

## The Delightfulness of Playgrounds, as Seen From Above

by Coburn Dukehart, National Geographic PROOF, 29.07.2015

When photographer Stefen Chow was growing up in Singapore, he couldn't sit still at school.

"I was a very energetic child, and sitting in the classroom and listening to the teacher was not enough for me—I had a lot of energy to expend. I wanted to scream and jump and do everything on the playground," he says.

Now that he is grown, with a wife and daughter, Chow wanted to pay homage to the spaces that influenced him so much as a child. And he wanted to bring the same sense of surprise and delight to his photographs that playgrounds can bring to a kid.

"As an adventurer, playgrounds played a huge part in my development," he says. "As you grow up you realize that playgrounds becomes more invisible, and the things in front of you are what you can buy or enjoy. Playgrounds are a place where fun is simple and straightforward, and I wanted to showcase them in a way that makes people say, 'Huh, I never thought about it in that way before.'"

In order to achieve that sense of wonder, Chow and his wife, Lin Hui-Yi, conceived the idea of The Play Project, which showcases a hundred of Singapore's playgrounds from the air and locates them on a subway map of the city.

To make the images, Chow hired an aerial photography company called Avetics to fly drones over playgrounds in Singapore. He scouted locations from an online street directory, then visited more than 200 playgrounds and made more than 300 flights to get the hundred images that ended up on The Play Project's website.

Avetics specializes in industrial and advertising photography, and for this project they customized a drone to carry Chow's Nikon Coolpix A compact camera. An Avetics employee would pilot the drone, and Chow would either take the photos while looking at an LCD-type screen, or act as art director while another Avetics employee took the photos.

And even though the images appear to be empty still lifes, Chow says he was looking for moments, even in these seemingly static images. An astute viewer can spot those subtleties—as a car makes a turn around a curve or trains pass each other on opposite tracks.

According to Chow, there are more than a thousand playgrounds in Singapore, so this project wasn't meant to be a complete survey. Instead, the project honors urban design, landscape architecture, and the pure aesthetics of the simple play space.

"My personal work has always been to get people to assume they know about something, and then realize they were wrong, or understand something deeper," says Chow.

"What we discovered is that people in Singapore assumed that playgrounds have disappeared. But in fact they are still very alive and well—the children all know where they are, but as adults, you can't see them."

*Stefen Chow is a landscape and portrait photographer based in Beijing. To see more of his work, visit his website, [www.stefenchow.com](http://www.stefenchow.com), and follow him on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.*

*This project was funded in part by SG50—a nationwide effort to celebrate Singapore's 50th anniversary in 2015.*

link to the original article: <http://proof.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/29/playgrounds/>



Adventure Playground in Tiong Bahru Park



11 Holland Drive



60 Marine Terrace



Stagmont Park (785 Choa Chu Kang Drive)



Tembusu Park



112 Whampoa Road