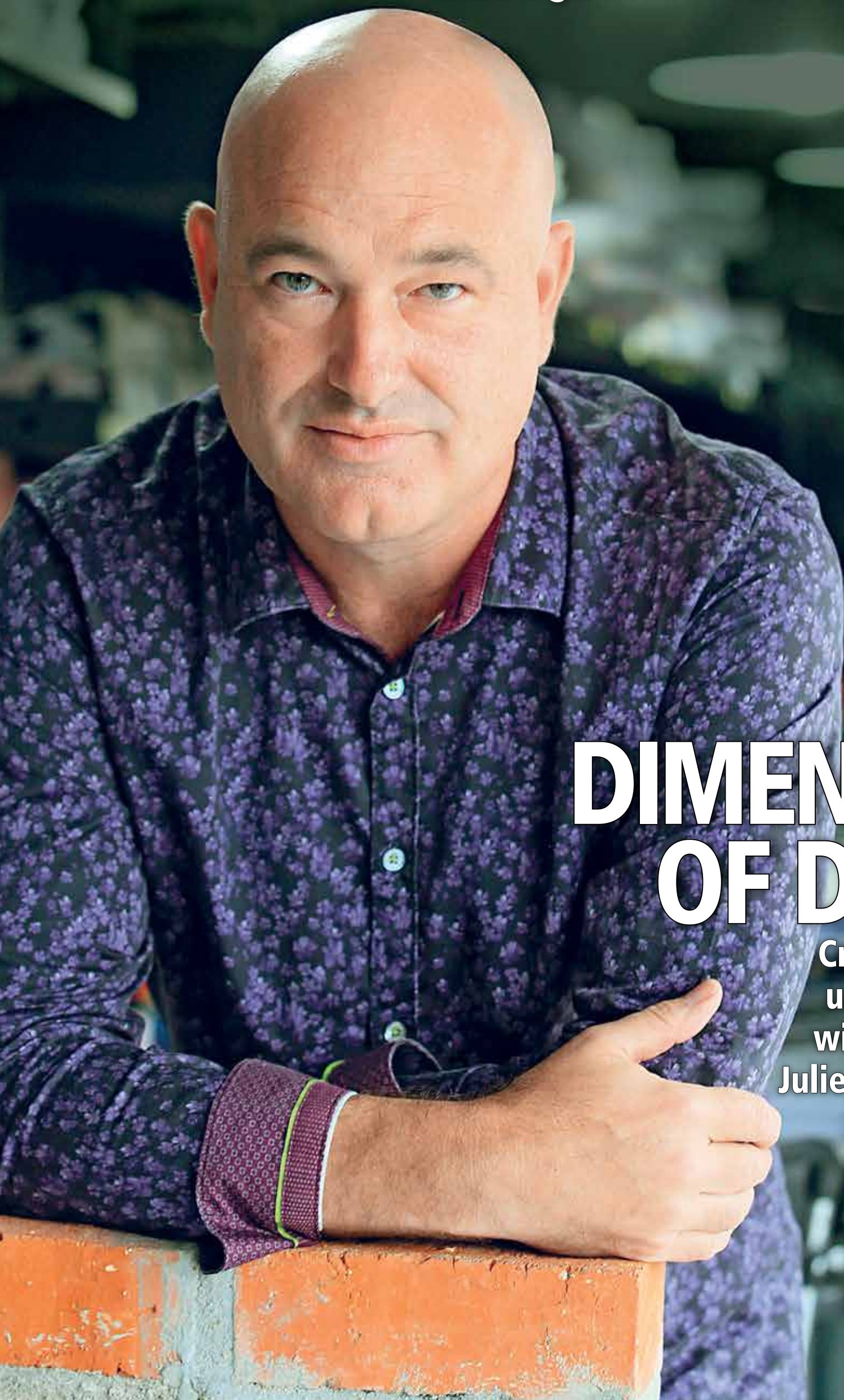


Living&Property

ISSUE 22

Enabling a better life

AUGUST 2016 | PP18562/08/2014(033965)



DIMENSIONS OF DESIGN

Crafting natural and
urban topographies
with Walrus Design's
Julien T Walker-Hodson

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Interesting times

THE year thus far has been the proverbial roller coaster ride of ups and downs, both within the property space and without, with more turbulent waters ahead for the ship of state as the impact of developments such as the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, Bank Negara Malaysia's revision of its overnight policy rate and other external factors resonate across the nation and economy.

With changing times comes opportunity, and as property often serves as the keystone driving the fortunes of the wealthy and influential, the prudent will leverage on the market's current reduced prices and favourable lending rates to expand their portfolios. Commercial shophouses and distressed properties represent the choicest picks for those in a position to snap them up, while the high-rise segment remains challenging in key hotspots.

In terms of design, landscape architects such as Walrus Design are taking their turn in the spotlight as developers continue to focus on townships along growth corridors extending from increasingly gentrified metropolitan zones. As well-crafted natural scenery

transitions from a luxury to a market standard, domestic players are well-advised to allocate generous spaces for greenery in their masterplans to benefit from its positive effect on appreciation rates.

Delving further into the trend, staff writer Ang Hui Hsien explores the roots of sustainability in Malaysia, along with the evolution of current benchmarks such as the Green Building Index. Not just a nod to compliance and environmentally-friendly practices, green buildings can improve the productivity of workers, with a recent study by the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health in the US estimating a doubling in cognitive performance.

Other stories in this issue of *Living & Property* include a behind-the-scenes look at domestic property education specialist SkyBridge International and its take on current prospects, a tour of Amsterdam's architectural traditions and an exclusive look at Tropicana Corp Bhd's latest launches. Till next month, here's to interesting times.

ALIFF YUSRI

Living&Property, Senior Writer
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Living&Property

is published by:

MW Magazines Sdn Bhd (1048577-T)

Corporate office:
No. 6, Jalan 19/1B, Section 19
46300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor

Distributed free via **Focus Malaysia, Anderson Analytics List and Editions Newsstand**

Facilities such as an infinity pool, cantilevered gym, and steam and sauna rooms present residents with numerous leisure options

Reach for the skies

Rising from the grandeur and greenery of its surroundings, SkyLuxe On The Park features lush, low-density lifestyles in homage to nature

| Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com

With prime acreage amidst Bukit Jalil's foremost recreational grounds, SkyWorld Development Sdn Bhd's SkyLuxe On The Park freehold development leverages on the Kuala Lumpur suburb's matured amenities and accessibility while offering its own premium blend of luxuriously appointed suites and lifestyle facilities catering for the sophisticated palates of contemporary consumers.

Comprising 477 serviced apartment units with built-up areas from 661 sq ft to 1,224 sq ft in two high-rise towers, the 1.85-acre project lives up to the developer's emphasis on experiential design with a concept revolving around the habitats native to tropical environments.

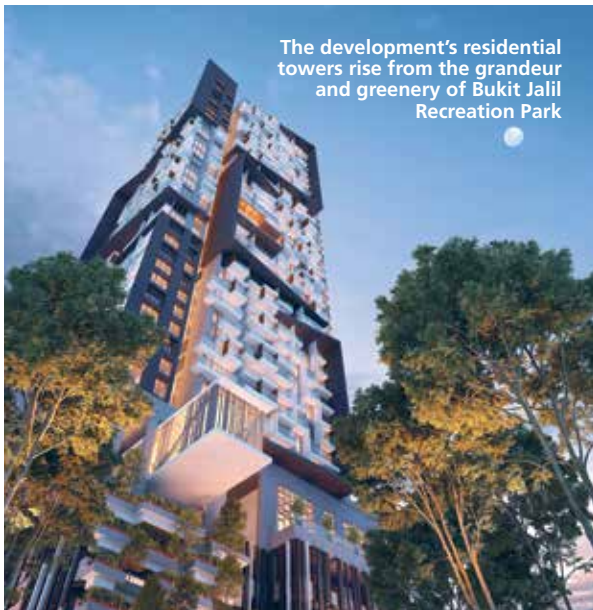
Art inspired by nature

For example, SkyLuxe on the Park's nine-storey podium and ground-level facilities draw inspiration from the floor of a rainforest, with a maze garden approximating the warrens of an ant colony and the podium roof reminiscent of the branching layers of lower intermediate tree canopies.

Meanwhile, sky gardens on levels 23A and 25 evoke the beauty of butterfly chrysalises, while sky terraces on the upper stories are patterned after the beehives and bird nests found in the higher strata of rainforest growths. In addition, facilities such as a cantilevered gym, infinity pool, and sauna, steam and reading rooms present residents with a variety of leisure options.

Serviced apartment units come with either 1+1 bedrooms, 2+1 bedrooms or three bedrooms, with a total of

The development's residential towers rise from the grandeur and greenery of Bukit Jalil Recreation Park



six different layout types. The project draws its name from the 80-acre Bukit Jalil Recreation Park surrounding it, with neighbouring amenities such as the Bukit Jalil Golf & Country Resort and upcoming Pavilion 2 mall offering 165 acres of manicured tee turf and over two million square feet of retail space respectively.

