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HAVEN

A TASTE OF IPOH

Entertaining at home with
author and restaurateur
Datuk David Tan

Living Made Easy

Soothing Sanctuaries in a Concrete Jungle

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LIVING





Safe & sleek

*Keeping things modern with a touch of nostalgia,
this experimental home champions safety and style*

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The two-storey home has a very modern feel with different textures and shapes

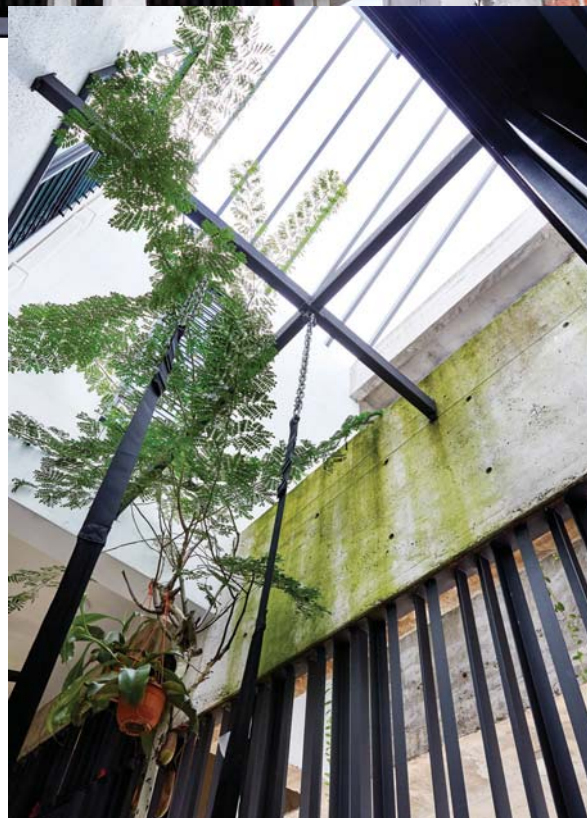


Safety is one of the most important aspects we look for in a new home. However, as architect Looi Mun Kit demonstrates, style and comfort need not be compromised for security reasons.

I meet Looi at his Petaling Jaya home, which took him roughly 10 months to build from the ground up on a piece of vacant land. "I am used to designing big bungalows for people, so a small home was a challenge for me," he says.

Occupying 3,000 sq ft, the house is a eye-catching structure that dwarfs the surrounding single-storey homes.

The façade of the building is modern, thanks to a mix of materials and textures. "There are three different languages here: a raw finish, high-tech louvres and normal plaster and paint. They form a combination that stands out but doesn't compete," Looi explains. The front porch has a lot of room for parking and even includes an elaborate fish pond that Looi maintains himself. There is ample room around the home, providing a great space for growing plants on one side, a barbecue area at the back and a cosy breakfast patio on the other side.





There is ample space around the house for gardening and entertaining





The ground floor has an open plan with the intricate staircase as the main standout feature



As we explore the garden, Looi points out a corrugated aluminium feature wall, a trend, he says, that is commonly seen overseas but one that Malaysians are reluctant to embrace. “I just wanted to do something that people wouldn’t do ... why not try this instead of just plaster and paint? The texture and the reflection of the material itself give you the character of the building,” he adds.

From the back, the shape of the structure is reminiscent of a simple house with a rectangular centre and triangular roof. “The house’s profile is very simple — it’s like a cottage. You know how you draw a house when you’re a child? I followed the profile of an old house but used new materials, like the aluminium metal that is wrapped around, to give it a modern feel,” Looi explains.

The heavy grille gate at the entrance opens into a little courtyard complete with greenery and a swing. Looi says this security feature gives him peace of mind when his sons are playing. “We used to live in an apartment, so security is important for us. It’s all controlled security here but it’s a very airy construction,

especially because there’s a courtyard right there,” he says. Even at the back, Looi had fitted a three-in-one security door that he designed himself. It comprises a grille, mosquito netting and a solid door.

The ground floor is an open plan, much like an apartment, with the living room blending into the kitchen on one side and an office area that connects to the television area. Cross-ventilation from the front windows to the back door keeps the house cool and comfortable even on hot days. At the centre of these spaces is a stunning staircase with Z-shaped steps that gives the impression of being suspended from the ceiling. “The staircase is my favourite but it took awhile to work it out with the manufacturer,” Looi says. He even has a roller-shutter installed at the foot of the stairs for added security.

Interested in using local materials, Looi took a nostalgic approach to certain elements of his construction. “If you notice the flooring, it’s just simple cement. It brought back childhood memories of my grandmother’s house. We grew up the kampung way,



The netted bed is a unique addition for family fun

so this is how it works.” Although there are expensive and seamless floor renders available, Looi opted for local materials to add to the house’s rustic charm.

The first floor has a master bedroom with a walk-in wardrobe and en-suite, two bedrooms for his sons, a guest bedroom and a cosy family area. The highlight of the upper floor is its netted bed or a “rollover sleeping area” that stretches across the ceiling. Accessed via a black spiral stairway, this netted roof lets the family lie back and enjoy the glorious sky, visible through a window that can be electronically opened to let out hot air. “One of my sons is autistic, so I wanted to create this, a bigger open space and playground for him to run around, for him to explore different areas and textures,” explains Looi.

Fond of DIY, Looi did most of the interiors himself with fixtures and cupboards from IKEA and multiple home improvement stores. He even adapted the

kitchen island, putting in a little nook that would let his sons climb up and try some cooking. Fitted with solar panels and a rainwater collection tank, this home is moving towards self-sufficiency.

When I ask Looi if he found it different, having no client to answer to, he laughs. “I have a client, my wife. In the beginning, she really didn’t know what I wanted to do, so it was the usual client-architect relationship.”

Still he managed to explore all the design elements he has been aching to try, such as the aluminium outer wall, intricate staircase and cement floors. Looi has been adamant about showing that it is possible to revive older development areas, “I basically wanted to showcase that a small house like this can be very interesting. Actually, my ultimate view of architecture, life and housing development is instead of people buying in new development areas, [think] about old areas like this.” **H**

