FLASH

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News+FLASH *is the digital offspring of* ***INTERSECTION****. It is published digitally each fortnight for the foreseeable future, until we run out of ideas, articles or money.*

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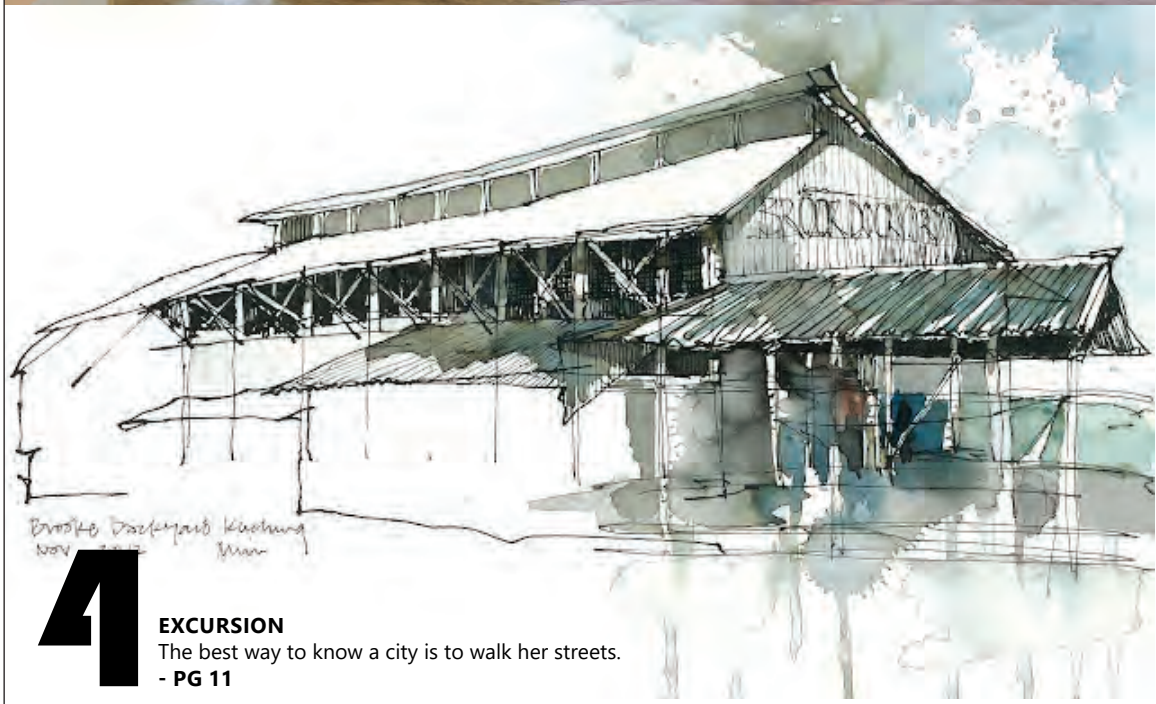

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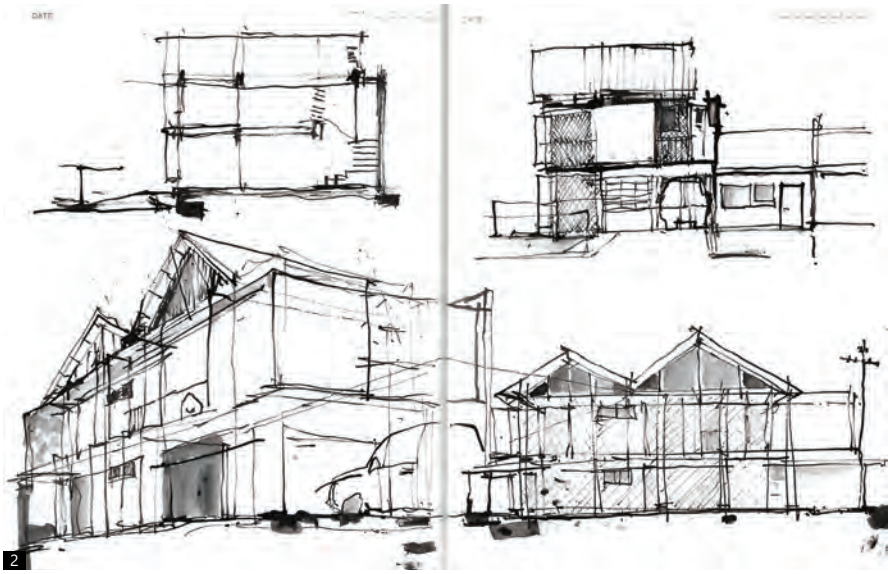
CAT HOUSE

