

The Birth of Wah Fu Estate

An Interview with Dr Donald Liao, the Chief Architect of Wah Fu Estate

VO:

Wah Fu Estate was opened on 27 September 1968
On that day, the Governor Sir David Trench appointed me
as the Commissioner for Housing

Super:

27.09.1968 Opening ceremony of Wah Fu Estate

Sir David Trench and Dr Donald Liao at Wah Fu Estate (1968)

Dr. Donald Liao

1960 Joined the then Hong Kong Housing Authority

1968 Commissioner for Housing

1973 Director of Housing

1980 Secretary for Housing

1989 Retired as Chief Secretary for Administration

Video Title:

The Birth of Wah Fu Estate

An Interview with Dr Donald Liao, the Chief Architect of Wah Fu Estate

VO:

The Wah Fu site was in Kellett Bay
It was known to the older generation as a very remote place
For me, it was 'love at first sight'

It was a sunny winter day
In front of me was the sea and behind me were the hills

I loved it very much
I thought of creating a sculpture

I also wanted to retain the beautiful scenery

Section Title:

The First Housing Estate Built with a Township Concept

VO:

How can this place be made home for over 50,000 people?

Actually I was thinking of something like a small town
rather than a housing estate

What would a place for 50,000 people require?

First, schools for children

I insisted there must be primary and secondary schools
so when people moved in
their children could go to school

... and also kindergartens

With so many blocks, I tried to house them on the ground floor

So that young children could go to school easily without crossing the
road

Secondly, housewives needed to go to market every day
to buy vegetables, meat and fish

It was the 60s

a library should be provided for a population of over 50,000

Therefore, the second public library in Hong Kong was built here
after Hong Kong's first in the City Hall

it was also run by the Urban Council

Then shops were needed, banks, grocery stores, coffee shops

and most importantly, a Chinese restaurant

I built a car park here

It was the first in a public housing estate

Another first was building a home for the elderly

I also reserved spaces for the elderly to play chess under the trees

I have tried my best to provide different facilities

catering for the needs of 50,000 people

Section Title:

Assimilating Architecture into the Environment

VO:

It is good that the site faces the sea

The L-shape block design makes it possible

for most people living there to have a sea view

My design was for more people to enjoy

the spectacular view of the South China Sea

...and also Lamma Island and other outlying islands farther away

Some flats are bound to face the hills

I have tried to allow more space in between the blocks

An architect suggested removing the hills

But I wanted to keep them

Firstly, for budget purpose secondly, to retain the natural topography

Before its development, a special feature of the site

was the series of hills one behind another

Therefore I specially designed "Twin Tower Blocks"

which allowed housing blocks

to be seated on platforms of different levels

just like repairing a broken tooth

there was no need to bulldoze the hills

After the project had been completed

I was so happy to see people moving in

The intake first began in 1967, the year when the riot took place
Intake was slow in the first few months
In those days
the bus fare on HK Island was generally about 20 cents
but it was 30 cents to Queen Mary's Hospital
and 40 cents to Wah Fu Estate

People were reluctant to move there
because of the higher transportation cost
Initially, the estate did not appear so successful
But after having moved in, people began to like the place
People kept moving in and soon all flats were taken up

Once I brought an UK minister
to see one of the residential units in Wah Fu Estate
I asked the tenant if she was happy living there
The lady did not know I was the Commissioner and the architect of the
estate
She told me that she was very happy
The place where she used to live in Wan Chai
had neither a toilet nor a kitchen
Her daughter suffered from asthma when they lived in Wan Chai
but recovered after moving to Wah Fu Estate

Thanks to the fresh air there
The mother was over joyed
I have children myself
I was so happy after hearing her story
Because I have done something to make others happy
and that gave me a sense of achievement

Section Title:

My Favourite Housing Project

VO:

Isn't it wonderful to see Wah Fu Estate from the sky?

I guess my happiest time was while working on the Wah Fu Estate project

I always say that this is my favorite project
just like my favorite child

I travel a lot after I have retired

Every time when I flew back Hong Kong

I would watch Wah Fu Estate intensely from the plane's window
until it disappeared from my sight

Its topography was just the same as the model I first made

It was engraved in my mind

Sometimes I even see it in my dream

I am glad that people live happily in Wah Fu Estate

The air is fresh and they stay healthy

A lot of celebrities grew up in Wah Fu Estate

Some went to college and moved out after making a success

(Last time when I visited the estate) I found those people playing chess
under the trees were getting older

The Estate is really ageing

If it was to be demolished and redeveloped

the needs of the new tenants have to be considered

I am not sure how the Housing Authority

will relocate the existing Wah Fu Estate tenants

My best wishes to them

be joyful and stay healthy!