

Additionally, the students also had urban experiences in Venice, Vicenza and Milan, including visits to the 2018 Venice Biennale. The intention was to broaden their awareness beyond the classroom. Professor Erwin Viray, Head of Pillar, Architecture and Sustainable Design at SUTD, was also present on the trip to share his experiences and wisdom with the students.

Here, students Eileen Wong and Ong Ying Ying diary their experiences and reveal what they learnt from the five-day trip.



DAY 1

10.45am

Piazza San Marco, Venice

First stop of the trip. This huge piazza is full of energy and life. It is a living space filled with different informal activities such as bird-feeding, coffee-drinking and even wedding photography! The experience was so refreshing. Singapore is lacking in spaces like this *piazza* that naturally brings people together – how can we replicate this?



2.30pm

San Giorgio Maggiore and Il Redentore

Both churches are done by Andrea Palladio but at different times of his career. Their exteriors are highly similar, with an overlapping cruciform church and grand pedimented white marble facade. Interestingly, the exterior of San Giorgio Maggiore was raised from the ground and an extra base was added to every column in order to maintain the golden proportion.

DAY 2

10am

Singapore Pavilion @ Venice Biennale

Everyone was excited to catch a glimpse of how Singapore was being represented at such an important event. Ours was one of the few that incorporates technology within the showcase and we are really proud of it. Apart from that, we also had the chance to witness works from different architects and their way of representation.

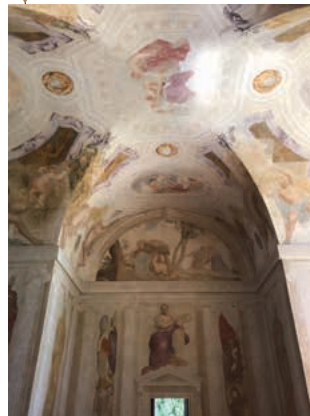


For example, Peter Zumthor's exhibition features big-scale models of his projects. By mixing different materials like wax, concrete or even burning part of the model really brings out the sensual experience of being in the space. It's a pity that photography was not allowed. However, we really learnt the impact of building models in a larger scale.

2pm

Villa Malcontenta

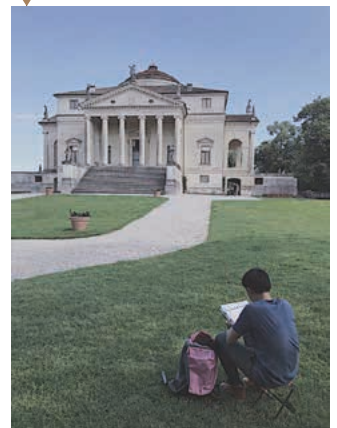
Villa Malcontenta, designed by Palladio, is located in Vicenza. We entered it through a flight of stairs from the rear and were amazed by its interior as it was well-decorated with frescoes all over the walls and ceilings. The space felt homely as the furniture of the owners, the Foscari family, were kept in place. We can vividly picture how the spaces were being used back in the 16th century.



4pm

Villa Rotonda

This is known as the perfectly-symmetrical villa. It is highly ornamented and decorated with sculptures that are made from plaster instead of stone. We spent 15 minutes sketching it. Fun fact: The dome was initially open to collect rainwater but was covered later because birds flew in and damaged the sculptures.



The interior of Villa Rotonda is more ornamented than Villa Malcontenta. We felt that the interior space of Villa Rotonda is rather constricted and narrow. It could be due to the monumental interior space, or even the symmetrical plan of the site that gives no hierarchy to the space.

DAY 3

10am

Venice Biennale

This time, we visited the Giardini side to see works done by famous architects, which are being used for exhibition purposes. For example, the Nordic Pavilion by Sverre Fehn was used for an interactive exhibition where a balloon inflates when touched. Entering it, you feel a sense of openness. Trees pierce through the translucent glass ceiling with concrete louvres, which causes the space to fill with natural sunlight, and blurs the line between indoors and out.



12.30pm

Olivetti Showroom – Carlo Scarpa

At this showroom by Carlo Scarpa, we observed how detailing can be done, especially the connection of two different materials. It also shows how detailing can be consistent throughout the same space, without looking boring.

DAY 4

11.30am

Querini Stampalia

Carlo Scarpa restored and added-on to the existing building. He turned a weakness into a strength when he turned the old entrance, which was



1.30pm

Venice Biennale, Holy See Pavilion

This is the first time The Vatican participated in the Biennale. Its exhibition showcases chapels designed by 10 different architects located in the garden behind the 400-year-old Benedictine



church on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore. Particularly compelling was the one designed by Francesco Cellini, which consists of two rectangles pieces intersecting at the centre to form an invisible cross. They also double up as shelter and seating. Intentionally created without a floor, it blurs the boundary between people, nature and religion.

always flooded, into the main focus of the building. When the water levels rose, a water feature would result. There is also an odd-shaped door with an opening on the top left – a design that an architecture student will not typically think of.

DAY 5

8.45am

Teatro Olimpico

This is a late work done by Palladio. The hallway of the stage set was designed with false perspective, which caused the performers to appear taller than they were. To enhance the fictional sense of depth, he used forced perspective to heighten the illusion. However, it was shocking to know that this theatre was only built for one show, since it was too expensive to redo the stage.



3.40pm

Ambrosiana Biblioteca

We managed to catch a glimpse of Leonardo da Vinci's Codex Atlanticus here in Milan. Through his sketches, we realised that he was widely interested in machining musical instruments as well as studying light and sound waves.



4.15pm

Prada Foundation

This project is the transformation of a distillery dating back to the 1910s by OMA. The compound combines seven existing buildings with three new ones. Among them is Torre, a nine-storey building that functions as an exhibition space. The scissors staircase, which is the main circulation route, is the result of interlocking the main and emergency staircase together.



7pm

Basilica Palladiana, Vicenza

We gathered outside the basilica and took photos with Palladio's statue. The basilica is currently being used for an exhibition by David Chipperfield's studio, where they showcase study models made with wood and stone on a large scale, hand drawings, and photo renders.