In terms of connectivity, SkyLuxe On The Park benefits from the nearby Awan Besar station of the Ampang LRT (light rail transit) line, along with proximity to the Shah Alam Expressway (Kesas), Damansara-Puchong Expressway (LDP) and Maju Expressway (Mex). ■



SkyLuxe On The Park offers 477 serviced apartment units with built-ups from 661 sq ft to 1,224 sq ft

Setting up house

Newfields Land Sdn Bhd's Maisson puts a fresh face on one of Ara Damansara's oldest existing projects



An urban revival success story, Maisson comprises 1,247 serviced apartments across five blocks

Situated in one of Klang Valley's newest residential enclaves, Maisson by Newfields Land Sdn Bhd is a modern-day success story for the industry, representing a revival of a project left fallow since 2007. Today, Maisson is anything but, with a 98% take-up rate since its launch in 2014 as a testament to its marketability in the right hands.

Comprising a total of 1,247 serviced apartments with built-up areas from 500 sq ft to 1,385 across five blocks, the development was completed nearly a year ahead of schedule, with contractual completion set for March 2017 and actual completion in July this year. Maisson recently celebrated a pre-handover party for homebuyers, with a luxury sports car showcase as well as appearances by the Miss Chinese Cosmos Pageant 2016 finalists.

A fresh start

"We'd like to thank our purchasers for their support over the past few years. We hope that you'll be proud to call Maisson your home, and enjoy all it has to offer. I'd also like to thank the dedicated team who made it happen, and acknowledge all those who have helped us realise this challenging, but fulfilling project," says Newfields Group managing director Seow Voon Ping.

Launched in 2014, the RM850 mil development was an unusual venture for the company, primarily known for the Puchong Gateway commercial hub in Puchong South as well as The Sanderson condominium project in Seri Kembangan. Current prices for Maisson units range from RM660 psf to RM850 psf.

Units at Maisson come in studio, two- and three-bedroom configurations, with a total of 27 layout types. Beside residential units, the development also includes 100,000 sq ft of commercial space, currently open for leasing and dubbed Maisson By The Park. Notable pull factors nearby include the Dataran Prima and Lembah Subang LRT (light rail transit) stations, as well as Citta Mall and Tropicana Golf & Country Resort.

For the near future, Newfields Land anticipates the unveiling of Denai 23, featuring 23 units of double- and triple-storey dual-frontage shop offices in Denai Alam, as well as Nassim, consisting of 113 link villas in Ukay Bistari, Ampang. Both are slated for launch later this year. ■



Further Newfields Land launches this year include Denai 23 in Denai Alam and Nassim in Ampang, says Seow

Featuring 185 units with built-ups from 721 sq ft to 1,464 sq ft, the development revolves around a collinear home resort concept

Pride of the valley

One of Kuala Lumpur's most sought-after addresses is launching its first high-rise duplex residence

| Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com

Representing a landmark collaboration between Naza TTDI Sdn Bhd and Prasarana Malaysia Bhd, the RM227 mil TTDI Segaris project in Taman Tun Dr Ismail represents a golden opportunity for homebuyers and investors alike, offering the benefits of a transit-oriented development with the established amenities and connectivity of the prestigious Klang Valley enclave.

Comprising 185 leasehold high-rise units in a 28-storey residential tower, the project espouses a low-density home resort living aesthetic, with four layout types ranging from 721 sq ft to 1,464 sq ft. Layouts feature up to three bedrooms in duplex configurations, with types B and Ba offering 32 non-duplex units.

A proud legacy

"The TTDI township provides its residents with numerous community facilities such as schools, colleges, banks, religious amenities and medical institutions. All these favourable factors, I believe, will make TTDI Segaris a property investor's dream come true, while definitely setting the standards for high living in this neighbourhood that we built," says Naza TTDI Group deputy executive chairman and group managing director SM Faliq SM Nasimuddin.

Designed by Hijjas Kasturi Assoc Sdn Bhd, TTDI Segaris revolves around a collinear concept as reflected in its name, with senior associate Amir Hamzah sharing that its 1.01-acre site straddles the line between the township's commercial and residential zones. In addition, its triangular shape posed challenges at the planning phase, though this was balanced by its strategic location and north-south orientation, affording scenic panoramas of the surrounding cityscape.

The building's massing also veers away from the traditional block aesthetics of high-rise design by shifting spaces horizontally and vertically, presenting a baroque façade which emphasises the development's low-density approach. In addition, its facilities were selected with the surrounding suburban context in mind.

"The ground level is a continuation of the retail concept of the shophouses next to TTDI Segaris, with al fresco dining to cater for the township's community. Even the choice of

greenery reflects the original flora of TTDI. If you look at the architecture as a whole, what we've tried to do is convey the atmosphere of an open resort or urban retreat," says Amir.

Drawing the crowd

Aside from Leisure Avenue on the ground level, the project includes two separate facilities decks on the ninth storey and the rooftop, with amenities grouped by themes into Lifestyle, Family and Neighbourhood Zones. These include recreational features such as an infinity pool, aromatherapy garden, barbecue patio and sky lounge, among others.

Other pull factors include the site's location next to the upcoming TTDI mass rapid transit (MRT) station, along with an abundance of nearby routes including the Sprint, Damansara-Puchong and New Klang Valley Expressways. Given its pedigree and the desirability of the address, units in the development are priced accordingly, starting at RM1,100 psf.

"While not a full-fledged transit-oriented development, TTDI Segaris leverages on some of the concept's advantages, including the possible provision of feeder bus services from the nearby MRT station to nearby destinations such as One Utama, which is one of the proposals we're looking at. It's value-adds like these which we can offer to developers who work with us," says Prasarana Integrated Development (Pride) Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Zahir Zahir Hussain.

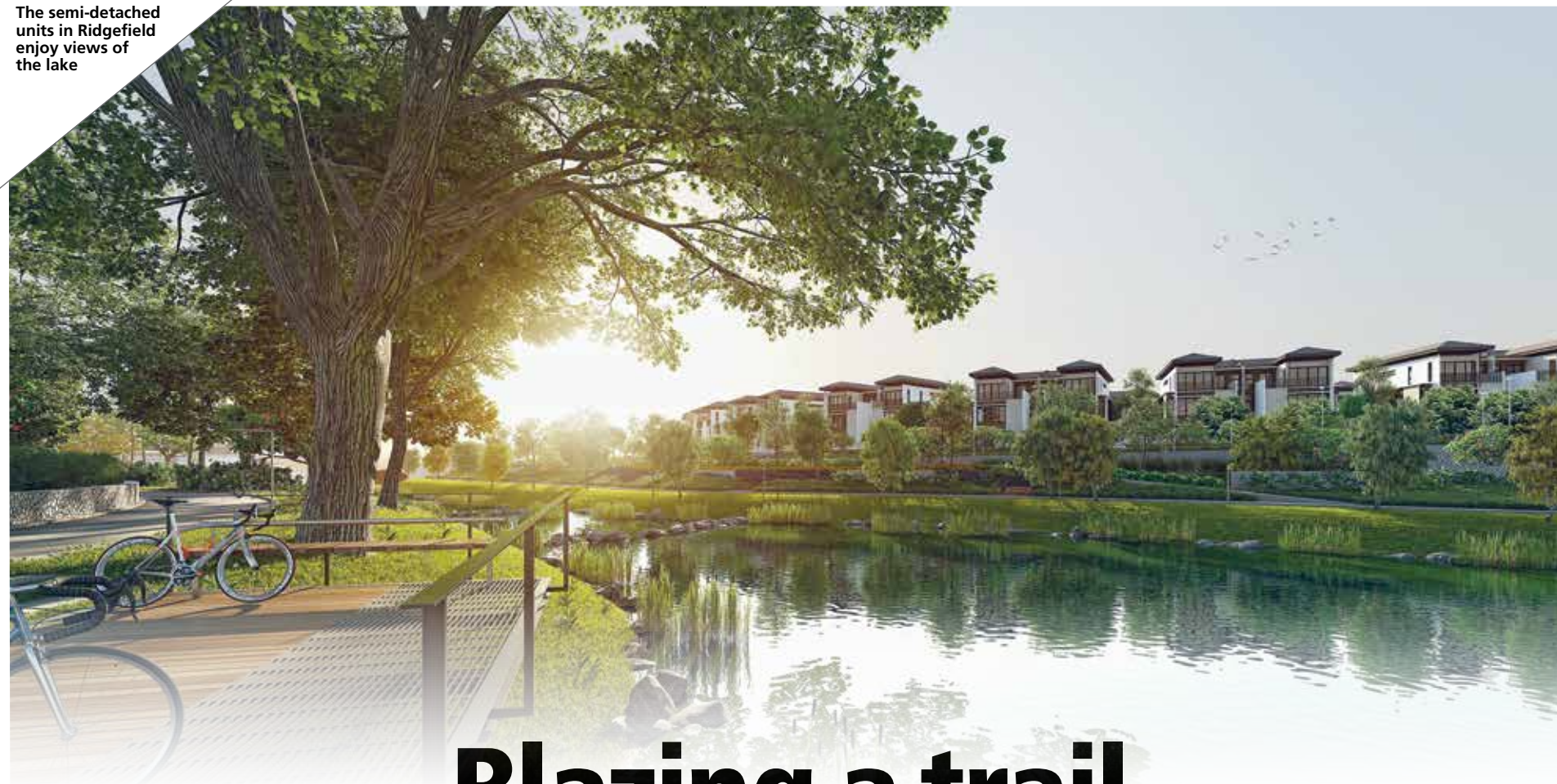
The project has already enjoyed encouraging market uptake, with Faliq citing a 50% booking rate as of June 29. TTDI Segaris follows on the success of the developer's recent launches in the area, including TTDI Ascencia, comprising 36 storeys of luxury condominiums, as well as the integrated TTDI Plaza development. While details are still under wraps, Faliq shares that Naza TTDI will reinforce its commitment to the TTDI community with an upcoming launch in the first half of 2017. ■



PHOTO BY MUHAMMAD HAZIM

The project represents a collaboration between Naza TTDI Sdn Bhd and Prasarana Malaysia Bhd

The semi-detached units in Ridgefield enjoy views of the lake



Blazing a trail

Tropicana Corp Bhd's market momentum continues unabated with its launch of three new phases across its portfolio

| Text by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com

Ung stresses that Tropicana Corp's pledge is to build homes that provide spacious living and modern lifestyles



PHOTO BY ANWAR FAIZ

The property market in Malaysia started 2016 on a slower footing, with many industry experts predicting more moderate sentiment brought on by several factors, including the central bank's enforcement of tighter loan regulations as well as the previous year's implementation of goods and services tax.

