Issue No. 116 | Summer 2025 THE EDGE

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SUMMER STYLE STAPLES



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Artist Impression Only


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PHOTOGRAPHY: **SooPhye**

LIGHT TO READ BY

A friend caught up with me over lunch recently to update me on her upcoming move to Sydney, Australia. Hailing from France, she remarked how she was looking forward to seeing the seasons shift, however mildly pronounced they may be Down Under. Living in a tropical climate, we Malaysians are just used to monsoon, no monsoon and the short, dry spell that usually occurs around the Chinese New Year. Despite the lack of autumnal leaves and snow, summer is the one season we enjoy all year round. And whatever special reason you may have, one that comes to mind — and always makes me smile — is a sentence by Jeannette Walls, the Arizona-born author of *The Glass Castle and Half Broke Horses*: "One benefit of summer was that each day we had more light to read by".

It is this yearning for the seasons that also compelled the homeowner of Bungalow 19 to choose a magnificent olive tree, carefully and lovingly shipped from Spain, as the centrepiece of his driveway landscape. It is the primary European accent in a contemporary villa of otherwise overwhelmingly tropical Asian expression. Read all about this stunning home, tucked away in a lofty, residential enclave, on Page 36.

In an era where high-rise living is — pardon the pun — on the rise, it should come as no surprise that the other two homes featured in this issue are condominium units. One is a dramatically creative nook with bold artistic flourishes and Thai-Nusantara touches; the other is a paean to its owner's love of clashing prints, colours and textures. Discover their stories from Page 20.

We also travelled south to Melaka to cajole Jennifer Tan to share simple recipes from her popular Nyonya supper club, launched this year. If you feel the need to whip up a relatively fuss-free *otak-otak* or *laksa lemak*, flip to Page 72. With Penang's George Town Festival and the Merdeka celebrations in the offing, we hope you find our pages filled with inspiration for design, decorative touches as well as discovery. Life, after all, is a journey. Make it beautiful.

Diana Khoo
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SUMMER NIGHTS (AND DAYS)

Summer days may drift away to — ah, oh — summer nights. But don't let it happen without injecting a few pops of colour into your personal as well as professional spaces. For an easy (and customisable) option, look to Merite Design Studio whose forte is refurbishing old or existing furniture, giving them a new lease of life by way of a good paint and polish or, better yet, fresh and snazzy upholstery. If you like what you see, turn to Page 20 for an insider's tour of its founder's home. H



Highlighting heritage

These new establishments and initiatives focus on preserving history and reviving old structures

Text **Aireena Azni**

ZAHID IZZANI/THE EDGE



REJUVENATING THE CAPITAL

As a major economic source and Malaysia's melting pot of different cultures, Kuala Lumpur has undergone decades of rapid development that have left many historic spaces in the city underutilised and disconnected. Recently, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim launched Warisan KL, a transformative initiative that seeks to breathe new life into the capital's historic downtown, including Dataran Merdeka, Masjid Jamek Enclave and Carcosa Seri Negara.

Led by Kuala Lumpur City Hall and Think City, with the support of the Ministry of Finance and Prime Minister's Department, this programme puts culture, creativity and community at the heart of the regeneration process. "Warisan KL is not just a heritage agenda — it is an urban strategy focused on liveability, inclusion and cultural resilience. We are not just restoring buildings — we are reactivating identity and public life," said KL mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WONDER

Situated just 2km from the ancient Great Pyramids of Giza on the outskirts of Cairo is the highly-anticipated Grand Egyptian Museum, set to officially open its doors this July. Designed by Irish firm Heneghan Peng Architects, this complex spanning nearly 500,000 sq m will be the world's largest archaeological institution housing over 100,000 artifacts, many of which will be publicly displayed for the first time.

Its overall interior and exterior take cues from Egypt's ancient design language, seen from the angular windows, sloping ceilings and hieroglyphs adorning the walls. The structure boasts a pyramidal entryway that takes visitors to its grand atrium, guarded by a 3,200-year-old, 10m-tall granite colossus of Ramses II. The main staircase, studded with well-lit pharaonic statues, leads the crowd to a viewing platform that offers a breathtaking outlook of the pyramids.

