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W+: The Future (Life) of a Historical Building

“Historic buildings are the soul of the city. Anderson Lee’s design studio on the former Wanchai police station exemplifies the pedagogical ideal in the architectural conservation education in adaptive reuse.”

Professor David Lung
UNESCO Chair/Cultural Heritage/Resources Management (2007-2012)

In the spring of 2012, the University of Hong Kong’s Department of Architecture conducted a series of research and design (R&D) studios within its Master of Architecture program. One of the R&D groups, led by Anderson Lee, examined the potential development of a historic building in the heart of Hong Kong: the old Wan Chai Police Station and Married Quarters. The students addressed issues ranging from public space in contemporary cities to heritage conservation—from design and building technology to sustainable planning.

The university’s new book W+ presents the subsequent research and R&D proposals—which are not meant to be the conclusion of such a complex topic. During the twelve-week semester, participants in the studio tried to identify issues of scale that inform and affect architectural decision-making; the roles of stakeholders pertaining to development; the urban and economic forces that shape the morphology of urban fabrics; and an innovative way to integrate new elements. Finally, the students designed a mixed-use project on a constrained site with a given formal and tectonic logic.

The building at the center of this investigation, the old Wan Chai Police Station and Married Quarters, remain largely uninhabited. The future of the space has yet to be determined. Given the current political climate in Hong Kong, surely this piece of colonial past must sit idle for a few more years—but the preparation will continue for a modernized future.

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