The idea that teachers must demonstrate a passion, not only for the learning of others, but for learning from others, forms the foundation of my teaching philosophy. Architectural history offers a unique and powerful means through which students from all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds may better understand the world around them. Through my own study of the built environment, I also have the opportunity to learn more about them.

In many respects, the most significant challenge of teaching modern architectural history in Hong Kong is also its greatest reward: the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of students for whom globalisation is a pressing, daily concern rather than an abstract hypothetical. Helping students understand and appreciate the significance of architecture not merely as physical form, but as a cultural, political, and social construct, deepens their connection to the city while also exposing them to the significance of intercultural understanding, collaboration, and global citizenship.

Hong Kong’s dynamic transnationalism and unique, post-colonial identity all represent localised concerns with broad, international implications, producing a productive tension that has shaped my teaching and research in critical and valuable ways. In my own courses, I have worked to impart to students the ways in which lessons in architectural history and theory – how a building was built, why it was built, and the political, economic, and social motives behind its particular form and function – can illuminate both the local built environment and the broader world beyond. This level of engagement encourages students to utilise historical materials in connection to their studio projects while also reminding them that their skills from studio can be used to enhance a particular research interest. Through this degree of disciplinary cross-pollination, students are able to develop their own foundational core of knowledge around which each of them, as individuals, can begin to build a sense of intellectual autonomy.

Dr Cole Roskam is incredibly encouraging to his students and helps us to achieve what we want to study. He helps us push our limits when it comes to research and allows us the freedom to explore our ideas and thoughts without dictating his ideals on us. His classes are well structured and organised. Assessment methods are appropriate, and he takes the time to go through them afterwards to help us understand our mistakes.

He encourages students to participate in discussions during class and express our thoughts on the subject matter, and this is done in a way that students don’t feel afraid to convey their ideas. He’s a teacher who cares about his students and helps them to learn and understand the subject matter.

Thilini Warnakulasuriya
BA(ArchStud) 2013

In my final year of postgraduate studies, I was fortunate enough to have taken two courses taught by Dr Cole Roskam. These two courses completely changed my perspectives towards architectural discourse through an in-depth and comprehensive study of architectural history and theory. Dr Roskam organised the courses with the aim to trigger curiosity and to induce critical thinking through encouraging discussion and debates. As such, he would routinely kick off the class by introducing the topic with a brief background that offered a general time and context in history for the class to anchor on to. Instead of teaching a chronological sequence of architectural history, his courses questioned the nature of architectural history itself and probed how histories of architecture have been fundamentally constructed.

Upon graduation, I began practising in a local architectural firm, but I wished to continue my academic endeavour in parallel by actively engaging in events and organisations that raise the public awareness of our endangered architectural heritage. Dr Roskam offered me the opportunity to design the venue of the very first DOCOMOMO HK exhibition, which was a meaningful experience in extending my academic interest into the real world of architecture.