



Architect Chea Bunseang has already helped build new Cambodian landmarks such as the Council of Ministers and International Conference Hall at the age of 35. PHA LINA

Building a country's future

Young architect **Chea Bunseang** is typical of the new breed of Khmer architects ready to step into the pioneering shoes of Vann Molyvann by creating a modern, yet uniquely Cambodian, aesthetic

Sun Narin

A NEW generation of Cambodian architects is preparing to emulate the work of Vann Molyvann and other pioneers of the modernist Khmer buildings that arose in the 1960s.

An example of the passionate new breed is Chea Bunseang who, at the age of 35, has already contributed to the planning of important new Cambodian buildings.

Chea Bunseang, who was born with a talent for drawing, said he had a strong commitment to invention and innovation, realising the impact that buildings can have on a modern society.

He is now a formidable architect and lecturer, has a bachelor's degree in architecture and urban planning, a master's degree in the field of urban environmental management, has travelled widely and worked for the United Nations in East Timor and with an international architectural firm in New York.

In early 2009, he was asked to help local construction company Ly Chhoung Co erect a new building, known as the New

Council of Ministers and International Conference Hall, on Phnom Penh's Russian Boulevard, which will be the venue for the 2011 Asian Summit. He worked as the chief architect, taking the lead in managing the construction, drawings and coordination of the China-funded project, which was officially opened last October.

Though Chea Bunseang's parents were in business and wanted him to follow in their footsteps, he decided to study architecture.

"When I was young, I liked playing with soil, turning it into houses and buildings as well as drawing. When I imagine something emerging from this, I want to make it happen," he said.

With enough ability and the desire to have his own design firm, at the end of 2009 he decided to set up a company, Bunseang Architects and Associates (BAA), and designed a 12-storey residential project in Phnom Penh which is now under construction.

He said that he designed the apartments with a unique concept of classic-modern architecture.

"I want a building to express the way of life I want, to remind me of my family living there. In the modern age with technology and

materialism, we all have to know the roots from where we came and past history," Bunseang said.

He takes time out to teach students and is an architecture lecturer at Pannasastra University, which provides him with the opportunity to pass on his knowledge to the next generation of would-be architects hoping that

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those with potential will go on to become professionals in the field.

Having been awarded a scholarship himself, Bunseang spent seven years studying for his bachelor degree in Architecture and Urban Planning from the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) which he completed in 1998.

In his academic life, Bunseang was chosen by his university to do a short vacation course in places such as India and Thailand, which

he said made him aware of other country's architectural styles. By seeing modern and sophisticated buildings in the developing world, he wanted to improve the standards of Cambodian architecture and give the profession some prestige.

Wanting to help the disadvantaged while he was studying, he also worked from 1997 to 2000 with one of the United Nations organisations to help build housing for the poor and educate them in hygienic living standards. In 2000, Chea Bunseang was selected to work for the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) for more than two years as a UN volunteer. While there, he helped with the building and design of infrastructure and administration facilities.

"I learned and contributed to developing poor communities in Timor and helped poor people there," he said.

Returning to Cambodia in 2003 with a quest to learn more about architecture, he pursued his master's degree by winning a scholarship to study at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok.

After completing his master's, he worked as a development

consultant for the World Bank's Cambodian country office in Phnom Penh and then in 2007 spent two years gaining experience in high-rise building design in New York. He helped design projects such as the Lexington House Hotel and other Marriott brand projects.

"I was absolutely delighted that I had the chance to work abroad and relate to these activities," he said.

Unlike many other professions, architecture requires knowledge of both science and arts, a combination of thinking and doing which requires natural talent, according to Chea Bunseang.

"Thought becomes reality. When I design a building, I always consider myself as the owner of the building.

"Cambodia is going forward towards a civilised modern country and society and will be growing up with many tall buildings and many real estate development projects. It expresses how Cambodia's economy is progressing and will bring confidence for foreign investment," he said.

However, he also feels that urban planners have to address many issues such as infrastructure, city transport, and cheap housing for migrants to the city. **20**