by MinWee Architect

ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

History

The corner terrace is located in the old residential enclave of Salak South, which seemed like an odd choice for a young couple who had worked overseas for last two decades. But if one were to consider the proximity to neighbourhood shops and work, and throw in the nostalgia of having grown up in this area - then it seems like a perfectly sensible idea. Especially if one appreciates a locality with history and local colour. It is probably part of the movement to re-inhabit the city, to return to it and fill in the gaps left by the departed (to a better place or to the suburban sprawl).



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CAPTIONS

1. *New house frontage; the former roof tiles were used in the front gate post (left)*
2. *Initial design sketches.*

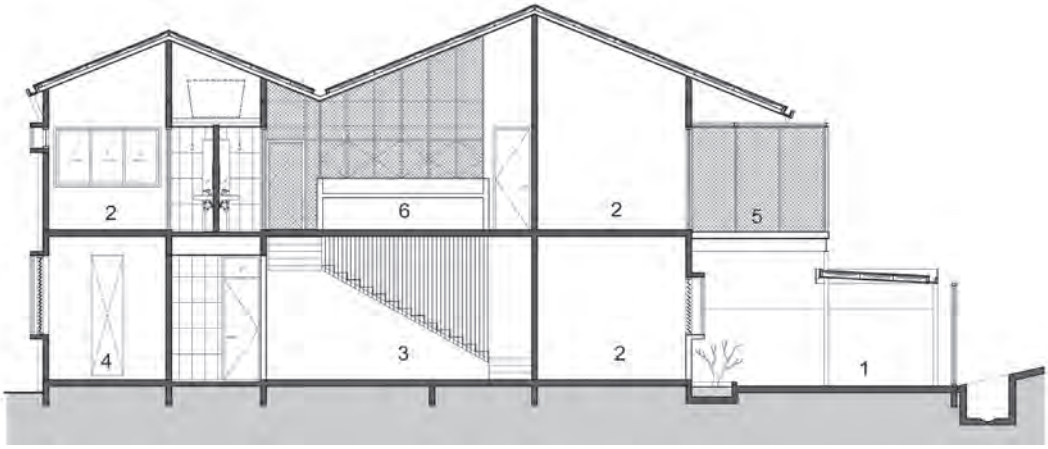
The existing house prior to the renovation.

Existing house

The existing house was one we have all visited before, on Chinese New Year visits to often forgotten aunties at a difficult-to-find maze of a housing estate. A single storey terrace with a 6.7 metre frontage, divided into two to share between the living room and the master bedroom, entered from the front of the house. This was followed by another bedroom as the living room evolves into a dining space with the help of a room divider/ shelf. There was a third room which faced the back lane, next to the kitchen and toilets. The toilet and bathrooms were in two compartments, no doubt to cater for the number of people in the house. This type of housing and planning was part of the early wave of housing estate or 'taman' development to cater for a newly prosperous Malaysia.

The extension was primarily built in steel to reduce the loading and increase permeability and ventilation.

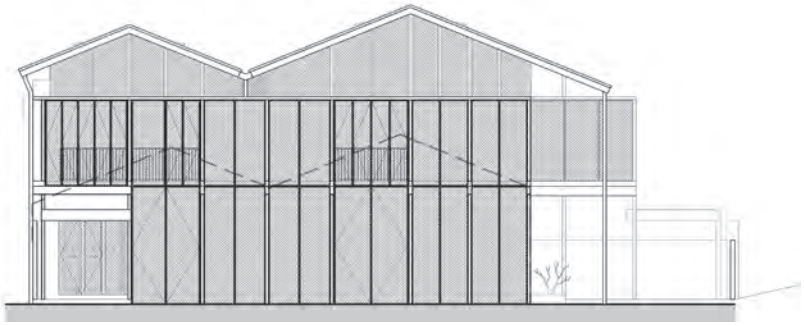
The bare brick wall and the suspended steel stairs contrast and complement each other.