While many property players have adopted the cautious approach and delayed many of their product launches in the hope that the market would pick up soon, Tropicana Corp Bhd has not let weak market sentiment stop it from launching the latest phases in three of its ongoing developments.

Riding on its reputation as a leading developer, the group has unveiled the most recent additions to its collection of developments, catering to the needs and lifestyles of various homebuyers while also adding value to their products in order to ensure that everyone gets the opportunity to own their dream home.

Doorstep accessibility

Situated in the matured neighbourhood of Kota Damansara in Petaling Jaya is Tropicana Gardens, a mixed development project consisting of serviced residences and a shopping mall as well as a planned 19-storey corporate office. The development occupies approximately 13 acres of land and bears an estimated gross development value (GDV) of RM2.3 bil.

Tropicana Gardens stands to benefit from its position right in front of the Surian MRT (mass rapid transit) station, which is currently under construction. Tropicana Corp senior general manager of marketing and sales Ung Lay Ting reveals that the project will be connected via a pedestrian walkway to the station, which will start operations this year-end. The seven-level Tropicana Gardens Mall also stands

to benefit from the line when its construction completes in 2019.

Aside from public transport, Tropicana Gardens is also well-connected via four major highways, namely the New Klang Valley Expressway (NKVE), Damansara-Puchong Expressway (LDP), Sprint Highway and Penchala Link.

"Only the residential components have a provisional Green Building Index certification currently, but tropical elements such as canopies of trees, water features and outdoor terraces feature heavily throughout the development. The adjacent lake and Seri Selangor Golf Club also present sweeping views of greenery, tying in with Tropicana Corp's signature resort living," Ung says.

To date, three of the residential towers have been fully sold, with the fourth — Dianthus Serviced Residences — being launched only fairly recently. The newest tower comprises 271 units spread across 27 levels, with three layout types ranging from 601 to 1,406 sq ft. Targeted to finish in 2020, the serviced residences are priced at between RM807,000 and RM1.99 mil.

Ung points out that the project holds great potential for capital appreciation due to the locale's rapid development and commercialisation. To illustrate her point, she says, "When the first block was launched, it was about RM800 psf. Subsequently, the second block was about RM1,100 psf. The fourth tower has reached about RM1,400 psf, so the increase in value is quite significant".

Healthy lifestyle

In contrast to the city living which Tropicana Gardens offers, Tropicana Aman in Kota Kemuning, Shah Alam aims to promote community living with an emphasis on wellness. The 863-acre gated and guarded development boasts of landed strata residences, serviced residences and a commercial precinct as well as public amenities such as a 10-acre international school campus, making it a truly self-contained township.

However, the project's highlight is its 85-acre landscaped

Each of Ridgefield's semi-detached units has a porch that can easily fit up to three cars



A walking community serves as the basis for Tropicana Aman's township concept



central park which sits right at the heart of the development. Home to a diverse mix of flora and fauna, a 7-km trail along the water's edge enables residents to walk, jog or cycle within a safe environment thanks to Tropicana Aman's multi-tiered security.

Accessible via six major highways including the Shah Alam Expressway (Kesas) as well as the upcoming West Coast Expressway (WCE), Ung expounds on the township's concept to eliminate the need for residents to drive once they are within its borders. "What we are trying to create with this project is a walkable community where the basic facilities are within short distances, thus reducing carbon emissions," she explains.

She adds that the township's newly-launched third phase, Cheria Residences, targets the population from around the vicinity, saying: "Our gated and guarded concept is a big draw to families and upgraders from the surrounding areas as most of the townships that were developed in the early days have little to no security".

The newest phase is made up of 272 semi-detached units spread across 38.5 acres of land. Available in two layouts, the homes feature spacious car porches that can easily accommodate three cars parked side-by-side as well as a communal linear garden which is a different take on the conventional back lanes.

Cheria Residences also marks the first time that Tropicana Corp has worked with PanaHome Malaysia Sdn Bhd — a home-building company within the Panasonic Group

— to create a "smart" home which includes features like an indoor air quality management system and smart security and home monitoring systems as well as built-in ceiling heat insulation for energy efficiency.

Life in the park

Down south in the flourishing town of Kajang, Selangor lies Tropicana Heights, which sits on what used to be a golf course. Surrounded by several highways such as the Kajang Dispersal Link Highway (Silk) and the North-South Expressway (NSE), the maturity of the area means that multiple education institutions of all levels as well as an upcoming MRT station are located within a reasonable distance.

The 199-acre township's maiden phase, Fairfield Residences, comprising two- and three-storey terrace homes, is sold out while its subsequent phase, Parkfield Residences — featuring two-storey terrace and three-storey linked semi-detached units — have chalked up a 90% take-up rate. Ung is cautiously optimistic that the third phase will be able to reproduce this success.

"It is too early to say for sure as we only launched Ridgefield quite recently, but the response so far has been encouraging and the interest is there. Aside from Kajang, we are also targeting residents from surrounding neighbourhoods such as Bangi and Cheras. Recently, we've also had interested buyers coming all the way from Petaling Jaya," she notes.

Phase three is a low-density mix of 178 townhouses and 40 semi-detached units that envelop a central park and lake.



One of Tropicana Aman's highlights is an 85-acre central park



Tropical elements such as canopies of trees feature heavily in Tropicana Gardens

The three-storey town villas open to views of the linear park while the four-storey ones have an unobstructed view of the lake. In comparison, the semi-detached units enjoy views of the central park and linear garden.

Selling at approximately RM380 psf, the townhouses measure between 1,994 sq ft and 2,658 sq ft, with the four-storey units having an additional rumpus room on the lower ground floor for families to gather. The units' wide frontage allows for more space within the interiors, which Ung points out is perfect for families starting out. "It also works for different generations who want to stay together but who still want to maintain their privacy," she says, adding that the units are more affordable compared to the town villas in areas like Petaling Jaya.

On the other hand, the built-up area for the semi-detached homes is 3,931 sq ft, with the units being sold at about RM450 psf. The concept of spaciousness is heavily emphasised, as each unit has an additional 10 ft of land by the side while the porch can easily fit up to three cars parked side-by-side. Inside, the living halls have a heightened sense of space thanks to its double-volume ceiling.

Ung points out that it is uncommon to find such expansive units selling at this price in the market, noting that there is much potential for capital appreciation due to Kajang's status as a booming township. She also adds that projects of such nature fit very well into Tropicana Corp's pledge to "build homes that provide spacious living and modern lifestyles". ■

Dimensions of design

Walrus Design founder Julien T Hodson-Walker crafts natural and urban topographies with equal aplomb

Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com

The verdant greenery that dominates much of Malaysia's rural countryside and inner cities are integral to its character, often lingering in the memories of visitors to the tropical nation long after their sojourns to its scenic shores come to an end.

From spectacular sanctuaries of primary rainforest to the manicured growths of metropolitan parks, these vistas struck a chord in the heart of one such pilgrim, British designer Julien T Hodson-Walker, who elected to settle down in Kuala Lumpur and devote himself to the perfection of local landscapes.

The test of time

"Landscape architecture is a true four-dimensional design discipline. It is an art form that designs using time. Soft landscape grows, hard landscape weathers, and the dynamics and drama of spaces are forever changing and maturing through age. Designers of enduring landscapes understand and embrace this process," he says.

A stranger in a strange land, Hodson-Walker's journey from his studies in landscape architecture at Manchester Polytechnic (now the Manchester Metropolitan University) in the UK to the establishment of Walrus

Design Sdn Bhd as a design consultancy in Malaysia was far from straightforward, though his passion for the field carried him through.

His interest began during his early years in the Midlands, the central region of England characterised by low-lying flatlands with the occasional rolling hill. Growing up in a village surrounded by picturesque fields and natural sights, with a flair for the creative even then, he initially considered architecture but decided upon landscape design after reflecting on the mathematical rigidity of the former.

"That turned out to be a good choice, because I love what I do. I get up in the morning and I enjoy the new challenges the work brings. I even get to draw; there was a recent craze in the hobby space for colouring as a mode of relaxation, but I get to do things like that as part of my job," he says.

"You get to see the things that you design grow through the building phase, and it's rewarding. As a profession, we're pushing the envelope in terms of helping to improve the environment, which is one of the things we do at Walrus: working out how to ensure sustainable drainage using natural systems, how you can manage wetlands, urban retention ponds, all sorts of things."

