

# CDT Communication, Design and Taras

By Brenda Whately

**Taras Wolf  
Class of 1991  
UWCSEA 1986-1989**

Taras Panichpakdee, as he was known at UWCSEA, now Taras Wolf, is founder/owner of Wolf Architects, based in Melbourne, Australia. Although his university degree and current career is in architecture, the years in between were spent in a number of different pursuits. He has been a painter, sculptor, graphic designer, professional ballroom dancer and instructor. Explaining the relationship between some of his career choices he says, "I love the idea that art, dance and architecture share a connection through using imagery to communicate a story to an audience."

Inspired by the movie *Strictly Ballroom*, Taras became a professional, competitive ballroom dancer and dance instructor for 15 years. Competing all over the world, he was ranked number one in Southeast Asia and seventh overall in Australia.

Taras has roots in both Southeast Asia and Australia. His father is Thai, his mother Australian. He spent his younger years in Thailand and three of his teenage years boarding at UWCSEA in Singapore. He attended university in Australia and lives there now with his wife and three children. Taras runs his own architecture firm, Wolf Architects out of Melbourne and has just opened a second office in Bangkok. He says, "Like myself, half Australian and half Thai, my practice now reflects my heritage."

After leaving UWCSEA in 1989, Taras returned to Bangkok where he completed his final High School years at ISB (International School of

Bangkok) and then moved to Australia to attend the University of Melbourne for architecture. Architecture was something he had been interested in since he was about seven years old. It began when he met an architect through his parents' property and construction business, becoming inspired by all the drawings and equipment. He says, "I grew up in Thailand in the '70s. There was no English spoken, no fast food and not much in the way of entertainment. So to amuse myself, I drew. I was intrigued by the fact that this architect could use drawings to communicate his ideas just as I did."

"At UWCSEA I took CDT (Communication, Design and Technology), taught by Peter Garrett and I loved it. I used that portfolio to help to get into the architecture programme at the University of Melbourne. I met up with Pete at our 20 year class reunion in 2011 and I felt like I had come full circle. The last time we met I was a mere student dreaming of being an architect and now I own my own architecture firm."

After graduating university with First Class Honours, Taras decided to spend some time pursuing his love of dance and he returned to Bangkok where he competed, taught and built a school of dance.

Returning to Melbourne in 2000, he began to teach ballroom dancing at the University of Melbourne. It was there he met his wife who was studying medicine, through a friend in his dance class. Taras taught her to dance and eventually they were entering competitions together.

After several years of concentrating on art and dance, Taras turned back to



*"I love the idea that art, dance and architecture share a connection through using imagery to communicate a story to an audience."*

architecture and in 2005 he opened his own firm. He says, "In an era of grave environmental concerns, I began to understand the power that architecture could have on people's lives and saw this as my way to make a positive difference."

Taras has several architects working with him, depending on the projects he is involved in and he accepts and mentors student volunteers, work placements and interns so that they can see what the business of architecture is all about and develop some basic skills. He encourages and in fact insists that everyone in his office works not just on their computers but collaboratively on physical models as well as on pieces of art that are often, in true UWC fashion, then auctioned or sold for charity.

Along with his thriving business, Taras lectures at the University of Melbourne. He is convinced that by giving back through teaching, he is rewarded with more business. His wife calls it 'Tarma.' Thus, even though he doesn't have a lot of available time, he continues to teach.

Taras' self-designed home was recently honoured in the finals of the Melbourne Design Awards. The home was designed to be family-friendly with plenty of shared space, sustainable, open to nature with sliding glass walls and areas to house his eclectic collections. One of those collections is a set of silver Mercedes cars—models as well as the real thing. His favourite, a sporty silver convertible, is actually parked in the middle of his home office beside a display wall of models of different vintages of that same car, all painted silver. Two more vintage Mercedes that he restored himself, are parked in his garage. On another wall is a collection of Star Wars figurines from his childhood and in his music room is a collection of keyboards and music-related electronics. His own artwork hangs on the walls. Having been given a tour of his home, I can attest to how beautiful and well thought out it is.

Taras says, "I design houses, not for the front page of magazines, but for the inside of magazines—houses that are built within a reasonable budget, that are achievable and appreciated by everyone, those who will live in it and those who will look at it. As architects we must remember that we don't usually live in the designs we create. They need to appeal to everyone and connect to people who are not architects."

Taras' home has featured in many magazines, has been nominated for numerous awards and has appeared on ABC TV's *Dream Build Series*.

Recently Wolf Architects has won a contract to build a seven-star hotel in Nai Yang Beach, Thailand. This, along with the new office and a waiting list of design projects in Australia, not to mention a family that includes three young children, means that Taras is going to remain a busy man for some time to come.



Taras can be reached through the alumni site and/or his website at <http://wolfarchitects.com.au>

The ABC *Dream Build Series* 2 episode in which Taras' house features can be viewed online.



*"I began to understand the power that architecture could have on people's lives and saw this as my way to make a positive difference."*

