

CITIZEN ARCHITECT

Award-winning architect Ole Scheeren is keen to create structures that are relevant to Asia's transformation and progress.

BY DESIREE KOH



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Ole Scheeren's global perspective has been shaped by observing the progress and transformation of major cities around the world. His creations bear geometric and social relevance, with glowing translucent fibreglass, movable metal cages, corrugated glass and illuminated animated backdrops. The multidimensional nature of his work showcases his active involvement in a city's culture and heritage, rather than being a static observer. To him, the context of a building is an important reason for its being – how it affects and addresses the way people live and how it contributes to its surroundings.

The son of an architecture professor, the German-born Scheeren moved to Beijing 10 years ago after numerous postings in Europe, North America and Asia for various projects. But it was his three-and-a-half-month exploration of China – while in his early 20s – that affected him most.

“The world is completely different from an environment of stability,” says Scheeren, referring to European traditions such as historical preservation, societal structure and status quo. “This realisation was both shocking and painful, but at the same time, liberating – to realise the values you grew up with might not be the only valid position in this world.”

The energy and power already bubbling in premillennial China infused Scheeren with the urgency of understanding the country and Asia's latent potential. One of Scheeren's most recognisable projects is China Central Television's headquarters in Beijing, an iconic constellation of two high-rise structures with striking glass and concrete segments suspended in air. With its facade completed in 2008, it was, along with other starchitect-designed buildings, the new face of Asia, a continent on its way up and reaching new heights, elevated to one of the world's top players through its recent economic surges.

Scheeren believes that when a place creates emotions, it affects the way people relate to each other, and this is truly what makes a building sustainable, on top of environmentally friendly features and practices. He is not interested in satisfying his ego and putting things up “just for the sake of it.”

“My origin and training is European but I've been in Asia for 20 years – I've become part of both worlds simultaneously. To see how one side could inspire and benefit the other is a very interesting question.”

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