

06

VEIL
HOUSE

LOCATION
HARTAMAS HEIGHTS
KUALA LUMPUR

DESIGN DIRECTOR
ADELA ASKANDAR

STUDIO BIKIN TEAM
BRYAN CHEE,
TIA AHMAD,
ADELA ASKANDAR
AND FARAH AZIZAN

ARCHITECT OF RECORD
NANIZAIN ARCHITECT

YEAR 2017



A JALI is an Indian term for a perforated stone or latticed timber screen, usually with a geometric pattern. It is a form of decoration that is common in Indo-Islamic Architecture. A similar device, the mashrabiya originates from Arabia. This too is a perforated screen wall fashioned from stone or timber used mostly in houses although sometimes in public buildings such as hospitals, inns, schools and mosques. Mashrabiya are found mostly in the eastern part of the Arab world, but they are also prevalent in Iraq, the Levant, Hejaz and Egypt. The earliest evidence of the mashrabiya dates back to the 12th century in Baghdad.

One of the major purposes of the jali and the mashrabiya is to provide privacy, an essential aspect of Islamic culture, but it also gives shade and protection from the sun, filters light and permits cooling breezes to enter a building by the venturi effect. One of the most famous examples of a jali is the Hawa Mahal (Palace of the Winds) in Jaipur built in 1799 with intricate latticework intended to allow royal ladies to observe everyday life and festivals celebrated in the street without being seen, since they had to obey rules which forbade them from appearing in public without face coverings. Both architectural devices are adopted in the Muslim world to afford privacy.



The principals of the mashrabiya and the jali were very much in the mind of the designer of the Veil House - Adela Askandar - when conceptualising the built form. The front façade of the house where the master bedroom is located is currently the only elevation that is overlooked but eventually the adjoining plots will be developed and privacy becomes a major consideration.

Adela Askandar (born Penang in 1974) is one half of a design practice known as Studio Bikin. She studied at Cambridge University and after graduating with a MA (Cantab) in architecture worked for two years with Lisa Shell Architects in London. Returning to Malaysia in 2002 she worked with Unit One Design and taught part-time at University Malaya as a design tutor before setting up Studio Bikin in 2011. Her fellow Director is Farah Azizan (born 1978) who studied architecture at Nottingham University and then at the AA in London where she graduated in 2004. Farah worked for Tonkin Liu in London and on her return to Malaysia joined the landscape practice of Ng Seksan where she worked for six years before founding Studio Bikin.

At Cambridge University there was an emphasis on theory and Adela was taught for one year (1999-2000) by the Czech-born architectural historian and theorist Dalibor Vesely, who was influential through his teaching and writing in promoting the role of hermeneutics and phenomenology as part of the discourse of architecture and of architectural design.

Adela visited India during her undergraduate studies and worked on earthquake resistant housing, visited Jaipur and studied the work of Laurie Baker in Trivandrum. That experience is doubtless the inspiration for 'veils' and 'screens'. Here, as in India, the porous screen or bris soleil is a response to climate and privacy, creating interstitial space.

The owners of the Veil House are a cardiologist and an investment analyst who studied in UK at the same time that Adela was at Cambridge. They remain friends and their residence is designed for their family of three children and includes a suite for grandparents. The open-plan ground floor is barrier free - that is to say without steps - something rarely found in Malaysian homes. The owners entertain at

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A veil is drawn over the private activities of the occupants of the dwelling

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A modest entrance delays the experience of enjoyment of the spatial quality of the open-plan interior

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The veil of precast concrete blocks is employed in a manner similar to an India *jali* to give privacy and to filter the sun

