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'MODERN-PAVILION' HOUSE IN BALI REDEFINED
A 'LONDON TOWNHOUSE' IN SELETAR HILLS
NEW/OLD KL HOUSE WITH GREEN AMBITIONS
WINNING WORKS—A CONCRETE PITCH, A GREAT BRICK WALL

high on the heels of grunge appeal
[LADY] ARCHITECT'S HOUSE IN BANGSAR KL
SEKSAN'S SEKEPING IPOH AND PENANG

PAN PACIFIC HOTEL REOPENS ANEW
ART? AT GILLMAN BARRACKS
YAYOI KUSAMA—LOVING LUIS VUITTON

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a lady architect's house

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KENNETH CHEONG

Red patent leather stilettoes dangle wantonly off seven inches of mild steel brackets holding up rough thick slabs of recycled timber that forms a book shelf anchored from the ceiling. The tart scent of lemon grass wafts through the entire house, mixing with the caustic aroma redolent of freshly cast concrete. This is the abode and personal test lab of Farah Azizan of Studio Bikin.



Nestled within a neighbourhood of row houses dating back from the late 60s, the Kurau House by Farah Azizan of Studio Bikin is an idiosyncratic work in progress. From the front façade, it terminates the row of two-storey terrace houses unassuming. Left totally untouched, the façade tells the story of previous inhabitants before Farah's acquisition of the property. Even the two original television antennas were left in its original state protruding from the roof and upper floor balcony.

A strip of green lawn traces the boundary of the original front fencing wall. Set back into the property, a textured wall of salmon-pink broken-clay brick provides privacy from prying eyes where once the entrance car porch stood. A flimsy textured wall of off-form concrete hints on an entrance door behind.

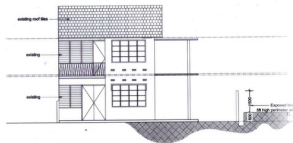
Turning the corner, a different story unfolds – a story of deft hands at handling the heaviness of concrete. Silvers of concrete are treated like the lightest of materials suspended from pilots on the side façade. Deep overhangs and extensive glazing breathe lightness to the materiality of concrete. Burnt orange folding timber doors opening into deep open verandah imparts barbs to the grey palette of the façade.

The neighbourhood itself is going through a metamorphosis of rapid gentrification propagating an aesthetic of weathered in-situ off-form concrete and

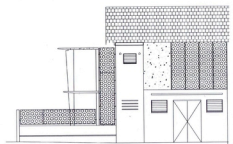
walls of fair-face clay bricks webbed with creepers. This aesthetic is synonymous with an architectural language or some might say 'movement' peculiar to Malaysia. It comes to no surprise that Farah trained in Sekisan Design, the design studio of one of the originators of the 'Third World Aesthetic' movement.

A matured Mango tree sits prominently in the centre of the raised car porch on the new façade. The branches of the Mango tree reaches for the ceiling of the covered verandah on the first floor to puncture holes in the concrete plane of the reinforced concrete flat roof. Scarpa-esque concrete cubes dance from car porch to the polished concrete deck below leading to the main entrance of the house. Mild-steel sliding grilles become the only physical barrier to open into the living room. According to Farah, the grilles with pretty floral motifs were salvaged from the original perimeter fencing and were retrofitted into sliding doors. From the living room, the view out towards the private garden is terminated by a rubble wall of salmon hued broken bricks. The bricks were salvaged from demolished walls from inside the house. The use of the broken bricks was necessitated by practicality rather than a whim of aesthetics – a practical solution to keep the cost of disposing construction waste down, and at the same time to reduce the cost of construction material delivered on site.





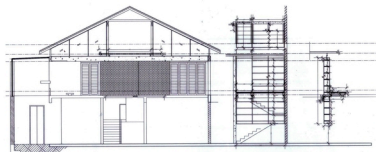
FRONT ELEVATION



BACK ELEVATION

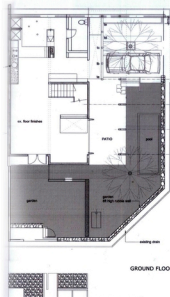


SIDE ELEVATION



LONG SECTION

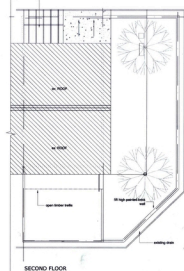
STEEL BOOKCASE SHELF DETAIL



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

the solution is not a courtyard

The typical solution in terrace house renovations is almost always the insertion of the courtyard as a source of natural light and ventilation from which rooms feed off. The Kurau House is not a courtyard house per se, but an abundance of light and air flow freely into a double-storey height space in the wet kitchen through a wall of salvaged mild-steel grilles that open to the service lane at the back.