REUTERS





LUXURIOUS SANCTUARY

In the late 19th century, Sadar Manzil was used as a courtroom and public hall for the Nawabs of Bhopal in what is today modern India. After more than a century, this historic structure has been restored by hospitality company Atmosphere Core and transformed into a 22-room heritage hotel dedicated to couples only. Located in between Bhopal's historic Old City and vibrant New City, the building features Indo-Islamic architecture, boasting turquoise and cream interiors, antique furnishings and hand-painted ceilings.

Operated by an all-women staff, this regal retreat comes with excellent service; a traditional greeting at the airport, a rose-petal welcome at the mansion gates and a full vegetarian menu for breakfast and dinner. The hotel also collaborates with local talents to present live performances during teatime for guests to experience the city's rich history and culture.

Sunny style

Reinvigorate your home with these light + bright ideas

Text **Quincy Tan**

123RF



OUT IS IN

Garden blooms and rustic lawns are fantastic ways to celebrate nature, but you can also consider bringing the great outdoors into your décor and interiors. A lush viridian monstera on the coffee table or a well-curated bundle of homegrown flowers works as a perfect organic oasis in the living or dining room. Worried about longevity? Try toying with materials such as rattan and bamboo in your furniture for a fresh, airy atmosphere.

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GOLDEN DAYS

From decadently buttery runway garments to Dulux's curry-like Colour of the Year (aptly named True Joy), yellow has been enjoying its time in the sun in recent months, and it can be a welcome addition to your *pied-à-terre*, too. Light straw walls can imbue comfort and levity into a room but, for a stronger touch, a saffron sofa or dandelion ottoman will truly speak to the season.

FERUNI



STACKING UP

Forget accent walls, think accent surfaces: A playful splash of intrigue anywhere in the house works wonders. Colourful tiles in bold, graphic patterns are a fun and functional means of approaching this popular feature, and may fit particularly well if you are in search of a way to jazz up your bathrooms. For a cohesive aesthetic, look into matching shades and vibrant slabs for your floors.

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COASTAL COOKING

If you need a little meal-making motivation, a kitchen revamp may just do the trick, and nothing says hearty and wholesome like a Mediterranean-inspired hearth. Terracotta tones, warm wooden tables and sandy exposed brick — coupled with a few charming details like potted herbs, white enamel cookware and hand-painted blue plates — will have you fantasising about zesting lemons and baking crusty loaves by the salty ocean in no time.

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LOW-KEY LIVING

Being tactical with layouts can be tricky, especially when trying to make the most of a tight area. To avoid clutter and clunkiness, maximise each zone with bespoke built-in storage solutions for a more seamless overall look. You may also find "invisible tech" on the rise now — intuitive, innovative and integrated systems that do not draw too much attention turn a smart house into a smart home.

MEGAH RISE
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FREEHOLD | Units from 2,291 – 3,232 sf

Artist's Impression

In the mature neighbourhood of Taman Megah, integrated developments that bring together residential, commercial, and lifestyle elements within a single, thoughtfully planned enclave are rare. A host of dining, retail and gyms provide the ultimate convenience at your doorstep.

This exclusive low-density development offers a unique proposition—combining the comforts of spacious, landed-style living with urban connectivity only a stone's throw away.



Artist's Impression



Megah Rise Mall

Each residence features generous layouts and all en-suite bedrooms, providing privacy, flexibility, and comfort for multigenerational households or modern families. Residents also enjoy the peace of mind of secure, private surroundings.

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Lavish living

Take a peek at some brands' forays into contemporary and vintage furniture

Text **Lee Charmynn**

SEEING STRIPES

After its restoration in 2020, the historic Miles C Bates "Desert Wave" house — named for its distinct curved roof that mimics the nearby San Jacinto Mountains — has been open to the public for home rentals by Boutique. Until Aug 31, it will serve as the showroom for collaborative works from furniture marketplace Design Within Reach and UK fashion designer Paul Smith. Furnishing every space in the Californian estate are pieces from DWR's best-selling brands Herman Miller and Knoll, refashioned in Maharam textiles with Smith's signature lines. The fixtures, including poolside lounges and a plaid-wrapped headboard, provide a balance between the modern and traditional. Those seeking to add some sharp and bold spice to their space can browse the collection online, or book a stay at the mid-century establishment to get up close and personal. *(dwr.com)*



