

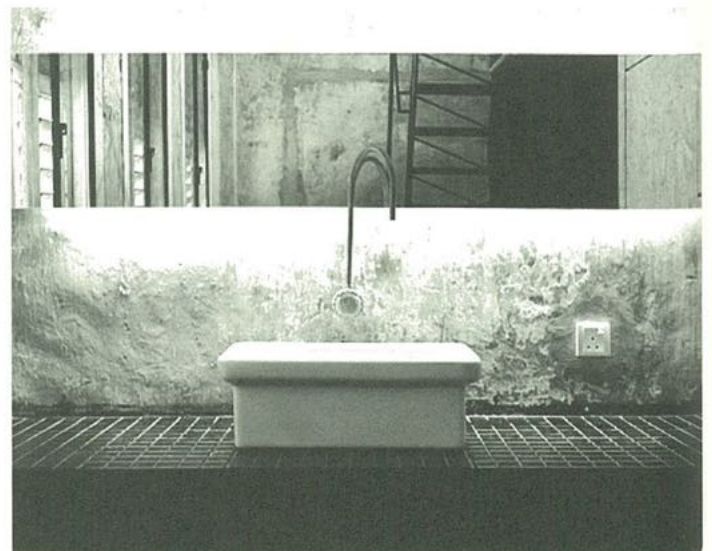


Adela Askandar, Farah Azizan

Studio Bikin

PARTNERS IN CREATION

Studio Bikin is a multidisciplinary practice established by Adela Askandar and Farah Azizan in 2011. Adela obtained her bachelor and masters degrees from University of Cambridge, while Farah attended the Architectural Association School and received her bachelor degree from Nottingham University. Their approach is centred on 'making' and establishing a close relation to the craft.



Q: Do you see architecture as a finished product or a process that grows in time?

Adela Askandar:

I think for us it is very much a process. A lot of our work is alteration and addition projects. We find that the transformation process was one of the more interesting aspects and it really demonstrates how architecture is a process and it can serve to transform a building, site, or a situation from a previous live to a new lease of life.

Farah Azizan:

I've had the honour of being able to work with Seksan for quite a long time as a landscape architect, even though I'm trained in architecture. Being in his practice was the first time that I realized that the work that we do is not finite. In architecture, when we want to express a certain detail, we are able to draw what we want in a scaled form, 1:20. But then, in landscape, how do we represent landscape in a graphical format? That was when I realized that it is organic. You have this tree that you want to plant, but it's represented in a circle and a dot, and it's not how it's going to look like in real life. No, it's live. There is soul to this thing we are designing, and this soul will continue to change as it grows. We see it in the way moss grows up building walls and the way water changes colour if we don't replace it.

Q: What are the consequences of your approach towards your process or method of design?

Adela Askandar:

My previous experience at the practices before we started Studio Bikin was that we were very precious about our drawings, to a point where I felt it was almost a war situation between the architects and the builders. Eventually I left for a while and that allowed me to reset my approach. Farah came from a completely opposite practice background in Seksan Design that had a very organic element. I think that's what makes our partnership interesting, because I had to let go of a lot of things, and Farah had to learn to discipline herself. We are precious about the design up to awarding of the contract, but then on-site the story might shift and change, and you might have to let go of certain things to solve problems on the site.

Farah Azizan:

When I first bought my own house—It's a crumbling 1950s house, really charming—I was just wanting to rebel against the notion of us being architects. I was like, I don't want walls, I don't want to paint my walls, I don't want to have railings. Of course things didn't work—our client fell down the stairs, my friends don't want to bring their children to the house because it's dangerous, there's no railings. There was no boundaries, no walls, no doors to the

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toilet. But eventually, as you grow older and you learn from the mistakes that you made, then you learn how to draw boundaries for your own self. I think this kind of extends to the work that you do for other people. You start to fight your impulse sometimes. As the bigger your projects grow and the more responsibility you have, the more consideration you have towards your client's needs.

But I always feel that you mustn't forget this spirit of play and your natural impulse. You probably have to tame it at some point, but that first impulse that you get is usually the lead that takes you on that journey. Then, it will guide you towards the kind of materials you want to use, and towards the kind of direction or form you want to take your building into. That tug of heart when you get a particular brief, for me, is the first step in moving forward.

I'm also thinking that the building process is also an exercise for our communication skills and to build up trust with our clients, contractors, and our *tukang* (craftsmen). When we first started with our line of furniture, we were dealing with *tukang* rattan, and this *tukang* rattan is as tough as the rattan itself—they're so used to making things their way for the past thirty or forty years. We come to them with a new idea, and every single rattan guy that we approached said no, until we finally manage to demonstrate by doing it ourselves and we bring it to them. Bit by bit you have to chip at their resistance. It takes time to build that trust, and I believe that you must have this persistence to communicate, so that you can start a process going. This is how we built a relationship with our *tukang*.

It's a very humbling process because it starts from our education and the Western ideal—every time you say architecture, I think of Leonardo da Vinci and that whole universal thing. We've been told that we sit on top and we look down on things, but actually you have to crouch down with the *tukang* who is building. That's how we are different from artists, who make the things themselves. For us architects and builders, we have to rely on the abilities of other people to realize our creations. So it is important that we are able to be part of the team.