

GWS Living Art grows green solutions for urban areas

HOMEGROWN urban greenery specialist, GWS Living Art, is a built environment green pioneer. Having started its work with green walls, it has grown to patent its own green roof system. Interestingly, the company calls itself a modern farmer. It won the 2017 Singapore Green Building Council's Green Innovator Award.

"In terms of the literal landscape, there is definitely more emphasis on green regulations and sustainable eco green buildings," says its director and founder, Zac Toh.

Growing up in a family business centred on landscape provided him with a keen interest in plants. The family company, Chop Ching Hin, is one of the oldest landscape suppliers in Singapore. GWS Living Art, although a startup, thus has long experience in local plant species.

"There is a lot of carbon footprint contributed by cities and people have not yet internalised this and trans-

lated this to behavioural shifts. Therefore, I feel it is important to really intertwine greenery and ecosystems into an urban city. Recently Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong mentioned climate change in his National Day Rally speech and it clearly shows the shift in importance of this problem."

Mr Toh says that liveability in cities is a big component of urban design as well as for urban greenery specialists like GWS Living Art.

"We pride ourselves in providing solutions for innovative greening of cities. Recently, we won a tender for a piece of land at Henderson to rejuvenate the district using an urban farm that integrates intergenerational interaction.

"Greening is going back to its roots and bringing people together. It has been proven that people are more attracted to green spaces."

The built environment sector is busy as there are more projects now, and more competition. Projects are

getting more complex with shorter timelines.

"We have shorter turnaround time. Although we are a labour-intensive industry, we understand that we cannot progress if we are fully dependent on labour and have thus been developing systems that are easy to install and less labour intensive," says Mr Toh.

For the built environment industry to be up to speed, he is of the view that more tech can be implemented. He says that as with any progressive industry, change is needed for progress. And change is needed in the whole value chain starting from the supplier.

"Digitisation is also a form of integration of technology. If the integration results in output with fewer man hours, it means there is value brought forth in the value chain. If it does not, then that is just extra work.

"No matter what type of digitisation it is, I believe it should be a tech-

nology that creates value."

He sees an opportunity for the built environment sector to break new ground.

"At GWS Living Art, we have called ourselves the modern farmer and won the 2017 SGBC Green Innovator Award. We are also working on other smart tech systems in our pipeline and have received government support so we do see it as an opportunity.

"I am a strong believer that a business cannot be stagnant. The built environment industry's statistical numbers show that it is one of the slowest adopters of technology and digitisation, along with the agriculture sector.

"As for our current state, we are going through the fourth industrial revolution. It is an exciting time and I am sure the sector will catch up with the other industries.

"When operational expense like labour and wastage of material are reduced, this improves the bottom line and the whole chain benefits."



Director and founder Zac Toh says greening is going back to its roots and bringing people together and people are more attracted to green spaces.