Practice makes perfect

Following his studies at Manchester Polytechnic, Hodson-Walker was officially recognised as a chartered landscape architect by the Landscape Institute, the royal

chartered body for the profession in the UK. Including academic and industrial training, applicants must undergo up to seven years of instruction before sitting for the institute's professional practice examination to be a fully qualified member.

From 1987 to 1990, the budding sculptor of scenery honed his skills at Lovejoy plc (now part of Capita plc), the renowned land planning consultancy he had trained with during his college years, as well as Building Design Partnership (BDP) Ltd, a well-established group with over 900 staff and offices across Europe and Asia.

The latter in particular afforded him invaluable experience in terms of exposure to the various roles, regulations and requirements that go into project management. "BDP offered a full range of services, so we worked closely with engineers, quantity surveyors and other disciplines. You learn how they operate, what their needs are and how to interface with them better," he says.

Hodson-Walker's first venture to the country that would become his home began in 1993, when he received an offer from the Malaysian branch of Aspinwall Clouston Pte Ltd (now part of the BMT Group Ltd). Making the move to Kuala Lumpur, he fell in love with the city and applied himself to his work, rising through the ranks to become a director at Aspinwall Clouston in 1996.

Like other notable landscape architects and designers, he is possessed of a fundamental understanding of and appreciation for the arts, even leaving the firm to start an online website promoting the work of Malaysian artists. However, persistent interest from past clients drew him back to the field, and he subsequently founded ICN Design International Sdn Bhd in 2000 to provide his own consultancy services for markets domestic and overseas.

Running a tight ship

Drawing its name from Hodson-Walker's vision of an in-

As a profession, we're pushing the envelope in terms of helping to improve the environment, which is one of the things we do at Walrus

— Julien T Hodson-Walker

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Desa Park City takes pride of place in Walrus Design's portfolio

11 Mont Kiara is just one of the studio's award-winning landscape designs

The firm's client-centric approach lends variety to its portfolio

A boutique consultancy, Walrus Design focuses on work it does well, prioritising existing relationships



tegrated consulting network, ICN Design International developed by 2010 into what is now Walrus Design. His philosophy at the helm has been to keep the company lean, with a maximum staffing of about 15.

However, its portfolio since establishment rivals the variety and depth of much larger firms, with projects running the gamut from master and landscape planning for Desa Park City in Kuala Lumpur and Tropicana Metropark in Shah Alam to high-end residential design ranging from Cyberia Crescent in Cyberjaya to the Twin Palms housing estate in Kajang.

Walrus Design has also participated in numerous projects overseas, including the Sindbad Beach Resort in Egypt, the Mandarin Oriental, Taipei in Taiwan, the Lippo Karawaci planned community in Indonesia and a new Abu Dhabi suburb called Al Manazel in the United Arab Emirates. Given its approach, the firm's performance has remained consistent through periods of economic volatility.

"The market is currently contracting, but that's not an issue for us because we're not overgeared in that sense, so we don't need to contract as well. Instead of taking on a large number of projects, we focus on what we do well, prioritising clients with whom we have established relationships. So far, that's worked out pretty well for us, and for our order book," he laughs.

Growing pains

The picture wasn't always as rosy, however, with the bou-

tique consultancy facing significant challenges when first starting out. However, Hodson-Walker's perseverance through difficult times, driven by a love for the craft, was sufficient for Walrus Design to survive and eventually thrive — though not without cost.

"I was paying the staff that we had through my own finances, and it got to the point where I had just RM500 in my personal bank account. No savings, renting from month to month, no house in the UK to go back to and not enough money for a flight in any case. Fortunately, we got some collections in and turned it around, but a lot of people get to that point then drop out. We managed to sustain the business," he says.

In terms of Walrus Design's approach to the discipline, Hodson-Walker characterises its style as tending towards the abstract, with a client-centric strategy that lends variety to its portfolio. Because it focuses on the specific requirements of each project, there are few distinguishing traits to mark a particular design as belonging to the firm, aside from a dedication to delivering on client expectations.

With regard to inspirations, Hodson-Walker shares that his philosophy was influenced to a large degree by Will Williams, a partner at Lovejoy who contributed two competition-winning designs for the National Garden Festival in the UK, an initiative aimed at rejuvenating areas of disused land in its industrial zones. The two collaborated frequently, with Williams serving as a mentor to the aspiring designer.

A polished pedigree

While having personally worked on an impressive number of projects, the bluff Briton takes particular pride in his work on Desa Park City, one of Kuala Lumpur's most prominent planned townships, with Walrus Design contributing towards the development's primary infrastructure as well as its landscape masterplan.

"Desa Park City represents a variety of scales, from the larger to the more intimate, in a single site. Our scope for the project started at the landscape level, going down to the design level for the ParkCity Club, and we even had residential parcels in the form of Casaman," he says.

Other highlights include the Kota Kemuning Wetland Park, with Gamuda Land Bhd approaching the firm to reimagine the reserve. Hodson-Walker's proposal replaced a 10-metre wide concrete U-drain with a naturally flowing body of water, which also formed a wetland frontage to the development. In doing so, the carbon footprint of the concrete U-drain was voided, while significantly reducing construction costs and environmental impacts.

Due to its boutique nature, Walrus Design focuses on localised projects within Kuala Lumpur and the central region, with Hodson-Walker citing logistical concerns as a primary factor. Moving forward, he notes that the current trend appears to favour township developments as growth moves away from metropolitan hotspots, affording landscape architects opportunities in the infrastructure, park and residential design spaces. ■



The open-plan layout in SP Setia's Corporate Headquarters has greatly improved communication among staff and departments

Back to nature

As society grows increasingly aware of the concept of sustainability, we find out how it is applied in the building industry

| Text by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com

Sustainability is the buzzword for today's developments, many of which incorporate green features as part and parcel of their design rather than as a value-added feature.

This, however, wasn't always the case. In fact, Malaysia had a relatively late start when it came to the concept of sustainable developments. The realisation that buildings have a big impact on the environment first came in the 1990s in the United Kingdom, Europe and later on, the United States. These nations developed their own sustainability assessment systems, and other countries began adopting them for their own projects.

The domestic industry's initial attempts to adopt these ratings found them poorly suited to the local climate and building practices. Stepping in, the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) set up a committee for the purpose of tailoring a sustainability assessment method for local projects, which led to the launch of the Green Building Index (GBI) in 2009.

That same year, PAM and the Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia (ACEM) also incorporated Greenbuildingindex Sdn Bhd as a wholly-owned subsidiary to facilitate GBI accreditation and training.

The evolution of green

Tan Siow Chung, the general manager of SP Setia Bhd's



FROM LEFT: Tan points out that the concept of green has evolved beyond just lush landscaping

Chan believes that public understanding of how a building's sustainability is assessed is lacking

Sowing the seeds

It is no secret that the "greener" the workplace is, the better the employee's performance. Numerous research papers have illustrated the positive correlation between eco-friendly work environments and employee productivity.

Tan affirms this by noting that the open-plan office layout in the GBI Platinum-rated SP Setia Corporate Headquarters in Shah Alam, Selangor has greatly improved staff and interdepartmental communication. He stresses, though, that sustainability should be all-encompassing.

"Being green and sustainable to us is not just restricted to a building structure, but is a central tenet of our LiveLearn-WorkPlay development philosophy, where we encourage work-life balance with ample opportunities for health-related activities. When employees are healthy and happy at the workplace, productivity naturally improves," he explains.

He acknowledges that the incorporation of eco-friendly features more often than not leads to higher initial construction costs, with green buildings generally costing a premium of between 3% and 5%. However, benefits like reduced greenhouse gas emission, better indoor environment quality and savings from efficient energy and water usage far outweigh the drawbacks.

Joining the club

In terms of uptake, Chan notes that PAM, via Greenbuildingindex, has been playing an active role in encouraging more developers to jump on the sustainability bandwagon. One such example is its GBI Facilitator courses which offer training in the design and implementation of green building projects, and which target building professionals due to the pivotal role they play in incorporating eco-friendly features into projects during the initial design stage.

"We understand that many developers want recognition for their projects when they adopt sustainability features. The organisation has therefore worked with the Malaysia Green Building Confederation (MGBC) to give out biannual awards for the best green buildings which, in turn, are nominated for regional-level awards," he adds.

Aside from due recognition, many developers have also been vocal about financial incentives for incorporating green features. As such, Chan reveals that Greenbuildingindex is working with Malaysian Green Technology Corporation (GreenTech Malaysia) and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry to extend the tax incentives given to GBI-certified buildings until 2020. ■

township Bandar Setia Alam, highlights that a green development is not just about having vast amounts of greenery. "The concept of green has evolved from just having lush landscaping to bigger concepts such as sustainable designs and green architecture to air quality and construction waste management, and renewable energy," he says.

He provides examples of how eco-friendly practices can be adopted in other aspects of the construction process, including using recyclable construction materials and sourcing for materials that are manufactured near the site to reduce emissions that come from transportation. Tan also suggests implementing a construction waste management strategy that focuses on waste prevention, reduction, reuse and recycling.

Chan Seong Aun, who chairs the accreditation panel at Greenbuildingindex, points out that this is where public understanding on the assessment of a building's sustainability is lacking: "The GBI tools assess the building not only from its features, but also from its operation. That is why the certification is valid for only three years after completion. The certification has to be renewed by sending in actual performance data such as electricity and water bills for reassessment".

