

BOLD + Human: One Architectural and Design Firm's Formula for Success in Hong Kong and the GBA

In 10 years, B+H Architects has gone from a one-person office in Hong Kong to handling some of the largest and most prestigious developments in China's booming Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Global architectural design and consulting firm B+H Architects glosses its name in simple terms: BOLD + Human. Catherine Siu (Executive Principal, Asia | Co-Managing Principal, Hong Kong) explains, "BOLD" means not setting boundaries, being ambitious and creative. It's part of the company's DNA, but always balanced by 'human,' recognising that all our work is for real people." On this basis, B+H Architects has blazed trails in architecture and interior design in multiple markets around the globe.

One of those trails led to Hong Kong in 2012. Since setting up B+H's Hong Kong practice in that year, Siu has overseen its gradual expansion - from Siu herself as the sole employee to over 20 architects today in B+H's spacious Hong Kong island office. Siu's area of expertise is interior design, she pioneered the Hong Kong office's breakthrough contracts with major high-end hotel chains in Macao. Since then, Hong Kong has expanded its range and taken on projects across the border in the GBA, leading to the setting up of a Shenzhen office in 2021. With around 10 staff, that office acts primarily as a project office for some of the firm's biggest and most prestigious GBA projects - notably the Shenzhen Natural History Museum and the Shenzhen Children's Hospital.

Catherine was born in Hong Kong and studied abroad but could not resist returning to the city. Her colleagues at B+H bear witness to Hong Kong's reputation as a talent magnet - like UK national Andrew Humphreys (Principal, Director, Healthcare), an architect working specifically on healthcare projects, and Barry Day (Asia Design Director, Planning & Landscape | Co-Managing Principal, Hong Kong), a South African by birth and Canadian by upbringing, whose specialty is planning and landscape design. Humphreys said, "Hong Kong has always been a place that draws people from around the world. For architects, it represents a fascinating assault on the senses, sometimes almost overpowering but never aggressive." For Humphreys, the juxtaposing of a lush tropical environment with a modern built environment is one of the city's key draws, as is the magnificent interconnection of the harbour and mountains.

With the recent rapid development of the GBA, B+H in Hong Kong has looked across the border for new opportunities. Humphreys is deeply involved in the new Shenzhen Children's Hospital, designed to provide an ultra-modern but ultra-comfortable and caring environment for its young occupants, with a particular focus on incorporating

“ Though it lies on the edge of the GBA geographically, in a genuine sense Hong Kong is its epicentre. Hong Kong is a place that draws talent, is supremely accessible, and amazingly easy to do business in. ”

Catherine Siu
Executive Principal, Asia
Co-Managing Principal, Hong Kong

"bench to bedside" technologies and the creation of a healing micro-landscape from ground floor to rooftop gardens. Day, meanwhile, is working on the stunning new Shenzhen Natural History Museum, a unique building closely intertwined with and springing from the natural landscape around it, where the lines between man-made and natural ecosystems are intentionally blurred and intertwined.

To find and win these and other GBA opportunities, an essential first step has been linking up with one or more local design institutes (LDIs) in the region. LDIs are essential partners who know how to get things done in China in areas such as compliance, but need external creativity and expertise from international partnerships. Typically, B+H teams up with an LDI for international design competitions for major projects and, when successful, continues to work closely with the LDI for the project's duration.

The numbers of these competitions and the opportunities for ambitious companies to work in the GBA are huge. Day comments, "Right now, Shenzhen plans to construct 10 monumental cultural buildings over the next few years. Most cities would only build one such building in a decade!" Humphreys adds, "The transformation of the southern part of the GBA has been nothing short of extraordinary in terms of pace and scale. Most importantly, it's being carefully designed for the long-term, with city planners looking well beyond the horizon and into the future."

What are the secrets to breaking into a market like this? According to B+H, one is the importance of Hong Kong as a base. They note that although the GBA is booming, it is Hong Kong that attracts and retains the essential talent. Another is the importance of building networks



and relationships with LDIs in the GBA. These organisations are critical funnels through which local knowledge and action are channelled. B+H has forged these connections by attending conferences and exhibitions and working with Chambers of Commerce and Invest Hong Kong.

B+H is hugely excited about opportunities in the GBA. "We're hoping to double the amount of work we do in the GBA over the next five years," says Siu. "But it's not just business growth that excites us. The chance to put a lasting mark on this remarkable area is a real motivation. When future generations look back, I hope they see a GBA architecture that is indeed BOLD + Human, creatively special, and a great place to live."

B+H Architects

- B+H Architects is a global design and consulting company originating in Canada and now part of the Surbana Jurong Group
- B+H Architects is currently involved in the architecture, interior design, planning, and landscape design for the Shenzhen Natural History Museum and the Shenzhen Children's Hospital

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