SECTION B

LEGEND
1. car porch
2. bedrooms
3. dining room
4. kitchen
5. front varandah
6. lounge

FRONT ELEVATION



LEFT ELEVATION

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

LEGEND
1. car porch
2. main entrance
3. dining room & living room
4. bedrooms
5. library
6. kitchen
7. courtyard
8. terrace

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

LEGEND
1. lounge
2. varandah
3. bedrooms
4. office
5. front varandah
6. back varandah

Brief

This was to be a house for a dozen cats, several dogs and 3 humans. There was a simple physical brief, primarily about the different zones to be occupied (and segregated) by the feline and canine residents, and also about extending the floor area of the existing house by adding another floor, which we did by using steel primarily to reduce the structural weight of the overall construction.

There was an understanding that the house would be easy to clean and maintain, and well ventilated in view of the number of cats (18) and dogs (2). We continued to detail the external enclosure in a light steel frame with expanded metal mesh; creating a feeling of lightness and airy-ness, and visibility which did not intrude into the privacy of the home. The spaces for the human owners are enclosed within more traditional construction of brick and plaster.

Response

We changed the entrance to the house from the front to the centre of the house, entering through a covered landscaped court. Entering into the centre of the house meant that the habitable rooms can placed at the four corners of the floor plan - where they have views and privacy. The living and dining space is central to the activities of this house - it is an indoor space with an outdoor component; the screened terrace that extends into the garden where the steel mesh doors are opened. The kitchen and toilet are retained in their original position with the new toilets stacked on top of the existing ones to ease piping connections. A small courtyard is carved out of the building envelope next to the kitchen, to provide cross ventilation, and house water tanks and pumps.

The upstairs floor plan is almost identical to the ground floor, with one difference where the kitchen is replaced by a studio and work space. It overlooks the courtyard which helps to ventilate the space and provides a secondary source of natural light. The family space upstairs is mostly for the feline family, it is where they are housed and fed, sleep and play, etc.

CAPTIONS

3. *The house uses only 5 major materials - concrete, steel, aluminium and glass, brick.*
4. *Cats live on the first floor...*
5. *while dogs live on the ground floor, and the humans live where the cats let them.*
6. *This explains the double gables which were used to great advantage in creating tall vaulted ceilings for the upstairs rooms.*

7

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We initially had a more dynamic architectural outlook for the house - but the local authorities required us to emulate the existing pitched roof-scape of the neighbourhood. This explains the roof-form of the new house; the double gables running along the length of the house. We used this to our great advantage in creating tall vaulted ceilings for the upstairs rooms, adding again to the overall lightness of the house.

The construction budget was very small despite the relatively large floor areas; the floor finish is cement render and the soffits of concrete slabs are left unfinished. There are small areas of extravagance such as the suspended steel stairs (easier to clean under) against a backdrop of bare red brick (we retained the existing party wall and built an independent structure front of it). Otherwise the house is an exercise in restraint, using only 5 major materials - concrete, steel, aluminium and glass, brick. The old roof tiles were re-constructed as the front gate post.

The owners moved at the end of 2019, and appear to have settled into their routine. The cats live upstairs separated by a steel mesh screen from the dogs who live downstairs; the humans live in the rooms when they are allowed (by the cats).

END

CAPTIONS

7. *Local authorities required us to emulate the existing pitched roof-scape of the neighbourhood.*
8. *A simple brief to carve out zones for humans to coexist with 20 animals was still made possible and relevant, turning the space into a home for all.*

Location	:	**Taman Salak Selatan, Kuala Lumpur**
Client	:	**Mike and Winnie**
Principal Use	:	**Residence**
Architect	:	**Minwee Architect**
Project Principal	:	**Wee Hii Min**
Project Team	:	**Lee Peng Hui, Ileana Quiroz, Sean Wee**
Design Period	:	**3 months**
Construction Period	:	**12 months**
Date of Completion	:	**Oct 2019**
Site Area	:	**265sqm**
Floor Area	:	**360sqm**
Project Cost	:	**RM800,000**
Construction Company	:	**Chew Heng Yip CTL Building Culture Sdn Bhd**
Civil Engineer	:	**CJ Consult**
Photography	:	**Michael Wong, Sean Wee**

Gene's Outlet Hair Salon

by J Hous Studio

J HOUS STUDIO was established by Joyce Wong after her tenure at Design Network Architects in 2017. With her experience abroad, she is well known in Sarawak for her adoption of unconventional design approaches and meticulous detailing. Aside from interior design, J HOUS STUDIO also provides architectural design, design and build and consultation services. Design-wise, their mastery lies in wabi-sabi and minimalistic style.