OLD SCHOOL COOL

Fashion label The Row has always had a penchant for vintage furniture, fitting its global boutiques and showrooms with such items. So, it comes as no surprise that the brand, known for discreet releases and keeping a low profile, has quietly updated its Galerie webpage with a selection of vintage furniture made in the 1900s. Curious collectors will discover geometric shelves by Mathieu Matégot, a pair of cushioned armchairs by Guillerme et Chambron, and even a conference table crafted by Edgard Pillet. Following the launch of its homeware line in Milan, which showcased quilted bedding and cashmere blankets, these pieces align with The Row's minimalist aesthetic and represent a further step into lifestyle offerings. Curators will have to keep their eyes peeled for any more drops from this elusive company to add to their collections. *(therow.com)*





NO SMALL SEAT

Sinuous curving wood and vibrant leather make for a playful couple in Longchamp's first venture into furniture. The bagmaker teamed up with French designer Pierre Renart to produce eight Ruban chairs and a Wave bench, made from sheets of American walnut veneer and completed with supple cowhide. The pair's partnership goes back to 2021, when Renart crafted bespoke pieces for the maison's boutiques, resulting in the iconic Wave coffee table currently on display in the Regent Street store in London. Presented during the 2025 Milan Design Week, the seats' seamless look captures Renart's distinctive organic style and craftsmanship, while the upholstery comes in pinks, browns and Longchamp's signature green shades. Though rigid and unmoving, wood has been shaped into forms that exude movement, reflecting its enduring vision of a life filled with adventure and elegance. *(longchamp.com)*

On the move

International design events for the jet-setting enthusiast

Text **Genie Leong**



WHAT: Design Shanghai
WHERE: Shanghai, China
WHEN: June 4 to 7
More than just an exhibition, Design Shanghai is a celebration of creativity, innovation and visionary thinking. Standing at the forefront of the Asian and global design scenes, it merges Eastern and Western philosophies in a spectacular line-up of workshops, conferences and installations. This year's edition will also debut a new format with four key sections — Furniture & Lighting; Kitchen, Bathroom & Systems Design; New Materials & Applications; and Living & Lifestyle.



WHAT: 3daysofdesign
WHERE: Copenhagen, Denmark
WHEN: June 18 to 20
Conceived as a platform to showcase and celebrate great design and provide networking opportunities, Denmark's annual 3daysofdesign festival aims to inspire visitors with its line-up of local and international talents. As it will be held across multiple showrooms and galleries, visitors will also have the unique chance to explore Copenhagen's vibrant scenery and stunning landmarks as they travel between events.



WHAT: Biennale Architettura 2025
WHERE: Venice, Italy
WHEN: Until Nov 23
The Biennale Architettura 2025 is being held along the Arsenale and Giardini della Biennale in the Floating City. Curated by architect and engineer Carlo Ratti, the 19th edition of the event will feature a grand cast of exhibitors and installations, as well as eight projects by young practitioners from Canada, England, Finland, Germany, Italy, Malaysia, Portugal, Spain and Syria as part of Biennale College Architettura 2024/25.



WHAT: Maison&Objet
WHERE: Paris, France
WHEN: Sept 5 to 9
If you missed out on Maison&Objet's event in January, rejoice, as you need not wait months for the next. The Parisian interior décor showcase will return this September, this time with designer Amélie Pichard as artistic director. With eclectic displays full of whimsical flair and colour, this is the ultimate vantage point for those seeking the inside track on market developments and cutting-edge trends.



WHAT: Helsinki Design Week
WHERE: Helsinki, Finland
WHEN: Sept 5 to 15
Established in 2005, Helsinki Design Week is the largest design fête in the Nordic nations, cooperating with various partners each year to introduce new faces and phenomena to the Baltic market. With as many as 150 events taking place, it also encourages citizens to be active contributors to the city's development. The fair's media platform, *Helsinki Design Weekly*, is Finland's leading industry magazine, regularly curating fresh insights and discussions.

WEAVING MAGIC

A treasure trove of quality furniture and décor pieces, this rattan goods store in George Town tells a tale of heritage and generational artistry

Text **Genie Leong** Photography **Low Yen Yeing**











If you wander along Beach Street in George Town, you may stumble across a quaint shophouse nestled between two taller buildings, its doorway flanked by columns of rattan baskets stacked high alongside rows of chairs and folding screens. Inside, bird cages hang from the ceiling, while shelves of toys, storage boxes and bags line the walls. The Chinese characters "Xiang Xin Long" are displayed in bold red brushstroke font across the white exterior's signboard, following the traditional right-to-left reading order. Just below, the store's more recognisable Romanised name, Seang Hin Leong, appears in black lettering.

