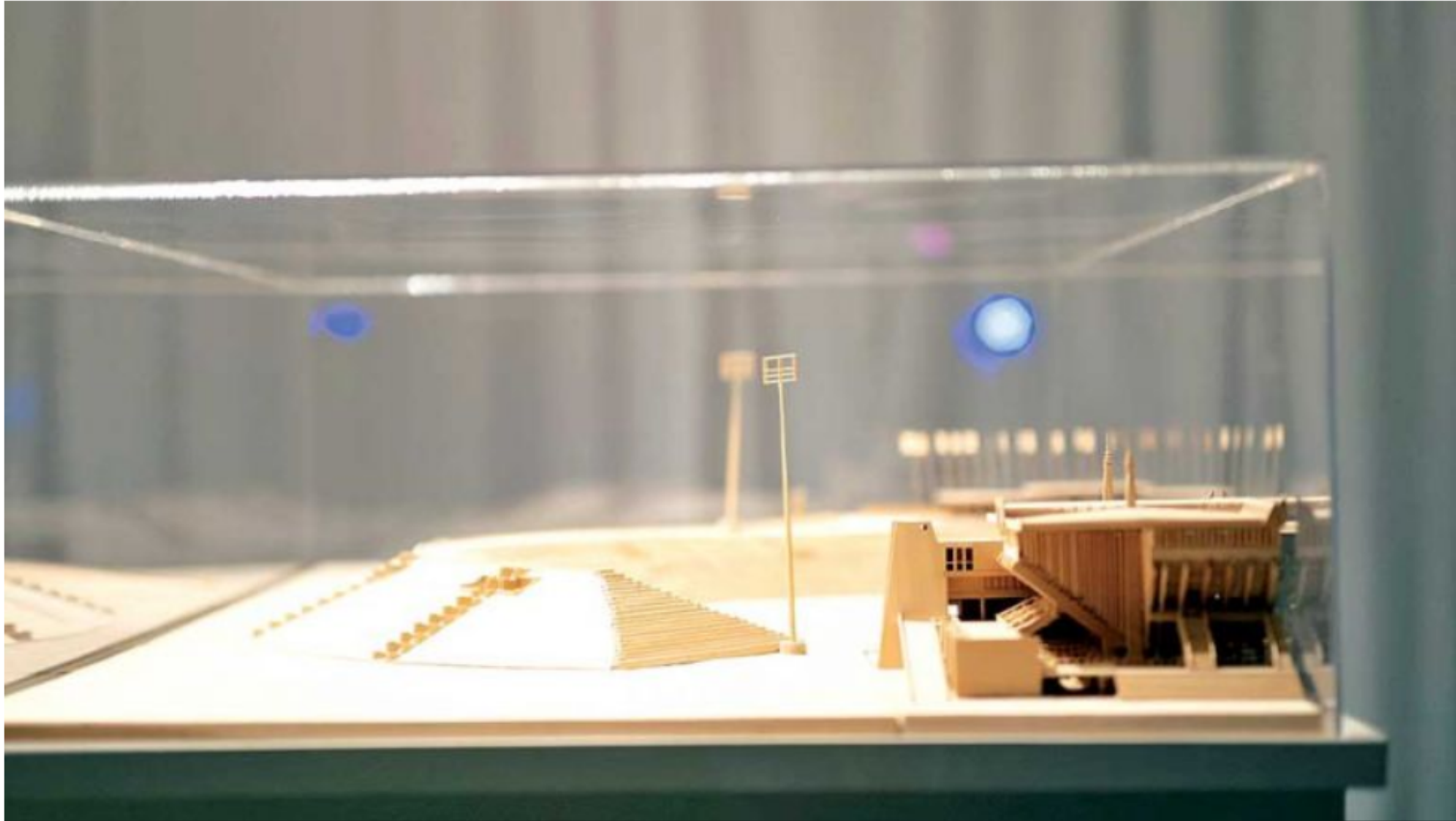


The man who built Cambodia

Raksmei Hong | Publication date 06 May 2019 | 11:23 ICT



A wooden model of the National Olympic Stadium on display at exhibition Learning From the Past: The Vann Molyvann Project. Photo supplied

The work of legendary architect Vann Molyvann is being displayed at Siem Reap town's Treeline Urban Resort to honour the "man who built Cambodia".