DESIGN STATEMENT

This is the second hair salon that the client owns in Kuching. From the experience of his first hair salon, he was very clear that he wanted this salon to have Japanese feel. He wanted the story of a busy day in the hair salon to be openly seen by passers on the street.

We responded with an interior design scheme based a wabi-sabi concept of imperfect beauty; using raw unfinished materials contrasted with refined touches of opulence. Raw cement flooring in sharp contrast to the matt metallic silver wall panels between the mirrors is an example of how our idea of delineation is carried out.

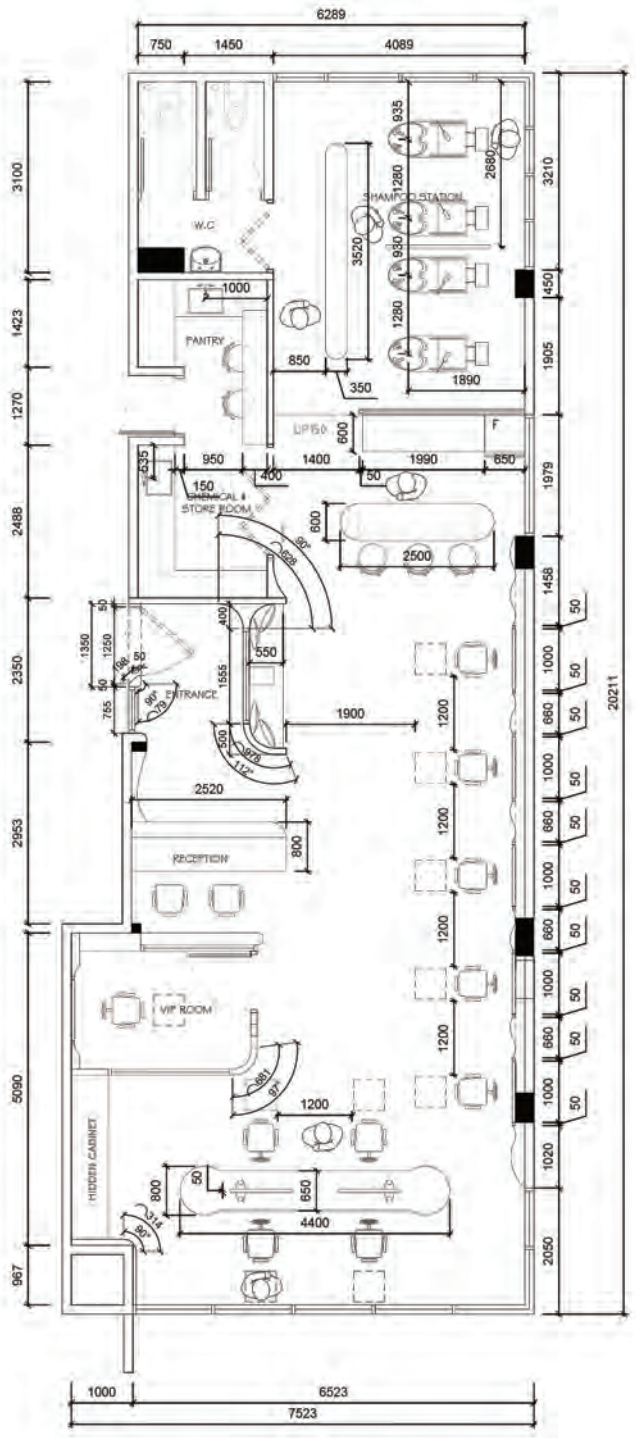
The whole space is lit with indirect lighting from the egg-shaped ceiling that corresponds to the curvy wall panels giving the customers a feeling of relaxation and healing. We used fluted glass with black steel framing as a partition to separate the hair wash area so that natural light can filter through while maintaining privacy. The movements of the people behind it presents a continual shadow play - a silent drama entertaining us while we are beautified and re-invented.

