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The Vertical Garden City Grows Into the 21st Century



Hiroo Mori

Interviewee

Hiroo Mori, Executive Vice President
Roppongi Hills Mori Tower
P.O. Box 1, 6-10-1 Roppongi
Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-6155
Japan
t: +81 3 6406 6116
f: +81 3 6406 9306
e: moichi-watanabe@mori.co.jp
www.mori.co.jp

Hiroo Mori

Previously with the Industrial Bank of Japan since 1986, Hiroo Mori joined Mori Building Co., Ltd. in 1995. He was appointed Managing Director in 2000, Senior Managing Director in 2003, and Senior Executive Managing Officer in 2011. He has held his current position of Executive Vice President since June 2013. Mr. Mori has also been Chairman of Shanghai World Financial Center Investment Co., Ltd. and Chairman of Shanghai World Financial Center Co., Ltd. since 2005. He was appointed President and CEO of the Mori Hospitality Corporation in 2012. Mr. Mori is a graduate of Tokyo University, Faculty of Economics.

As host of the 2020 Summer Olympics, Tokyo is undertaking a major redevelopment effort, giving long-planned projects new energy under the political impetus of the games. At this auspicious time, Mori Building, the developer of the ARK Hills, Roppongi Hills, and Toranomon Hills tall building complexes, and the host of the inaugural CTBUH Japan Symposium, *Vertical Habitat – Vision 2020 and Beyond*, is in a strong position to shape the future urban landscape of the city. CTBUH Journal Editor Daniel Safarik interviewed Hiroo Mori, Executive Vice President, Mori Building, who has led the construction of several critical projects in Japan, as well as the Shanghai World Financial Center in China.

Mori Building has created some of the best-known tall buildings and public-private spaces in Japan. What is the guiding philosophy behind its tall building projects?

We always ask ourselves, “what makes an ideal city, one capable of thriving in the midst of fierce competition with other global cities?” The key question that follows is, “how can a city generate the ‘magnetic power’ it needs to attract people, goods, money and information from around the world?”

Our answer is what we call the “Vertical Garden City” concept. Since it is not usually possible to add new land to cities, our concept opens up existing space in urban environments by building vertically, both into the sky and into the ground. Replacing countless low-rise structures with a relatively small number of massive high-rise structures efficiently concentrates diverse urban functions for residences, work, commerce, education, leisure, culture, human interaction, and more. By building vertically, we create compact cities where people have enhanced mobility and accessibility, often on foot, for the enjoyment of fuller, more rewarding private and professional lives.

Mori Building first implemented its Vertical Garden City concept in 1986 with ARK Hills, Japan’s first privately built large-scale mixed-use urban complex. Centered on the 37-story ARK Mori Building (see Figure 1), ARK Hills also offers residences, a hotel and a concert hall. Thereafter, in 2003, we opened Roppongi Hills (see Figure 2), a mixed-use

cultural complex. Revolving around its centerpiece, Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, a skyscraper crowned with a museum and observation deck, Roppongi Hills combines diverse urban functions, including residences, a hotel, and a TV station. And in 2014, we launched Toranomon Hills, which is catalyzing Tokyo’s Toranomon-Shinbashi area as a new international hub. Toranomon Hills (see Figure 3), rising 52 stories and 247 meters as Tokyo’s newest landmark, the project encompasses offices, residences, hotels, international conference rooms and shops, plus Loop Road No. 2, a key Tokyo



Figure 1. ARK Mori Building, Tokyo.
© Chris73. Source: Wikipedia



Figure 2. Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, Tokyo. © KPF

thoroughfare, routed efficiently underneath the complex.

Why does Mori consider it important to develop major public areas?

Urban complexes offer diverse functions ranging from work and residence to leisure, shopping, culture, and human interaction. We want to enrich urban life by creating large public spaces where people can enjoy their time together, as well as enjoy the outdoors, abundant greenery and cultural facilities, such as museums and concert halls.