The exhibition, named Learning From the Past: The Vann Molyvann Project, opened on April 7 and is set to run until June 30. It is being hosted in collaboration with the Vann Molyvann Project – an organisation that celebrates the legendary architect's work.

"I wanted to commemorate the works of Cambodia's greatest icon, the late Mr Vann Molyvann, and it is with great honour and gratitude that we will be hosting the Learning from the Past exhibition," says Hok Kang, Treeline Urban Resort's founder and the exhibition's organiser.

The 36-year-old – who also founded Hok Kang Architects (HKA) in 2009 and owns many Brown's Cafe branches – wanted to pay respect to the late Molyvann, as well as use the exhibition as a platform to inspire young Cambodian architects.

"As the guests navigate through the architectural models, drawings, photographs, information panels and maps, they will be transported to the Sangkum era as the spirit of Mr Vann Molyvann's work comes alive," added Kang.

Vann Molyvann's projects include Phnom Penh's National Olympic Stadium, the Bassac Riverfront Project, the Institute of Foreign Languages, the Preah Suramarit National Theatre and the Cambrew Brewery.

On display in the resort's open-air gallery are models, photographs and illustrations of these buildings, and more.

The theme of the exhibition focuses on Molyvann's construction techniques, namely "the specific elements of a really Khmer ecological architecture" and using modern building materials. Molyvann's buildings worked in harmony with the environment through their incorporation of water, natural light and ventilation, inspiring younger generations of architects to meet the demands of context, climate and culture.

Chhin Chhon Visothm, a Treeline staff member who accompanies visitors through the exhibition, tells The Post that the exhibition has been visited by both foreigners and locals, many of whom are architects and artists.

"In his age, Molyvann's architecture was considered revolutionary. He based his designs on ventilation, water and light working in harmony with structure. He designed buildings to have holes allowing for air to blow in and out and natural light to pass through. Beneath the structures he also had drainage systems to support the buildings during the dry season," he says.

Molyvann was born in 1926 in Kampot province. He earned a scholarship to study architecture at the School of Fine Arts (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts) in Paris in 1946 and made Cambodian history by becoming the country's first fully-qualified architect upon completing his studies.

In 1956, Molyvann returned home and was appointed official state architect by Prince Norodom Sihanouk and was entrusted with spearheading a revolutionary modern Khmer urban planning movement in 1950s and 1960s. So profound was his legacy, in 2017 he had a documentary dedicated to him called *The Man Who Built Cambodia*.

Pen Sereypagna, the Vann Molyvann Project's director, said this is the first exhibition dedicated to Molyvann in Siem Reap, where the architect spent his final years.

"We want our young generation and students in architecture to see his masterpieces in Siem Reap and also pay homage to the late Vann Molyvann because he spent his last years here," she says.

Thai Yamang, a Royal University of Fine Arts graduate who now works for an architecture company, is one of the many young Cambodians visiting the exhibition. He told The Post that he appreciated all of Molyvann's work on display, especially the National Olympic Stadium.

"I observed all his projects showcased at Treeline and I admire what grandfather [Vann Molyvann] did in the past, his designs are still celebrated in the modern day. Among them, I love the Olympic Stadium most," the 27-year-old says.

Speaking at the exhibition's opening night in April was Molyvann's daughter Vann Delphine. She stressed the importance of Cambodian architects seeing her father's masterpieces.

When the exhibition closes in June in Siem Reap, the models will be transported to Hong Kong for display.

"This will also be the last time the public and admirers of Molyvann will be able to see his architectural models before they are transported to the M+ museum in Hong Kong. It is a privilege to host such a fascinating exhibition, and I believe a fitting tribute to the life and work of the Cambodian maestro," says Kang.

Learning From the Past: The Vann Molyvann Project will run until June 30 at Siem Reap's Treeline Urban Resort's open-air gallery located on Acha Sva Street.

For more information, Treeline Urban Resort can be contacted via telephone (+855 63 961 234).