

# Concord Of Nature And Design

Hidden within the dense rainforest hills of Bentong lies a private house built to complement nature's beauty.

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As life gets increasingly busy and urban living becomes more compact by the day, it is now a prevalent trend for city-folks to seek escape from the confines of their hectic lifestyles. For some it may be travelling, for others nature-inspired hobbies or outdoor adventures. However, just about 45 kilometres away from Kuala Lumpur, one family's idea of a getaway took a more permanent form: a private house built deep within the hidden folds of nature, amidst dense rainforest hills, flowing streams and lush fruit orchards.

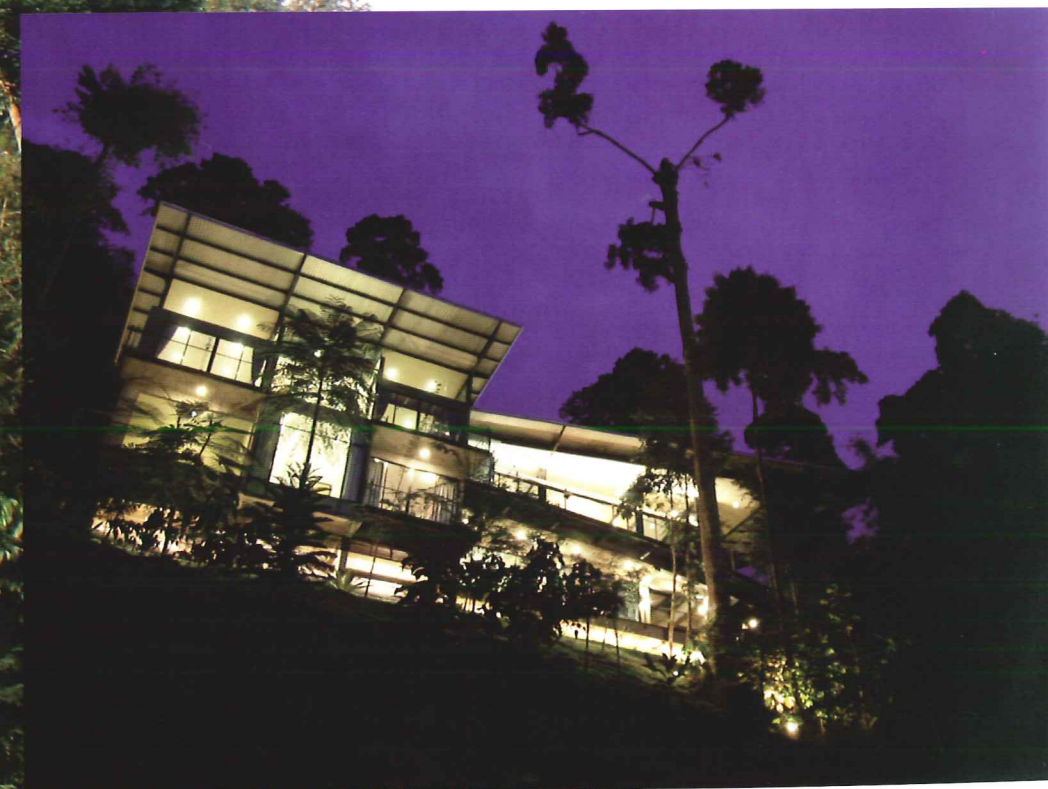
Located in the laid-back town of Bentong near the foothills of Genting Highlands, the two-storey house has a built-up of 4,500sq ft that includes two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and an open plan that connects the living room, dining hall, an entertainment room and a dry kitchen. It also features a pond and two balconies. The homeowners had wanted

a weekend house to enjoy the quiet surroundings of their one-acre land, having in mind a design that would allow them to unwind and feel close to nature. To make it happen, they approached Adrian Liew and MK Looi of LNL Sdn Bhd, the two architects behind the innovative architecture.

## A STEELY RESOLVE

Before they could even begin designing, Liew and Looi had several complications to consider due to the geography of the location. "It was a remote site that sat on a steep slope with lots of trees blocking its access," says Looi, adding that they had to build a road before anything could be done and then create a platform on which the house could sit.

It was a challenge that they both relished, giving them an opportunity to experiment with the possibilities of unique materials and design. Their vision was to build a house that was sustainable and requires minimal maintenance, considering the nature of the environment and remoteness of the location. As such, Liew and Looi proposed the use of steel, which could be pre-fabricated off site,





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LEFT  
The aesthetics stress the outdoor green environs.

BOTTOM  
The pond brings the predominant outdoor vibe inside.

therefore saving workers cost and time involved on site. It was lucky for them that the owners agreed with their vision, as they admitted that steel was a choice that many Malaysians have still not accepted for their homes.

