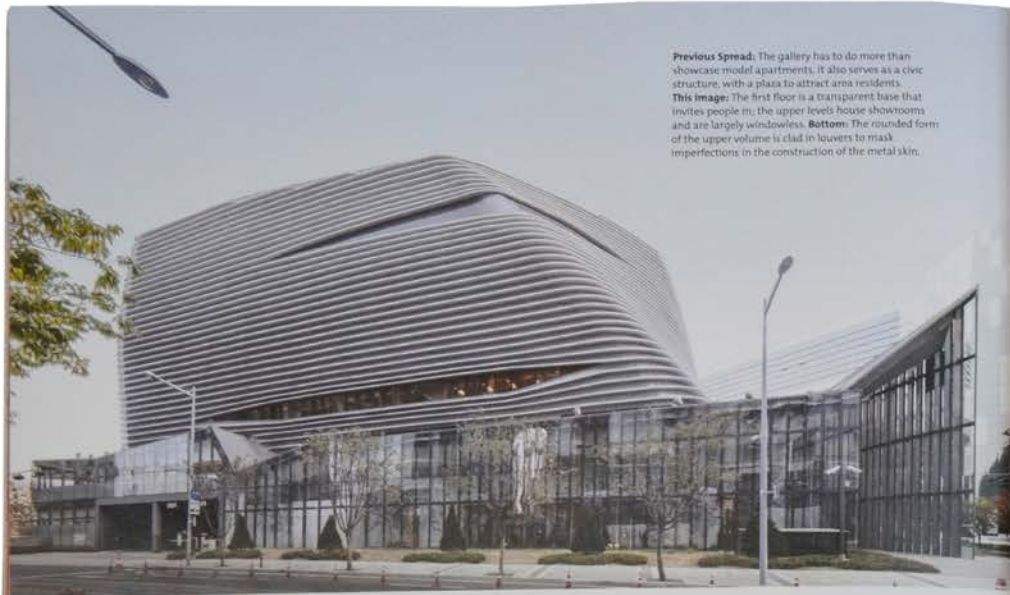


SAMSUNG MODEL HOME GALLERY

WITH THIS NEW HOUSING SHOWCASE IN SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA, NADER TEHRANI OF BOSTON-BASED NADAAA DISCOVERED THAT WHEN YOU CAN'T CONTROL THE TRANSLATION FROM DESIGN TO CONSTRUCTION, YOU DESIGN FOR WHAT YOU CAN MAKE FOOLPROOF.

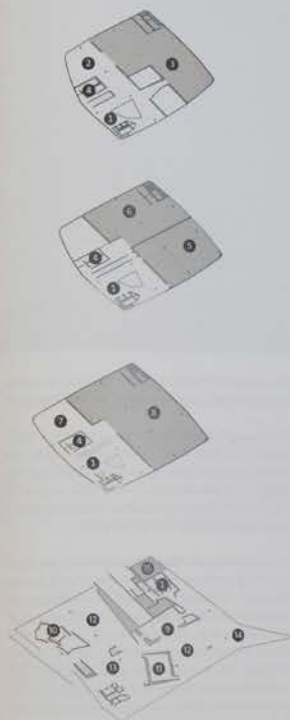




Previous Spread: The gallery has to do more than showcase model apartments. It also serves as a civic structure, with a plaza to attract area residents. **This image:** The first floor is a transparent base that invites people in; the upper levels house showrooms and are largely windowless. **Bottom:** The rounded form of the upper volume is clad in louvers to mask imperfections in the construction of the metal skin.



Axonometric Plan Diagram



- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Waiting area | 8. B2C unit showroom 1 |
| 2. Promotion hall | 9. Auditorium |
| 3. B2B unit showroom | 10. VIP room |
| 4. Restrooms | 11. Multifunction room |
| 5. Design factory | 12. Gallery |
| 6. B1C unit showroom 2 | 13. Information |
| 7. Contract and consulting room | 14. CSM |
| | 15. Office |

Interview by Ian Volner
Photos by John Horner

Given that the purpose of the gallery is to sell apartments, did you research the residential mindset of the Korean consumer marketplace?
Nader Tehrani: Absolutely. The research we did was, on one level, exhaustive, but also lost in translation almost constantly. So I can only say with humility that we always try to do our best.

Part of the research was done through interviews with architects who had done these galleries before, and with architects who understand the cultural mindset. The other part was a tour of a dozen or so of these model home galleries, not just Samsung's, trying to understand their organizations and the way in which these apartments are sold.