What kind of role does Mori expect to play in the upcoming Tokyo Olympics in 2020?

Can you attribute any current or future projects to the Olympics? What kind of partnerships will Mori undertake with the government to assist with issues like transportation, accommodation of visitors and athletes, and redevelopment of Olympic sites after the event?

Tokyo plans to significantly redevelop its urban infrastructure. The city's selection as host of the 2020 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games has created a shared focus and timeline for all of us involved in this undertaking. This is very significant, because it will be like a powerful wind at our backs, helping us to accelerate ongoing efforts to redesign and redevelop Tokyo.

As one example, Toranomon Hills, which Mori Building opened up in June 2014, has an Olympic connection. The complex is integrated with the newly extended Loop Road No. 2, a key trunk route that had been planned for many years. In a public-private partnership led by Mori Building and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the road was extended underground through the Toranomon-Shinbashi area, with Toranomon Hills built over and around it. Ultimately, this "Olympic Road" will tie together Haneda International Airport, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Village, and the main Olympic Stadium. Moreover, directly above the tunnel is a surface street that is being transformed into Tokyo's version of L'Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

The Japanese economy has been a subject of concern recently. How does this affect or change Mori's plans for future developments?

A key to Japan's continuing economic revitalization is urban redevelopment. Indeed, urban redevelopment is an integral part of Prime Minister Abe's national growth strategy. Tokyo is the starting point; and in fact, redevelopment projects in the city are accelerating. Mori Building, an expert on urban redevelopment, is making the most of this opportune timing to push forward with initiatives that ultimately will contribute to the revitalization of Tokyo and thereby the economy of Japan.

Asia is not a monolithic place. Even though Mori predominantly has worked on tall buildings in only three countries – Japan, China, and Malaysia – how would you describe Mori's efforts to produce tall buildings that make sense culturally as well as economically in these countries?

Yes, Mori Building has concentrated its development of high-rise buildings in countries such as Japan and China. Asian cities tend to be congested with residences and offices, so by applying our Vertical Garden City concept to make efficient use of vertical space, we are creating compact urban settings where people can enjoy shorter commutes and richer, more varied lives. Going forward, we believe that our urban design concept can be applied in other emerging cities of Asia where urbanization is advancing rapidly.

Do you have expansion plans outside of these countries? Outside of Asia?

Mori Building is looking beyond Japan and China into Southeast Asia. In 2014, we opened a new representative office in Singapore, which joins our existing offices in Shanghai, Dalian, Seoul, and Hong Kong. Rapid urbanization and economic growth in many Southeast Asian cities are creating growing demands for high-quality buildings and development. Our new Singapore Representative Office will engage in research and marketing, targeting real estate investment, development, and consulting. At



Figure 3. Toranomon Hills, Tokyo. © Kanazawa1999. Source: Wikipedia

this point, however, we do not have any specific plans for business outside of Asia.

With the recent passing of Jon Jerde – who designed the public spaces and shopping areas of Roppongi Hills as well as several other successful projects in Japan – what architects do you think share your philosophy about developments that are integrated into cities and feel like neighborhoods? Who have you not worked with yet, but would like to?

Mori Building undertakes major projects in collaboration with some of the world's most renowned architects and designers, including Jon Jerde, Terence Conran, KPF, Cesar Pelli, Tadao Ando, Fumihiko Maki, and SAANA. We will continue to work with such top innovators, sharing our urban design concepts and philosophies in a joint effort to develop highly advanced cities.

What role should tall buildings have in making their cities?

High-rise buildings play a very important role in relieving urban congestion. By vertically concentrating urban functions in tall buildings, we open up ground space for more practical uses, including greenery, transportation networks and much more, thereby creating compact cities where people can enjoy enhanced accessibility. While it takes time to design such cities, the 2020 Olympics are creating an opportunity to apply these benefits in an accelerated fashion, driving Tokyo's development. ■