END







1 FLP **FIXTURE & FURNITURE LAYOUT PLAN**
GENE'S WORK SALON

Client Name	: Gene's Outlet Hair Salon
Size	: 1500sf
ID	: J HOUS STUDIO
ID contractor	: J HOUS STUDIO
Ceiling construction	: Mercury J.L
M&E services	: Tang Multi Purpose
Masonry and painting	: W&T Builders
Fluted panel, ripple glass and decorative glazing	: Living Objects
Project type	: Commercial Retail

Michael Hansmeyer & Benjamin Dillenburger
Digital Grotesque – generated by algorithm. 3D printed out of sandstone.

In your opinion, will Architects be replaced by AI in the future? What can we do to preserve the role of Architects?

Written by Ar. Ng Chee Wee

I don't think AI will ever replace architects, just like AI will never fully replace doctors, artists, even engineers.

Architecture is a creative cultural product. It involves rationality – which computers and AI can do very well, but also irrationality and thinking outside the box. It requires the architect to draw on his or her personal experiences and emotional response, which is very difficult if not impossible to replicate in a computer.

Some aspects of architectural work may be taken over by AI in the foreseeable future – e.g. production of drawings, 3D modeling, simulations, etc. These tasks are based more on logical processes, and one can imagine that as computers and software advances, more and more of these tasks can be automated. With more adoption of BIM software, especially among the allied professions, it is foreseeable that computers will be able to handle the coordination of services through layering and analysis of drawings at much greater speed and accuracy.

Another area that AI may become very useful is in checking for compliance. As most of the rules and regulations are rules-based and therefore can be divided into systematic and logical checklists, it is definitely possible for an advanced AI system to handle. AI could serve as the first filter, with the more complex and ambiguous issues to be flagged for further checking. This will speed up the approval process, which is often bogged down as the checkers are overloaded.

I remember a podcast I listened to recently about the development of the Spread Sheet Computer Programme – now commonly known as Excel. It was first developed by a Harvard Business School student Daniel Bricklin in 1978. He built it into Visicalc – the first electronic spread sheet programme. It revolutionized the accounting industry, and most other industries that rely on computers. Before VisiCalc – accounts clerks had to calculate and update spread sheet tables by hand. It was an ardous and time-consuming task which took days if not weeks on complex calculations. When VisiCalc arrived – many thought it would wipe out the accounting profession – and indeed it decimated the jobs of accounts clerks. But it did not wipe out accountants. It took away the mundane tasks of manual calculations and updates – and allowed the profession to handle higher volumes of work, and also more complex calculations and analysis. In fact many of the financial instruments that we take for-granted today would not be possible without the electronic spread sheet. The lesson here is that the nature of the job changed with new technology – but it did not wipe out the profession.

The AI field is a very complex one that requires high levels of intellect and expertise. For the general public, it is quite hard to wrap our heads around it. That is why there is a lot of misconceptions about it. True AI systems that are self-aware, the likes of what we see in science fiction and sci-fi movies does not exist yet and may not exist for a very long time into the future. And that is just as well – because true AI may one day take over the World!

The types of AI that are available now are usually very advanced computers which use brute force to solve complex problems - like IBM's Deep Blue that famously beat Kasparov in Chess, or more recently Machine Learning and Neural Networks. Machine Learning mimics the human mind by developing code that can learn from a vast pool of data. Neural Network codes mimic the structure of the brain – by using thousands or millions of nodes that are interconnected, which can be "trained" to form connections which amplify the processing power. Don't ask me how they work as I am no computer scientist, but these technologies – although very advanced, are still considered to be in their infant stages.

While true AI may be many years in the future, there are some recent developments which offer some very promising and exciting possibilities for architects:

Parametric Architecture

In recent years as architects get more comfortable with computers – Parametric Architecture has emerged as one dominant force in shaping architectural design. If you are interested in how computers can help to shape the future city and architectural landscape, google "Parametric Architecture" and there are lots of links to many interesting articles and projects to explore. Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel and Santiago Calatrava are some of the big name architects who have used parametric design in their projects.