Founded in 1957, this old-school rattan shop has been the livelihood of the Sim family, who emigrated from Guangdong, China, in the early 1900s. The business has been passed down through the decades, and is now managed by fourth-generation siblings Sim Chew Po and Sim Jeck Choo. Long-time customers, however, are likely more familiar with their father and previous owner Sim Buck Teik — one of Penang's last surviving rattan weavers until his passing last year.

Born locally in 1929, the late Buck Teik moved back to China for education at the age of seven before returning to Malaya in 1948. He reunited with his father, who had been running the first outlet under the name of "Xiang Xin" on Penang Road. The year of his homecoming, Buck Teik devoted himself to mastering the craft, helping his family open their now-renowned Beach Street location, which he eventually took over. Before his children inherited the business, customers often saw him at the back of the shop, carefully preparing tall stalks of rattan or working on a half-finished project with his weathered yet nimble fingers.

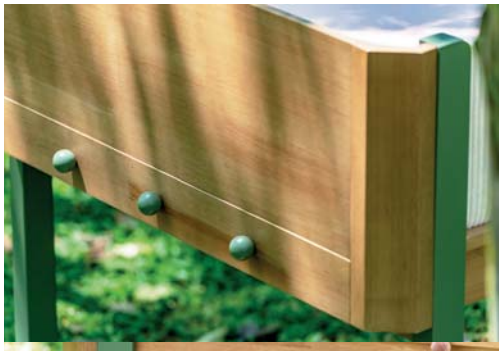
From rocking chairs and pet beds to coin purses and handheld fans, Seang Hin Leong offers a wealth of functional and decorative objects

In the business's heyday, most products were made by hand in-store, using rattan sourced from Johor and Pahang. Suppliers delivered them in bundles, with the skin peeled and stems boiled in oil to preserve the material. Using heating and water soaking techniques to make the shoots more malleable, the weaver decided how to split and shape them. In recognition of Buck Teik's meticulous craftsmanship, the enterprise was awarded Living Heritage of Penang status by the Penang Heritage Trust in 2009.

Over time, most of the shop's offerings have come to be produced by other companies. Its current keepers, always happy to answer questions about the products and space — even for window shoppers — preserve Seang Hin Leong's heritage by hosting regular weaving workshops. These serve as a reminder of this increasingly endangered trade and the state's legacy as a vibrant centre for arts and crafts. **H**

393 Lebuh Pantai, George Town. Open Monday to Saturday, 9am to 6 pm. Closed on Sunday.







Yap's Dodo Bed has chamfered edges for safety and space to hold the little things dear to children



Growing with young users

Furniture that adapts to the changing needs of children fits space-scarce homes

Text **Tan Gim Ean**

Stylish and smart — that is the trend for children's rooms today, notes furniture designer Victoria Pamela Yap Wei. Bulky, over-decorated beds are out. What is in are innovative pieces equipped with convenient storage, soft curves and calming colours.

Interior designer Skylar Chew Enn Qi agrees, saying children's furniture that saves space and can evolve into practical items as the child grows serves the needs of young families today. As many live in compact urban homes, function, efficiency and adaptability are key.

Yap's Dodo Bed and Chew's The Mighty Nest are among 24 products that have been chosen for the TIMB3R Design Incubator Programme 4.0, which connects designers and manufacturers to conceptualise, design and develop creative timber furniture and products. Final results from collaborations will be showcased to potential buyers at events such as EFE (Export Furniture Exhibition), and RiX (REKA Interiors Exhibition).

The Malaysian Timber Council, Malaysian Furniture Council and Malaysian Institute of Interior Designers are behind this annual initiative, which specifies that at least 30% of the material used have to be timber. Imported parts and components are allowed, provided the end products are either made or finished in the country.

"Dodo" refers to the series' multi-function, "like do, do, it's doable", says Yap. After becoming a mother, she realised the importance of safety in furniture for children. Storage space is a plus, as toys,

books and clothes pile up over the years. Parents also care about design: Will what they buy now still fit the room and occupant over time?

A crucial step to staying relevant is to make things modular for flexibility, says Yap, founder of ZangToria Designs. Her loft-style Dodo Bed has a section for storage and a sanctuary where kids can play, read or just curl up and dream. Should another sibling need to share the room, the bed can be converted into a double decker and two can sleep as comfortably as one.

The idea to give children a cosy nook springs from Yap's memories of climbing into an elevated hideaway when young. "It felt like my own little world and I wanted to recreate that same sense of wonder for kids.

