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*"The dialogue between client and architect is about as intimate as any conversation you can have, because when you're talking about building a house, you're talking about dreams"*  
— Robert AM Stern



Above Ant Farm House, Taipei / Xrange



**WHO** Grace Cheung (GC)  
**WHAT** Founder, Xrange Taipei  
**WORKS** Museum of Speed; The Cloud;  
House of Music (all Taipei); Sun Moon Hotel, Nantou

**Was there a gender imbalance when you were at university?**  
**SS:** No, I wasn't aware of any gender imbalance in either London or Stockholm, where I studied. We were fairly even in numbers. Most of my former female classmates are all employed in the industry now.

**GC:** My class at Columbia was at 60-strong when we started. The male:female ratio was about 50:50. By the time we graduated, we had about 10 girls left out of about 30 graduates. I think those of us that made it were more intensely involved.

**Why was there was such a great dropout rate among the women?**

**GC:** By the time we graduated, we were at our prime age. You have to really like architecture to delay the process of having a family and kids. Those of us who made it through the entire programme have our own studios now. Also, most of our professors were men who were famous architects. There is a kind of camaraderie between them and male students. I don't know if you can call it inequality, but it is hard for a woman to accept. I'm not going to be buddies with my professor, but I'll deal with it and still try to impress people with what I believe in.

*"Don't expect more or less because you're a woman. If you believe that, you will always face this demon everywhere you go. I'm a really 'girl power' kind of person"* — Grace Cheung

Below Flat Östermalm, Stockholm / Shaygan Architects

# Not just a man's world

Zaha Hadid has blazed a trail for women in the world of architecture. Grace Cheung, founder of Taipei-based Xrange, and Shideh Shaygan, who recently set up her own studio in Hong Kong, spoke separately to *Perspective* about proving that gender is not an issue when it comes to talent

TEXT: VIRGINIA LAU  
PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF XRANGE / SHAYGAN ARCHITECTS



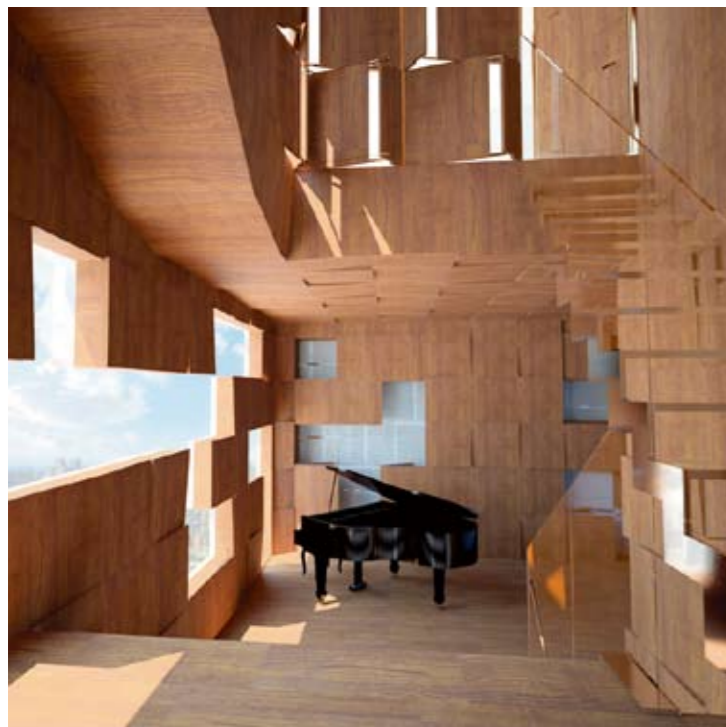
**WHO** Shideh Shaygan (SS)  
**WHAT** Founder of Shaygan Architects, Hong Kong  
**WORKS** The Living Room W1, London; Fjällnäs Reserve, Tänndalen; Flat Östermalm, Stockholm





*“Be focused and confident in your ideas. And you have to work hard. Without working hard, being focused and having confidence in your ideas, none of it works” — Shideh Shaygan*

This page, clockwise from top The Cloud, Taipei / Xrange; winner of 2009 ID Annual Design Review, Environment category, 2008 • The Living Room W1, London / Shaygan Architects • House of Music / Xrange **Opposite page** Fjällnäs Reserve, Tärendalen / Shaygan Architects



**What are the challenges and benefits of being the gender minority?**

**SS:** The public interest is shifting more towards female architects, so it is easier to attract attention. It's something rare to celebrate. Also, women can be more creative when they really go for it. One major challenge is tackling difficult clients. It happens to both male and female architects, but women are naturally softer and give up more easily. I think men have more gear to tackle that.

**GC:** Architecture is challenging whether you're a man or a woman. I've had bad experiences, but they are mostly one-offs. One benefit is that I get to wear cool clothes and high heels.

