

SOCIAL LADDER

A new university sports and entertainment development, funded by a self-made philanthropist and featuring accessible sloping roofs, is designed to teach students the importance of the climb

After a childhood of hardship, and forced to quit school at the age of 12 to provide for his family, Li Ka-Shing is now one of the wealthiest people in the world – currently ranked the 12th richest man on the planet. But while the foundation of his empire was built on manufacturing, real estate, infrastructure, energy and resources, his true passion is philanthropy. In 2006 Ka-Shing pledged one-third of his fortune to his foundation for charity and philanthropic projects throughout the world – a pledge estimated at over US\$8 billion. “To be able to contribute to society and to help those in need to build a better life, that is the ultimate meaning in life. I would gladly consider this to be my life’s work,” says Ka-Shing.

The LKS Foundation was established in the early 1980s to enhance three strategic objectives – to nurture a culture of giving; to support education reform initiatives that encourage long-term thinking, empowerment, creativity, open mindedness and constructive engagement with a focus on positive and sustainable change; and to help advance medical research and services.

With those three objectives in mind, and immediately after establishing the foundation, Ka-Shing founded a new university near his hometown in southern China. To the north of Hong Kong, in a ‘small’ Chinese town of approximately five million people, The Shantou University (STU) has built a reputation for excellence as the only public university supported by private funds in China. And after nearly 30 years of steady growth and innovative thinking, the LKS Foundation is initiating a bold new plan to expand the STU

campus to make it a model for higher learning and culture throughout China.

The design of the campus expansion is being inspired by internationally renowned architects. It includes a new library designed by Ray Chen (winner of the Design for Asia Award by Hong Kong Design Center); an innovative new research and medical facility by Herzog & de Meuron; a new campus park and bell tower by Maya Lin; and a new sport, conference and entertainment facility (Sports Park) designed by MANICA Architecture.

Sustainability

It was a requirement of the foundation that the new campus facilities activate and inspire the minds, bodies, and spirits of the students while also being responsive to the campus’s long-term environmental goals. “Unlike many of the projects in the spotlight today that seek to impress through shock and awe, Ka-Shing’s approach is truly sustainable – both environmentally and financially,” says David Manica, president and managing director of MANICA Architecture. “Instead of constructing the projects as a self-indulgent homage to himself, his approach will provide a legacy for the entire region, and will become a hallmark that inspires similar developments throughout China – and the world.”

The 70,000m² Sports Park includes a small multi-use arena, a natatorium (swimming venue) with competitive Olympic swimming pool, sport and fitness training facilities, a flexible grand conference hall, 200-room boutique hotel, and an underground car park. “While each of these elements is designed to work independently as an asset for the university, it’s actually the way that the various programme



Shantou University's Sports Park will be a place for interaction – visitors can climb, cycle, run or skate up the arena's roof and enjoy terraces, gardens, playgrounds and even rock climbing walls along the way

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Above and below: The 6,000-seat multi-use arena will be used for commercial and university events, including basketball, concerts, and graduation ceremonies

components work together that will result in a one-of-a-kind destination for the campus, community, and the surrounding region,” says Manica.

Retractable partition walls

The anchor of the development is a 6,000-seat multi-use arena. The large lower seating bowl has been designed to accommodate various spectator and entertainment events, including professional basketball, touring concerts, flat-floor tradeshows, tournament sport, and the university’s annual graduation ceremonies. Additionally, by incorporating full-height retractable partition walls within the seating tiers, the entire seating bowl can be easily and quickly converted into four smaller theatres. The acoustic partition walls will allow the subdivided arena bowl to host simultaneous speaking events, or provide four additional lecture auditoria for the university. The smaller auditoria can also be used in conjunction with the adjacent conference facility and hotel to supplement the plenary needs of larger international conferences.

The indoor pool in the Natatorium will include a regulation competitive Olympic swimming pool, athlete changing and training areas, and spectator seating for 1,000 people. The pool facility will be open to students, the community, hotel guests, and when necessary, can also be easily secured for competitive events. With the public concourse immediately adjacent to the arena’s concourse, the two venues can be separated through operable gates and doors, or alternatively, the concourses can be combined to accommodate maximum crowds for combined tournament events.

The 2,000m² flexible conference hall can be easily configured to host tradeshows, gala ballroom events, multiple smaller breakout meetings, or a variety of speaking conferences. With its built-in stage and retractable seating systems, the hall can also be easily converted to a small theatre that will be used for a variety of theatrical stage events.

Along the north of the development, the 200-room boutique hotel will include a restaurant, bar, spa, fitness centre, private terraces, and even 20 roof-top bungalows for visiting scholars, with views to the campus below and mountains beyond.

Shared space

Through shared use of spaces and programme, the Sports Park’s design has been compacted to fit within a smaller building footprint, resulting in a lower construction cost and lower ongoing lifecycle costs. But certainly the design’s most instantly recognisable asset is the way it utilises the exterior skin, roof, and surrounding site. Called the High Park, the roof transforms the entire building into a fully interactive sport and entertainment destination. Students and visitors can ascend the naturally landscaped roof to the peak of the arena. Along the way is a series of entrances, terraces, gardens, playgrounds, rock climbing walls, and various other extreme sport pathways for biking, running, or even skating. The dynamic design allows the building to be used 365 days a year, and fuses the landscape, urban planning, and architecture into one seamless experience. The building itself becomes a mountain to be climbed, a field to play upon, or a garden to meditate within.

“At the core of the concept is the philosophy of Petrarch described in *The Ascent of Mount Ventroux* – the realisation that the journey up the mountain is more valuable than the view from the summit,” says Manica. “It’s an ideal that Mr Li wants to bring to all the students – that it’s not the fleeting moment of victory that satisfies us, but the way we come together to learn, play, and grow that is most important.” ■

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