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# old space new volumes

BY KENNETH CHEONG | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADELA ASKANDAR

The dilemma of any urban renewal or restoration exercise has always been that, to erase the past equates to erasing the charm of the urban fabric. Where Sekeping Kong Heng attempts to keep everything intact, peeling paint and all, Plan B @ Kong Heng by Studio Bikin attempts a transparent insertion as an intervention.



## T

he charm of Jalan Panglima in Ipoh Old Town lies in the faded Neo-Classical facades of the shophouses that line the street whispering of a bygone era of wealth during the tin mining boom at the turn of the 19th century. The richly time textured facades belie a wealth of eateries specialising in gastronomic delights from a time when

food was prepared by hand from scratch.

Complementing Restoran Ipoh Kong Heng (the namesake of the new development), Plan B @ Kong Heng is located just next door in a converted space that was a disused furniture warehouse, and offers a gentrified dining option to the Ipoh institution famed for pork satay and Ipoh hor fun.

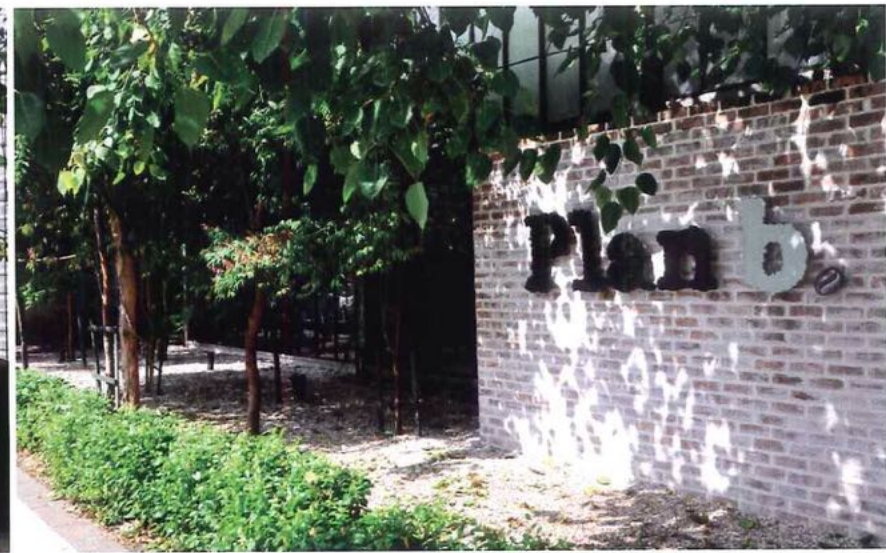
When Farah Azizan and Adela Askandar of Studio Bikin first visited the site, the green painted steel column of the superstructure holding up the metal deck roofing had faded into a sublime pale mint. The mosaic flooring was worn off in parts tracing the partitions of long gone rooms within the space. At the rear of the warehouse, a banyan tree had taken root. A central linear jacked roof with a strip of clerestory windows orientates the volume in two sections and floods the space with light. These were elements which were important to keep, stressed Farah and Adela passionately.

### transparent interventions

Farah and Adela took to task the delicate operation of the transformation of the warehouse with a process of reviewing and auditing to assess what to retain, with the objective of retaining as much of the original structure and elements of the site as possible. To take advantage of the double-height open space, the new insertions were planned around the linear central jacked roof, resulting in the insertion of two rectangular boxes into the volume to emphasize the height of the central jacked roof. These boxes naturally informed of the programme of the spaces.

'In trying to maintain the steel superstructure of the original warehouse and keep the building works to a bare minimum, we tried to keep the linear central jacked roof section clear of interventions, inserting a more solid block that housed the services on one side, and a more transparent one housing the airconditioned dining area on the opposite side.'



