

Tamar Site Proposal

***A proposition paper on the development of
The Tamar Docklands site, Hong Kong Island***

Paper 1: Appraisal (RIBA Work Stage A)

***A paper written and published by
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About the Author

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David has been in the practice of design since 1986, and was made a Registered Architect in the United Kingdom in 1997. He now specializes in architectural theory and its consequences. He is a chartered member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and a member of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC).

David divides his time unequally between the countries of Wales, England, Hong Kong, The PRC and Canada.

Tamar Site Proposal

*“We came into the world like brother and brother;
And now let’s go hand in hand, not one before another.”*

William Shakespeare.
“A Comedy of Errors”
c. 1594

Preface

This paper is written in order to suggest an alternative line of thinking with respect to the development of the Tamar Site on Hong Kong Island.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank friends in Hong Kong for their interest, encouragement and support.

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Introduction

There is no doubt that in the lead up to the occupation of Hong Kong by the People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China, some people, including myself, paused for just a moment, to think about what the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland had left behind in their rather hasty and embarrassing 'exit' from the South China Area.

The answer, in my opinion is...not much.

In the eight years that I was present in the Hong Kong Area, between 1992 and 2000, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) made precisely one visit (not including visits by members of the Royal Family to collect the rent).

Given that the City of Victoria is perhaps the third most important financial city in the World, after the cities of London and New York, I believe that such a city ought to have a World class artistic culture to match this status.

One of the ways to achieve this goal, as well as introducing something excellent about the culture of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the region, is to build a Globe type theatre.

In Chapter 1, I shall outline both the reasons and the benefits of the proposal in more detail. In Chapter 2, I shall introduce the Tamar Site and the reasons for locating a Theatre in this location. In Chapter 3, I shall introduce the main points of the design for a Hong Kong Globe type theatre. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I will outline a design proposal for the landscape around the theatre.

1. A Hong Kong Globe Theatre

The economy of the Hong Kong Area is a three fold system. Its pillars, in no particular order, are shipping, finance and tourism.

With the occupation of Hong Kong by the People's Liberation Army, the number of tourists from the People's Republic of China has substantially increased since the start of the occupation in 1997. No doubt some of these tourists arrive in Hong Kong expecting to see at least some evidence of British heritage and colonial rule. They must all be very disappointed. (Unless of course they mistake an American style culture as a British one. Certainly the Architecture of the city is more American than British.) The truth of Hong Kong is that the culture of China lies at its heart. There is really not much British culture left to see. The reasons for this are really immaterial, the reality, however, is undeniable.

My proposal for a Hong Kong Globe type theatre will I hope be a small reversal in the steady decline of a British presence in both Hong Kong, and the Asia Pacific Region as a whole. In addition, I believe that the construction of a Hong Kong Globe type theatre will be an excellent attraction for tourists to the Area, which could result in substantial revenue for local retailers, hoteliers, airlines, and Government.

2. The Tamar Site

The ideal location, in my view for a Hong Kong Globe type theatre is the Tamar Site.

The Tamar Site is located on Hong Kong Island near Admiralty MTR Station. The site is enclosed to the north by Victoria Harbour, to the south by the MTR Admiralty Development, to the west by the People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison Headquarters, now called 'Central' or 'China Barracks' (formally known as H.M.S. Tamar), and to the east by the CITIC Building. The Area is approximately 180 metres square.

The site is centrally located and has good transport connections. Currently the Tamar site is used for ad hoc theatrical and commercial events, exhibitions and trade shows.

Formally, the site was a harbour basin used by the China Station of the Royal Navy of Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (HMG (UK)). The basin was in filled with sea sand prior to 1997.

The site was used by HMG (UK) to hold a rather unusual ceremony to mark the occasion of the embarkation of HMG (UK) British Uniformed Land Forces from the Hong Kong Area on the 30th June 1997.

3. The Design Proposal

My proposal for a Hong Kong Globe at the Tamar Site consists of two phases.

The first phase is for a theatre to be constructed in Bamboo. The second phase is for a more permanent construction in Teak. The implementation of the second phase however would be subject to a popular demand for such a theatre, which could be determined over a period of time by observing the attendance to the theatre as constructed in Bamboo.

The Bamboo Theatre could be a temporary structure, which could be built annually at the Tamar Site for use throughout a theatrical season. This season would of course need to avoid the worst of the weather in the Area, and more particularly the season for Typhoon winds, which occur, as I recall, between July and October.

The ideal theatrical season could be between November and March, the period of the North East Monsoon, which brings with it low temperatures and reduced rainfall.

