

DNA

S A QUARTET OF ARCHITECTS IN SARAWAK, MALAYSIA, DNA HAS BEEN UNDER THE RADAR FOR YEARS – UNTIL NOW. BLUEPRINT ASIA DIGS A LITTLE DEEPER INTO THE MINDS OF THE YOUNG FIRM WHO IS NOT AFRAID TO START SMALL WHILE DREAMING BIG.



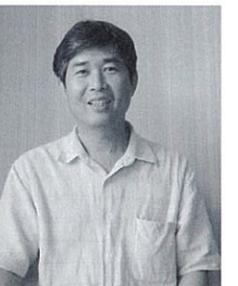
Wee Hii Min



William Khoo Boo Chuan



Wong Kiong



Hwong How Hing



Arlene Chew



Ming Ngi & Suh Chee

DNA, AN ARCHITECT FIRM IN KUCHING,

Sarawak, Malaysia consists of four partners: Wong Kiong, Wee Hii Min, William Khoo and Hwong How Hing. Their partnership was somehow organic; with one architect joining the firm after another – and quickly grew to the comfortable four as they are now. Their design philosophy is simple: to provide qualities such as open-ness, accessibility and comfort in the finished building, and their workplace is essentially about working together in a non-hierarchical studio along with members of their extended design team such as engineers and consultants. Their manifesto includes exploring materials for their economy without losing the design intent and to use simple materials in unusual ways – the recent Pansar renovation is a good example of this young firm's thinking. Although considered a young firm (they were officially set up in 2000), recent award wins and mentions highlights the dynamic studio's potential and their eagerness to spread their wings.

What was the firm's very first project?

Our first projects were projects that most architects turn down – private homes and interior fit-outs. We had no choice as we had little or no work – we did them and found that we enjoy building them... and have continued to build them after 7 years. Our first significant project was an interior fit out of the Suburtiasa head office – after it was completed, it was published; short listed (but did not win) for the PAM Awards (but it did however, paid for our plotter). We were over the moon.

Who/what inspires you?

We are inspired by the works of young architects in the region, typically through magazines or books; seeking them out as benchmarks for ourselves. There is not a single source of influence since DNA is "owned" by a diverse group of people. However, our library reflects the sources of our influence; from Aalto to Zumthor, with Bawa, Siza, Herzog & de Meuron keeping close company.

As for the "what" that inspires us – having our works published – that continues to be a source of inspiration for us.

We have had some successes in the National Architectural and Design Awards; this success driving our work to an extent. We feel that we are now more ready to discuss our work; having recently invited to speak at Arcasia Conference 2007. The experience has taught us a great deal. We felt that we gained more from the audience and delegates in Colombo (Arcasia 2007) than what we were able to offer.

The young Sri Lankan architects who showed us their work in Colombo have become a new source of inspiration for some; particularly in the creation of spaces and architecture that one feels instead of simply seeing.

Is there a particular theme or industry that you have yet to explore, but would love to experiment with?

An area that we have had little opportunity to explore and test our skills on are public buildings – spaces that have direct impact on the general public – without them having to pay money to enter and experience.

We think that the architect can offer more than just specific solutions to one problem or design brief. We would like to see buildings and spaces having more than one function; depending on the user, on the time of day, or through a social programme. This multiplicity of functions will reduce waste and encourage better use (and hence care) of a building or a space because its users provide it with a purpose.

What would be your dream project?

A library that's part transport hub, which could also be a community centre with a plaza and gardens for impromptu street performances, public art and cafes. Why? It combines our thinking about "intelligent" public architecture with what DNA is good at and enjoy – traveling, eating, enjoying good books and music and meeting new people.

Where do you see yourself within the next few years?

In our small way in Kuching, we can see that we are starting to influence the way people appreciate competent design. With the completion of our commercial projects, this influence will probably grow. We would like this to be a platform for projects with more complex briefs and challenges. We will also very likely want to test ourselves by participating in competitions within the next year or so. We will continue to get our projects built; we have not built overseas – but we see ourselves doing that within the next few years.