Other organisations have followed in the footsteps of PAM in developing their own sustainability rating systems, such as the Green Real Estate (GreenRE), pH JKR (Penarafan Hijau Jabatan Kerja Raya) and Green Performance Assessment System (GreenPASS), though only the GBI is recognised by the World Green Building Council (WGBC).

Chan reveals that six criteria come into play when assessing a building's sustainability. Although all rating tools typically refer to these six as the basic assessment criteria, there are variations and sub-criteria in accordance with the local climate, building standards and practices as well as materials and resources in the countries in which they are implemented.



Source: Greenbuildingindex Sdn Bhd

Buildings are assessed for their sustainability based on these six criteria

The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam merges traditional and contemporary architecture



The Netherlands may not have the geographical size of other countries in Europe, but the proud nation has earned a larger-than-life reputation for its world-famous tulip fields and magnificent windmills which continue to draw millions of visitors each year, along with its liberal policies and tolerant society which has intrigued many a visitor to its shores.

Statistics released by the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC) recorded 13.9 million in tourist arrivals to the Dutch nation in 2014 alone. The board's findings also showed that the most popular destination for inbound travellers was the Dutch capital of Amsterdam, which is known for its vibrant lifestyle, elaborate canal systems and heritage architecture.

What came before

Many of the buildings in the city follow a style of architecture dubbed the Amsterdam School, which enjoyed a short-lived popularity between 1915 and 1930. Rooted in expressionism, such buildings were characterised by the use of brick for structure and design, rounded appearances, decorative masonry, wrought iron accents, spires and “ladder” windows.

Fiercely proud of their heritage architecture, regulations laid down by Amsterdam's authorities placed heavy emphasis on the preservation of legacy buildings. Very often, this entailed erecting an entirely new building while making minimal changes to the outward appearance of the old one, with both structures connected only at certain parts, effectively creating a merger of traditional and modern architecture.

The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam — proclaimed as the largest Dutch museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art and design — is a classic example. First opened in 1895, the museum underwent eight years of extensive renovation, which include the construction of a new wing before being reopened in September 2012.

Work within the old building was focused on reinstating the interior back to its former state of splendour, including the resto-

ration of its staircase railing. However, minor changes were also made to strengthen its function as a museum. These included repainting the inside walls to white and replacing the floor tiles with more subtle designs to avoid drawing attention away from the displays.

The new wing was constructed right next to the old building utilising contempo-

Going Dutch

Amsterdam continues to marvel with architecture steeped in tradition, conservation and innovation

| Text and photos by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com



Millions of visitors come to see the windmills of Amsterdam each year

Tilting structures

The canal houses of Amsterdam are probably the most iconic buildings of the city. Tall and narrow, they run so deep that many house a garden in the back. Infamous for their narrow staircases that make it almost impossible to move large objects, these buildings were built with protruding beams at the top that are used to hoist items like large furniture through the wide windows.

Many have observed that most of the buildings in Amsterdam seem to be leaning towards one side. Although some historians have said that this is deliberate so as to prevent goods from damaging the façade of the canal houses as they are being lifted up, a more plausible explanation is that it is due to damaged foundations caused by the rotting wooden poles that support the capital's buildings.

Situated on a former swamp, builders of the first structures in the city of Amsterdam had to find a way to support and prevent them from sinking into the soft soil over time. Their solution was driving wooden poles into the ground until they reached the first solid layer of sand. It is estimated that some 9,000 poles rest below the city's largest railway station, Amsterdam Centraal.

It was crucial that the poles stood below the lowest estimated water level so as to prevent decay, but receding water levels caused by drastic climate change have left the top part of these poles exposed to air and water. This constant exposure has caused the wood to rot, jeopardising foundations and resulting in a slight tilt in the buildings they support.

Although its characteristic crooked skyline is one of Amsterdam's charms, city authorities realised the danger the damage could cause and began taking measures to mitigate the problem. One option was to replace the wooden poles with concrete and steel ones, though this has proven to be extremely costly and requires the opening up of floors which would render buildings uninhabitable for long periods of time. ■

In celebration of architecture

Archidex returns as part of the Kuala Lumpur Architecture Festival 2016
with a focus on engaging the public

| Text by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com

Widely recognised as South East Asia's leading trade event for the architecture and design communities, the International Architecture, Interior Design and Building Exhibition (Archidex) recently made a return to the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC). Encompassing nine halls spread over three floors, the four-day exhibition attracted the participation of exhibitors from 17 countries, including Austria, Germany, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam, with the total number of booths exceeding 1,200.

The annual affair, held for the 17th time, is one of the main pillars of the Kuala Lumpur Architecture Festival (KLAF), which is hosted by the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) as a platform to promote developments within related fields.

An opening ceremony was held on the first day of Archidex 2016 on July 20 to celebrate its launch, as well as that of KLAF 2016. Deputy Works Minister Datuk Rosnah Abdul Rashid Shirlin officiated the ceremony, which culminated in a tour of the exhibition.

Making architecture mainstream

In his remarks at the ceremony, KLAF 2016 director David Teh described the festival as a celebration of architecture and design and illustrated its importance in relation to the public sphere. "The view of an architecture festival is that it is part of the public domain and is therefore, celebrated by the public and not just the profession," he noted.

Expressing his hopes that the festival would open up the public's eyes to the significant role that the disciplines play in society and the environment, PAM president Mohd Zulhemlee An revealed that "Future Communities" was selected as the theme for KLAF 2016 in order to shine the spotlight on the human elements within architecture and design.

As a joint organiser of Archidex 2016, CIS Network president Datuk Vincent Lim also shared the future agenda



LEFT TO RIGHT:
Lim shared his aspirations for Archidex to be a gateway for the industry in the region

Teh noted that architecture should be celebrated by the public as well as the profession

The theme "Future Communities" was selected to shine the spotlight on the human element, elaborated Zulhemlee

of the exhibition, which is to be a gateway in the region and encourage exhibitors as well as service providers to expand their reach to South East Asia.

One of the hallmarks of the exhibition was a series of informative and educational talks called Biz @ Archidex, where local and international speakers were invited to share their insights and knowledge on new technologies and solutions that are beneficial to the architecture, interior design and building industries in general.

This year's edition also saw the introduction of Focus Forum @ Archidex, a special session to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) from the perspective of the construction and building industries.

A total of 49 exhibitors also submitted their nominations for the New Product Awards and Green Dot awards — both highly coveted accolades recognising innovations that embody excellence in design and production as well as exemplary environmental contributions.

Upholding the profession

Another mainstay of the festival is the annual Datum PAM

Conference, which started in 2003. It was joined by Archidex in 2007, and both were subsequently grouped under the KLAF moniker in 2011. The festival has since gone on to include forums, lectures and other events — all with the purpose of promoting architecture.

Several regular components of the festival were also rebranded to be more inclusive and interactive on a public scale. Some examples are the PAM Green Forum and PAM Design Forum, which were formerly known as the Green Building Forum and KL Design Forum respectively.

In addition to this, a series of public-oriented events were also created specifically for KLAF 2016 during its run from July 20 to 29. These include the PAM Public Lecture, which featured award-winning architect and urban designer Ridwan Kamil, who is the mayor of Bandung, Indonesia — a city known for its planning methods and open spaces.

Also making its debut this year was KLAFFX, a series of activities initiated by the young architects of PAM via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, marking the first time social media platforms were utilised to promote the festival. ■



Archidex is one of the main pillars of KLAF, hosted by PAM every year to promote architecture and design

Top of their game

Property professionals share the limelight in a special night dedicated by iProperty.com to appreciating those who performed above and beyond

| Text by ANG HUI HSIEN | hhang@hckmedia.com



IQI Realty came out as the biggest winner with multiple awards under its belt, including the night's top two honours

PHOTOS BY SHARIL AMIN

The real estate industry is a competitive arena, and the hard work and effort put in by property agents in the field was recently recognised in a night of glitz and glamour organised by iProperty.com. Dressed to the nines, more than 500 real estate professionals turned up at the portal's recent Agents Advertising Awards (AAA) 2016 ceremony, which saw honours being handed out to winners who excelled in 19 categories.

Now in its second year, the objective of the annual awards is to bestow recognition on both agencies and professionals who have exhibited excellence in their practices and performances. This year, over 100 submissions were received, which were subsequently shortlisted before the winners were selected.

Celebrated industry professionals sat on the panel of five judges, including iProperty.com Malaysia Sdn Bhd managing director and CEO Georg Chmiel, Ho Chin Soon Research Sdn Bhd chairman Ho Chin Soon as well as David Shieh

Chong, who is general manager of the training, research and educational arm of the Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) Institute.

Crème de la crème

The event started off with an opening performance followed by a welcome address delivered by Chmiel, who expressed his pleasure on behalf of iProperty.com Malaysia at being able to reward the top performers of the industry. "We are proud to honour and recognise the best real estate professionals and agencies in the country. The volume and quality of the responses we have had this year reaffirms the outstanding impact that the iProperty.com AAA has in the industry," he says.

Live performances helped set the tone for the awards, which were given out to both agencies and individuals. The biggest winner was real estate investment agency International Quality Investment (IQI) Holdings Sdn Bhd, who took home the top two honours of the night — Agency of

the Year (Titanium) and Outstanding Real Estate Agency of the Year (Titanium).