The reason for all this attention to the weather is because a Shakespearian Globe type theatre is first and foremost an outdoor theatre.

The London Globe Theatre is also an outdoor theatre. However, its design is still suited to a Temperate Climate. A Hong Kong Globe Theatre will need to differ somewhat in its design to meet the local conditions of a sub-tropical maritime climate.

The design for a Hong Kong Globe will need to have at least two additional attributes. These are open sides for natural ventilation and cooling and additional shading devices for reducing solar gain.

(See Sketch Images 1 and 2.)

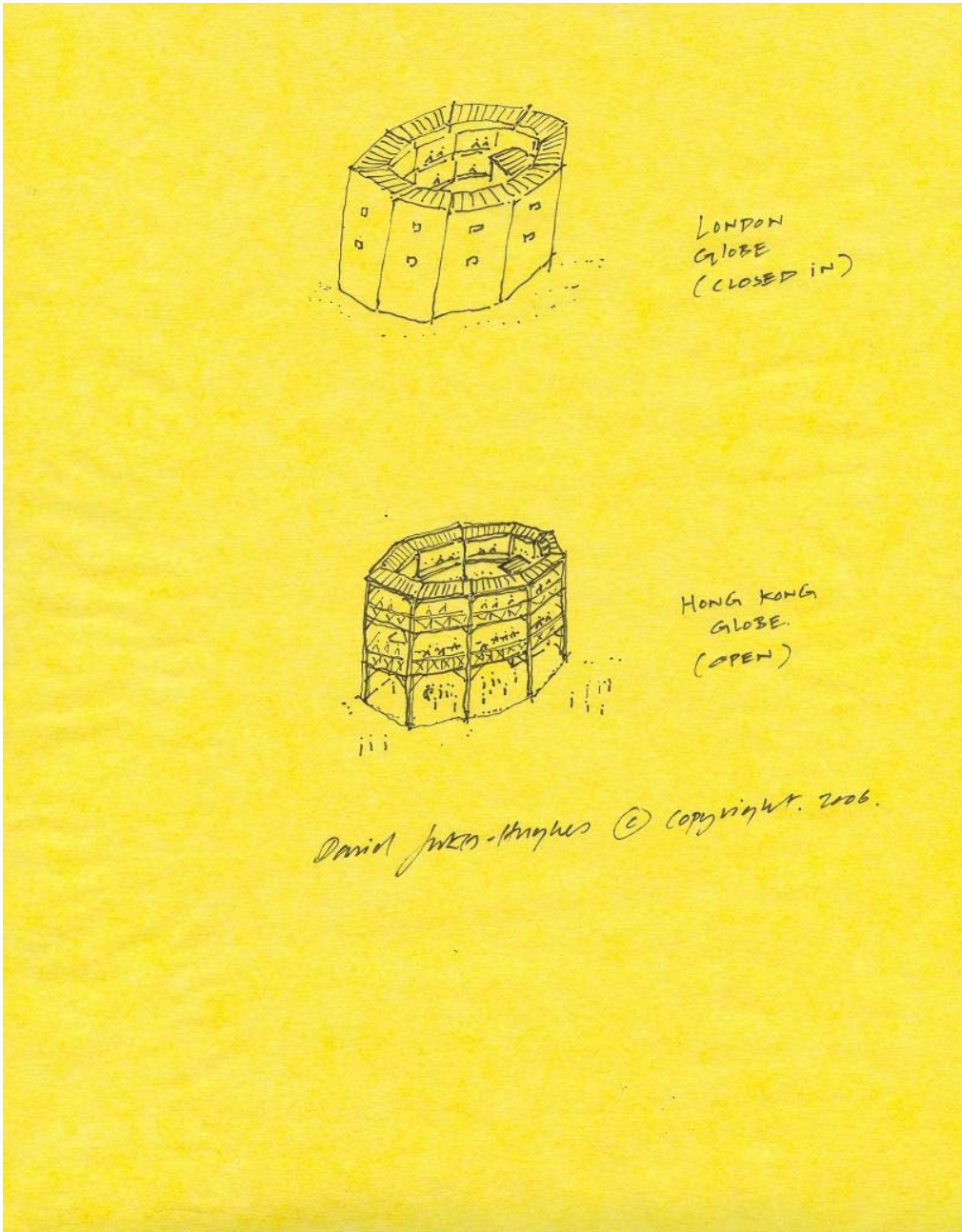


Image 1: A Hong Kong Globe Theatre: Design for natural cooling

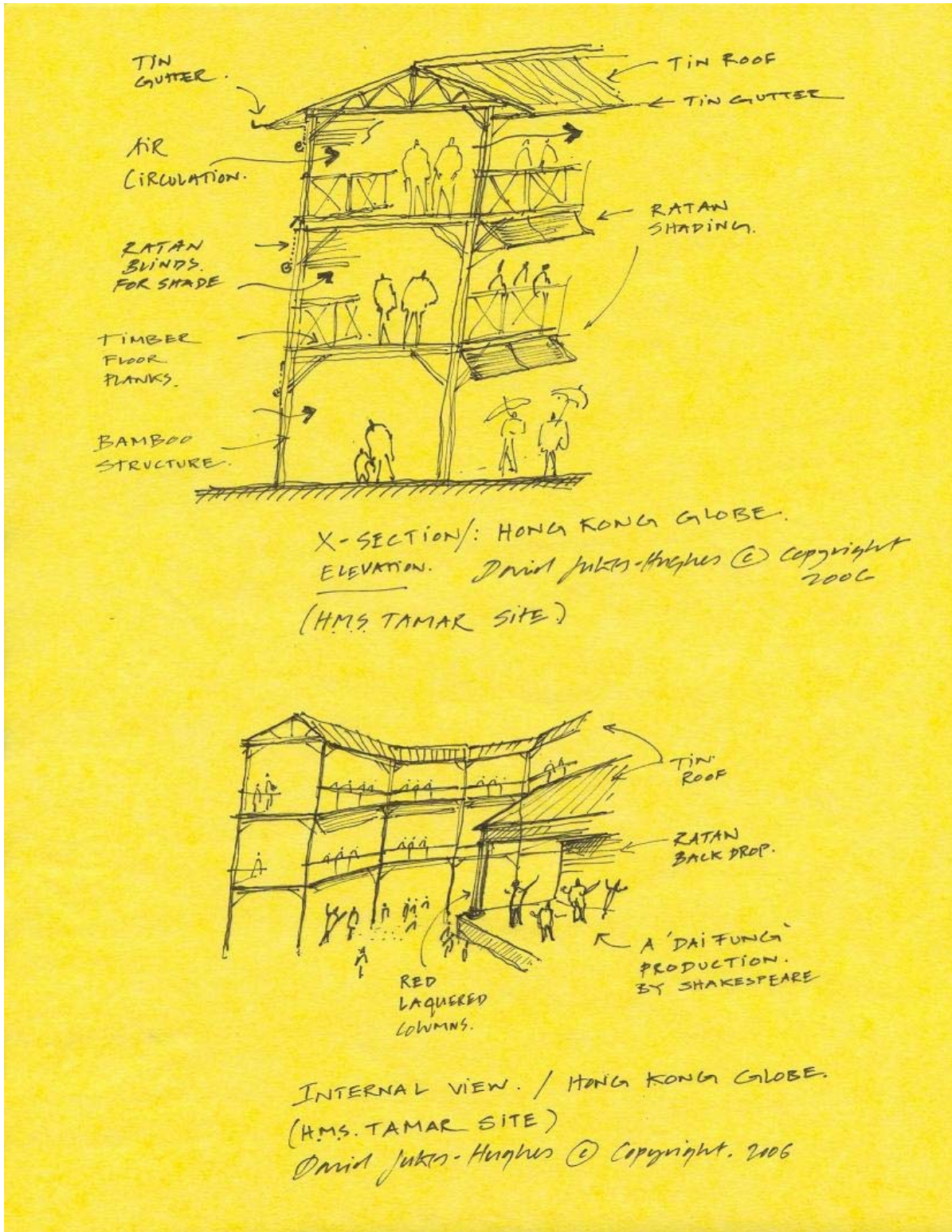


Image 2: A Hong Kong Globe Theatre: Shading for reduced solar gain

Other than these two points, the design of a Hong Kong Globe should not differ too much from the London Globe. The Hong Kong Globe would be of a similar size, and contain similar building elements. The two stage columns could be in red lacquer to add a local touch to the detail.

