

# Interiors

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# Exploring the new paradigm

**DR SAEED ZAKI explains how creative sustainability can be achieved by simple solutions**



## About the author

Dr Saeed Zaki, PhD, is regional managing director (Southeast Asia) of international architecture + interior design firm dwp (design worldwide partnership).

Sustainability and creativity used to be perceived at opposite ends of the spectrum in design. Modern, imported materials and fixtures, extravagant design forms, trendy but energy-inefficient technologies and equipment were all seen as key to modern interiors. However, on the other hand, awareness in design spaces that were responsive to environmental sustainability and, therefore, creating minimal or zero carbon footprint required the use of recycled, reused, locally produced materials, fixtures and forms that were simple and not extravagant, as well as technologies and equipment that were energy-efficient, but somehow were not necessarily impactful.

The question that comes to mind is why one cannot design spaces that are both creative and sustainable at the same time. Why should interiors not be able to have the lowest impact on the environment, yet be iconic and timeless? In response to this, a marked trend to watch is emerging that is both creative and sustainable, since both of these elements have become increasingly inextricably intertwined.

This emerging trend in design, in general, and that of interior spaces, in particular, reflects the movement that designers are coming up with materials,

finishes and fixtures that, whilst meeting sustainability standards, carry an increasingly creative flair.

Technologies such as LED lighting have significantly improved lighting solution options, to almost replace the energy guzzling, yet previously often necessary alternatives, and furthermore provide unique opportunities, to create stunningly lit environments. Know-how, such as with building automation technology, at once sustainable and meeting the needs of modern lifestyles, both at work and in the home, is a great example of this. These technologies integrate shading devices (controlling daylight and radiation), heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) and lighting, to create the most energy-efficient and healthy living environments, with strong positive impact on productivity and the environment. Outstanding design and functionality can now be achieved without compromising creativity or sustainability, and the more this takes hold, the greater the range of solutions available will also become – supply meets demand.

Another good example of the amalgamation of creativity and sustainability can be seen in the interior design of large workplaces. The 20,000-sq-m interior design development of Citibank's campus





in Singapore not only resulted in an iconically built environment, but also achieved the client's objective of creating a sustainable and vibrant space for its staff and customers.

The project was designed to future-proof the working environment, by implementing efficient space planning, utilising natural light in the most efficient manner. The design created their 'Village Green', a concept that generated social spaces within the workplace and simultaneously consolidated all common facilities centrally for environmental and social benefits. The design utilised materials, fixtures and technologies suited to a modern, international workplace, yet fulfilled the sustainability criteria. The project was rewarded with Leed (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold and local 'Green Mark Platinum' awards, for its sustainable design. This makes it a prime example of the emerging design paradigm shift towards 'creative sustainability'.

Creative sustainability does not necessarily mean expensive or futuristic solutions relying on extensive technological inventions.

Creative sustainability can also be achieved by means of simple solutions. We need only look back into the past. Historically, our ancestors always implemented creative solutions, to achieve sustainably-built environments.

A good example of benefitting from past wisdom is the multi-award-winning Evason Earth Spa by Six Senses, in Hua Hin Thailand, designed by dwp | design worldwide partnership. The Earth Spa clearly demonstrates this new paradigm within holistic wellness, by presenting in a natural, yet luxurious, eco-environment. Made entirely from a mixture of clay-like mud mix with rice husks, straw and other local materials to form circular domed buildings, the spa is set over 1,386 sq m of water and landscaping. The earth domes, which appear to float on water) were designed using ancient local wisdom,



combined with modern techniques. Their low openings on the outside allow refreshing breezes and energy flows to enter the buildings, while the openings at the top of each provide natural ventilation. The project achieved a holistic integration of green design, aesthetics, involvement of the local community and knowledge transfer from one geographical region to another.

Widely publicised, the project also helped raise ecological awareness within the local community, who still maintain a sense of pride in these earth domes. The benefits of creative sustainability echo beyond the immediately apparent ramifications. Designers the world over will need to get on board or get left behind.

**Holistic wellness:** Evason Earth Spa by Six Senses, Hua Hin Thailand and (top) Citi Sindora, Village Green, Singapore