

# Designs on Barcelona

Kelis Wong

**T**HE SPANISH CITY of Barcelona is a lesson for architects and planners when it comes to how a visionary outlook can contribute to the future of a city, as well as act as a social glue for a community.

“The city government is a very important agent in the field of the power between different urban agents,” said Josep Maria Montaner, councillor for housing on Barcelona City Council. “Its aim is to represent the wills and the needs of citizens.

Hailed as a fine example in the modern history of city planning, the Catalan capital’s transformation from a coastal industrial town to a “smart city” happened in only three decades.

The transformation began when the city government decided in the late 1980s to set aside 70 percent of its budget for infrastructure projects in anticipation of hosting the Olympics Games in 1992.

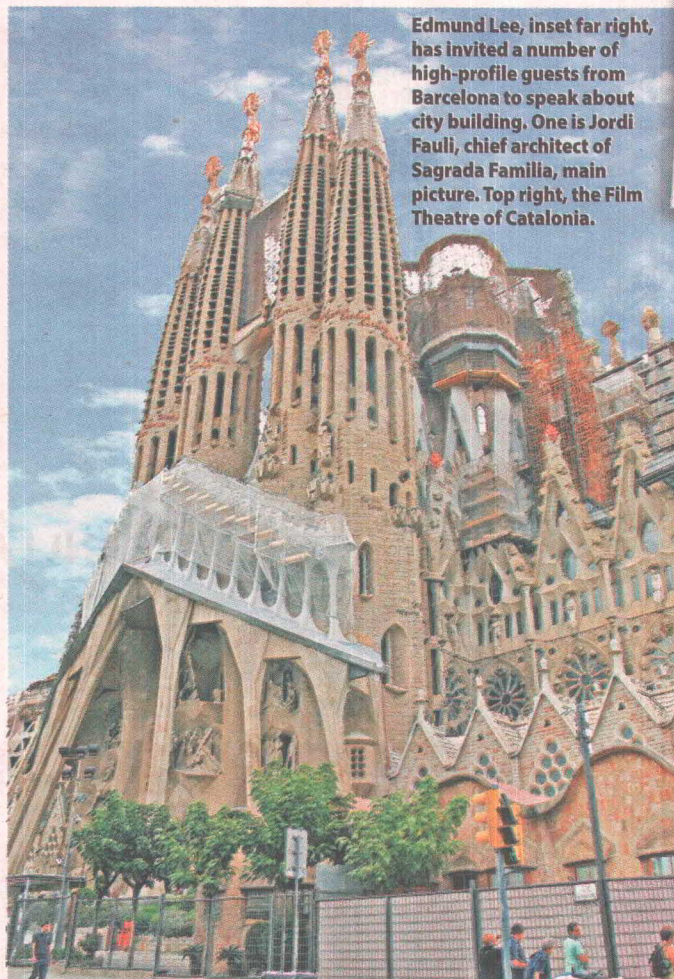
Today, electric-powered buses transport 95 percent of the residents to almost every part of the city. An extensive network of biking lanes also links up the alleyways. People can hop on to any one of the 6,000 bicycles parked in public spaces.

“The high quality of the urban and structural details is very important for the quality of landscape, especially in the relationship between buildings and pedestrian ways,” Montaner added.

“Hong Kong could learn from our experience in the accurate design of urban spaces.”

Edmund Lee Tak-yue, executive director of Hong Kong Design Centre, said: “Design in Barcelona is also both community-driven and forward-thinking, but never at the cost of the city’s rich traditions.”

The organizer of Business of Design Week has chosen Barcelona as its partner city for this year’s international design conference, which runs until Saturday



Edmund Lee, inset far right, has invited a number of high-profile guests from Barcelona to speak about city building. One is Jordi Fauli, chief architect of Sagrada Familia, main picture. Top right, the Film Theatre of Catalonia.



Josep Lluís Mateo, principal of architecture firm Mateo Arquitectura.

Mateo is considered one of Spain’s and Europe’s most prolific and visible architects. He is famed for his two public space projects in Barcelona: the Film Theatre of Catalonia and the El Ninot Market.

They are both redevelopment projects situated in an old district of Barcelona. While the theater involved the construction of a new building next to people’s homes, El Ninot preserves and reuses an abandoned market in a central location.

“Both projects address the dialogue between the old and the new, bringing a contemporary approach that is not nostalgic, but that also somehow wants to ensure continuity,” Mateo said.

He said that El Ninot is a city monument so the project was received enthusiastically.

The Film Theatre of Catalonia, however, prompted a lot of discussion and criticism before the project was accepted by those affected.

Mateo will be sharing his experiences in the session themed Culture & The City: Design Cities of the Future, on Saturday.

“Sometimes, architecture involves negotiating between old memories and future dreams – this is what these two projects are about,” Mateo said.

“As architects, we are builders of the future, but not always without roots.”

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at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre and PMQ. The conference has invited more than 20 speakers from Barcelona alone to share their successful experiences in architecture, urban planning, design and fashion. Speakers include Jordi Fauli, chief architect of the Sagrada Familia church; Xavier Asensi, Asia Pacific managing director of FC Barcelona; and