These apartment homes are in towers that, in the Western world, have come to be associated with social housing. In Korea, they're a status symbol, and the consumer's level of expectation is actually quite high.

And your design reflects some of these expectations spatially?

Our design is a stage set. At one level, our design targets the inability to control the construction process the way we do in the West, which is by working drawings that are monitored weekly on site. We undertook this job by developing four details for the things that became of paramount importance, not only to them, but for us to control.

What are those four details, and why did you select them?

One is a public ground that emerges from the park into the building and out onto the sidewalk. The second is a ceiling that contains all of the building's systems, and becomes the envelope for the columns, staircases, and VIP rooms on the ground floor. The third is a skin that envelops the base to make it transparent and to make it well protected against the sun; it's a steel structural system that is supporting the edge of the building, it's the mullions and fritting, and it's a vertical barcoding system that is a kind of wrapper. The fourth is a skin for the black box atop the transparent base, which is a foil for the lack of tolerance in the construction system for a compound curved surface. The louvers are not there for sun protection, as there are very few windows; they are there as a foil for the imperfections of the skin behind them, since they were unwilling to build it through digital manufacturing processes—and as such they would have telegraphed all of the imperfections onto the skin.

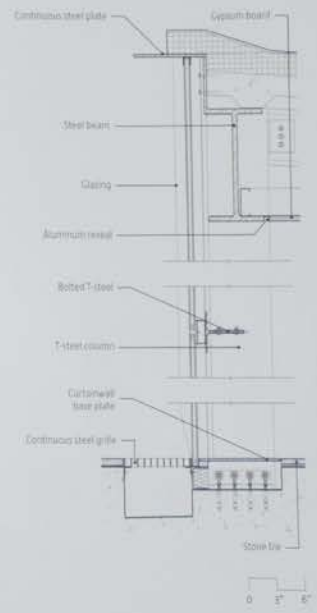
I was trying to do damage control more than anything. I don't think they got our geometries right, to be honest. But they were easy to fix because we gave them parameters of which intersections were imperative to meet and which were not.

How were these requirements communicated?

We did 80 WebEx's and Skype calls, so we saw each other's screens and we worked directly with each other's lines. That is an interactive model of collaboration that works quite well. We made trips with my team to Korea, and they also came here. The design period was not much longer than six months, nor was construction, and that's with transitional periods of one or two months where there were either silences or things that were happening in preparation. So we're talking about quite intensive charrettes.



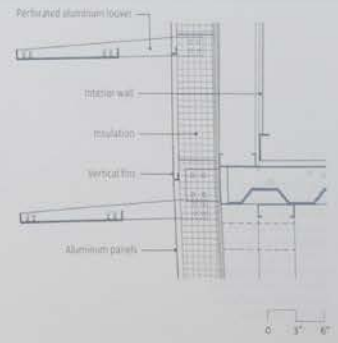
Facade and Floor Detail



Ceiling Diagram



Louwer Detail



Opposite: A ground-floor auditorium is used for presentations by Samsung and for public events. **Above:** The southern end of the building comes to a sharp point that houses seating for a café. The bases of the steel mullions are covered by river rocks to mask imperfections in the construction, and to mark the transition from outside to inside.

These silences included not telling you about the start of construction?
We submitted our drawings and we didn't hear from them for two months. I sent an email asking about the status, and we got an image of our project that was well-framed, and they said: "We're having some issues with the sounding of the corners. Could we consult with you?"
I wasn't shocked, because I've been around the block a few times. But I was touched that they called me because it meant we could actually follow up on some of the experiments we were doing. So we re-entered the project after a couple months of construction administration.

The team we started with was still there, but added to that was a set of engineers who drove the motors of the construction site. At that moment everything that you're talking about, everything you've drawn, either becomes irrelevant or becomes the exact thing they'll build. It comes down to your ability to be able to communicate that on site. That happens with some level of translation, and some level of drinking, and rolling up your sleeves and working with them.

I'm sorry, did you say drinking?
Eating and drinking is a central part of Korean culture. If you cannot drink, you're not going to survive it. All I can say, on a very personal note, is that if I had not fallen in love with Korea and its culture a long time ago, I'm not sure I would've survived the process, because I'm not much of a drinker. But I love the people, and I love working there.