**Have you ever faced gender discrimination in the line of work?**

**GC:** I once attended a meeting for a museum project. One of the men there said something very insulting about me being the woman quietly supporting my partner on the side as he tackles the tough challenges. It was really shocking to hear that. After the meeting, I chatted with him and very nicely told him I designed other projects. And then I could see his face change. But I really think this is a one-off experience.

**What do you think sets you apart from other women who aspire to become architects but fail in the end?**

**SS:** I can be extremely focused, dedicated and hard-working. I think if you're passionate about architecture, it becomes a part of your life that you cannot live without. I don't see work as separate. I don't close the door and go to my 'normal' life. It's totally seamless.

**GC:** Outside of work, I'm really easygoing. At the same time, there's something 'man' inside of me. When it comes to work, I'm like a real beast. If your personality tends to be soft and you don't speak up, it can be a hindrance. I'm very resilient and don't give up easily. I can be quite stubborn. These are key traits of architects, because projects take so long to build – it's easy to digress and give up.

**What do you think can be done to improve the ratio of men and women in architecture?**

**GC:** In Taiwan, it's quite a conservative society. By 25, women are expected to find a good husband. My parents have never pushed me to get married. I've never felt like I had to live up to this social expectation. If parents were more encouraging, more women would take on tough fields in school and not drop out when they face a challenge. It has to be a concerted effort by all parties.

**Why do you think there are so few female architects, especially well-known ones?**

**SS:** Historically, architecture has always been a male profession, although there were a few women like Charlotte Perriand and Eileen Gray during the Modernist period. I think women prioritise things differently in life. First of all, physically, if we want to have a family, it's women who have children. Women typically try to do many things at the same time, which reduces the amount of time and energy they have. I've seen more examples of male architects who don't think about anything but work. I see that very rarely in women. Also, female architects don't seem to be as skilled as male architects in self-promotion. The media is interested in strong, male names, and big offices and projects. There's something sexy about a strong, male architect that doesn't apply to female architects.



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# 英雄莫問男女

過去Zaha Hadid為女性在建築界創出一片天；現在，張淑征在台灣創立十一事務所，而Shideh Shaygan則在最近於香港開設工作室。兩人分別與《透視》暢談並印證才能是無性別之分

撰文：VIRGINIA LAU  
攝影：由十一事務所及SHAYGAN ARCHITECTS提供

**WHO** 張淑征 (CC)  
**WHAT** 台北十一事務所創辦人  
**WORKS** 台灣鐵道博物館、戶外裝置「雲」、音樂之屋(全台灣)、南投日月潭飯店

**WHO** Shideh Shaygan (SS)  
**WHAT** 香港Shaygan Architects創辦人  
**WORKS** 倫敦The Living Room W1、瑞典Tandalen市Fjällnäs Reserve、斯德哥爾摩Flat Ostermalm

**你們就讀大學時，男女人數有不均嗎？**  
**SS**：沒有。無論是在倫敦就讀的學校，還是斯德哥爾摩的學校，我都沒有發現這個現象。男女人數都差不多，而我大多女性同學也都受聘於建築界。

**CC**：我就讀哥倫比亞大學時，班上起初有六十人，男女比例差不多是一比一。但到畢業時，三十個畢業生中只有十個是女生。我想能夠畢業的都對建築十分投入。

**為甚麼修讀建築的女學生退學率會這麼高？**

**CC**：我們畢業時，大家正值花樣年華，你要很熱愛建築，才會延遲結婚生子的打算。能夠修畢課程的，現在都已經擁有自己的工作室。而且，大部份的教授都是有名的男性建築師。他們跟男學生比較投契，我不知道這是否男女不平等，但作為女性就不易接受這種情況。我不會與教授做交心好友，但我會勇於面對，嘗試以我的信念去打動他們。

**作為少數的女性建築師，遇到甚麼挑戰，又享有甚麼好處？**

**SS**：大眾對女性建築師更感興趣，所以較易能引人注意。這是身為女性建築師少數值得慶幸的事。而且，女性認真投入時會比男性更有創意。主要的挑戰之一，就是要應付難纏的客戶。不過，男女建築師也要面對這個問題，但女性天性

較柔弱，較易放棄。我認為男性更有能力搞定這些客戶。

**CC**：無論男女，建築都深具挑戰。我有過不愉快的經驗，但大多都只是個別事例。其中一個好處，是我們可以穿時尚服飾及高跟鞋。

**工作時有試過受性別歧視嗎？**

**CC**：我曾經參與過一個博物館項目的會議，會上其中一個男人對我說了一些非常侮辱的說話，指我的拍攝努力解決設計難題時，我只是個在旁冷眼靜觀的女人。聽到這番說話真的很驚訝。會議結束後，我找那個男人談話，很友善地告訴他我有設計其他項目，然後他的臉色都變了。不過，我真的認為這只是個別事件。

