



## Thai artist takes on property developers

*Chakrabhand Posayakrit is waging a battle against Bangkok property developers to preserve the city's rich cultural heritage*

AFP, BANGKOK



Clockwise from top left: Master Chakrabhand Posayakrit (not seen) gives instruction and rehearses with his volunteer puppet manipulators at the Chakrabhand Posayakrit Foundation in Bangkok; Chakrabhand Posayakrit rehearses with a puppet at the Chakrabhand Posayakrit Foundation; A staff member applies paint on the head of a puppet at the Chakrabhand Posayakrit Foundation; Volunteer puppet manipulators practice using Chakrabhand Posayakrit's puppets.

PHOTOS: AFP



Chakrabhand Posayakrit relies on the sunlight that pours through the high glass windows of his Bangkok home to create the traditional Thai art that won him the coveted status of National Artist.

For four decades the 65-year-old has lived and worked peacefully in his wooden downtown house, producing mystical paintings and delicate, intricate puppets which perform at theaters across Thailand.

He has even opened his home up as a museum, school and meeting place for fellow artists to share his passion for the kingdom's creative history.

Bangkok developers, however, rarely think twice about cultural heritage when they throw up skyscrapers, and now a 32-story condominium is threatening to dwarf Chakrabhand's house of cultural treasures in the up-and-coming Ekkamai area.

But like a growing number of individuals, Chakrabhand is determined to fight the rampant development that many say is threatening the city's character.

"If they go ahead with their plan to construct that big building, I will have to move out because I will not be able to do my job," says Chakrabhand.

The artist has submitted a petition against the project to the Thai king, while his supporters are piling pressure on the developers, trying to convince them of the social impact of their project.

Chakrabhand has also consulted lawyers, architects and engineers, most of whom tell him that Singapore-based developer Dalvey Residence — who did not respond to telephone queries — was following the law.

"The more I hear about how little Thai laws and authorities support the general public, the more I lose my faith in fairness in our country," Chakrabhand said.

Sukanya Panthajak, who works with the environment ministry's policy and planning department, says laws exist to protect buildings or areas of historic or natural significance, but many structures fall outside that definition. "Chakrabhand's place is precious mainly in terms of culture and arts," she said.

While Bangkok's streets were once filled with shophouses and traditional wooden Thai homes, the skyline is now dominated by skyscrapers,

mega-malls and plush hotels — pushing many long-term residents out.

Hundreds of small shopkeepers are currently locked in a legal battle to prevent Bangkok's night bazaar, a hugely popular tourist attraction, from being razed and replaced with a mall.

Ordinary residents are also doing what they can to battle big business, only to find the rules and red tape are not on their side.

Sutdhya Vajrabhai, a retired businessman, has a modest plot of land in the Ploenchit area, another hot spot for development.

Construction of a 30-story hotel next door has caused cracks in his floors, while broken underground pipes have flooded his property.

"A large-scale construction project means hundreds or thousands of people coming to live or work there, with more cars, more traffic, more trash, more air pollution and many other issues in the long term," he says.

He took his complaint to the National Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (NREPP) department, who halted the project, but Sutdhya says the developers have gone ahead regardless.

Buildings do not need an environmental impact assessment or approval from the NREPP as long as they are no bigger than 80 units, so Sutdhya says the developers simply revised their plan from 320 to 79 units, and will apply to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) later to add more.

An official at the BMA who did not wish to be named said that all the projects they approved went ahead according to the relevant building control laws.

For the moment, Boonyawat Tiptus, vice president at Thailand's Council of Architects, warns that taking on large-scale development projects is tricky given the funds companies can ply into legal advice.

"Maybe the most practical solution is that Master Chakrabhand finds a new plot of land somewhere away from the city in order to carry on work peacefully," he says.

But Chakrabhand is not planning on giving up the fight that easily.

"I still believe in the existence of fairness somewhere in our society," he said.

"This is a battle for not only for myself, but also other people likely to suffer from large-scale development projects."

