

GLOBAL GURUS

THE 4 EDGIEST ECO-ARCHITECTS DESIGNING AROUND THE WORLD **By ANDREW SESSA**



OUALALOU+CHOI (FORMERLY KILO ARCHITECTURES)

Paris, France, and Casablanca, Morocco. kilospace.com

The firm: Husband and wife Tarik Oualalou (born in Morocco and educated in Paris) and Linna Choi (born in Korea and educated at Yale and Harvard) worked together at the NYC firm Anderson/Schwartz before launching their own firm in 2002. In the last year they've grabbed attention for two high-profile commissions: the Morocco Pavilions at both the Venice Biennale and Expo Milano.

The look: Mixing primitive and industrial, ancient and contemporary, the firm creates structures that feel like modern takes on the traditional stucco architecture of Oualalou's native Morocco. But they also surprise, as with a recent camel- and goat-wool tent installed at Paris' Institut du Monde Arabe.

Star project: Their Co-Habitation compound comprises five rectilinear, red adobe houses (pictured above) and a cooperative farm on Marrakech's outskirts, referencing the vernacular architecture of the region. Oualalou and Choi managed a neat trick here, maximizing the houses' views of the natural landscape and also the privacy between them.

See them soon: The pair has not yet worked together in the States — though they'd like to — but you can experience their Morocco Pavilion in Milan through this month, and they've designed the world's second Baccarat Hotel, in Rabat, Morocco, which will debut next year.



Married architects Tarik Oualalou (left) and Linna Choi designed the mod-meets-stucco Co-Habitation compound (top) outside Marrakech, Morocco.



Kedem's In Praise of Shadows house in Tel Aviv plays with sun and shade.

PHOTOS BY AMIT GERON, COURTESY OF PITSOU KEDEM.

PITSOU KEDEM ARCHITECT

Tel Aviv, Israel. pitsou.com



PITSOU KEDEM

The firm: This 11-architect studio, led by its eponymous founder and launched in 2000, has won the pre-eminent Israeli design award, Ot Haitzuv, for the past seven years. Its projects range from retail interiors and homes to larger hotels and residential complexes in Israel and, increasingly, Europe.

The look: Embracing pure modernism for decades, Kedem largely eschews curves, ornamentation and most color in favor of interconnecting geometries, rigid rectangles and monochromatic palettes. Of late he's begun to add layers and depth to his work with more rugged materials like weathered steel and exposed concrete.

Star project: Recently singled out in Wallpaper, Tel Aviv's In Praise of Shadows house masterfully carves dynamic spaces from a cubic concrete block, combining smooth cement, glass and a checkerboard screen of weathered steel to create dramatic plays of light and shadow, solid and void, indoors and out.

See him soon: Now working in NYC on the design of a high-tech company's offices on the 84th floor of One World Trade Center, Kedem has also launched a small line of home décor called Object.



Nghia's House for Trees, in Ho Chi Minh City, elevates urban green living.

PHOTOS BY HIROYUKI OKI, COURTESY OF VOTRONGARCHITECTS.

VO TRONG NGHIA ARCHITECTS

Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, Vietnam
votrongnghia.com



VO TRONG NGHIA

The firm: This 60-person practice, led by founder Vo Trong Nghia, has tackled designs big and small, cultural, residential and commercial throughout Asia and Europe, most with a decidedly green slant. It's also picked up many awards over its nearly 10-year history.

The look: The firm earns its green cred by not only using local and sustainable materials (especially bamboo), but by making trees and other plantings integral to its designs, thereby fighting ever-encroaching urbanization. Its highly contemporary buildings vary in form from sweeping, curving structures to those that are nestlike or almost entirely cubic.

Star project: Recently completed, their House for Trees in Ho Chi Minh City is a cluster of five pavilions, each shaped like a giant concrete planter topped with trees rooted in a deep bed of rooftop soil. A central, shade-dappled courtyard connects the five towering boxes.

See him soon: You have a rare chance this year to view Nghia's green creativity without crossing an ocean: The Chicago Architecture Biennial (through Jan. 3) features a prototype of the firm's S House 3, an affordable shelter for low-income families in the Mekong Delta. They've also designed the Vietnam Pavilion at Expo Milano.

CINCOPATASALGATO

San Salvador, El Salvador
cincopatasalgato.com

The firm: The name of this inventive architecture, interiors and furniture design practice — founded by second-generation architect José Roberto Paredes in 2004 and run with partner Roberto Dumont — references a Spanish saying about trying to find the fifth leg of a cat, indicating the firm's goal of achieving the impossible. It's been featured in top international and US design magazines.

The look: Though the firm defines itself by an inquisitive, site-specific approach, its (often beachfront) projects share a certain contemporary Latin-mod, jungle-industrial look. Clean lines, right angles, concrete, glass and corrugated metal are warmed by local materials and features, like palapa roofing.

Star project: Casa Costa Azul, on the Salvadoran coast, proves a prime example of Cincopatasalgato's work. The private home (featured everywhere from Architectural Digest Mexico to Swedish Elle Decoration) invites the seascape inside, with a light-on-the-land open plan that combines traditional elements with those highly contemporary.

See them soon: Paredes and Dumont have exhibited in NYC at ICFE (the global design fair) and are designing New York hotels with American partner Scalar Architecture, including Club Quarters, Wall Street.



ROBERTO DUMONT (left) AND JOSÉ ROBERTO PAREDES



Cincopatasalgato dreamed up Casa Costa Azul on the coast of El Salvador.

PHOTOS BY JASON BAX.