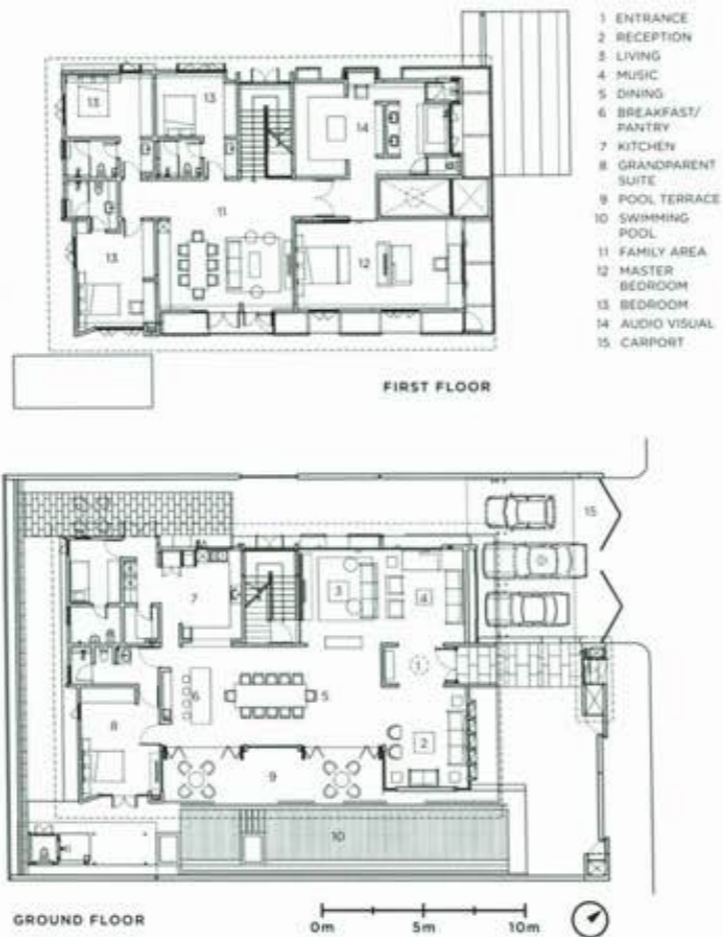




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Off-form concrete is employed as a robust backdrop to some exhilarating artwork

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The formal dining area overlooks the swimming pool

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The reception area, living room and music room are defined by furniture arrangements



home and emphasised the requirement for openness and connection to the poolside terrace. The lap pool extends along the southern boundary of the house and there is also a small outdoor gymnasium.

The overall form of the house is a simple two-storey rectangle with twin monopitch roofs that fills much of the site. The façade screens are constructed with custom-made concrete blocks designed by Studio Bikin and cast by Premier Building Material Sdn Bhd. There is a dramatic two-storey entrance lobby designed to encourage ventilation via the 'stack effect'. The interior finishes are a combination of concrete with vertical board marks and plastered walls. The designer refers to the concept as, "akin to an oyster shell – textured and protective on the outside and smooth and cool on the inside." The off-form concrete is of exceptionally high standard and forms the background to a collection of abstract modern art and a grand piano. At ground floor level there are polished off-white terrazzo floors and exquisite carpets.

The Veil House is a mature piece of architecture incorporating multiple levels of meaning. Adela notes that the 'individual style' of Studio Bikin has only surfaced in the last three years. "University is about finding yourself," she reflects, "but you can only do it through practice."





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Details of the minimalist steel staircase

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The ground floor stair lobby

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The reception area alongside the entrance functions as a *serambi*





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Upon entering the house there is a dramatic double-height light well



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Details of the elegant purpose-made fountains alongside the azure lap pool



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DESA
LIGHTWELL
HOUSE

LOCATION
TAMAN DESA,
KUALA LUMPUR

DESIGNERS
FARAH AZIZAN AND
ADELA ASKANDER
OF STUDIO BIKIN

ARCHITECT
OF RECORD
K. F. SHA ARCHITECT

YEAR 2016



THE Desa Lightwell House involves the total remodeling of the interior of a two storey mid-terrace house on a site where there is a significant fall from front to rear enabling a split-level solution. A small garden with a cluster of trees obscures the house frontage from the gaze of passers-by. The architecture is not apparent until one penetrates through this protective screen and a garden court to encounter a narrow but enormously tall (5m) entrance door. The effect of this manipulation of scale is beguiling and continues as one enters the house.

