

1. What's the essence of a great city? How will Tonson's Rama III developments add to that?

There is no simple answer to what constitutes a great city. The best cities are open minded and hungry for experimentation and change while deeply conscious of their roots. They share qualities of diversity, energy, modernity and an international outlook but they also have a less tangible but equally strong sense of depth or soul. Bangkok can be chaotic and frustrating sometimes but it already has that soul. People here are not afraid to be open minded, pioneering, to experiment and to modernise but at the same time there is a strong sense of identity, history and tradition. Bangkok is already one of the great cities in Asia, and if development follows a modernising spirit and avoids simply reproducing facsimiles of past developments then there is no reason why Bangkok can't be one of the very greatest cities in the world.

We are currently planning our next development in the Rama III area following The Sathu. The district is one of the most dynamic and exciting areas of the city. Rather like the Docklands area in London before the major redevelopment of the 1980s, the Rama III area was largely neglected before it was earmarked as the new financial district in the mid-1990s. Development slowed after the Asian financial crisis but in the last five years the level of interest has escalated. Rama III has the longest undeveloped stretch of river front in the city and is really the only central district with the potential for large scale redevelopment which will be needed as the central business district expands.

Along with many other developers in Rama III, we have a number of projects in the planning stage. Our projects are neighbourhood and residential developments in the area that in style are aiming to be modern, minimalist and spacious while recognisably rooted in Bangkok. We have chosen the Rama III area because it is the ideal place for architecture that gives people calm, clean and large open spaces and the opportunity to come home to a safe environment of relative detachment and equanimity without sacrificing the energy and dynamism of the city centre. A lot of careful design is needed to get it right, but in the years ahead we hope we can complete some high quality developments that contribute to the transformation of the district into one of the best places in Bangkok to live and work.

2. What does the river mean to you and how will Tonson's master plan utilise it?

It is worth looking at what happened in London where for several decades development ignored the river as a resource, largely because aspirational London residents for many years relocated out of the city to the suburbs. Since the 1980s professional families have moved back into the city centre and developers soon discovered that buyers would pay a premium for riverside accommodation. Today the River Thames is central to the way the city is enjoyed and perceived both by tourists and residents. There are new recreational areas with open walkways along the embankment fringed by restaurants, galleries and theatres – the South Bank near the National Theatre and Festival Hall, More London, County Hall and Butlers Wharf are all good examples. There are still some developments, particularly residential, that have been criticised for the lack of thought and design, but it is fair to say that in the last 20 years London's riverside has been transformed for the better.

Bangkok is a city built upon waterways so the river here is much more a part of our identity than is the case in London, Paris or New York. It is still a working river too and as living standards rise it will become a focus for greater leisure and residential development. Rama III has the longest stretch of under developed riverbank in central Bangkok. As incomes rise, expectations of residential quality will rise too and as Bangkok follows the path set by other great cities, central river front locations will become among the most sought after. High quality residential and business development is already starting to cluster along the river front but we can expect this to accelerate and for central river front areas to become prime residential neighbourhoods.

Bangkok is among only a handful of cities in the world to have modern suspension bridges spanning the river close to the city centre. The most spectacular by far is the new Bhumibol Bridge connecting the Rama III road with suburbs to the south and the 20,000 rai oxbow of woodland – ten times the size of New York's Central Park - in the Bang Kachao nature reserve on the opposite river bank. There are genuinely very few locations anywhere in the world that are in the centre of a major city where you can own a home with these kinds of breathtaking views.

There are a large number of sizable undeveloped land plots stretching along the Rama III river bank to the left and right of the Bhumibol Bridge. This area has the greatest potential to be home to new iconic architecture and high quality residential communities that make full use of both the riverfront, the spectacular views across the bridge and the proximity to the Bang Kachao nature reserve.

There is space here too for new public areas and amenities, particularly giving residents and the public access to recreational areas along the river front rather than seeing these areas occupied exclusively by private residences or luxury hotels. In fact this is probably the only area of Bangkok where the river can become the public focus of a modern high quality community development.

3. Will the project be transformative for Bangkok and if so why?

The city is changing all the time so it is not right to say that what developers may do in Rama III in the next two decades will be transformative for Bangkok, but how Rama III develops can have a significant impact on the expansion of the central business district and create a new high quality, modern and family centred residential area that is both highly central and of a different character from other central Bangkok neighbourhoods.

The area is large and very diverse with property prices ranging from some of the cities lowest to some of the highest. As such, it follows a pattern of high quality mixed development in other major international cities. With the right planning it is perfectly possible to retain that diversity and build a variety of family neighbourhoods accessible to different income groups alongside a modern dynamic business area. That can be done without losing Rama III's open skyline and the balance of low and high rise development avoiding the tower block forests that congest some of the other city districts. Indeed the large scale redevelopment possible here gives planners an opportunity to ensure that new buildings conform to the highest possible standards with adequate public space at street level and access for emergency vehicles around buildings avoiding this becoming another district blighted by narrow and overcrowded streets that tend to result from piecemeal development seeking to maximise returns on small plots.

The Rama III area is one of the few that can be transformed through significant new development and as with the Docklands development in London it is possible to imagine a master plan for the area including careful selection of spectacular high rise development that creates a new iconic skyline for the city along side a mix of high quality residential communities accessible to different income groups with good local schools, shopping malls and restaurants.

4. Are great architecture and iconic buildings more important than the provision of affordable housing and low cost amenities?

There doesn't always have to be a choice between great architecture, iconic buildings on the one hand and affordable housing on the other. Why can't affordable housing be well designed? In a city like Bangkok both are important – the business districts of a city are its engine for growth and there will be increasing demand for high quality, efficient working environments connected to global markets as well as a mix of local residential communities. There are many city districts that can host affordable housing but very few where it is still possible to develop a new business district in an area on the scale of Rama III and it would seem a missed opportunity not to consider an ambitious master plan for this area with iconic architecture to rival any of the world's modern city centres.

5. What is the future of the Asian city and what key parts of it does your plan represent?

The main feature affecting a city like Bangkok is going to be growth. The population of the city is rising steadily and inward investment is bringing new businesses into the city. All the major business centres in ASEAN will need to adjust to new opportunities from developments in the Asian Economic Community in 2015. Bangkok remains one of the most attractive operating centres for international companies and it is highly likely that business investment in Bangkok will accelerate as 2015 approaches. Like many cities in South East Asia, the development of public transport infrastructure is at a relatively early stage but given the level of growth we would expect the BTS and the Metro to spread across most areas of the city, easing congestion.

As a leading Asian city, Bangkok will continue to grow and the pressures on residential and business areas will increase. It is this that is already pulling interest back to the potential of the Rama III area which is the only and best remaining central location where it is possible to build a new and dynamic business and residential neighbourhood. This is not something any one company can do but nor does it need to be. But as incomes and opportunities in the region expand, we do believe that there is a once in a lifetime chance to build a new modern and dynamic city centre in the Rama III area and we hope to be in a position to play a small part in what can be a very exciting future for the city.