

Architect molds ideas to fit a fluid society

By Inès Cho
Staff Writer

A foot bridge with a circular glass projection screen with water streaming down it, hanging above Gangnam traffic, may sound a bit puzzling, but French architect David-Pierre Jalicon hopes that the enigmatic structure will become a new landmark in Seoul.

The gleaming Aqua-Art Bridge, which is to open in early August, spans the constantly packed six-lane avenue that connects the east-west traffic in Seocho-dong, southern Seoul. The 75-meter-long, 4-meter-wide foot bridge features a 28-meter diameter ring structure which harbors a glass panel that will run water streams above a fountain and project moving images.

To choose the exact spot for the bridge at the foot of verdant Mt. Wumyeon in 2000, Mr. Jalicon obtained a map of the area and studied *fengshui*, or geomancy (the ancient Chinese study of the natural environment), a decision regarded unusual or even unscientific by Western standards.

"Architecture should tell a story, reflecting the evolution of culture and tradition in the country. To better understand Korea and her people, I spent many months researching Korean history and customs," he said.

"I reasoned with Koreans using the right *qi* (material force in nature) of the bridge to explain about the procedure of bridge-making. Even the most conservative Korean officials



The Central Point Bridge, which was completed in 2002, in southern Seoul, above, and the sketch by the architect.

were surprised, and my proposal was met with open arms."

With the bridge, which is intended to be a "gate" to the cultural arena, the good *qi* from the mountain will naturally flow to Seocho-gu's citizens, Mr. Jalicon said.

"To prevent the bridge from being just a bridge, the glass panel launched at the foot of the mountain will disperse the *qi* from the mountains while projecting moving images created by artists as well as practical information, such as weather, temperature and traffic status in the city," he said.

Seoul Arts Center theater

The bridge helped Mr. Jalicon land an even bigger project nearby.

After Kim Sun-gyu, president of Seoul Arts Center, announced his plan to turn an old-fashioned opera house into a high-tech musical theater by 2006, he saw the plans for the Aqua-Art Bridge. Impressed, he and Seocho District Mayor Cho Nam-ho asked Mr. Jalicon for his ideas for the new theater.

They were especially intrigued by his idea of making the bridge a part of the new complex and picked him to head the \$30 billion project, which includes transforming the neighboring Mt. Wumyeon and turning more than 10,000 pyeong (33,000 square meters) into a multi-functional cultural complex.

After recently inspecting the bridge, which is in its final stages, Mr. Jalicon, dressed in an immaculate black-and-gray pinstriped suit, headed out to meet with the Kuwaiti ambassador to Korea, whose residence Jalicon designed.

Later on, he was scheduled to visit about a dozen projects, both commercial and residential, in Taiwan, Spain, Japan and France before returning to Korea in a week.

His experience spans several areas: architecture, environmental and urban design, interior design for office, residences and luxury brands. For example, he is the main architect for Cartier in Korea and several oth-

er Asian countries.

At 36, his résumé already takes the form of a tome, packed full of the details of a 12-year career, as well as photographs of him flanked by French President Jacques Chirac. Mr. Jalicon, a native of Clermont-Ferrand in central France, is most proud of the prestigious Grand Prize of Architecture at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1991 and Lauréat de la Villa Médicis Hors Les Murs in 1995.

"When I was born, my mother was only 18, my architect father 23. Just like my parents, I started my life early," he said. "My mother was always fastidiously picky with her choice of food, decoration and everything. I think I became influenced by her sense of selecting and controlling effects and details."

The time spent with his father, then a young architect who started his firm, André Jalicon Architects, and his late grandfather, an architect-contractor, influenced his decision to attend the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris and work as an architect upon graduation.

His connection to Korea started in 1996, when he visited as part of a French research delegation to help design the KTX bullet train.

To develop the train's route, he traveled south in order to better understand the Korean landscape. There, he met with locals who ogled the blond and blue-eyed foreigner and explained to him, through an interpreter, how Koreans build things. That's how he was introduced to the Korean word *pungsu*, or geomancy.

During his researching, he landed other projects, including building the French School and French Cultural Center in Seoul. Within a year or so, he became the first and only French architect to own firms in both Korea and France.

For the French School, he wanted to build a symbol of French education and culture in a foreign country, whose design and details not only embraced the

local culture but also created its own strong identity in the so-called French Town in Seoul. But, more important, he wanted to express what French people aspired to in Korea.

Embracing openness

"Koreans often imagine that we foreigners want to live in a specially guarded compound, but that's not true at all. We don't come here to meet French people but to make friends with Koreans and get to know the country better," Mr. Jalicon said.

To reflect the concept of interconnectivity, he placed a large window in front through which the life of French students could be seen by Korean students who attended neighboring schools and vice versa.

The consular office inside the new annex at the French Embassy in Seoul reflects a similarly open attitude. When Mr. Jalicon first visited the French Embassy compound, built by renowned Korean architect Kim Chung-up in 1960, the place gave an impression of somber authority and closed doors, he said.