The interior elicits an involuntary gasp of wonder for light streams down from a northwest facing mansard roof light and two internal light wells that emphasise the depth of the house while other features, namely exposed structural roof beams and waist-height walls, emphasise the horizontal dimension. There is a dialogue between the vertical and the horizontal elements that is well balanced. The designer has inverted the functions of the house. The public areas of the house for entertaining guests, including a guest suite is on the upper ground level stretching from the front to rear of the plot while the most private areas namely two bedrooms,

bathrooms and a sitting area are at the lower ground level looking into the light wells.

The designer extols the honest use of materials, mainly off-form concrete, timber and brickwork in Stretcher and Flemish Bond. The main vertical circulation is a beautiful dogleg staircase that utilizes a series of polished concrete stringers separated by 12.5mm gaps. It is a successful experiment that questions the usual logic of a staircase as a series of horizontal treads attached to a single stringer or suspended by steel rods. A memory of the former staircase is etched on the plastered wall.

The two light wells reference an element found in the rowhouse typology throughout Southeast Asia. The light wells are in this case glazed at roof level to prevent rain ingress. Both light wells bring daylight to the lower ground floor level and have substantial trees that ascend towards the light and bring nature into the urban typology. The house is orientated roughly southeast to northwest so that the passage of the sun is captured by light and shadows cast on the walls and floor. The space has the quality of a loft apartment and it has good cross ventilation. At the rear of

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Daylight streams into the living areas from two light wells and a dormer window

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Two tall brick piers frame the entrance door. View from above

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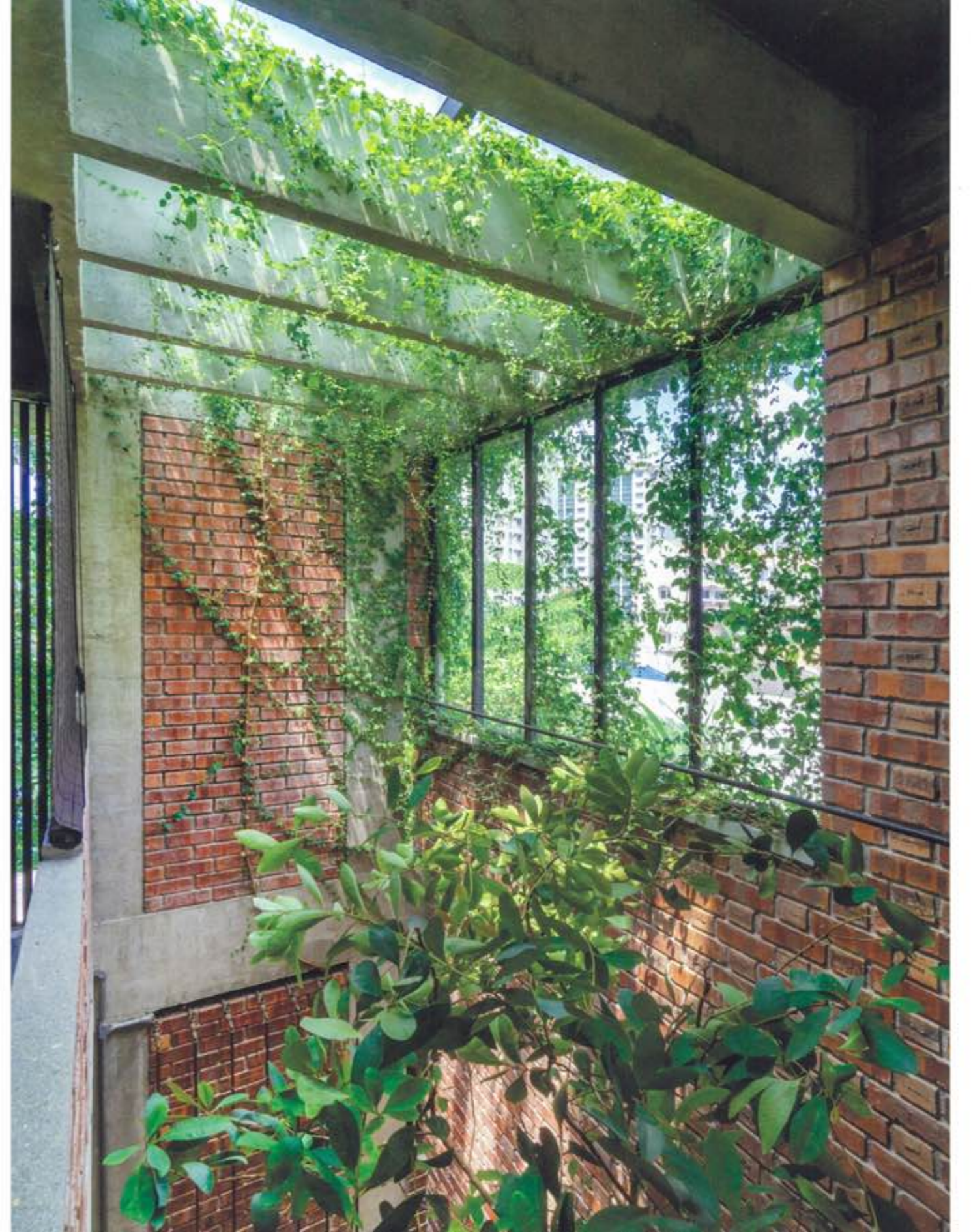
The enchanting brick-paved entrance courtyard