**你認為與那些想要成為建築師、最後卻未能成功的女性比較，是甚麼讓你們之間有所分別？**

**SS**：我可以異常集中精神、專注投入而且非常勤力。我認為如果你真的很熱衷於建築，建築就會成為你生命的一部分，不能失去它。我不會把生活與工作分割開來，不會把家門關上就過「普通正常」的生活。我的生活與工作完美融合得很。

**CC**：我在工作以外都很隨和。不過，我的體內總有一種「男兒」個性。一涉及工作，我就會很頑固。如果你的個性過於柔弱又不敢言，就會構成障礙。我是個能很快振作的人，而且又不會輕言

放棄，有時甚至相當執著。建築師就是這樣，因為項目都要很長時間才能建好，期間很易讓人走了岔道而放棄。

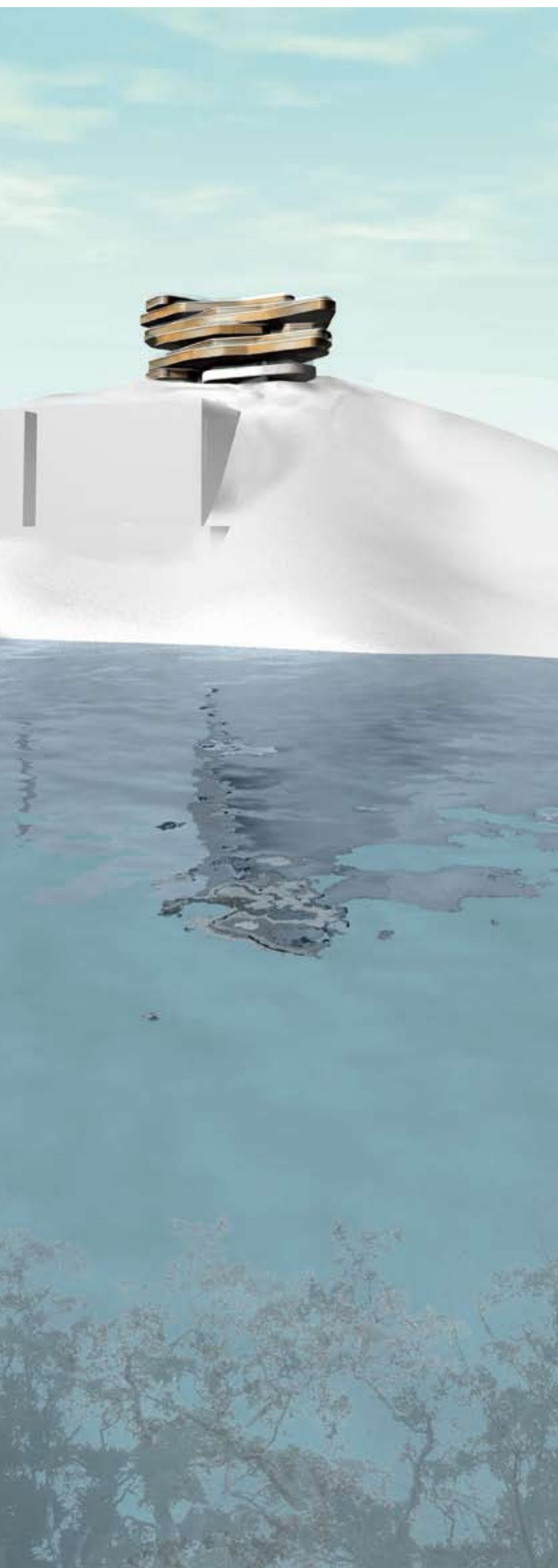
**你認為可以做一些甚麼來改善建築界的男女比例？**

**CC**：台灣是個頗為保守的傳統社會，女性二十五歲便應找個好男人，嫁作人婦。我的父母卻從不催促我要結婚，我亦不曾覺得我要跟隨這種社會期望。如果父母能更加鼓勵女兒追求事業，會有更多女性選擇在學校修讀更艱辛的科目，亦不會一遇難關就要退學。這要各方面共同努力才能達成的。

**你覺得為甚麼女性建築師、尤其是知名的女性建築師會這麼少？**

**SS**：一直以來建築都是個男性職業，雖然現代主義時期亦曾出現過一些女性建築師，如Charlotte Perriand和Eileen Gray。我認為女性對人生有不同看法、不同的優先順序。首先在生理上，我們會想要生孩子組織家庭，畢竟懷胎十月的是女性。

女性通常會嘗試在同一時間做很多事情，這就減少了她們有的時間與精力。我看到較多男性建築師只專注於工作上，對其他事不聞不問，但卻很少女性會這樣。而且，女性建築師在自我推銷上沒男性那麼熟練。媒體都對有能力的男性建築師、大公司與大型項目感興趣。有能力的男性建築師總帶種女性建築師沒有的誘惑魅力。



Above Sun Moon Lake Hotel, Nantou / Xrange; second place winner of Sun Moon Lake hotel competition, 2006