Automation of Construction

CAD/CAM has been used in building projects since the 1950s. Advanced fabrication technologies such as CNC machines and prefabrication have no doubt revolutionize the construction process. But currently the installation is still mainly done by hand.

New generation of construction robots may change this. Robot bricklayers, plasterers, assemblers could potentially replace human labourers and even deliver higher quality of work. When that happens, we no longer have to lament over the poor workmanship of plastering etc. that is often the bane of existence for architects in Sarawak – if not the whole of Malaysia.

3D Printing

3D printing of buildings is probably the most exciting new technology in construction. This technology is advancing quite rapidly – from small prototypes in the beginning we now have reached buildings of up to 2 storeys. There is no reason why a 3D printing machine mounted on a tower crane cannot be used to 3D print a highrise building. I believe this is a building revolution waiting to happen.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, don't be too caught up with the AI that you see in TV and movies. True AI that is indistinguishable from a real human – is probably decades if not centuries away. The role of the architect has been eroded more by the architects' own actions than the advancement of AI. Over the years, architects in US, Australia and even Europe have seen their roles and scope diminish. Project Managers, Building Surveyors, and even Quantity Surveyors have taken over much of the traditional scope of architects. This is because many architects have decided that they only want to do the creative part of the profession, and do not want to be bothered with the nitty-gritty work of project management, costing and compliance. Once these responsibilities which used to be central to the profession have been chipped away, it would be very difficult to win them back. That is why PAM has been very adamant about preserving the central role of the architect as the Lead Consultant for building projects – but that means that we have to be willing to do all the hard work of project administration, cost estimates, compliance, etc. that are just as crucial to the success of a project - not just design.

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Image 1. ***Michael Hansmeyer & Benjamin Dillenburger*** *– Digital Grotesque – generated by algorithm. 3D printed out of sandstone.*
Image 2 - 5 Parametric Architecture
Image 6 - 7 3D Printing & Digital Fabrication
Image 8 - 9 Construction Robots

Excursion

The best way to know a city is to walk her streets.

Armed with that thought and a faint memory of Kevin Lynch's The Image of the City - we headed off with 40 students in tow, walking from the Pullman Hotel to their project site. Along the way, we aimed to point out EDGES and how they differed from PATHS, and how NODES are quite distinct from LANDMARKS (although some nodes are also landmarks, and vise versa). We also talked about how landmarks are not always built elements, or prominent structures in the urban landscape - a favourite eating place can be a social landmark such as the Open Air market, which was a landmark from my school days; stopping there for a drink before heading home on a public bus. It was also a node as the bus terminal was next to the market. All the while, the fire lookout tower loomed high above the market roofs - it is one of a pair of fire lookout towers (it's companion is at the end of Jalan Padungan). These two towers defined the extent of Kuching town and her DISTRICTS for many years; the Main Bazaar, Chinatown, India Street, the Golden Triangle, and the Administrative Centre.

Since the walk was expected to take about 90 minutes (in the rain) - we devised a 'walking' quiz; many of the answers can be found during our excursion. some of the questions are:

- **Where would you find Corinthians in Kuching?**
  This one was to make sure they remembered their lessons from Architecture History - I read that this building was originally designed as an Art Gallery (perhaps for the Ranee Sylvia?)

- **Get a mehndi tattoo.**
  This one is part of the immersive experience.

- **Why is it called Wayang Street?**
  The companion structure to the temple is often overlooked, we wanted them to see hidden urban patterns and links.

- **What's the local name for KaiJoo Lane, and why?**
  Many place and street names were given based on original features, buildings or people of the place; Upper China Street was known as (大井巷) my mom still refers to Bampfylde Road as (水池路) or Water Reservoir Road.

While the quiz was conducted like a game, it taught the students to delve beneath the surface to uncover history and stories which might guide and enrich their design narrative. It is also the type of learning that you have, when you are not aware that you are learning, hopefully it teaches them to be intuitive in their design response.

We shall see.