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Brick pillars frame the entrance door. View from below

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Vegetation flourishes in an incredibly beautiful light well above the rear courtyard





the house the land falls away precipitously below a cantilevered balcony with a reflexology surface. An entrancing but inaccessible garden has been planted on the slopes by the house owners for their visual pleasure and it provides a security barrier.

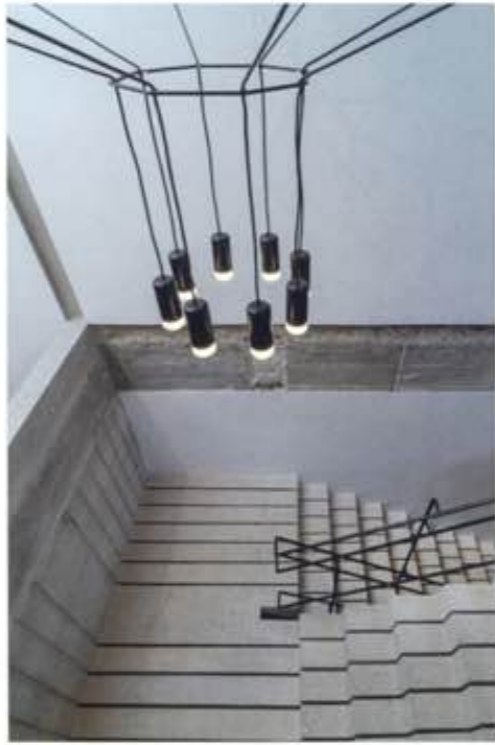
The designer of the house is Farah Azizan (b 1978), a BA graduate of Nottingham University School of Architecture in the UK. After graduation she pursued a one-year internship with GDP Architects in Kuala Lumpur where she was mentored by Kevin Mark Low who was at that time working with GDP. She credits Low with teaching her the basic principles of architecture or, 'what they don't teach you in architecture school'. She returned to the UK to complete her academic credentials at the AA School of Architecture in London (2004-2006). Having gained her Diploma she worked with Tonkin Liu before returning to Malaysia where she took up an appointment with landscape designer Ng Sek San. She worked with Ng for six years on projects such as the Lone Pine Hotel in Penang and the landscape of the PJ Trade Centre before setting up Studio Bikin with Adela Askandar in 2012. They are both in demand as guest critics in several Malaysian architecture schools.

