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SOCIAL NETWORK

Tencent

Guangzhou, China

M. Moser Associates

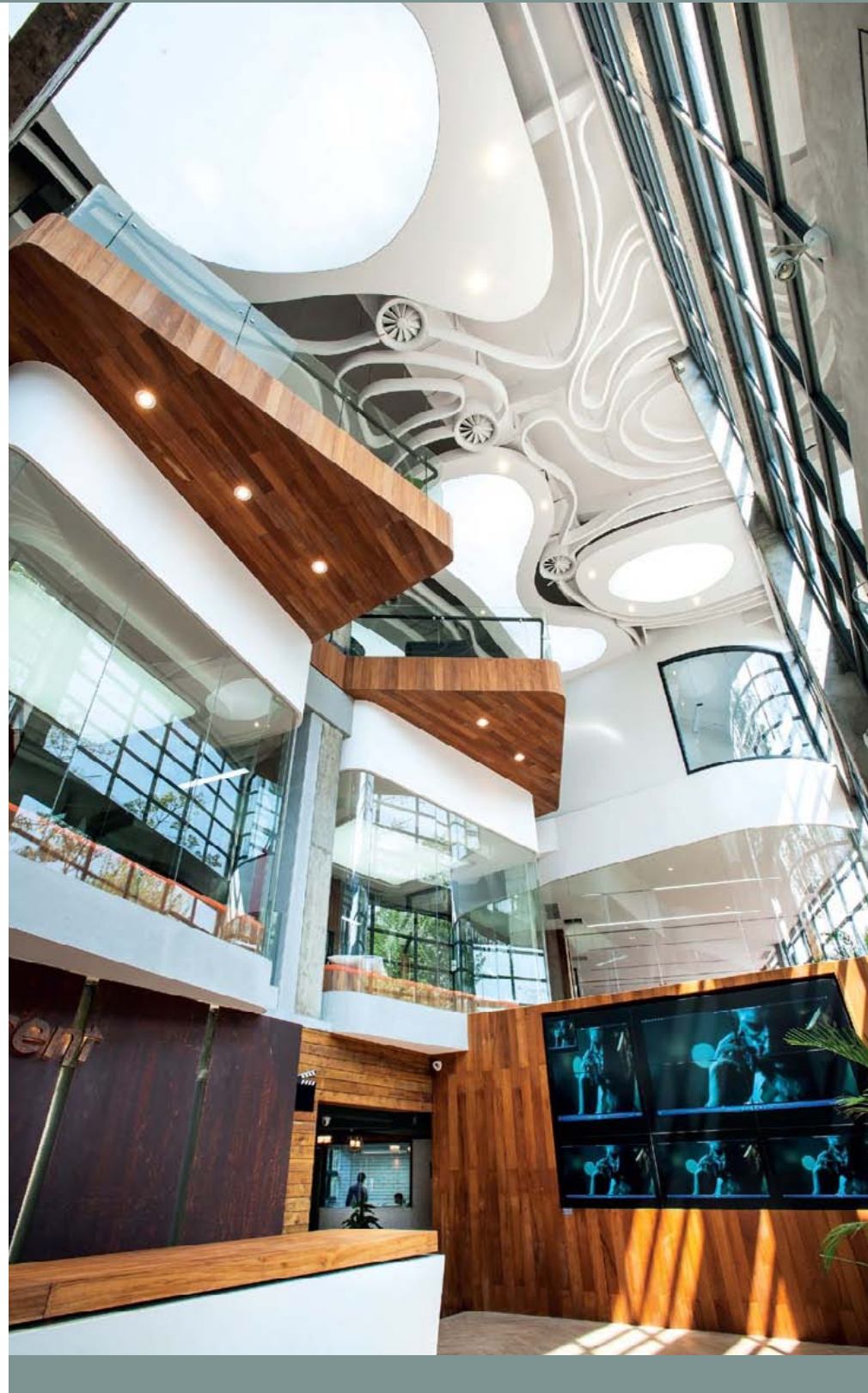
Shenzhen-headquartered media giant Tencent is the fifth largest Internet company in the world, with a market value exceeding US\$150 billion. For its new Guangzhou campus, completed in October last year, the company had selected a cluster of mid-20th-century industrial buildings sitting in the shadow of Canton Tower, which for a brief period earlier this decade enjoyed a reputation as the world's tallest freestanding structure (it is currently the world's fifth tallest). The six dilapidated buildings, formerly textile factories, were scattered among a rambling series of then-red-brick-clad, pitched-roof structures, which have since been redeveloped to constitute what is now known as Guangzhou Creative Park. Tencent's share of the lot comprises a total floor area of 9,914sq m, albeit spread somewhat haphazardly. M. Moser Associates was entrusted with the task of repurposing those spaces to suit Tencent's needs while also linking the buildings.

"Somehow, all the buildings had to be connected together and have a distinct, coherent identity," says Ramesh Subramaniam of M. Moser's Kuala Lumpur office and the project's concept designer. "There was also a need for very clear wayfinding through the campus, because there are quite a lot of other buildings there which don't belong to Tencent." Bridges supported by exposed steel beams became the way to go, and these join four of the six buildings, which house workspaces for the company, while the other two buildings contain the staff canteen, meeting rooms, lounges and reception area. "The bridges not only connect the buildings physically and turn four workspaces into one, but also link them together conceptually. They create a distinct campus within a campus for Tencent, without altering the buildings' existing historical features and characteristics."

M. Moser's project directors Wendy Leung and Joe Ho, along with project leader Grace Hu and her team, referenced the old factories' characteristics throughout their design solution. Red wooden decks allude to the site's existing architectural elements, while colours inside the offices are kept simple, muted and earthy, with green walls acting as lively textural counterpoints. Materials are predominantly natural, locally sourced and renewable or recycled, in keeping with the industrial vibe while at the same time being low-maintenance and highly sustainable. The main building features an entrance lobby with a full-height glazed atrium capped by a series of abstracted white fins that evoke clouds floating above staff and visitors. Meanwhile, a stacked series of meeting rooms and workspaces inserted as mezzanine floors within the large volume resembles a jagged cliff finished with greenery and timber panels.

"When you're in the atrium, you feel like you're still outside looking at a natural feature," Subramaniam says. "The cliff face also exposes the functions inside the buildings: what's in front of you are all the spaces you're about to enter and use. You get an instant understanding of where everything is." Hu chimes in: "The mezzanine levels were added so we could fully exploit the floor-to-ceiling height of the buildings. It was one of the most successful but also difficult parts of the project, because we needed to blend new engineering into old architecture."

Naturally, social interaction and serendipitous gatherings are the hallmarks of Tencent's business, encouraged by greenery and aisles – instead of solid walls – that indicate different functional areas. Breakout areas are planned near workstations, while writeable boards and washable walls throughout





the workspaces support creativity. Indeed, the only enclosed area is the meeting suite of rooms, although these, too, include moveable glass walls, for the spaces to be as flexible as possible. All the rooms can thus become one large, open space, ideal for the company's regular 'town hall' meetings. "The aim was to create an interesting and comfortable environment that would encourage spontaneity," explains Hu. "It makes collaboration a natural and instinctive act, rather than a matter of scheduling a meeting."

There's no denying Tencent's Guangzhou office is a vivid expression of the company's DNA, and suitably represents a network for creative interaction. For M. Moser's efforts, the project was recognised with an Honour Award for Interior Architecture by the American Institute of Architects Hong Kong Chapter.