Min

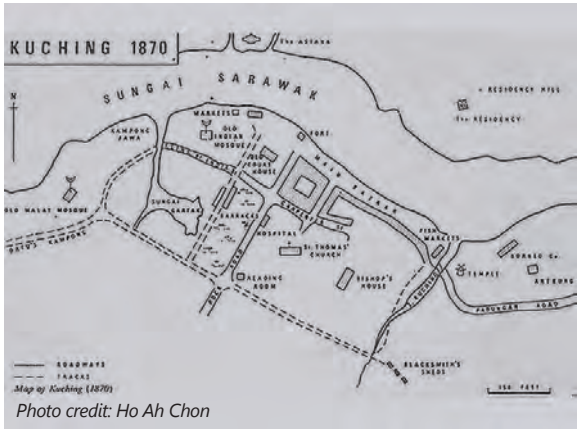


Photo credit: Ho Ah Chon

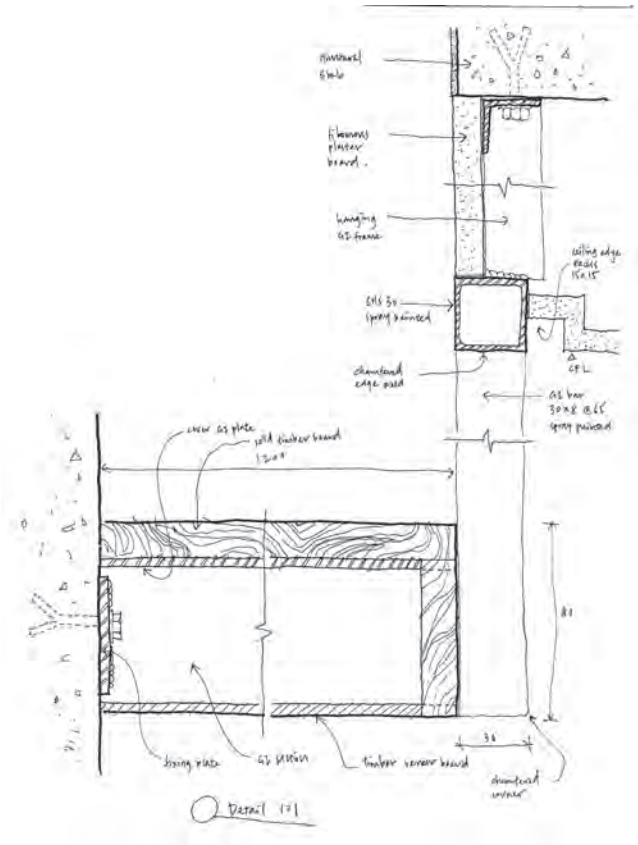
The sketches in this article are a result of excursions of a different nature; the sketch-crawl.

I think it is related to the 'pub-crawl' where people visit as many pubs or bars as possible within a designated time, stopping to have several drinks at each place. A sketch crawl works much the same way, with sketches 'collected' along the way. I often map out a route through my neighbourhood or someone else's (when I am traveling) and have my own sketch-crawl; recording vignettes of life there.

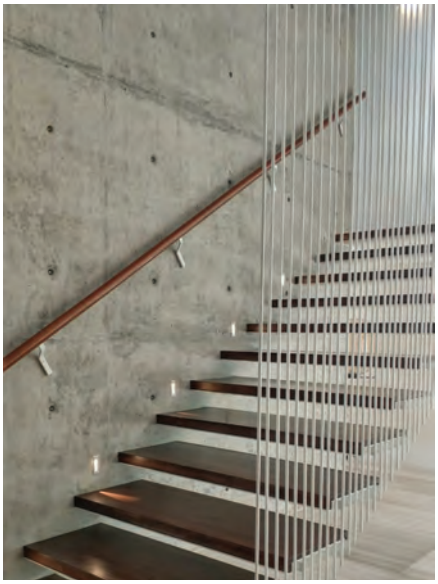
Each sketch usually takes 10-15 minutes, to capture the main forms and some details to be finished afterwards.

#talkingdrawings

Architects and designers sketches drawn on scraps of paper, cardboard and back of envelopes with the primary intention of conveying an idea to a colleague or a builder.



"In contrast to the heavy rustic concrete wall, the stair was imagined like a 'floating screen', light, translucent and refined. "



Lee Cherng Yih *is not interested in solving problem, but designing one.*

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