



A breathtaking view of the rainforest hills and the house.



A pond next to the living room creates a zen-like ambience.

The 'Iron Leaf' in the rainforest

Integrating a great design concept, a wise selection of materials and smart lighting techniques, 'Leaf' is a weekend house located in the middle of the thick rainforest hills of Bentong. It has arguably raised the bar for the local architecture industry.

By WILLY WILSON and ELLEN TANG

FORTY-FIVE kilometres north of Kuala Lumpur sits the village of Bentong. At 2,000 ft. above sea level, Bentong is a popular weekend destination located at the foothills of Genting Highland. Surrounded by thick rainforest hills, the village is in a small valley blessed with picturesque waterfalls and streams and cool rushing brooks and streams.

Hidden behind the lush greenery is a swanky weekend house that stands out for its architecture and design. The owner, who prefers to remain anonymous, is a nature enthusiast.

"Sitting on a hill and surrounded by nature, it is the perfect location for a weekend house that my husband and I have always wanted to build," says the homeowner of her 0.4 hectares (one acre) land.

Collaboration with two young architects from LNL Sdn Bhd saw a weekend house that sets a beautiful contrast between a contemporary structure and a tropical jungle setting.

"We called this project 'leaf'," says Adrian Liew and MK Looi, the architects who man LNL Sdn Bhd.

StarProperty visits the stunning weekend house and chats with the homeowner and the architects.

Architectural challenges

'Leaf' is a 2-storey structure that houses two rooms, two living rooms, two balconies, a kitchen, a pond, a little glass house near the pond, two bathrooms and two powder rooms. Sitting on hilly land, the built-up area is 405sq m (4,500sq ft).

"We knew it would not be an easy project considering the position of the land," says Looi. "We took up this project knowing that it would be an interesting and challenging one."

Even before they could begin



Looi (left) and Adrian Liew.

the construction work, they had to overcome some serious issues. First of all, they had to flatten certain parts of the hill to build a base for the house. Then, the logistics of organising the whole project, such as seeing that materials were supplied regularly despite the remote location, had to be dealt with.

"The extremely vertical position of the land was not an ideal location to build a house," says Liew matter-of-factly. "Consequently, the first few months were spent flattening the land while conceptualising the design." To add to the woes, the location is remote, and it can only be accessed by a small lane that fits two cars. Such difficulties required great coordination between the architects, the contractor and the client.

"We are happy that none of the difficulties harmed the project," says Liew.

The design concept

The main idea behind 'Leaf' is to create an establishment that emulates the shape and characteristics of a leaf.

"Architecturally speaking, we wanted to create a modern structure that would stand out in a rainforest setting," Looi explains. "So we toyed with the idea of a contemporary design that exudes lightweight and elevated feelings, just like a leaf

hanging on a tree. We also intend to highlight a contrast between a modern structure and a rainforest setting."

To achieve such a contrast, modern materials are broadly employed. Metal decking, floor-to-ceiling glass panels and steel frames are mainly used for the exterior, while a solid concrete base is built for the house to sit on, suggesting an idea of a solid tree trunk.

Unpolished concrete and concrete rendered surface too are found in nearly every corner of the house, from the walls to the breakfast table.

When asked about her favourite corner of the house, the homeowner confesses that she never gets bored of the balcony. The balcony, which is located on the second floor, gives an extra sense of elevation due to the fact that the house itself is built on high ground.

She explains that because there is no obvious space segregation between the balcony and the living room, "it feels as if the balcony is a part of the living room." All thanks to the floor-to-ceiling glass walls and the uniform use of timber flooring in and out of the house.

With whispering wind, wandering monkeys and twittering



Modern interior set against the backdrop of thick rainforest hills.



The spacious living room.

birds literally everywhere, it is only natural that the owner instantly fell in love with this location.

"You could even watch hornbills hanging out on a tall tree if you are lucky," the owner

enthuses.

How we wish that weekend could stretch longer.

Go to www.starproperty.my for more beautiful pictures of the 'Iron Leaf'