"Furniture can tell a lot of stories — for example, [Arne Jacobsen's] Egg chair or even the pieces left behind by our grandparents." It is this mix of nostalgia and modernity that makes it fun to design furniture, she thinks.

Longevity in everyday objects is a concern for Chew, whose The Mighty Nest can be turned from baby cot into a study table or sofa that seats an adult and child. She likes to play with materials, textures and colours, the last especially because they bring energy, warmth and engaging playfulness that form an environment children are drawn to.







The Mighty Nest can transform from cot to a study table or a sofa made for two, Chew says

Still new in the industry, she joined the TIMB3R programme enticed by its purpose of turning designs into products. "We had discussions with manufacturers on how to make our ideas real. It takes about nine months to come up with a prototype, as there are lots of trials and tests," she says, crediting a professional team for guidance on the different standard operating procedures for building children's furniture, working with wood, as well as what ergonomics and flexibility involve.

While Yap's Dodo Bed is made from rubber wood, Chew uses beech sourced from Germany for her cots. She layers slabs of the wood for thickness and to strengthen The Mighty Nest's structure — fitting for a product built to grow with its user. **H**

MIX 'N' MATCH

Colour, pattern, print and texture all collide to create a surprisingly harmonious mash-up in Nabila Nasir's KLCC condo

Text **Diana Khoo** Photography **SooPhye**
Hair + make-up **Nicolaz Tan**











"When I am stressed, I make furniture and buy plates," says Nabila Nasir in all seriousness.

Living in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, just a stone's throw from the Roberto Burle Marx-designed KLCC Park and imposing Petronas Twin Towers, the petite former humanitarian worker has recently returned to roost in the capital city, after years abroad.

"I used to live only in fully-furnished set-ups, so I could only experience the joy of prettying up spaces with small decorative items, like cushions, vases and votive candles," she says. "When I finally returned home last year, I set about looking for a completely unfurnished apartment."

Describing her preferred style as maximalist and eclectic, Nabila assures it is all about "fearless curation", bringing together clashing prints, bold splashes of colour and unexpected elements and detailing that would, otherwise, normally not match.

"I am over the top but how 'extra' you want to be is really the individual's choice. If you can make it work, why not?"

And somehow, looking around her expansive 3,800 sq ft space, it works indeed.

One room is designed around a Mughal-inspired theme. Another is distinctively Peranakan. But every space tells a story of Nabila's travels and years living overseas. Upon entering her home, one is greeted by an entryway tablescape. Between the tall leaves of green spike weed grass and dracaena in baskets, there are thumping coffee-table books on glorious escapes and luxury hotels and a little trunk, all signifying her passion for exploring and seeing the world.

"Yes, home for me truly reflects all the places and cultures I had the privilege of experiencing, particularly my time in the Middle East and Africa," she says.





A wall is adorned with an extra-large tapestry, a flea market find and keepsake from her student days in London. Another boasts vintage Hermès scarves, lovingly framed and repurposed as vibrant wall art, while a painting of a Javanese dancer, sourced during a trip to Jogjakarta, brings movement as well as a touch of Southeast Asia to the space. A quick overview of all the cushions — they cover a multitude of scenes, from safari prints to Indian processions, Chinese blue and white pottery and French *toile de Jouy* — in Nabila's collection alone is enough to take you on a journey around the world.

"Everything is curated to express, not impress," Nabila asserts. "I decorate in ways that seem unconventional but always feel right … much like my design philosophy."

Despite the luxury of a clean canvas to adorn according to her heart's desire, Nabila was initially faced with an overarching conundrum: all the furniture she came across in shops was either too flimsy, too plain or boring, at the wrong price points or simply did not fit in with her design vision. "I then decided to try my hand at refurbishing items of furniture," she says.

What followed was a full-blown treasure hunt for pre-loved, vintage or even discarded objects, searching for fresh fabric to work with, as well as trawling the internet for quirky, whimsical decorative accents to completely transform them.

What started as the simple sourcing and re-designing of second-hand pieces to give them new life has now given birth to an unexpected career path for Nabila.

"I started with dining chairs from my mum's old house, reupholstering them for a fresh look. I also acquired two old side tables, had them sanded down, and found a multi-disciplinary artist, who has now become a close friend and associate, to decorate them with hand-painted parrots! As I started to fill up my home, sharing photos with friends and family along the way, I began receiving requests to sell the new-look furniture to them," she laughs. "I started getting enquiries for help and to dispense design advice too."



