

SACHI in collaboration with Palo Alto Art Center is delighted to present

An illuminating discussion on Sri Lankan Architect Geoffrey Bawa

Portal to Sri Lankan Culture: The Architecture of Geoffrey Bawa

An Illustrated Presentation by Architect Thomas Soper, AIA

Sunday, June 19, 2016, 2 p.m.

Palo Alto Art Center | 1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto

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Geoffrey Bawa (1919-2003) is Sri Lanka's and one of Asia's most celebrated and influential architects of the 20th century. Bawa received the Aga Khan Special Award for a Lifetime's Achievement in Architecture in 2001. His life, work, and legacy have had a tremendous impact on emerging architects in the regions of Asia.

In describing the essence of Bawa's work, Sri Lankan architect, Channa Daswatte, Geoffrey Bawa's protege, sums up his mentor's ennobling vision: "Architecture is seen as a line that defines and marks the presence of man in the landscape and then dissolves into the background to make way for life."

Mr. Soper's objective is to present Geoffrey Bawa's inspiring vision as a world Architect. He will elaborate on some of Bawa's key projects to demonstrate his mastery of regional splendor, providing insight into Sri Lankan culture via his art form. Mr. Soper traveled to Sri Lanka in 2007, and continues to explore Bawa's architecture with great fascination.

Thomas Soper is a practicing architect working in and from the Bay Area for the past four decades. While the majority of his architectural projects are California and US based, his work has taken him as far away as Bangladesh where he designed a school for the American International School system. Since his early years, Tom was mesmerized by the unique landscape of his birthplace, Seneca Falls, nestled in the Finger Lakes of Upstate New York. Its beauty would inspire a life-long affinity for understanding structures deeply influenced by the land and its history.

Tom received his Bachelor degrees in Fine Arts and Architecture from Syracuse University, and his Masters of Architecture from Eliel Saarinen's Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Tom is a member of the American Institute of Architects. He has traveled extensively to Asia including Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Korea, Myanmar and Iran.

During the Sri Lanka trip in 2007, Tom led a small museum group to visit some of Architect Geoffrey Bawa's key projects, which he will focus on in this lecture.

Bandarawela Chapel, Tea Country 1961-2003



Architectural Office of Edwards, Reid, and Beggs
Colombo 1961-2003



Lunuganga Country Estate, Bentota 1948-1998



photography by Thomas Soper

Architect Geoffrey Bawa – A Brief Background:

Geoffrey Bawa (1919-2003), a rare architectural genius, revolutionized tropical urban living through his regionalist approach. Contemporary in spirit, yet rooted in tradition, he pioneered Sri Lanka's unique style of tropical modern architecture with innovative use of light, space, and materials. Working in cohesion with the natural environment, he focused on climate appropriate solutions inspired by the local vernacular and use of local materials and methods, thus making "each project . . . a very particular response to the culture it's in", said Bawa of his own work.

The intense devotion he brought to composing his architecture in an intimate relationship with nature is reflected in his significant projects throughout his career. Among Bawa's dynamic designs in his final burst of creativity include the outstanding Kandalama and other hotels. His innovative and aesthetic expressions span a wide spectrum over four decades from several private residences, and offices to Buddhist temple, Catholic church complexes, Sri Lanka's majestic new Parliament building, a new Ruhunu University Campus, Education & Research Institutes and more.

One of Bawa's distinguishing talents was his ability to blur the edges of his work, re-defining indoor-outdoor relationships. He believed the inside and outside were indivisible, that architecture involved a dialogue between the interior and the landscape. For him, trees were sacrosanct, and boulders made great sculpture.

The vistas he created in his garden at Lunuganga, a masterpiece of landscape design, and the poetry and harmony he brought through his aesthetic, carried through far and wide into Sri Lanka, and into neighboring countries - India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Mauritius, and other regions of Asia. Bawa's talent was sought after in India and his ideas were carried to Bali, also through a book collection, which helped to promote his designs in Southeast Asia, inspiring a whole generation of builders.

An architect with an unparalleled legacy in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, Bawa was honored with the prestigious Sri Lankan award of Deshmanya in 1993, and the International Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2001. In 2004 he was the subject of a major retrospective exhibition in the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt.



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