RECENT AWARDS WON

Honorary Mention,
PAM 2006 Awards
Repetitive Residential Buildings
7th Avenue, Kuching

Honorary Mention,
PAM 2006 Awards
Alterations & Additions
Yap House, Penang

Mention, PAM 2006 Awards
Public & Civic Buildings
Ching Kwong Church, Kuching

Honorary Mention,
PAM 2006 Awards
Interior Design
PAM Sarawak Chapter, Kuching

Special Jury Mention,
PAM 2006 Awards
Industrial Buildings
Steel Prototype, Kuching

Winner of PAM 2007 Awards
Interior Design
Pansar Sibu, Sibu

Winner of MIDA 2007 Awards
Office & Space Planning
Pam Sarawak Chapter, Kuching

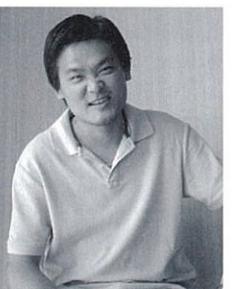
Winner of MIDA 2007 Awards
Office & Space Planning
Pansar Sibu, Sibu Mention,
MIDA 2007 Awards
Residential BMJC
Apartment, Kuching



Angelina Tang



Galvin Jimmy



Jimmy Chiong



Muhammad Azman Santiman



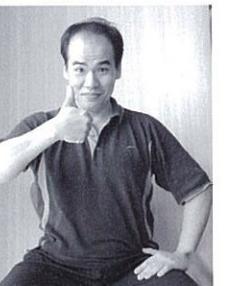
Grace Lee



Haniza Bt Muji



Leong Gian Wen



Mark Ling



Peter Bong



Ong Siok Lee



Lee Ying



Nicholas



Sok Tian



Daphne Ling



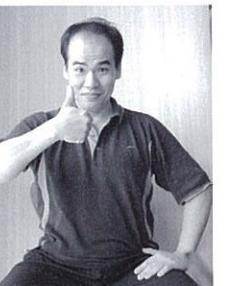
Polly



Lydia Siew



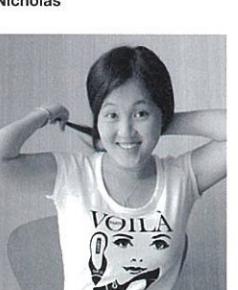
Rona



Chin Hui



Michael Voon



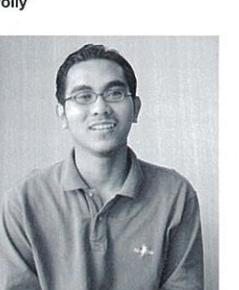
Jascinta Yee



Ronald Yoh



Pau Chung



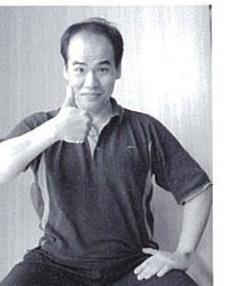