The agency's winning streak did not end there, as it was also announced as Top Agency in the Northern Region, a title it shared with three other agencies. Its agent, Jeff Lim had even more cause for celebration when he emerged as Breakthrough Negotiator of the Year (Residential) and Star Negotiator (Residential) for the Subang Jaya area.

Following closely behind as the second biggest winner of the event was Tech Real Estate Sdn Bhd, who bagged the Agency of the Year (Platinum) and Outstanding Real Estate Agency of the Year (Platinum), while also being named — along with four other agencies — as Top Agency in the Central Region.

Awarding the best

Apart from increasing their brand awareness and status, winners of the awards are entitled to use a prestigious seal in their marketing materials throughout their winning year. These seals will also appear in iProperty.com's print and on-line materials to promote the winning agencies and agents in terms of awareness and exposure.

Past winners and participants have praised the event in helping them forge business relationships and create new opportunities.

Chmiel shares, "We are championing the innovation and sheer hard work of real estate professionals and agencies that give it their all in helping millions — not just Malaysians but also those from overseas — find their dream home in Malaysia".

He reveals that shortlisting the submissions was no easy task, as the judges had to ensure that the winners fulfilled the criteria — which included best usage of iProperty.com Malaysia data as well as factors such as marketing initiatives and sales transactions in the preceding year — within each respective category.

"The award-winning entries are truly best in class and represent top-notch thinking and execution in delivering the best services in the real estate industry. The winners tonight are not just recognised by real estate professionals but will also be identified as the best in the industry. This, in turn, will help them stand out with property buyers and investors," Chmiel concludes. ■



Chmiel speaking during his welcome address at the AAA 2016

Putting productivity into practice

Going green can have positive effects on worker health and efficiency in office environments

| Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com

In the past, environmental concerns were often dismissed as the domain of conservationists and other social activists. However, sustainability has since come into vogue in the workplace, as compliance and corporate social responsibility make such practices increasingly mainstream.

A collaborative study by the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health's Center for Health and the Global Environment, however, suggests that eco-friendly design and systems can have practical applications beyond their environmental impact, with results pointing towards a doubling of productivity in workers based within enhanced green buildings.

Best of both worlds

"The research explored cognitive functions and how they responded to different systems and environments. The difference between controlled and non-controlled buildings is nearly 100% in terms of how such functions respond, with factors such as carbon dioxide regulation leading to increased energy levels in workers, and so on," says United Technologies Corp (UTC) Climate, Controls & Security (CCS) president (Asia Pacific) Gaurang Pandya.

Conducted by the Harvard Chan School along with researchers from the State University of New York (SUNY) Upstate Medical University and Syracuse University, the study identified a range of behaviours associated with productivity among corporate employees, including information usage,

crisis response, breadth of approach and task orientation.

The behaviours of 24 participants in response to various stimuli was then evaluated over six working days in the Total Indoor Environmental Quality Laboratory at the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems in New York, with conventional office environment conditions serving as the baseline, conditions with low amounts of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) simulating "green" buildings and conditions with low VOCs and high ventilation designated as "enhanced green" buildings.

"From there, you can look at the business side, in terms of how that translates into employee productivity. The study results show that if you put these systems into a building, it may cost you up to US\$40 (RM159) per employee per year, but the productivity improvements they give the business back are nearly US\$6,500 (RM25,890) annually," says Pandya.

Walking the talk

The research initiative is based on what is dubbed the 90% principle, which states that contemporary urban residents spend 90% of their time indoors. On top of this, 90% of the costs associated with an office building are linked to the human element in terms of salaries and benefits, with just 10% going towards energy, maintenance, rent and other considerations.

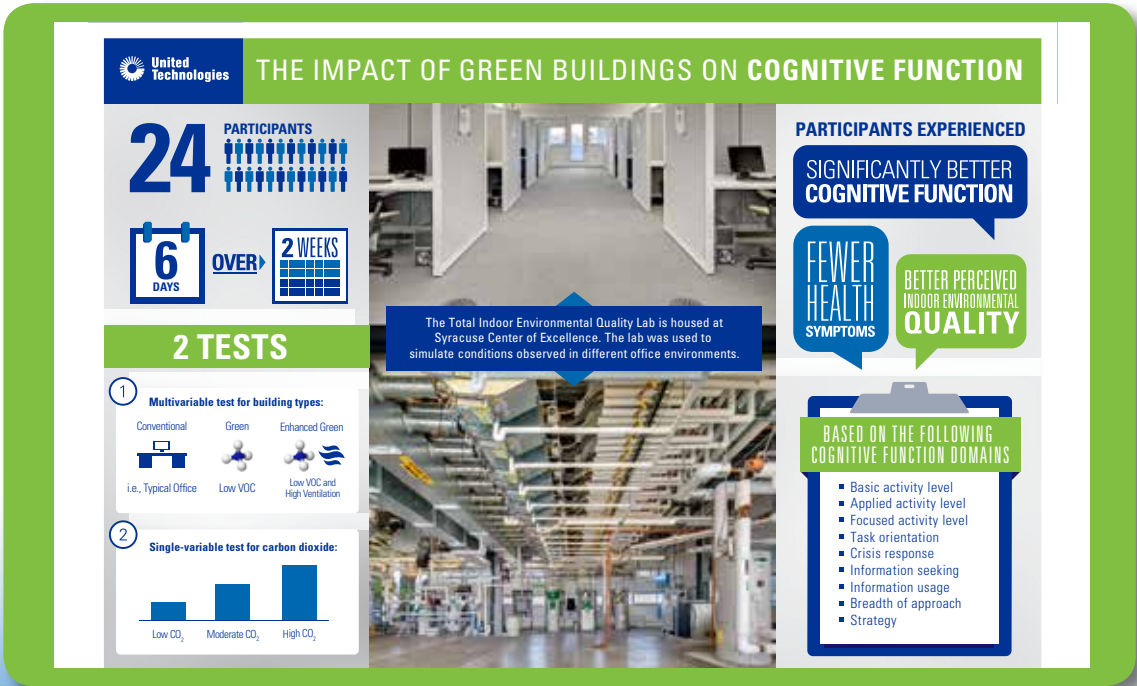
As such, maximising the returns on expenses attributed to human resources is as crucial, if not more so, to a business as the savings and environmental impact of optimising maintenance costs and sustainability. The cognitive study demonstrates the possibility of a synergistic relationship between the two, with a positive correlation between the implementation of green systems and the bottom line.

"Building ventilation and cooling are particularly relevant with the recent heatwaves in Malaysia, and are core business activities for UTC. We've been established in Malaysia since 1965, and we know the buildings and the systems," says UTC CCS Singapore managing director Chong Wai Yen.

"Carrier made the first air-conditioner, over a hundred years ago. We invented them, we developed them, we make them, we service them, we replace them and we retrofit them. We have experience throughout the entire value chain, in every type of environment and application," adds UTC CCS president (South East Asia) Oon Wee Chin.

A brand under the Connecticut-based UTC, Carrier's variable refrigerant flow line of heat recovery and heat pump solutions allows for the installation of multiple indoor fan coil units to a single external condensing unit, while enhancing ventilation and minimising the build-up of VOCs. The Harvard Chan cognitive function study was co-funded by UTC and published in Nov 2015, with Pandya sharing on-going efforts to disseminate, apply and extend its findings. ■

Pandya notes a difference of nearly 100% in terms of cognitive performance among workers in controlled and non-controlled environments



UTC has been in Malaysia since 1965, with building ventilation and cooling as core business activities



Southville City has the advantage of accessibility thanks to its location along the North-South Expressway



Cerrado is expected to follow in the footsteps of Savanna Executive Suites and Avens Residence

Southern city life

Even before completion, Cerrado — the third project to be launched in Southville City — looks set for success thanks to its accessibility and affordability

| Text by **ANG HUI HSIEN** | hhang@hckmedia.com

Mah Sing Group Bhd's latest township, Southville City, may be located a distance away from Kuala Lumpur — in Bangi, Selangor, to be precise — but the group's chief sales officer James Bruyns is not concerned about its location hindering sales, thanks to the development's accessibility.

The township — consisting of a mix of residential and commercial components — will have a dedicated interchange which connects from the North-South Expressway (NSE) along which it is located. Bruyns expects the interchange to experience high traffic volumes upon completion towards the end of 2017, as it will also serve commuters from Dengkil, Bangi, Semenyih and other surrounding areas.

Stressing that time is money, he adds that the accessibility provided by the NSE puts Southville City in a favourable position in terms of convenience for people to travel to KL for work and return to their hometowns in the south during the weekends.

Next in line

Bruyns' confidence in Southville City stems from the resounding success of the township's first two components — Savanna Executive Suites and Avens Residence. To date, 98% of the former's 3,192 units have been sold while all 196 of the latter's three-storey super-link homes are fully taken up.

This success is expected to continue with the launch of Cerrado, which is slated

for completion in 2020 and comprises four 35-storey towers of residential suites. Mah Sing's senior general manager Daniel Law says that compared to Savanna Executive Suites, which sits next to it, Cerrado has smaller units but more luxurious fa-

cilities. Additionally, with a price tag that averages RM560 per sq ft, they fall under the affordable range.