To fully embrace tropical living, Farah has intentionally limited the use of glazing to keep the house naturally ventilated and as porous as possible – most of the openings and thresholds are permanently open or permeable. Sliding doors are kept entirely porous with the use of only the grilles as physical barriers. On the upper floor, folding timber doors are pulled back should there be a need allow light in – reminiscent of the tropical way of living in a traditional Malay house.

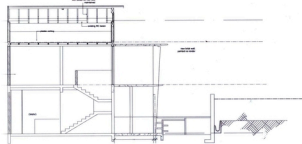
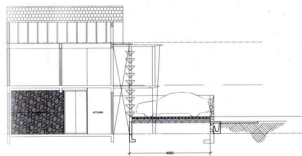
progressive renovation

The Kurau House is in a constant state of progressive renovation. Distinct features of the old house were retained, such as the original vent blocks to the kitchen, interior finishes, and balustrade details; all unique to the time when the house was constructed in the late 60s. The rest of the house will evolve with time as this is a personal work in progress according to Farah.

On the ground floor, the walls of the original guestroom were torn down to create one open space for living, eating, cooking and cleaning. The original bathroom on the ground floor is the only room which was left intact and untouched. A book shelf made from recycled timber becomes a sculptural screen that plunges from the first floor to the living room. Thick slabs of timber set on custom made steel rollers slide open on tracks to open the void to the work space above.

Key to the robust aesthetic of the Kurau House is Farah's penchant for shopping in junk yards around the region for potential construction materials. A heavy loth marble workshop is fixed onto customised stainless steel wheels in the kitchen. According to the Farah, she chanced upon the elongated marble piece while trawling through a junk yard in Joh. Originally salvaged from Gopeng, the soft matt finish of marble was achieved through years of use as the marble top in the local fish market.

For her dining table, the angular connection joint of a timber roof truss becomes a utilitarian hook for hanging bags. The thick heavy robust timber is set on logs fashioned from BRC rods left over from projects and are attached to mild steel wheels.



SECTIONS





On the first floor are the bedrooms and Farah's home office. The roof cavity to the original house was exposed with a glass box inserted into the loft space. The glass box is the only room in the entire house which is capable of being sealed air tight and air conditioned. Farah uses the loft space as a TV room and with the airconditioning switched on, it becomes an insulator of heat from the roof.

Two bathrooms in the house are located on the first floor of the house which Farah uses depending on her mood. The long sinuous brass tap hints that this is the inner sanctum of a lady. Heavy concrete balls become the taps to her cast in-situ concrete bathtub. A circular mirror bought off the rack from Ikea was set into a steel plate to become a window to open towards a view of the top of the mango tree.

Farah is in the phase of adding a second layer to the original renovations of the house, having lived in it for over six months. In the second phase of the renovation process, vent blocks were laid onto the floor of the wet kitchen. Farah intends to plant a tree and grass in between the concrete pavers right in the middle of her kitchen.

architectural painting, tapestry and pattern making

What is perhaps most striking about the interior of the house is the use of colour and pattern fashioned from the architectural finishes and materials. Stripped paint is painted over, sometimes with the linear lines of exposed wiring running over. Concealed wiring is painted over with cement render, rendering strokes of grey

concrete on colour. In the open living dining area, a border of a light blue speckled with the exposed strata of paintwork becomes an architectural Rottko to a pastel hued rectangle.

On the kitchen walls, cool polished concrete contrasts with the textured geometrical patterns leftover from the impression of tile adhesive. On another concrete wall, a web-like filigree pattern stretches across the entire surface. The pattern according to Farah was an experiment dating back from her days at the Architectural Association – a practical solution to facilitate the removal of concrete formwork. A plastic sheet is lined in the plywood formwork and pinched to create the pattern.

On the floor, the original mosaic tiles become a tapestry of colour. With the walls removed, the different colours for the different rooms in the house are revealed and are sewed together with concrete infill like an architectural patchwork. The white mosaic tiling to the staircase is dotted with dainty multi-hued tiles.

As a second generation of the 'Third World Aesthetic' movement, Studio Bikin is still feeling its way around things. Farah maintains that the house as a work in progress is in constant flux as she finds her own footing. Future additions are constantly being planned and shelved. As a work in progress, the Kurau House allows Farah to test the limits and flesh out new ideas; ideas which her clients would conventionally find difficult to imagine. +