

# Gaia wins UNESCO's grand prize for architecture and design

By **Angela Chau** - 04/12/2024

**Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore)** has been recognised on the global stage with a prestigious award that celebrates the finest contemporary architectural projects worldwide.



*Image: NTU Senior Vice President (Administration) Ms Tan Aik Na holding the Prix Versailles prize, the grand prize under the World's Most Beautiful Campuses category at the annual UNESCO Prix Versailles awards.*

NTU's Gaia, the largest wooden building in Asia, is the winner of the **Prix Versailles 2024**, the grand prize under the **World's Most Beautiful Campuses category**, which honours the best in campus architecture and design.

**NTU Senior Vice President (Administration) Ms Tan Aik Na** accepted the **Prix Versailles 2024** award on behalf of NTU at a ceremony held yesterday at the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)**, headquarters in Paris.

The Prix Versailles is an international series of architectural awards celebrating contemporary projects worldwide, recognising excellence in design, innovation, and sustainability. The annual "World's Most Beautiful" achievements highlight exceptional architecture and design projects that elevate and beautify living environments.

Gaia clinched the top award after making the shortlist with five other world-class university buildings in the US, UK, France and China. Each finalist is recognised as a laureate by UNESCO, having showcased exceptional design, creativity and ecological efficiency.

These laureates and the grand prize winners are identified and chosen by the esteemed Prix Versailles World Judges Panel, which comprises distinguished international experts from diverse interdisciplinary fields, including architecture, design, and the arts.

**NTU a pioneer in sustainable building technologies**

A living testbed for tomorrow's technologies and a beacon of sustainability, NTU is a trailblazer in advancing the use of Mass Engineered Timber (MET) for tropical climates. It continues to refine and adapt its building conservation and preservation practices, transforming its hands-on experience into actionable expertise and valuable insights. By developing new benchmarks and practices in sustainable construction and the preservation of MET buildings in challenging environments, the University seeks to inspire a global shift toward the adoption of eco-conscious building technologies and materials.

On receiving the award, **Ms Tan** said: "We are deeply honoured that NTU's Gaia has been recognised by UNESCO and its partners for its innovative design and commitment to sustainability. This recognition underscores the University's dedication to pioneering sustainable building solutions, creating an inspiring and environmentally responsible campus. By enhancing the living and learning experience for our community, Gaia serves as both a cornerstone of our campus and a model of sustainable development, especially for the tropical region."

**Secretary General of the Prix Versailles, Jérôme Gouadain**, said: "These places that serve to educate people, places where knowledge is shared and learnt, are crucial to the development of a sustainable society where sensitivity and intelligence go hand in hand. Beauty in the form of architectural excellence on campuses helps to spur the learning process. It contributes to the well-being of students and instructors alike, and represents an undeniable mark of trust and an invitation to shine."

### **An award-winning building**

Named after the Greek goddess of the Earth, Gaia was constructed using MET sourced from sustainably managed forests.

Designed to be environmentally friendly, Gaia emits 2,500 fewer tonnes of carbon dioxide annually compared to conventional concrete buildings—equivalent to over 7,000 roundtrip flights between Singapore and Hong Kong. It is also the eighth Zero-Energy Building on the NTU Smart Campus, which has frequently been named one of the world's most beautiful campuses.

Launched in 2022, Gaia incorporates cutting-edge energy-efficient systems and renewable technologies, making it one of the greenest buildings on NTU's lush 200-hectare campus. It was also the eighth building on the NTU campus to receive the Green Mark Platinum (Zero Energy) certification, the highest accolade from Singapore's Building and Construction Authority (BCA).

Over the past two years, NTU's Gaia has been recognised with more than 10 international accolades, including the **Austrian Green Planet Building® (AGPB) Technology Award** presented to NTU at Gaia last week by the Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to Singapore, Mr Peter Guschelbauer.

This Austrian award recognises buildings that excel in energy efficiency, resource conservation, and renewable energy. It is supported by Austria's Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK) and AUSSENWIRTSCHAFT AUSTRIA (AWA), the trade promotion arm of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber.

Other international awards for Gaia include the **Architizer A+ Awards (Sustainable Institutional Building – Jury Winner)**, and the **Architecture MasterPrize Architectural Design Award** in the Institutional Architecture category (Best of Best).

Gaia's latest recognition by the Prix Versailles underscores NTU's leadership in sustainability and architectural innovation, reflecting the University's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2035 under its Sustainability Manifesto.

“We hope Gaia continues to inspire the NTU community and beyond to embrace sustainability practices in every aspect of our lives,” added Ms Tan. “This award is not only a recognition of NTU’s pioneering role in not just championing, but adopting sustainable building practices, it is also a call to action for universities and institutions globally to prioritise sustainability in their building projects.”

By combining architectural beauty, sustainability, and functionality, Gaia exemplifies NTU’s commitment to innovation and environmental stewardship, positioning the university as a global benchmark for excellence in integrating education and sustainability.

The Prix Versailles is presented annually by **UNESCO**, in collaboration with the International Union of Architects (UIA) and the International Union of Design (IUD). It is an international series of architectural awards celebrating contemporary projects worldwide, recognising design, innovation, and sustainability excellence. The annual “World’s Most Beautiful” achievements highlight exceptional architecture and design projects that elevate and beautify living environments.