Mohd Taqlyuddin Ahmad



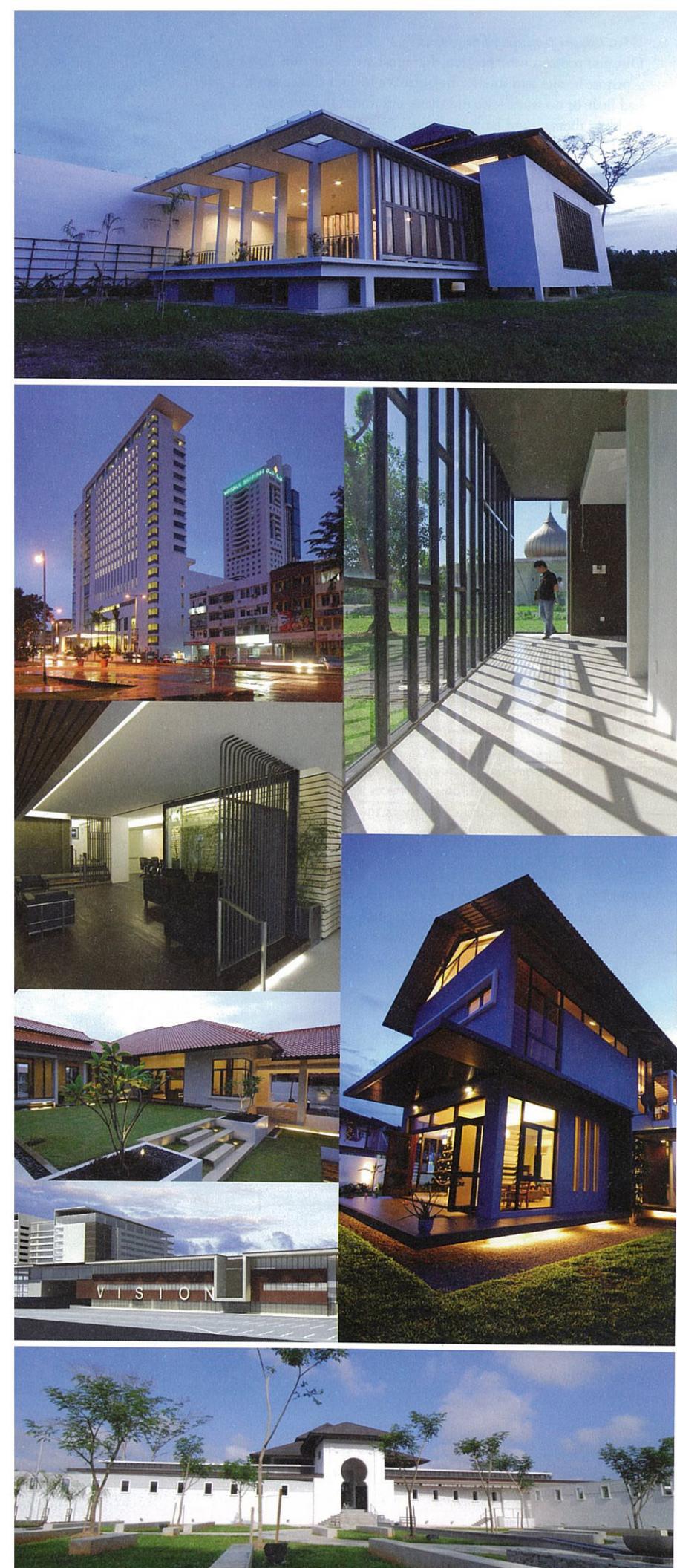
Pau Chung



Kim Fui



Fadzil Ikhwan B Ismail



WORKS OF DNA

1_Pansar Sibu

This is part of a series of renovations carried out for various branches of the Pansar Group. The exercise revolves around the creation of a strong corporate image through design, and through the use of the company's own product in non-standard ways as part of the new premises. The result is a modern, innovative and edgy new premise for the client; where art, architecture and graphic design is melded into a contemporary work environment.

This project won the PAM 2007 Awards under the Interior Design category, and won MIDA 2007 Awards under Office & Space Planning category.

2_7th Avenue

This is a dynamic housing scheme in Kuching comprising 24 terraces and 6 semi-detached housing units. Located in the heart of an established suburb, this scheme explores a new typology in local repetitive housing. In 7th Avenue, through its open plan concept, the internal spaces are well lit and ventilated through the introduction of a double storey atrium and courtyard. The single pitched roof form and thin roof cantilever create a new and exciting silhouette, while uniting the front elevation with the carport roof and front fence.

