



## The Fruits of Creative Insight

“In a rare forthcoming moment, I. M. Pei shared his inner thoughts on the balanced realms, the yins and yangs, that enriched his full life...East and West, old and new:

*“When you think about the history of human feelings, which is what the history of architecture is, you will notice that the most fruitfully imaginative developments almost always take place when two or more very contrasting lines of thought or feeling come together. They may be rooted in very contrasting cultural soils, but if they do come together...then an unexpectedly rich relationship can emerge. Perhaps the developments that I’ve had a hand in building over the years are not as new and useful and inspiring as the developments that I have felt in these ways as the contrasts of my life gradually attained a kind of complementarity. It is similar to sowing and reaping, the cycling of the seasons and sentiments, the movement of light and insights. You never quite know when something that you have planted is going to be harvested. The yield may be once or recurrent. You may forget that something was planted—an experience, a perception, a relationship to a person or to a philosophy or to a tradition. And then there is suddenly this bloom, called up by circumstances that are completely different. Such blooms can breach walls and whole epochs.”*

The Confucian philosopher Mencius once said, “The great man is the man who hasn’t lost the heart he had when he was a little child.” A former associate stepped from his office one evening and spotted the Peis dashing as nimbly as teenagers across Fifty-seventh Street, that great axis of art and power leading to their Sutton Place home. “I. M. is ageless,” said Kellogg Wong. “His

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bearing. His posture. His energy. His manner. His charm. The twinkle in his eye. It's all still there."

According to Lao-tzu (whose *Tao Te Ching* Pei referred to as the writings which most effected his design work) a deep serenity comes to those who are attuned to the intangible forces astir in the natural world. Pei has largely ceded the Kantonah house to his children and grandchildren, but he returns periodically to walk its wooded grounds. What he undertakes there is not gardening so much as an enlightened form of landscaping, the benefits of which will outlive him. The Pei children laughed among themselves one spring weekend as their father began clearing a patch of undergrowth. "We all thought: What is Dad doing?" said his daughter, Liane, "but his labor revealed a stand of beautiful trees in a sunlit glade. It was a revelation. It made perfect sense, but he was the only one who had seen it."

From:

*I. M. Pei: Mandarin of Modernism*

By Michael Cannell

Carol Southern Books, New York, 1995 pp. 302, 303