'I love being over the top,' says Nabila Nasir, principal designer of Merite Design Studio













As a result, the 40-year-old is now in the midst of setting up an office for Merite Design Studio, the small but growing sustainability-based design consultancy she founded last August. The bricks-and-mortar location is scheduled to open sometime this July. Those drawn to Nabila's unabashed love of colour and pattern will also be charmed by her commitment to saving the planet. "Merite aims to be as eco-friendly in its practices as possible," she assures. "The name itself stems from the French phrase '*c'est très mérité*', which means 'well deserved'." Besides refurbishing furniture for sale, Merite also offers interior design and styling services.

"We are also happy to provide decorative items and work with, for example, real estate agencies and creative companies for their private events, photo shoots and even open houses. Right now, we are working on



An eclectic palette of colour, prints and textiles adorn the space of the city centre condo





a living room and kitchen makeover as well as home storage organisation system, a home entrance project and the creation of six uniquely designed spaces for our clients. In between all this, I am always on the lookout for more pieces of furniture to refurbish, as I believe, under our lens, the transformed pieces tell a special story while creating unique visual harmony. Every object, texture and colour has a voice. My job is to orchestrate them into a symphony."

When it all gets too much and a little downtime is needed, Nabila enjoys retreating to her Nyonya-themed room, replete with digital illustrations of Nyonya vases, cushions with Peranakan tile prints, a refurbished headboard in yellow with little fan patterns, and even plushies in the shape of traditional snacks like curry puffs and pineapple tarts.

"Being here always brings a smile to my face," she says. "It is playful and nostalgic with the influences beautifully layered. I love starting my mornings here with a cup of coffee, basking in the sunlight that streams through the windows."

Although it overlooks a busy street, the room has a calm and quiet vibe, effectively serving as Nabila's private sanctuary. There is a sitting area which combines the charm of an English cottage with chinoiserie, anchored by a refurbished sofa rescued from the building's recycling bin. "I think everything is pretty yet playful and this room gives me so much joy every single day."

She also points out a pair of bamboo motif lampshades by MyRumah Tropikal. "Most of my lampshades are by them. These, though, are bespoke and infused with tropical elegance that somehow brings all the different elements in the room together. I love working with their pieces as each lampshade comes with so much personality, always complementing the spaces I curate."







The octopus chest was handpainted by Maldivian artist Mariyam Shany Ahmed

An enthusiastic hostess, there is nothing Nabila likes more than having friends over for home-cooked meals or a full-blown dinner party. The light-coloured kitchen is kept simple and functional, the only obvious decoration being whimsical posters of food art: illustrations of spices to reflect her Asian heritage and *nasi lemak*, as it is her signature and most-requested dish.

"I have my tiffin collection on the mantel though," she notes. "I grew up with tiffins and two of what you see actually belonged to my grandmother, which makes them ever more special. I love being able to incorporate part of my history and heritage in such a natural, lived-in way."

Sentimental mementoes and quirky bric-a-brac are also staples in every space Nabila creates. Treasured possessions include a small turquoise pear-shaped basket, gifted by a female weaver and entrepreneur as thanks for supporting her business, and a controversial artwork by Jerome Kugan. "He is a close friend but, beyond our personal connection, I love how the piece boldly speaks to my femininity. It is empowering, unapologetic and always sparks interesting conversations."

Besides the naughty work of art, Nabila also shares how she is busy hunting down artistic photographs of all the cities she has called home. "They need to be unusual, something slightly off the beaten path, yet captures the soul of each place.

"I recently purchased a few works on KL by Pang Khee Teik. I am also hoping to acquire more pieces by Malaysian artists. Last year, I finally received a trio of charcoal sketches by Bayu Utomo Radjikin, of whom I have been a fan since I was 21. I honestly cried when they arrived … that moment meant so much to me. Art has always been a deeply emotional experience. To be able to collect them now feels like I am preserving moments of inspiration, memory and identity within my own space." **H**

BRIGHT + BOLD

These items in striking shades and shapes bring fun to your home

Text **Aireena Azni**













1 Spotlighting the vibrant *ikat* pattern, these lightweight yet durable coasters by Malaysian artist **Dayang Salim** are constructed using eco-friendly bamboo **(RM35, @dayangembroiderycollageart)**