Each tower features a mix of two-bedroom type A units that measure 656 sq ft while type B, at 825 sq ft, has a three-bed-

room layout. Situated on the top floors of all four towers are duplex units, while a limited number of cabana units — only 10 — can be found on the seventh level.

"The facilities and spaces in Cerrado are designed to meet the leisure and activity needs of the various demographics of users. These diverse demographics range from young children to the elderly, with spaces catering for different individuals and group sizes," Law explains.

Following the feedback of customers who purchased units in Savanna Executive Suites and Avens Residence, special attention has been paid to enhance Cerrado's security features. Aside from the use of cards that grant residents access to the car park and their unit's floor, the suites are also equipped with a keyless digital lockset — the first development in Southville City to do so, according to Law.

Occupying the lowest two floors will be 48 retail outlets that aim to cater for the lifestyle needs of the residents, although their launch date has yet to be determined.

Capturing the south

Despite their smaller size compared to Savanna Executive Suites' accommodations, Law says that Cerrado's residential units are designed with space optimisation in mind. This, combined with their affordable pricing, makes the units perfect for young couples, small families and first-time homebuyers.

Bruyns reveals that another market which they are hoping to capture is the segment of Seremban residents in Negeri Sembilan who work in the city centre, saying, "Cerrado has the potential to serve as transit homes for these individuals, who are still living with their parents in Seremban but commute on a daily basis to KL for work".

He adds, "The mindset that most people have when they think of Bangi is that it is very far from the city. In actual fact, it is about the same distance, or even slightly nearer, compared to Subang Jaya and Puchong. Distance is one thing, accessibility is another. It's all about changing mindsets".



Bruyns (left) and Law are confident of Cerrado's success due to its facilities and accessibility

PHOTO BY DD HOE

Jewels in the making

Homebuyers and investors are venturing further afield in search of value, and finding it in IJM Land Bhd's up-and-coming townships

| Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com



Aimed at younger property seekers, Penduline's double-storey linked houses start from RM689,800

As urbanisation and gentrification continue to drive property seekers from the rarified heights of the Kuala Lumpur market and its surrounding suburbs to the gentler slopes of the larger Klang Valley region, farsighted players have identified a number of development hotspots pointing towards tomorrow's most promising townships.

One of these firms is IJM Land Bhd, which has nurtured large-scale developments through an extensive landbank of more than 4,000 acres in key growth areas throughout the nation and overseas since taking its current form in 1989. Primary among these are Seremban 2 and Bandar Rimbayu, both of which are well-positioned to address the increasing demand for homes removed from Kuala Lumpur's prices and costs of living.

Southern hospitality in Seremban

Seremban 2 benefits from IJM Land's foresight, with its establishment in 1995 giving it ample time to mature into a bustling community with diverse amenities, a resident population of over 60,000 and a range of educational institutions, including an upcoming international school.

To date, the developer has delivered over 12,500 residential and commercial properties in the township, with its latest launches comprising Rimbun Irama, featuring 183 double-storey terrace homes with built-up areas ranging from 2,224 sq ft to 2,451 sq ft, and Kalista 2, offering 208 executive apartment units with built-ups from 926 sq ft to 1,561 sq ft.

Deriving its name from a vernacular phrase for the tempo found in melodies, Rimbun Irama invites homeseekers to take a break from the crowded and cramped confines of the metropolitan life with a low-density concept emphasised through a choice of two spacious four-bedroom layouts, along with fully extended car porches and backyards. In addition, houses in the project incorporate high-speed broadband infrastructure, with each freehold unit affordably priced starting from RM555,800.

Meanwhile, Kalista 2 represents the second phase of IJM Land's RM63 mil Kalista Residence project, which recorded take-up rates in excess of 80% during its launch in 2013. Its second block offers five layout configurations while leveraging on common facilities such as a swimming pool, gymnasium, multipurpose hall and basketball court.

Couples can also look forward to the project's allotment of two car parks per unit. Similar to Rimbun Irama, Kalista 2 is perfectly priced for the younger market, with units starting from RM317,800. Families just starting out will also appreciate the lower costs of living associated with the township, particularly given the economic concerns and inflation prevalent in the domestic context this year.

Last but certainly not least, both projects share Seremban 2's connectivity factors, which include proximity to the Seremban-Port Dickson and Kajang-Seremban (Lekas) Highways, with the North-South Expressway offering a direct route to Kuala Lumpur, with the city centre a 45-minute drive away.

Closer to home

Situated nearer the urban sprawl, Bandar Rimbayu showcases IJM Land's commitment to nurturing communities throughout its portfolio with a calendar of events which include a Pet Out Day and Big Fun Day as well as weekly Zumba classes to encourage active lifestyles among residents.



ABOVE: Chong emphasises that projects in Penduline's price range are few and far between

RIGHT: Kalista 2 follows on the success of IJM Land's Kalista Residence launch in 2013

The most recent launch in the township, Penduline, is situated within its Fauna precinct and fittingly takes its name from a species of passerine found throughout Eurasia, Africa and North America. Underscoring the leasehold development's close-to-nature concept, it is surrounded by 8.4 acres of greenery, including a central park and pocket parks.

Penduline itself features 625 double-storey link houses, with built-ups from 1,771 sq ft to 2,283 sq ft and prices starting at RM689,800. Two layout types are available, further differentiated into intermediate, end and corner lot configurations. Units within the project feature large window panels for optimising natural lighting and ventilation.

"This is the product that the market is looking for during the current economic slowdown. With an outstanding value-for-money proposition, we are sure that Penduline homes will entice prospective buyers, whether to stay or to invest. There has never been a more opportune time for the young generation to buy, as houses in this attractive price range are hard to come by nowadays," says IJM Land managing director Edward Chong. ■



Promoting property literacy

SkyBridge International's Adrian Un shares his views on the domestic market and its prospects

| Text by ALIFF YUSRI | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com

Property investment often serves as the keystone driving the fortunes of the wealthy and influential, with a healthy portfolio of assets considered *de rigeur* for financial success. However, it can be an impenetrable jungle to the uninitiated, with lions, tigers and bears lurking in the undergrowth to snare the unwary.

Established in 2013, SkyBridge International seeks to ease the transition for first-time investors into the market, leveraging on the experience of founder Adrian Un and his years of networking in the banking and property industries. Sitting down with *Living & Property*, he shares his take on the domestic segment, external influences affecting the market and matters arising.

1 What was the motivating factor behind the founding of SkyBridge International?

In my career in the banking industry, I have handled many cases where home purchasers were distraught after having bought into abandoned projects. A lot of these were older buyers who lost their hard-earned savings, and their stories carried a lot of emotional impact. SkyBridge International was set up to address issues like this through property education and awareness.

2 There are many property education specialists out there. What sets SkyBridge International apart?

Experience and versatility. Many specialists concentrate on specific niches; for instance, some focus on auctions. Here at SkyBridge International, you get everything under one roof, from loan applications to legal considerations and even tenant management. We also have an advantage in terms of developer risk evaluation, looking at factors such as gearing and track records, due to an extensive network built up over the years.

3 If you could have one take-home message for beginners, what would it be?

The first thing to consider when it comes to investment is risk. You can't just use potential profit as the basis for decisions; if you're unaware of the risks, you're setting yourself up to lose your initial stake. There has been a tendency for beginners to get caught up in a rush to make their first quick million through property, which is a dangerous mindset. While it serves a purpose in sparking interest and action, you need due diligence to make it happen.

4 What are your criteria for evaluating the attractiveness of a project?

The more connectivity, the better, because when you're living in a house or a condominium, you need to work to pay for it. Alternative roads and routes are a bonus, to avoid congestion at bottlenecks. Purchasers also want their neighbourhoods to be surrounded by trees, gardens, manicured lawns and so on, so a township with generous space allocations for greenery will usually see values appreciate significantly. MRT and LRT access also helps, but is less of a factor at higher price points in Malaysia.

5 What are the draws of the Malaysian property segment? Why buy into local properties?

Malaysia is one of the few countries in the region to allow for freehold ownership. Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia,



PHOTO BY DD HOE

Vietnam and Thailand all have significant barriers to international ownership, usually in the form of quotas or local representation. Singapore was popular, but has cooled in the past few years due to extensive cooling measures.

6 Given developments such as the recent correction for the segment, revisions in Bank Negara Malaysia's overnight policy rate and Brexit, is this the right time to explore the property market?

Any time is the right time. The real questions are whether it's financially feasible, and whether you're buying to stay or to invest. If you're buying for investment, there are plenty of products to choose from at reasonable prices, as these have actually gone down slightly. Before you purchase, however, you need to ask whether you can deliver the instalments, rain or shine.

Total household debt for Malaysia has hit 89% of its gross domestic product, which is pretty high, but the less highlighted reality is that Malaysians are still very high on savings. However, many are playing a wait-and-see game.

7 What are your thoughts on domestic property hotspots? What should first-time investors be wary of?

I've been monitoring the progress of hotspots in Johor for a while. The masterplans and infrastructure are first-rate. Developers began by launching at about RM500 psf, and at its highest point, this was closer to RM1,500 psf, with encouraging sales. However, there are concerns regarding the sustainability of this trend, with an oversupply of high-rise developments and a comparative shortage of tenants.

8 Do you have any tips for intermediate or advanced property investors?

Distressed properties and commercial shophouses are highly sought-after but these are usually out of the reach of most investors, unless they are in the industry itself, because the good ones tend to be snapped up right away. However, they offer undeniable value if you are in a position to leverage on them.