## [ TECHNOLOGY REVIEW ]

### A CAMERA WITH A GPS SENSOR AND AN ETHERNET PORT



PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Nikon's unique Coolpix P6000 point-and-shoot camera has a few odd tricks up its sleeve. Globetrotters will enjoy the P6000's built-in Global Positioning System sensor for geo-tagging — or adding geographical information to photos — and Luddites will love the camera's built-in Ethernet port.

While most camera makers use Bluetooth or Wi-Fi for uploading images to Web sites, Nikon has added a full-size Ethernet port that allows you to plug the camera right into the Internet. The P6000 uploads images whenever it is connected. While that may seem odd, the feature could come in handy in cybercafes or hotels where Wi-Fi is not available.

The GPS feature adds geographical data to every photo, but it can be turned

off to conserve battery life.

The camera has a 4x optical zoom lens and a 13.5-megapixel sensor. It takes photos in JPEG or RAW format. At 241g, it is a bit heavier than the average point-and-shoot camera, and it is made of magnesium alloy for ruggedness. It supports light sensitivity up to ISO 6400 and accepts SD and SDHC storage cards. The camera also includes 48 megabytes of built-in storage.

### A GREEN PC THAT'S EASIER ON THE ELECTRIC BILL. THE BAMBOO CASE IS OPTIONAL



PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Those of us who pay lip service to green living can now be more genuinely PC — with the Dell Studio Hybrid PC, a fashionably curvy computer with special power-saving features.

The PC, which starts at US\$500, weighs about 1.8kg and is about 20cm wide. Dell says it uses 70 percent less electricity than a standard PC, yet it is still powerful enough to run Windows Vista. Inside are a low-power Intel Pentium Dual Core processor, 4 gigabytes of memory and a 320-gigabyte hard drive.

The Hybrid, available now at dell.com, includes a CD/DVD writer and can read

Blu-ray discs with an optional upgrade. Another option is a TV tuner that lets you watch television on the PC.

The computer includes a removable case that comes in six translucent colors. While the internal parts of this PC are still made of plastic, metal and silicon, Dell also offers a case in a bamboo finish for the ultimate in eco-friendly style.

### STYLISH (AND WIRELESS) WAY TO DISPLAY DIGITAL PHOTOS

Most people tend to notice the pictures and ignore the frame. But a digital photo frame by the French interior designer Andree Putman may upstage your vacation shots. She designed it for Parrot, a Paris-based company specializing in wireless and mobile-technology products.

Putman's trademark minimalist style surrounds a 7-inch LCD screen with a resolution of 720 pixels by 480 pixels. The frame has a Bluetooth chip to wirelessly copy photos from Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones and computers; it does not support Wi-Fi connections. There is a slot for camera memory cards and a mini-USB port for copying photos from computer to frame. The 10 megabytes of internal storage can hold up to 400 photos.

The Andree Putman designer frame



PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

comes with a designer price tag of US\$450 and is available to order at www.parrotshopping.com. No matter if it is positioned horizontally or vertically within your own interior design, the frame automatically rotates and resizes the photos to the proper orientation.

### CAR STEREO EJECTS THE CD, IN FAVOR OF NEWER FORMATS AND BLENDS IN WITH THE DASH

Selecting CDs for a car trip and juggling them in and out of a dashboard slot seems passe, now that you can carry hours of music on a digital music player, a USB thumb drive, a pocket-

size hard drive or a memory card the size of a postage stamp.

So Blaupunkt left the CD player out of its Brisbane SD48 car stereo, supplementing its radio tuner with inputs and card slots for all of those compact music carriers instead. The front panel has an analog auxiliary input, for connection to the headphone jack of a portable player or satellite-radio adapter, and an SD/MMC memory-card slot. A USB adapter cable plugs into the back.

There are options to configure the Brisbane for use with iPods, Bluetooth or wired-in cell phones, navigation systems and CD changers.

The Brisbane also has a built-in amplifier with four 50-watt channels, and four-channel preamp outputs for use with external amplifiers.

The Brisbane fits standard radio slots, and its dial illumination color can be adjusted to match virtually any car's dashboard lights. The front panel is removable to deter theft.

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