

Tokio Marine Nichido Headquarters Building Renovation

Tokio Marine Nichido Headquarters Building (TMN) is an epoch skyscraper in the heart of Tokyo, right at the corner of the Imperial Palace. It was designed in the 70s by Kunio Maekawa - a pioneer of modernist architecture in Japan, author of many architectural masterpieces. TMN Building is one of the first skyscrapers in Tokyo. The building is also known for the fact that it once became a hot subject of debate for its original height towering over the Imperial Palace, which resulted the building to a last-moment reduction of a 1/3 of its height. Later the height limits of the area had loosened and the surrounding buildings started soaring much higher after 2000. Now TMN building is very distinguishable from its neighbors not only due to its reduced height, but also because of outstanding aesthetics. Its rich, thick, red brick-ish tiles and deep cuts of vertical windows contrast with a sleek look of its neighbors covered by shiny glass curtain walls. From a historical standpoint this masterpiece undoubtedly shall be preserved as a landmark of the area.

However, the developer has recently announced a new plan for this plot that involves demolishing the existing TMN building. The reasons behind such decision are current significant under-utilization of total buildable floor area and the height limit, and outdated MEP equipment. Even though from a business standpoint the decision is justified, architects raise their voices to preserve the existing building due to its cultural importance and historical value. Also, the fact that a simple scrap-and-build approach being no more reasonable for today adds a good reason for reconsideration from an environmental point of view. But the plan is still proceeding unaffected. Therefore, NOIZ took on a task to present a design that allows both to preserve the masterpiece and to comply with the most up-to-date office building standards. The solution we propose is a "wrapping by a new building" around the existing tower. One of the traditional Japanese sweets, called "kuzu-manju", is a great visual metaphor for this concept. A crystal clear mochi-skin surrounds dark and thick bean paste, showing dual-layered structure in a very beautiful fashion. Just like "kuzu-manju", NOIZ envisioned an extra layer of glass wrapping around the existing building, to improve its efficiency and performance, while simultaneously keeping the beauty of the existing building visible to the spectators. The space between the new and old perimeter can accommodate reinforcement and extra vertical cores, which allow the entire building to be raised almost to the height of its neighbors. The total floor area can be almost tripled. Wrapping skin also improves the environmental standards in terms of heat insulation, sunlight cut, visibility, view, and updated MEP structure. The existing structure's finishes remain intact inside of the new shell to bring rhythms and a vivid sense of materiality to the interiors. Such design can be a triumphal symbol of utilizing old structure, while bringing new value.

In terms of functionality the project showcases a new approach towards urban office by mixing multiple functions in a dispersed manner. Triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the new shift towards remote working is becoming a new standard and it is unlikely to go back to the good old 9-5 work style. Office buildings need to have a more robust offer of facilities and be more flexible, updating their composition and circulation. In our proposal, hospitality service, residences and work spaces coexist sharing resources and facilities. The plan allows portions of the hotel area can work as service apartments or meeting lounges and vice versa. Aside from traditional functions, buildings for new normal should also allow for more exploratory functions like e.g. a network-based school system. In such a system students can choose a campus from a variety of small venues in mixed-use buildings like the presented one, or in suburb, or even in nature.



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The building also contains some new features for a new building standard, such as green shaft vertically going through on the new skin, which provide natural heat circulation and visible green for residents/neighbors, as well as a secured infrastructure for drone delivery/pick-up for light weight parcels to reduce unnecessary operation of heavy-load elevators. Those green shaft networks among ground floor, landing spots provided on middle floors, and sky gardens to provide amenity and additional value to the residents and workers.

Presented proposal intends to resolve an emerging issue of how to preserve remarkable mid-late 20th century buildings that do not comply with recent standards, yet remain symbols of their era and the area. Recently, such cases are becoming more and more common and leading big debates, especially in Japan which experienced rapid economic growth in 1960's and 70's. Our solution touches upon environmental, business, value, equipment and circulation issues as well as applying new technology. We also tackle the aesthetic aspect of such renovations by adding a new value, while maintaining original looks intact to let the building remain a historical pride. It might be too late to save the legacy of Tokio Marine Nichido Headquarters Building as the rebuilding plan has been officially announced, but we are hoping that an approach similar to the one presented can be implemented in other cases. Such treatment can become one of the feasible methodologies letting renovations give more respect to the global issue of sustainability, while providing access to a new technology standard.