This project won an Honorary Mention in the PAM 2006 Awards

3_RH Hotel

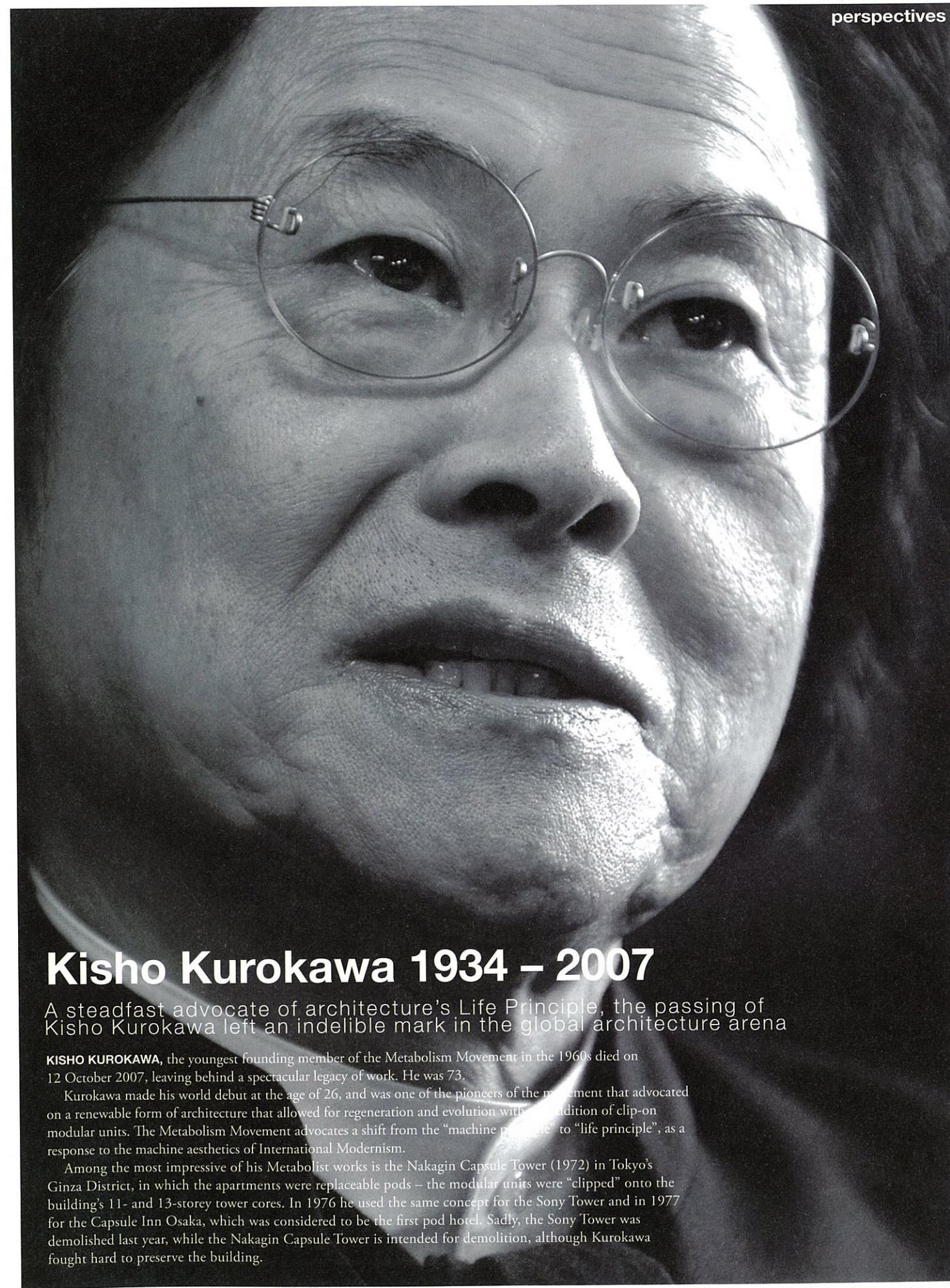
The RH Hotel was completed in August 2005; it was commissioned in 2001 – construction commenced in 2004 after a series of planning approvals was obtained. This 4-star Hotel is located in the centre of Sibu town on an extremely compact site for the host of facilities called for in the client's brief. The interiors were undertaken by DNA as well, allowing the contemporary design theme to be carried through in the guest rooms and the hotel facilities.

4_Masjid Wan Alwi, Kuching

This is a small mosque in suburban Kuching, built to relate to the context within which the mosque resides. Planned around a tree court and plaza forecourt, it has strong landscaping themes that support community functions as well as religious ones. Its architectural language represents a religious building built for local inhabitants and grounded in local traditions. It is a single storey structure with undercroft space for ventilation.

5_PNG City Extension

Our first overseas project – a mixed-use development in Papua New Guinea comprising a hotel and apartment block as well as retail outlets, a supermarket and offices. As of January 2007, drawings were submitted to authorities in PNG for construction approval. Although the construction methods and design approach does not differ much to our norm, the cultural and anthropological differences adds a distinctive "local" flavour to the buildings.



Kisho Kurokawa 1934 – 2007

A steadfast advocate of architecture's Life Principle, the passing of Kisho Kurokawa left an indelible mark in the global architecture arena

KISHO KUROKAWA, the youngest founding member of the Metabolism Movement in the 1960s died on 12 October 2007, leaving behind a spectacular legacy of work. He was 73.

Kurokawa made his world debut at the age of 26, and was one of the pioneers of the movement that advocated on a renewable form of architecture that allowed for regeneration and evolution with the addition of clip-on modular units. The Metabolism Movement advocates a shift from the "machine principle" to "life principle", as a response to the machine aesthetics of International Modernism.

Among the most impressive of his Metabolist works is the Nakagin Capsule Tower (1972) in Tokyo's Ginza District, in which the apartments were replaceable pods – the modular units were "clipped" onto the building's 11- and 13-storey tower cores. In 1976 he used the same concept for the Sony Tower and in 1977 for the Capsule Inn Osaka, which was considered to be the first pod hotel. Sadly, the Sony Tower was demolished last year, while the Nakagin Capsule Tower is intended for demolition, although Kurokawa fought hard to preserve the building.