If money isn't an issue, commercial is definitely the way to go, because from a rental yield point of view, there is a higher tenant turnover rate for residential. Ultra-high net worth individuals tend to purchase properties overseas as well, usually as a hedge.

9 What are the relative merits of build-then-sell versus sell-then-build properties?

Build-then-sell is usually the better choice, because you don't pay progressive interest, and because you can see the end

product and avoid abandonment concerns. It's very popular in other parts of the world, such as Australia. However, you have to pay a premium, which can be as high as 15%–20%. Sell-and-build, however, offers greater value appreciation due to its compounding rate of returns.

10 How do the office and industrial segments weigh in as investment venues?

There is currently an oversupply in the office space, with about 100 million square feet to be filled up. That will take a while, unless the oil and gas industry rebounds. Barring that, it is a challenging proposition. The industrial segment is a whole different ball game, as you need deep pockets to buy and hold anything there, with joint ventures as a common vehicle for entry. ■

ABOVE:
Landed homes and high-rises remain the simplest entry point for beginners

RIGHT:
Un notes that risk management is critical in effective property investment





Jardin Des Plantes comprises a wide range of linens, wallpapers and other home furnishings such as cushions

Celebrating the time-honoured art of the botanist, the West London-based Designers Guild introduces its Autumn/Winter 2016 collection of fabrics, wallpapers and home accessories, dubbed *Jardin Des Plantes*. Taking its name from a French phrase meaning “garden of plants”, the launch features exquisitely drawn flora and fauna in a variety of picturesque palettes.

As with many collections in the Designers Guild portfolio, *Jardin Des Plantes* makes extensive reference to historical figures, in this case renowned explorers and botanists such as William Forsyth, George Bentham and George W Melville, who pioneered new frontiers of understanding in the natural world and recorded their findings with exacting accuracy and stunning artistry.

Treasure trove of textures

Entries in the collection include “Marianne”, encompassing a range of linens, wall coverings and cushions. Named for Marianne North, the famed Victorian biologist who devoted her life to travelling the world and recording its plant life in landscape paintings long before photography became a practical option.

Her dedication to nature is captured in burgeoning blossoms and evocations of a summer rose garden in homage to North’s gallery at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, with *Jardin Des Plantes’* digital prints available in scoured linen as well for a quintessential vintage look.

In a similar vein, “Aubriet” commemorates the work of Claude Aubriet, French artist and botanical illustrator at the Jardin du Roi in Paris, whose explorations in the Middle East

documented the beauty of that region’s historical sites and flora. Featuring vivid pinks and yellows against neutral greys and blues, “Aubriet” is available in linens, wallpaper panels, cushions and throws, with the latter woven from fine merino wool finished with a blanket-stitched edge.



The collection draws inspiration from nature

Gardens of wonder

Drawing inspiration from nature with the Designers Guild’s *Jardin Des Plantes* collection, available at Janine Kuala Lumpur

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For a more understated statement, *Jardin Des Plantes* also features a series of non-woven parchment wallpapers, available in rotary-printed tonal and gravure-printed striped effects. Parchment wallpapers come in a choice of 41 colourways, while parchment stripe variants offer 24 colourways.

Other notable offerings include “Majella”, a modern take on classic damask with a dual pattern of large- and small-scale Venetian leaves. Available as a range of cushions, the design comes in graphite, cobalt, fuchsia, alchemilla, viridian and ivory colourways.

Rounding out the collection is the Designers Guild’s AW16 washbags, designed for the washroom or for travel. Comprising Couture Rose, Pugin, Delahaye and Tulipani, the washbags are primarily crafted from printed oil-cloth, with Pugin standing out in stylish velvet. All four designs come in three sizes, with Pugin finished in waterproof lining and Couture Rose, Delahaye and Tulipani waterproof both inside and out.

A proud pedigree

Jardin Des Plantes is the latest collection from the Designers Guild, a wholesale fabrics, upholstery, and bed and bath specialist

founded in the UK by Tricia Guild. A family concern, the company is helmed by Guild as founder and creative director, with her brother Simon Jeffreys serving as group chief executive.

Investing extensively each year into new product lines, the studio has produced designs from materials as diverse as Eastern decorative art, Italian architecture and even classical documents.

Notable imprints under the group include Designer Guild Essentials, featuring plain and semi-plain fabrics for every eventuality, Designer Guild Kids, adapted for nurseries and playrooms, and The Royal Collection of Fabrics and Wallcoverings, inspired by the interiors of royal residences, along with labels under designer houses such as William Yeoward, Christian Lacroix and Howard Hodgkin.

Janine is the exclusive distributor for the Designers Guild in Malaysia. Established in 1982, the homegrown furnishings boutique opened its first outlet in Yow Chuan Plaza, Ampang, growing through the years to launch two showrooms in Great Eastern Mall and Bangsar Shopping Centre. It has since supplemented its portfolio with design consultation services for residential and commercial projects. ■

Good things come in threes

SIME Darby Property Bhd has launched phase three of Elmina Valley in the City of Elmina, Selangor following the success of its preceding phases. The first two phases recorded over 90% in take-up rates within two days of their respective launches — a feat which the developer is confident of repeating.

The latest phase consists of 354 double-storey link homes with built-up areas starting from 1,762 sq ft. Designed for contemporary and multi-genera-

tional living, the units — scheduled for completion in 2018 — follow an open-plan floor layout and utilise large windows that allow ample natural light to stream in as well as encouraging better ventilation indoors.

Featuring a gross development value (GDV) of RM280 mil, the third phase makes up part of the City of Elmina, a mixed development which sits on 5,000 acres of land and has a total GDV of RM25.8 bil. ■



Phase three of Elmina Valley consists of 354 double-storey link homes designed for contemporary and multi-generational living



The ICE Gallery is the pride of IJM Land's integrated city development Pantai Sentral Park

Unveiling the ICE

THE new IJM Land Centre of Excellence (ICE) Gallery in Pantai Sentral Park, Kuala Lumpur sparkled during its official opening hosted by IJM Land Bhd — the property development arm of IJM Corp Bhd — and its joint venture partner Amona Development Sdn Bhd. Close to 200 guests who attended the opening were entertained with live jazz music and a dance performance.

Challenging conventions with its design, the RM30 mil ICE Gallery is composed of two transparent interlocking geometric glass cubes and is an interpretation of nature and organic forms that grow in all directions without the intervention of men. Its column-free structure allows for flexibility in terms of the utilisation of its internal spaces for fashion shows, product launches, exhibitions and the like.

The 29,000-sq ft gallery is the main showcase of IJM Land's Pantai Sentral Park, an integrated city development that is surrounded by the 200-acre forest reserve Bukit Kerinchi. ■



The ceremony was graced by Ekovest chairman and co-founder Tan Sri Lim Kang Hoo (left), Wee (centre) and Lim (right)

Retail therapy for Cheras

EKOVEST Bhd has signed key tenants for the retail component of its EkoCheras mixed development in Cheras, including premier brands such as Golden Screen Cinemas, The Village Grocer, Borders and The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, with the occasion graced by the presence of Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong.

Dubbed EkoCheras Mall, the retail offering comprises 250 outlets across approximately 625,000 sq ft of net lettable area, with a gross development value of RM2.11 bil. It is set to transform Central Cheras into an upscale shopping and leisure destination in its own right.

"EkoCheras Mall's strategic location will see EkoCheras as an effective property for retail yield or capital appreciation," says Ekovest managing director Datuk Seri Lim Keng Cheng.

Aside from the mall, EkoCheras components range from its iconic twin SoHo (small office home office) towers and a service apartment tower to hotel and office suites. ■

Top marks for quality

GAMUDA Land Sdn Bhd added another feather to its cap when it achieved the highest Construction Quality Assessment System (Conquas) score for construction quality and workmanship in Malaysia with its development in Jade Hills, Kajang. Jadite Suites — an exclusive serviced residence — was given a score of 82.8 out of 100 in the residential high-rise building category.

A low-density development that comes with full condominium facilities, the first three blocks of Jadite Suites have been fully sold, while the fourth block is currently open for sale. New material innovations were incorporated to improve the quality and look of the buildings' facade as well as the durability of the common facility area.

Conquas is administered by Singapore's Building and Construction Authority and is internationally recognised as a benchmarking tool for quality. Aspects that are assessed include the building's architecture as well as basic mechanical and electrical workmanship standards. ■



Jadite Suites received a score of 82.8 out of 100 in the residential high-rise building category

Spreading the cheer

FESTIVE seasons often bring forth the spirit of giving, and the little ones in the paediatric ward of Pusat Perubatan Universiti Malaya (PPUM) in Petaling Jaya, Selangor were not forgotten during the recent Hari Raya celebrations.



A boy receiving his gift from SP Setia divisional general manager Paul Chan

The sick children received a pleasant surprise in the form of 30 SP Setia Bhd staff who not only came bearing gifts but also spent time with the children to lift their spirits up.

SP Setia divisional general manager Tony Ling says activities like this are part of the developer's commitment to caring for the community, particularly during festive seasons. "To most people, bringing a smile to their faces is not difficult. We just need to show people that we care," he adds.

The visit was organised in collaboration with SP Setia Foundation, the group's corporate social responsibility arm which was founded in 2000 to provide assistance to underprivileged members of society. ■