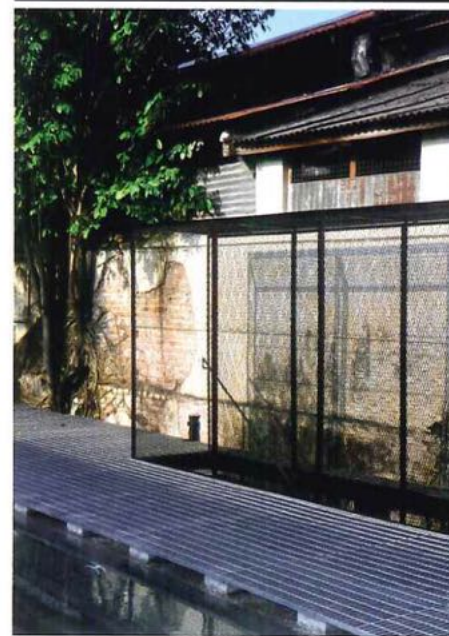
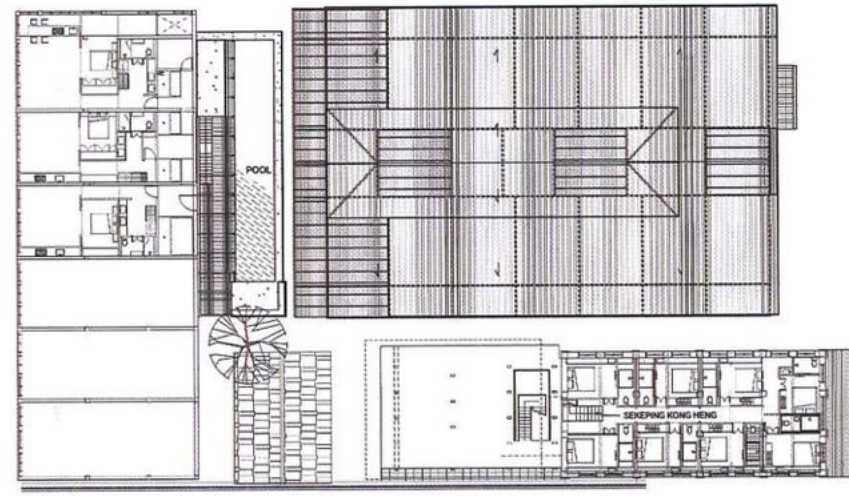
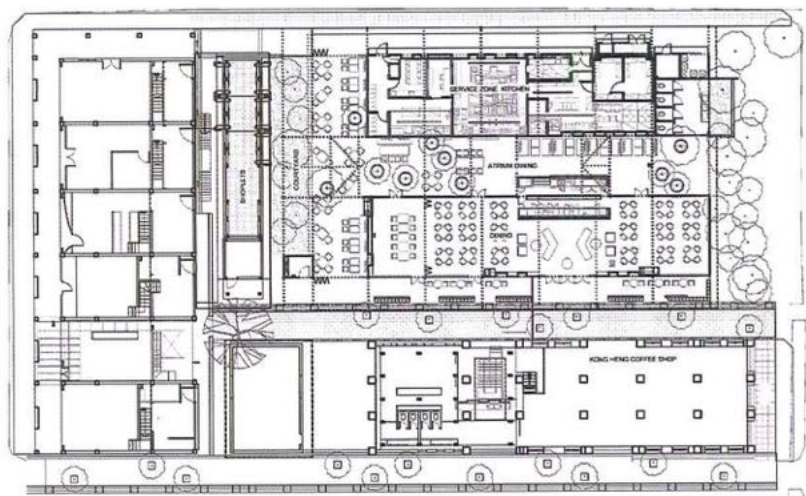
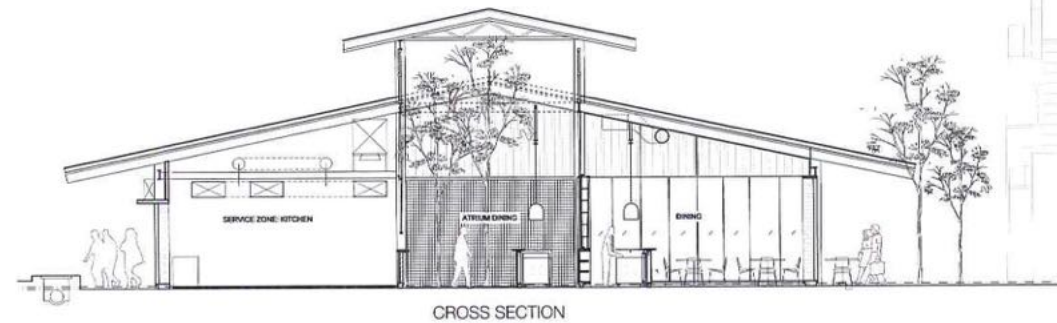


### scales of space

From one<sup>st</sup> volume, the scale of the warehouse space is dramatically transformed with these new additions. The central linear courtyard affords a dining experience in an airy, naturally ventilated, high-ceiling environment. The glass box offers a more intimate space. The roof cavity is lined with polycarbonate sheets on both sides of the boxes. At night these sheets are back-lit as light strips which trace the linear courtyard.

As much as possible, vertical partitions were kept transparent. Single-layer brick walls are the only solid partition material used. The brick walls were designed in a zigzag pattern navigating the sea of steel columns. The zigzag pattern was intentional and adds to the structural integrity of the wall, according to Farah. The pale salmon hued brick walls were treated a plaster wash to complement the 'original' mint coloured steel columns which were merely cleaned of debris.

The existing banyan tree marks where the toilets are. A concrete trough looks into a courtyard shaded by a canopy the foliage affords.



### organic evolution

The Kong Heng development is constantly organically evolving. In addition to Plan B, the scope of work evolved to include an elevated concrete lap pool attached to the expansion of Sekeping Kong Heng. The Shopplex, consisting of four shops, is tucked in the cavity beneath the elevated pool concealing the back alley of a row of shophouses that the pool flanks against.

A staircase connecting to the pool above was fashioned from leftover steel sections from the warehouse superstructure. The staircase leads to an expanded metal box opening to an expanded metal deck platform which allows light into the alleyway below.

In contrast to the restoration works below, the pool deck offers a third experience. Where Sekeping Kong Heng is an experience

of immersion in the old and Plan B an intervention into the old, the pool offers a platform to observe the old – the roofscape of the clay roof tiles of the shop houses below.

### pleasures in the unmanufactured

As much as possible, surfaces were left untouched or unaltered. Farah and Adela passionately retained a painted steel door faded with the patina of age along the alleyway behind the Shopplex, finding beauty in the natural gradation of colour the exposed layers of paint revealed. Tinted with rust and moss, the rectangular block of colour is reminiscent of a Rothko. And just like a Rothko, with Plan B, it is not the colours which are important, it is the vibrancy between the colours which matter. +