"When people think of steel, they think of industrial factories, but it is actually a material that can be stretched to give a lot of interesting forms," says Looi. In fact, the bold designers initially wanted to build the entire house using steel, but were deterred by increasing steel prices, ultimately settling on a half-concrete-half-steel structure.

Architecturally, it was an opportunity for them to create a modern contemporary structure that could stand out on its own in the rainforest setting. Modern materials such as unpolished concrete, rendered cement surfaces, steel frames and glass panels were used to create that striking contrast; with wooden decks and floorings



providing a sense of balance and harmony to the design, giving the house a cosier atmosphere.

Through it all, it was a priority for both the owners and the architects to ensure that the environment was preserved as much as possible. Liew and Looi carefully planned to keep most of the trees and bamboos on the land, managing to also recycle some of the cut trees for furniture materials and outdoor use. In line with their vision for self-sustainability, Liew and Looi insisted that the house require no finishings or paint, as the walls of concrete seasons itself from the weather over time. Further, the homeowners and architects decided not to install any air conditioning system in the house.

#### FLOW OF SPACE

The remote surroundings and unrestricted space gave Liew and Looi plenty of freedom to explore with things that usually cannot be done in an urban setting, an example of which being the open toilet concept overlooking the hills. When it came to designing the interior space, they focused on integrating the outdoors and indoors, creating a harmonious relationship between design and nature.

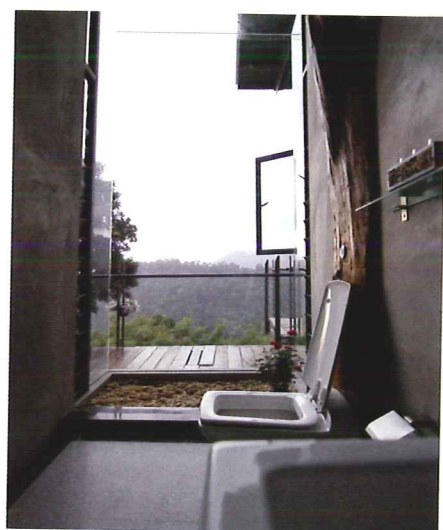
The house was crafted with an emphasis on the flow to connect the spaces, seeking to maximise the potential space available. Instead of divisive concrete walls, the dining space simply flows to the living area, which in turn leads toward the pond and garden area outside, allowing



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM  
The deco of the house is uncluttered, in sync with the overarching open-planned theme of the house design

uninhibited airflow through the entire home.

The true beauty of this house is found on the second floor, where an extensive balcony stretches the space from inside out, combining with the beautiful natural surroundings to create an effect of unlimited space, one that travels as far as the eye can see. A glass roofed hallway also offers a beautiful view of the night sky, an idea that came to Liew and Looi when they were planning the house from a spot on top of the hill. Top-to-floor windows and glass doors were cleverly used as an unobtrusive way of segregating the outdoors and indoors, incorporating nature's panoramic beauty into the design. The philosophy behind the design is derived from the uninhibited and limitless characteristics of the natural environment. Explains Looi, "It is a forest area, so the house should not feel tied up and sealed. The design also allows the owners to rearrange the space however they want."



## THE IRON LEAF

For Liew and Looi, the highlight of their design is the stunning steel roof that makes the house truly stand out. Inspired by "Outback Houses" while still students in Australia, they drew from the simplicity and rough-hewn style that mirrored the harsh surroundings, one that evoked a sense of stress-free and lightweight atmosphere miles away from city living. Affectionately nicknamed the "iron leaf", the unique roof design exudes a sensation of being afloat, suspended in a quiet stillness. This is



**"The unique roof design exudes a sensation of being afloat, suspended in a quiet stillness...a contemporary interpretation of the surrounding nature, like a floating leaf from a tree."**

TOP  
The standout glass-roofed hallway on the second floor

LEFT  
The outdoor bathroom overlooking the lush greenery

RIGHT  
The special feature of the second floor is the iron leaf roof, a contemporary rendition of the surrounding nature



apparently what both Liew and Looi aimed for, a contemporary interpretation of the surrounding nature, like a floating leaf from a tree.

Despite the painstaking effort that went into the design, Liew and Looi believe that the priority is not the house. "Unlike city living that strives to stand out, the building here is only ten percent, [instead] it's about the environment and the lifestyle of the user," says Looi. Ultimately, they feel that the house should blend in with its surroundings to enhance the enjoyment for its owners, whether it be sitting by the pond enjoying the breeze, tending to the garden or looking out from the balcony into the lush rainforest. ■

