

# From fan to friend

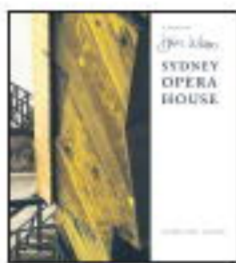
Photographer Katarina Stube's love for Sydney's Opera House led to her befriending its architect eventually

tay suan chiang

It is like the architecture version of Julie & Julia. But unlike that movie about a fan who pays homage to a famous work by a food writer but never meets her distant mentor, Ms Katarina Stube got in touch with her hero and even collaborated with him on a book.

Visiting Sydney for the first time eight years ago as an architecture student, she visited the Opera House and fell in love with it instantly. That marked the start of a quest to meet the architect behind the building that so enchanted her and resulted in the book, Jorn Utzon's Sydney Opera House (above).

Ms Stube, 31, now a photographer, was in Singapore recently to launch the 192-page work, which contains her photographs of the Opera House, as well as old pictures of the Utzon family and early sketches of the landmark.



She tells Life! that the iconic building captured her attention as she was almost blinded by the light that reflected off its white shells.

"I was so overwhelmed by it. I enjoyed the energy around it. It has so many shapes and was fascinating."

After snapping countless pictures of the building, she decided to seek out Utzon. "I wondered how it was created."

The search began in 2003 and, eventually, she got in touch with Utzon's son, Jan, also an architect. She sent her photos to the younger Utzon, who was impressed with them, and said his father would welcome a visit from her.

"I was nervous the night before, and I turned up at Jorn's home in Denmark with a bunch of flowers and my photographs," she recalls. "Jorn told me he saw the music in my photos."

He signed three of them, which Ms Stube now keeps in a safe. Utzon died last November of a heart attack.

Ms Stube says Utzon saw himself as the father of the Opera House, although he never saw the completed building in person before he died.

He won the competition to design the building in 1957. His design - a series of soaring shells - was inspired by the act of peeling an orange. The building has 14 shells which, if combined,



'I was nervous the night before, and I turned up at Jorn's home in Denmark with a bunch of flowers and my photographs. Jorn told me he saw the music in my photos'

Ms Stube (left) on her first meeting with Jorn Utzon, who won a competition to design the Opera House in 1957



Ms Stube fell in love with the Opera House eight years ago, and has put out a book containing pictures of the building (above) and its designer Jorn Utzon. PHOTOS: TERENCE TAN, REVEAL BOOKS

would form a sphere.

But Utzon never did complete the project. The lack of funds and cooperation from the new government, which wanted to change his design, forced him to resign from the project.

He returned to Denmark in 1966 and never visited Australia again.

The Opera House was finally completed in 1973, and was opened by Queen Elizabeth II.

Utzon, who eventually received the prestigious Pritzker Prize for architecture in 2003, was not invited to its opening, nor was his name mentioned.

The Sydney authorities began reconciliation with Utzon in the 1990s. In 2007, the Sydney Opera House was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site.

"He wasn't upset that he didn't get to see it, he was proud that he had created an Australian icon," says

Ms Stube.

Although meeting Utzon was "all I wanted", she began tossing about the idea of having a book as a tribute to the architect. She started work on the book in 2007, in collaboration with Jorn and Jan Utzon, who contributed their stories and photos. The elder Utzon also selected which of her photos to publish.

Earlier this year, she published 5,000 copies of the book on her own for an undisclosed sum. About 1,500 copies of the book have since been sold in Australia, Asia and Europe.

She is on the lookout for other iconic buildings to shoot. "It could be another opera house, or even the Esplanade." [taysc@sph.com.sg](mailto:taysc@sph.com.sg)

Jorn Utzon's Sydney Opera House (\$90) is available at Kinokuniya and other major bookstores.

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## Ikea catalogue goes Chinese

Your eyes are not playing tricks on you: For the first time in Singapore, the Ikea catalogue is now available in Chinese (right).

Other Mandarin-speaking markets such as Taiwan and China also have a Chinese catalogue.

Of the new Chinese edition, an Ikea spokesman says: "Ikea would like to extend our reach to include the Chinese who are not English literate."

