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LIFESTYLE

NTU's Gaia and Changi Airport T2 win Unesco architecture and design prizes



Gaia bagged the top prize under the world's most beautiful campuses category, while Changi Airport T2 received the special prize for its interior.

PHOTO: NTU, The Straits Times

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By **ESTHER LOI**

SINGAPORE – The Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Gaia, the largest wooden building in Asia, bagged the top Unesco prize for architecture and design under the world's most beautiful campuses category on Monday (Dec 2).

Changi Airport Terminal 2 also won the special prize for its interior at the series of competitions known as the Prix Versailles World Architecture and Design Award 2024, under the world's most beautiful airports category.

This award is one of the top three world titles – namely the top Prix Versailles prize and separate special prizes for interior and exterior – that finalists in each category competed for.

The Prix Versailles is an international series of architectural awards that celebrate contemporary projects worldwide by recognising innovation, creativity, reflections of local heritage, sustainability and design.



Gaia is the largest wooden building in Asia.
PHOTO: NTU

The other winners for the world's most beautiful campuses include the University of Edinburgh's Edinburgh Futures Institute in Scotland, United Kingdom, which clinched the special prize for its interior, and Paris-Saclay University's Henri Moissan Centre in Orsay, France, which won the special prize for its exterior.

The winners of the world selection prizes, which give them recognition by Unesco, include Wenzhou-Kean University's Student Learning and Activity Centre in China; Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg Centre in Washington, and New York University's John A. Paulson Centre in New York City, in the US.

Constructed using mass-engineered timber sourced from sustainably managed forests, NTU's Gaia is designed to be environmentally friendly and produces 2,500 fewer tonnes of carbon dioxide – the equivalent of over 7,000 round-trip flights between Singapore and Hong Kong – annually compared with typical concrete buildings.

Completed in 2022, Gaia – where the university's business school is located – uses energy-efficient systems and renewable technologies, making it one of NTU's greenest buildings.

NTU senior vice-president for administration Tan Aik Na accepted the award at a ceremony held at the Unesco headquarters in Paris on Monday. She said: "This recognition underscores the university's dedication to pioneering sustainable building solutions, creating an inspiring and environmentally responsible campus."

Separately, Changi Airport Terminal 2 received the special prize for its interior after undergoing a major 3.5-year facelift from May 2020, which gave it more than 21,000 sq m of additional floor space - the size of about three football fields. The terminal reopened fully in November 2023.

It houses a four-storey-tall multimedia waterfall at the heart of its departure hall as well as a garden equipped with a digital 'sky' ceiling emulating real-time weather conditions outside the terminal, more than 20,000 plants and a few ponds in the departure transit area.



Changi Airport T2 houses a four-story-tall multi-media waterfall at the heart of its departure hall.
PHOTO: The Straits Times



A garden at Changi Airport T2 equipped with a digital 'sky' ceiling emulating real-time weather conditions outside the terminal.
PHOTO: The Straits Times

Ong Sim Lian, group senior vice-president for design management at Changi Airport Group, said the group is deeply honoured to be awarded the special prize.

"We would like to thank our passengers and partners for inspiring us to create the best travel experiences for all we serve at Changi Airport," she added.

Additionally, Pan Pacific Orchard also won a world selection prize under the world's most beautiful hotels category, earning the title of one of the best 16 recent hotel openings around the world.

This comes about two months after the hotel, which opened in June 2023, was named the world's best new skyscraper by the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, a non-profit organisation founded in the US.

Choe Peng Sum, chief executive of Pan Pacific Hotels Group, said the group is honoured to be awarded the prize, adding: "Our biophilic design approach is centred around creating thoughtful, impactful spaces that integrate nature with the



Pan Pacific Orchard won a world selection prize under the world's most beautiful hotels category, earning the title of one of the best 16 recent hotel openings around the world. PHOTO: UOL Group

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