"The French Embassy should be a gate to Koreans and always open doors to welcome them," he said.

Just like the contrast of old and new in the Louvre Museum in Paris, the annex, made of bright, semi-transparent glass, is placed next to traditional Korean-style pinewood doors at the entrance. The interior is designed to streamline the movement of visa applicants, who can also see through the glass walls and take in the classically esthetic Korean architecture of the main building.

In the world Mr. Jalicon envisions, the kind of architecture he practices is not about static edifices of a by-gone era but modern-day events in which citizens participate.

"Architecture today is about mobility as it embraces movements of the people, of the city," he said. "We live in society with multiple layers of interfaces that are connected. Architecture used to be all about building a solid structure with bricks and mortars. That concept has evolved to accommodate the need of the contemporary."

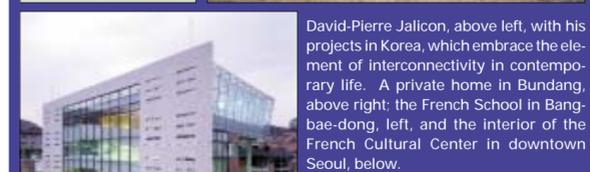
"When I was growing up, my landscape was what I saw and experienced in my immediate environment — my hometown, school, home. Now, new means of transportation and the Internet have changed our landscape and perspective of what's defined as our landscape," he said.

Architecture should be as fluid as the times, he said. "Architecture should create a space with a new concept that constantly changes and moves along with people, trends, culture and ideas."

For this reason, he became interested in designing and building bridges at his company, D.P.J. & Partners.



The original conceptual sketch, left, by French architect David-Pierre Jalicon, of the Aqua-Art Bridge, above, near the Seoul Arts Center, which will serve a "gate" to a cultural complex that is to be finished in 2006. Provided by D.P.J. & Partners, Korea



David-Pierre Jalicon, above left, with his projects in Korea, which embrace the element of interconnectivity in contemporary life. A private home in Bundang, above right; the French School in Bundang, left, and the interior of the French Cultural Center in downtown Seoul, below.



ners, Korea. Another bridge he built in front of the Express Bus Terminal in southern Seoul, in 2002, follows that same concept of interconnectivity and citizen participation.

The Central Point Bridge is supported by an interactive lighting system, and the intensity of illumination is based on the number of cars and pedestrians. It's a peaceful landmark that contrasts not only with the constant traffic jams in Gangnam but with the square-shaped buildings in the cityscape.

Mr. Cho, Seocho's mayor, was thoroughly impressed. "I first saw the French School, which was extremely well-designed in terms of efficiency in space. And then I saw the Central Point Bridge," he said.

"I found the solution for Korean urbanity in which foot bridges were disappearing. But foot bridges are important for the old, young and invalid, and Mr. Jalicon has succeeded in establishing the old French architectural tradition in the heart of modern Seoul," Mr. Cho said.

Incorporating nature

He remembers that when Mr. Jalicon was asked how he would build a similar bridge near Seoul Arts Center, the architect whipped out his sketch book and started drawing.

"I knew then he was talented ... and ingenious in his concept to embrace the nature surrounding it," Mr. Cho said.

Mr. Jalicon argues that modern-day architecture is polarized when it comes to nature. "In landscape, there are two separate entities, buildings and nature. And nature is good, buildings are bad. Why can't we connect the two in a positive way?"

"Why are we still thinking the city in terms of zoning, a 20th century theory, and not in terms of mixity, interface, trans-functionality... which fit with our way of life today?" he asked.

One of the ways he plans to incorporate nature into the new Musical

Theater at the Seoul Arts Center is by making the theater underground, with a grassy outdoor plaza for various events above it. This minimizes the damage to the landscape and maximizes use of the nature in the area. Excess water during the annual monsoon seasons will be turned into natural springs and fountains surrounding the plaza.

In Korea, where his work and life are based, Mr. Jalicon is an outspoken crusader of a philosophy that emphasizes architects as visionaries in the fast-changing context of contemporary society.

He tells his colleagues that architects should never look down, but up and beyond. If architects get bogged down by ever-changing demands from contractors and clients, he said, they will not be able to achieve their vision.

When Mr. Jalicon goes into a presentation, he offers only one option. If the clients don't agree with it, he accepts that, instead of trying to please them with something that goes against his vision.

As for his vision for Korean architecture, he hopes to increase the bond between Korean citizens and where they live.

"My experiences in Korea allowed me to build the new genre of public space based on movement and interface. Korea has many equipment and facilities, but that doesn't mean that the country has public spaces that provide the people with a feeling of identity," he said.

Parisians, for example, feel a collective consciousness and affinity to their city, which is what makes Paris special, he said.

"It is the ultimate goal of those bridges as well as the new park in front of the City Hall and Cheonggyecheon," Mr. Jalicon said. "They are done in that right direction. They will become the Koreans' plaza where people can feel their heart belonging to the city." inesco@joongang.co.kr