The 2010 catalogue was also launched recently in English. Both the 376-page English and Chinese editions feature the same 2,000 items but the product descriptions and home decoration tips are in different languages.

The spokesman adds: "Chinese readers will not only be inspired by the images but, at the same time, they'll be able to benefit from all these additional information in Chinese."

Some 40,000 copies of the Chinese catalogue have been printed and distributed



The language for the product descriptions and decoration tips is the only difference between the Chinese and English editions. PHOTO: IKEA

ed free since Sunday at the Tampines and Alexandra stores.

In contrast, 1.235 million copies of the English catalogue, including customers' reference copies in the stores, have been printed this year. Copies of the English catalogue have been distributed to homes

in Singapore since Aug 1.

Ikea says it is still too soon to say how well shoppers have taken to the Chinese catalogue.

The spokesman adds that the company will "most probably" print Chinese editions of future catalogues, "but we will monitor the response and popularity of this year's issue".

The catalogue will not be available in Malay or Tamil, though, as "English literacy among the Malay and Tamil is pretty high", says the spokesman.

Ikea fan Michael Lee, 39, picked up a copy of the Chinese catalogue at the Tampines store on Monday.

"I don't usually read Chinese, but this will be a collector's item," he says.

Tay Suan Chiang

### design item

Cute as these are, they are not toys - not unless you consider gardening fun and games.

They are actual gardening tools designed and manufactured by Thai label Dogo.

The green Key Mini Tool set (far right) is great for small pots of plants, while the colourful Kidder Garden Tools (right) for kids can double as play tools at the beach.

Grown-ups, try to resist the urge to take them from the children for your own use.



What: Dogo Gardening Tools  
Price: Key Mini Tool, \$20, and Kidder Garden Tools, \$24  
Where: Botanic Gardens Shop, Singapore Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre

ST PHOTO: DESMOND LIM

## China's Water Cube is still a hot venue

Beijing - Where Michael Phelps swam for the Olympic gold last summer, there are now swans, or at least ballerinas and synchronised swimmers pretending to be swans, plus a few plastic ones for good measure.

The Water Cube, officially known as the National Aquatics Centre, has got a whole new life post-Olympics.

Defying the destiny of most Olympic venues to become white elephants, the bubble-clad wonder has been in almost constant use since the 2008 Summer Games.

It is leased out for weddings and corporate galas. By day, members of the public can pay US\$7 (\$\$10) to swim in the warm-up pool and, as at China's other public pools, undergo a quick health check and swim test.

And now it is the site of an unusual production of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. The Imperial Russian Ballet is performing on platforms constructed alongside and on top of the pools. Completing the effect of the extravaganza, stunt divers plunge off the high board in the pool used for the Olympic diving competitions.

The Water Cube, designed by a consortium of Australian and Chinese architects, is distinctive for its exterior, with its 3,000 air cushions that are supposed to convey the essence of water.

It has inspired lines of jewellery, teapots, watches, key chains, purses, liquor and perfume bottles, thermos flasks, swim goggles and bathing suits. There is even a Water Cube line of, yes, just plain water.

In contrast, the shape of the Bird's Nest, the other Olympics icon, lends itself more readily to souvenir ashtrays.

The US\$500-million structure was supposed to be the signature building of



The Water Cube is now a stage for a production of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. PHOTO: REUTERS

the Olympics. But the colossus of twisted steel has been scorned as a classic case of China's so-called "edifice complex" - too big, too expensive, too intimidating.

Concert and sports promoters have shied away from scheduling events there for fear they would be unable to fill all 100,000 seats.

The Cube has not had such problems. Audience members leaving the facility after Swan Lake said they had bought tickets out of interest in the building more than the ballet.

So far the building has got better reviews than the shows inside. This Swan Lake struck one Chinese culture blogger as a "hodgepodge, like frying up French food in a Chinese claypot and serving it with McDonald's hamburgers and chopsticks".

In any case, the Water Cube's stint as a theatre is coming to an end. Beijing State-Owned Assets Management Co, owner of the building, plans to close it in October for extensive renovations that will turn it into a water park and recreation centre. **Los Angeles Times**