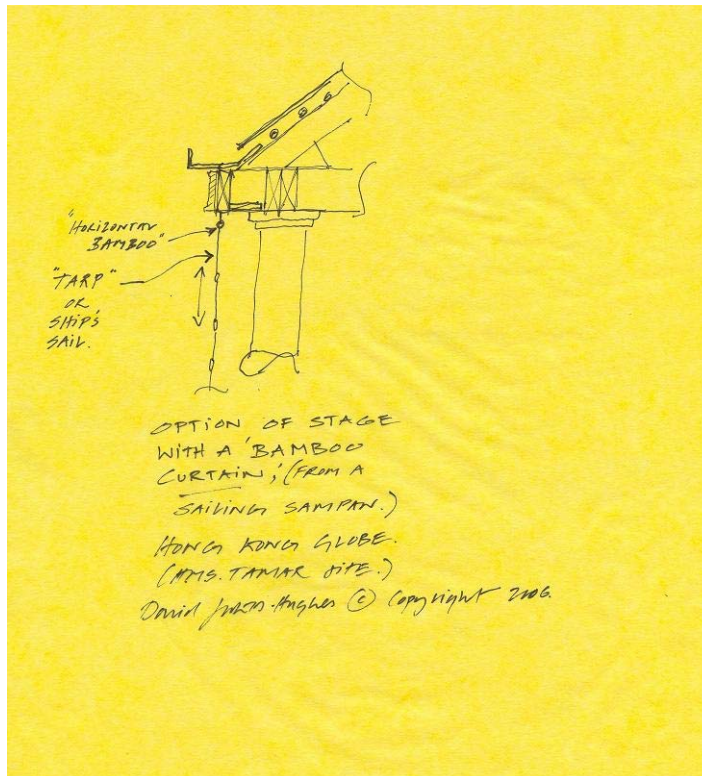


Image 3: A Hong Kong Globe Theatre: Detail of Stage Curtain.

4. The Landscape Design Proposal: A Teak Forest

The proposal for a Hong Kong Globe Theatre at the Tamar Site would not be complete without a landscape proposal.

The idea of completing a final and more permanent design in Teak was not made lightly. It is well known that the Asia Pacific region is now losing its first growth rain forest and Teak forests at such a rate that in all probability they will have all disappeared over the next 50 years.

It is therefore proposed that the Tamar site be fully planted with Teak trees. After 50 years these trees will reach a height of 30 metres, and may be ready for harvesting. The Teak grown on the Tamar site could then be used for the construction of the more permanent design for the Hong Kong Globe Theatre.



Image 4: A Teak Forest. What the Tamar Teak Forest might look like.
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With the completion of the construction of a Hong Kong Globe Theatre in Teak, a new Teak forest could then be replanted on the site for future harvesting. In addition to providing a resource for the rebuilding of the theatre in the future, the forest could also provide timber for local ship builders and construction companies.

The Teak forest could also be used as a public park and recreational area for picnics, horse riding and cross country athletics etc...

Given the association of the Tamar Site with past naval activities, a suitably ironic name for the forest might be, "The Forest of Dean." Whether such a forest could be twined with The Royal Forest of Dean is perhaps a matter for future speculation.

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I outlined both the reasons and the benefits of the proposal in more detail. In Chapter 2, I introduced the Tamar Site and the reasons for locating a Theatre in this location. In Chapter 3, I introduced the main points of the design for a Hong Kong Globe Theatre. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I outlined a design proposal for the landscape around the theatre.

To my knowledge no final decisions have been made on the scope of work for the Tamar Site. However, it is widely understood that the current Executive Government of the Hong Kong Area, under Donald Tsang, wishes to use the site for a new government office complex. This will include the Offices of the Chief Executive, the Executive Council and the Legislative Council.

Given that no final decision has been made on the constitutional setup of the Hong Kong Area, one might think that to proceed with such a project is rather like putting the cart before the horse. However, it is well known that the current occupying power would like to see political discourse of any kind eliminated entirely. It is therefore perhaps not surprising to see a government of the blind being lead by the blind even in matters which are as trifling as new government office buildings.

The Tamar Site is of course prime real estate. It is in an excellent location. Commercial developers must be chomping at the bit to build on it. In many ways it is commendable of the current government to come up with an alternative to commercial opportunism, even at a significant cost to the exchequer. However, the reality is the Government can house themselves anywhere. It already has acres of office floor space throughout the city. It cannot possibly need more!

I believe that these new government proposals are simply the result of a government so ossified and bureaucratic that it has become simply incapable of any rational thought, let alone facing the onerous task of exercising its imagination.

I hope that this proposal will stimulate other designers to think of new and other exciting ways to develop the site, regardless of any narrow government thinking on the issue.

The Glossary

HK	Hong Kong
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HMG (UK)	Her Majesty's Government (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
PRC	The People's Republic of China
SAR	Special Administrative Region

Bibliography: Books

The Holy Bible: The Authorized King James Version	Genesis, Chapter 38 (The story of Tamar and Judah)
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Papers, periodicals & web sites

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