

HOMES & DECORATING



Left: The second floor of the Shalini Ganendra Fine Art gallery; above: Shalini Ganendra.

Life and Art Mix Outside Kuala Lumpur

By MARK LEAN
Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

When Shalini Ganendra sought to expand her 14-year-old gallery, she envisioned a space where artists could wake up, show their work and have cocktails with patrons at sunset.

"I wanted to ensure that whatever public space the gallery took up would incorporate a residential component, reflecting innovation, thought and good design—as with all great contemporary art," she said.

Over lunch, she convinced Ken Yeang, an architect and family friend, to take the job. T.R. Hamzah & Yeang, where Mr. Yeang is a partner, specializes in eco-friendly projects, and he has led the design of mixed residential and commercial developments in London, Dubai and Southeast Asia.

More than a year later, what Ms. Ganendra calls "an experimental tropical structure" has taken shape in Petaling Jaya, an affluent suburb of Kuala Lumpur. The two-story structure with its sharp, angular edges and rough-hewn concrete exterior is a minimalist contrast to the more traditional neighboring homes, many of which have private driveways and swimming pools. Built with materials costing roughly \$300,000, the building is composed of exhibition and living spaces, linked with passageways on both floors.

Inside, the 2,500-square-foot living space includes three bedrooms and a fully equipped kitchen. The three bathrooms include adjustable louvers (and specially designed drains) that let residents take rain showers during Malaysia's frequent storms.

The artists' studio space is located steps away from the residential area, and those staying at the property are free to use it and the 4,300-square-foot gallery outside of regular business hours. Ms. Ganendra selects residents through curator recommendations across media and regions.

For artists living at the site while their output is on display, the



blurred work-life boundary is a beneficial one. "There is no travel time lost," said Susan Cochrane, a curator who recently presented an exhibit of Australian Aboriginal art.

"The building reminds you at all times that you are here for a purpose," said Claudia Cannizzaro, a multimedia artist who normally lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. "At the same time there is an alertness about living here, as people may walk in any time, which keeps you on edge."

The bedrooms are each furnished with two patchwork-quilted beds and little else—a nod to artist residents who arrive with their own design ideas. "The building praises asymmetry and modernity, so I arranged the furniture, which has an old-fashioned flavor to it, in a way to continue that praise," said Ms. Cannizzaro. "I was so bad I even took off the posters on the walls, as I like the walls bare, which is quite common with artists. I think it is bound to happen again."

According to Mr. Yeang, designing ecologically attuned buildings in the tropics is easier than in colder climates, because the temperature varies less, though the high humidity must be factored into design decisions. He obtained construction materials within a 500-kilometer radius, including timber and cement bricks. The buildings are made from reinforced, locally produced concrete and include rooftop drainage devices called bioswales that help return rain to the grounds and foliage—resulting in a vibrant landscaped gar-



den connected to the building.

He added a design element more commonly seen in the Middle East: a wind chimney, which pulls air into the gallery to help cool and ventilate it. It is an experiment that he is still tweaking, he said.

For Ms. Ganendra, seeing her project materialize has been professionally rewarding. "My intention was to present the best art in an innovative gallery that does not intimidate," she said, "and the building's residential aspect flows quite naturally with this idea."

Meanwhile, Ms. Cannizzaro has gone beyond the work-life integration of the gallery to get to know the rest of the neighborhood. On weekends, she is a regular at the morning market, a 10-minute walk from the grounds. "There is no food stall in the 500-meter distance that I have not tried yet," she said. "I love street culture, and there is plenty of it here."



Architect Ken Yeang specializes in eco-friendly projects. Clockwise from top left: One of the residence's bedrooms; the gallery office; the gallery's interior; the exterior; a sculpture in the garden.



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