Is the process that you developed of working from parameters something you can see being applied broadly in similar scenarios?
I think this is a new and emerging challenge for all of us. The scale of projects is no longer the dimension of a building, it's a block, or two blocks, or

a megablock, so you can't design everything bespoke. You have to design systems and frameworks for decisions to be made that are often going to be shared.
Also, the speed at which buildings are built now around the world requires 24-hour construction sites. That means that you need to be prepared to give up certain things because you're not going to specify in detail every drawing to every mullion. So you develop systems that respond to those conditions. I think this is quite effective on many cultural fronts, the construction industry has changed a lot over the last 20 years.

How does this fit into the scope of how you thought architecture worked?
As much as we have pre-existing aesthetic notions about what is beautiful, what is proportionally correct, and what looks right, this challenges all of those. Effectively, I'm not ready to tell you this is a beautiful project. It operates within the tradition of the folly, or the grotesque landscapes of some of these follies, because it challenges normative notions of beauty, not just the ones that the public has, but that even architects have. You can't always control the outcome in exactly the way you would compose them. It defies your compositional sensibilities and forces you to reconcile your systemic thinking with your aesthetic thinking.

How did this project challenge your notions of your own architecture?
Given the kind of ambitions that I've had and that I continue to have, to design buildings with syntactic precision and the development of a vocabulary that is quite precise, it takes a learning curve to know where to maintain an arm's length from your own authorship. It was a huge lesson that required me to rediscipline myself according to a very different set of cultural requirements — basically not to be myself.

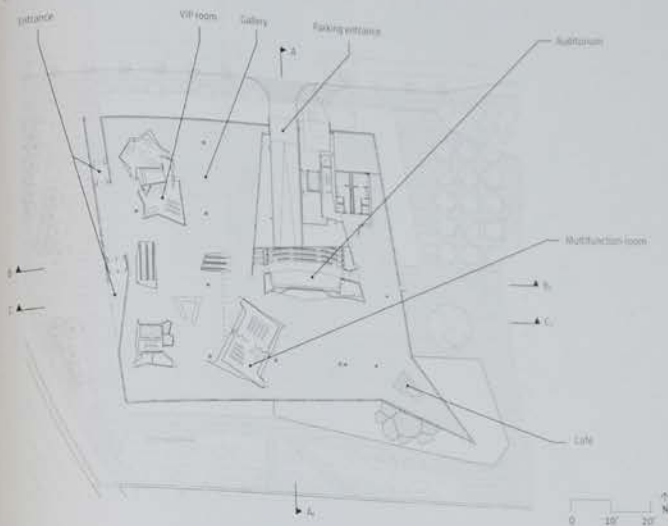


The ground floor of the Model Home Gallery showcases the ceiling detail designed by AIAA. Black-painted channels inscribed in the ceiling plane (which consists of white Venetian plaster on gypsum board) house systems, including lighting, speakers, and HVAC.

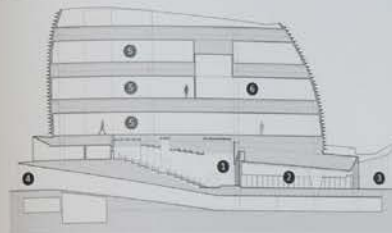
A skylit atrium extends through the building, terminating in an articulated aperture over a seating area in the ground-floor gallery.



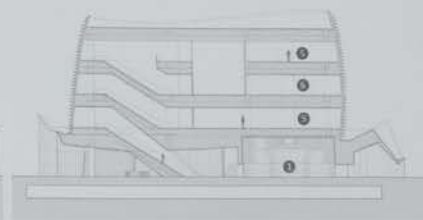
Ground-Floor Plan



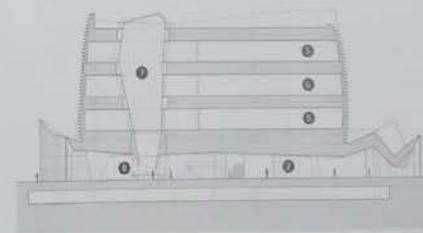
Section A-A₁



Section B-B₁



Section C-C₁



- 1. Auditorium
- 2. Gallery
- 3. Cafe
- 4. Parking entrance
- 5. Showerroom
- 6. Design factory
- 7. Skylight
- 8. Info desk

The ground floor forms a sort of hypostyle hall, with the articulated ceiling plane extending to the ground to encase columns, elevators, and escalators. The stone tiles that line the space are part of the flooring detail system designed by HOKUSA, which aims to continue the exterior plaza into the building.

PHOTO: SHIMIZU SEIZO ARCHITECTS