Where adjoining rowhouses have sacrificed space at the front of the house to provide parking facilities here the designer has created a garden with a screen of rapidly maturing trees - evidence of Farah's background in landscape design gained while working with Ng Sek San. The trees provide privacy and the first floor living room looks northwest through the canopy to a community recreation park

The owners of the house, Pascal Yeong and Toto Ooi, are the proprietors of Café Café, a fashionable restaurant in Kuala Lumpur serving French cuisine in a setting that evokes 'Parisian chic and grandeur'. There is no hint of their day-job in the cool interior of the house and this is deliberate for they value a complete break when leaving work to return home.

On a relatively small site the challenge was to choreograph routes through the house that combine spatial surprises and delight. The use of two dramatic light wells is the clue to achieving an ambiance that is at once restful and life enhancing.

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Elements of the split level house such as the roof beams and trusses are retained and incorporated into the new interior



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The trace of a former staircase is retained and expressed in the plastered wall in the manner of a palimpsest

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Elegant light fittings compliment the fair-faced brickwork and off form concrete employed elsewhere

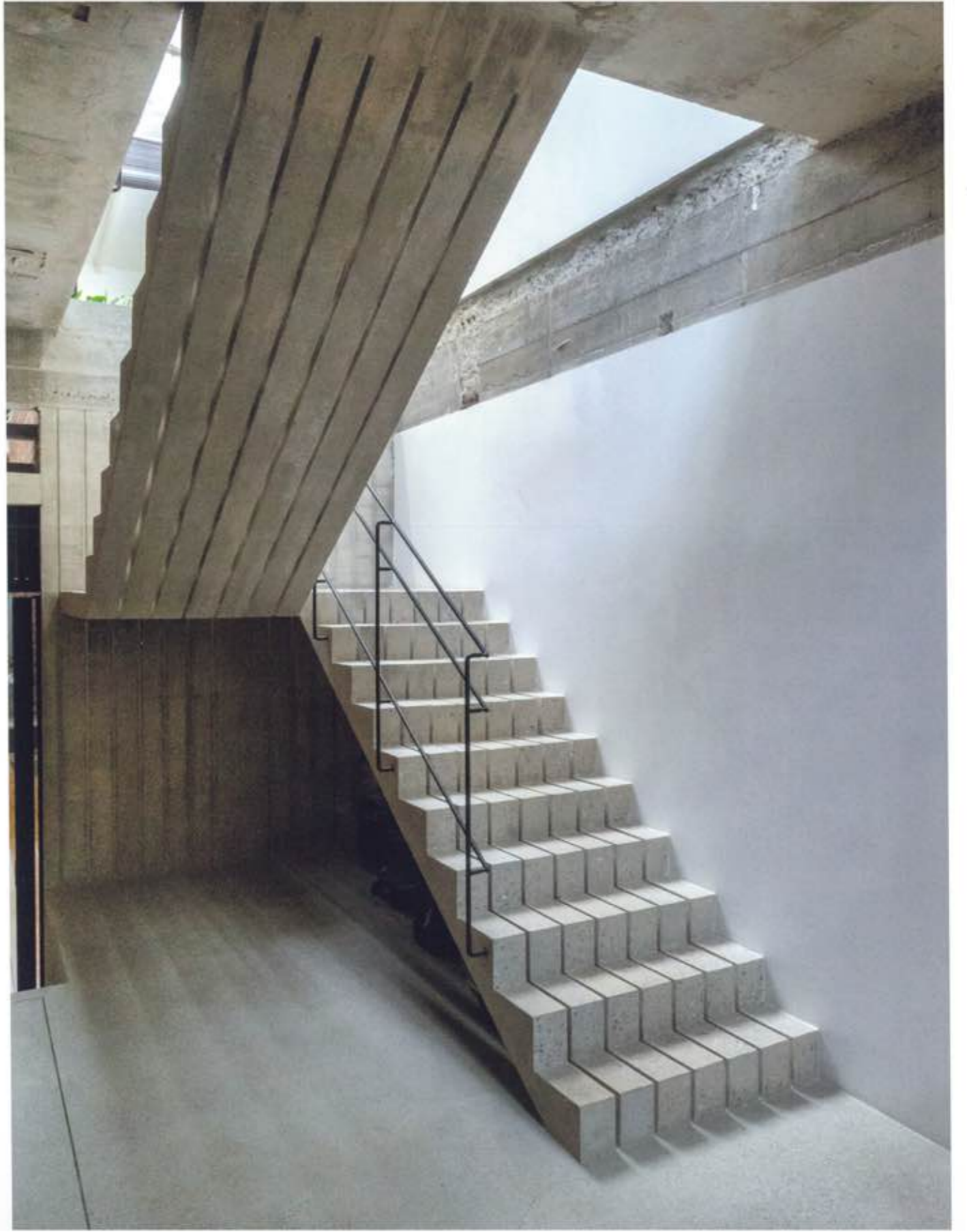


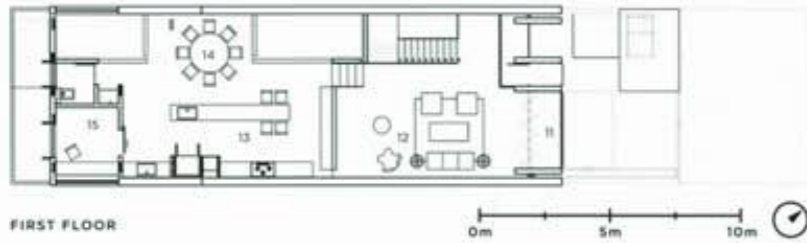
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A minimalist steel balustrade and meticulously detailed stair treads are testimony to the designer's skill

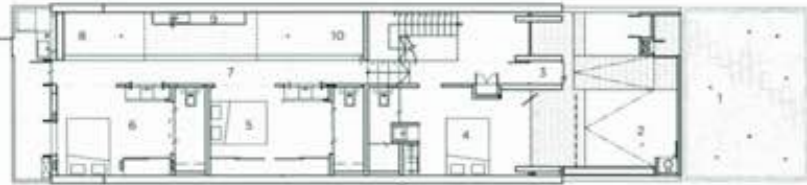
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Daylight illuminates the lower ground floor

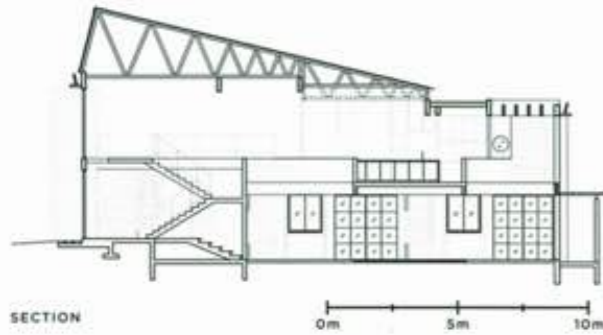




FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



SECTION

- 1 GARDEN COURT
- 2 GARDEN
- 3 MAIN DOOR
- 4 ENTRANCE
- 5 ENSUITE GUEST BEDROOM
- 6 ENSUITE BEDROOM 1
- 7 ENSUITE BEDROOM 2
- 8 CORRIDOR
- 9 COURTYARD 1
- 10 PANTRY
- 11 COURTYARD 2
- 12 BALCONY
- 13 LIVING AREA
- 14 KITCHEN
- 15 DINING AREA
- 16 STUDY ROOM

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The central light well illuminates the kitchen and dining area and penetrates to the lower courtyard

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The balustrade, the light fitting and the furniture demonstrate the sure hand of an accomplished designer