2 The Solvinden pendant lamp by **Ikea** introduces a splash of colour to your living area. Its shade is made using recycled PET bottles and its LED bulb is solar-powered. **(RM35, ikea.com)**

3 Painstakingly designed using a hand-applied printing technique, **Hermès**' porcelain Les Leopards change tray makes a bold and beautiful centrepiece **(RM4,050, hermes.com)**

4 A practical yet quirky storage solution? Yes, please. This braided rattan pear basket by **Ferm Living** has ample room for tucking away various items, including toys or throws. **(RM599, smuk.com.my)**

5 Whether used as part of the décor or for comfort, this wool-and-cashmere blend La Coupe des Dieux blanket from **Versace** adds character to any sofa **(RM6,350, versace.com)**

6 Fill your cocoon with **Marks & Spencer**'s classic scatter cushion, crafted from soft velvet and adorned with a bright, vintage-inspired bird print for an elegant touch **(RM99, marksandspencer.com)**





THRILL BILL

A great admiration for American architect, landscaper and interior designer Bill Bensley's work is the source of inspiration for a young Malaysian creative's new pied-à-terre

Text **Diana Khoo** Photography **SooPhye**



Two thumping copies of *Escapism* and *More Escapism* by Bill Bensley take pride of place atop a 1970s-style stand in a retro shade of orange. Besides the literary homage, the home of Rafy Hamid, an integrated design manager with a local property development company, also displays many elements that are the cornerstones of Bensley's aesthetic: fabric lanterns, Thai artworks, cast brass adornments and even framed pieces of shot silk by Jim Thompson.

Occupying a 1,440 sq ft unit in Mont'Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, the space is not expansive but it perfectly suits the homeowner, who lives alone. One of the three bedrooms is designated as the master, while the other two are the guestroom and study. "I purchased the property in 2023 and did some simple renovations before moving in. Slowly, slowly, bit by bit, I am adjusting and adapting each space to suit my life and lifestyle," he says.

Prior to this, Rafy was living nearby in Bangsar but he much prefers the vibe of Mont'Kiara. "Some people say it's congested but I travel against traffic. Work is also nearer for me now and everything is so convenient here. The gym, bank … everything you'd need or want is within walking distance or a short drive away."

Although a self-confessed fan of the American architect, landscaper and interior designer, Rafy, no slouch himself in the creative field, has incorporated into the Bensley design codes a style and perspective that are entirely his own. The wall of the dining area, for example, is dominated by his own artwork. "I was born in the Year of the Rabbit, hence the bunny motif," he smiles. "I indulge in art when I need to de-stress. It's not so hard for me as I have a background in fine art. In fact, I did this piece myself, with some help from AI, as to get a painting this size would have been too costly. The triptych is meant to represent me or my aspirations, in a way. See the first rabbit? Silent but confident. The second is about family and siblings and also to remind myself of a sense of belonging and what is ultimately important in life. And, finally, the fighting hares remind me to be resilient and how you sometimes need to struggle to achieve big things in life."

Hosting dinner parties and having friends over is a joy for Rafy, who loves to cook. "My table only





seats six, unfortunately, but that's okay. I use the weekends to rejuvenate after a hard week's work by meeting friends for brunch first before returning here for coffee. We'd then just *lepak*, play games and let things stretch into the night over a simple home-cooked dinner. I love that," he says.

Despite the small space allotted for the kitchen, Rafy somehow manages to make magic. "I am Kedahan by birth — from Changlun, my mother is Thai — but I studied in Kelantan, so my specialities and favourite things to serve are *rendang daging*,



Rafy's electrifying eclecticism draws from a diverse range of cultures and styles







ABOVE
The living room is adorned with a piece by Thai artist Leela Promwong

LEFT
Even the tiny kitchen effortlessly combines form and function

pulut kuning and *ayam percik*." Friends coming over also gives him the perfect excuse to set the table with his precious Royal Worcester Shantung bone China set. "It was a gift from a dear friend when I first moved in. He kindly said I would appreciate it more than he did. And I really do."

The living area is anchored by a Leela Promwong painting and a simple sofa from Kaizen Furniture but jazzed up with colourful, textured cushions — his loot from numerous holidays to Bangkok, where a visit to its famous Chatuchak Market would invariably be on the cards. "I love travelling and usually bring home something nice as a souvenir and décor piece. I feel happy whenever I see things that remind me of special trips and times with friends," he says.

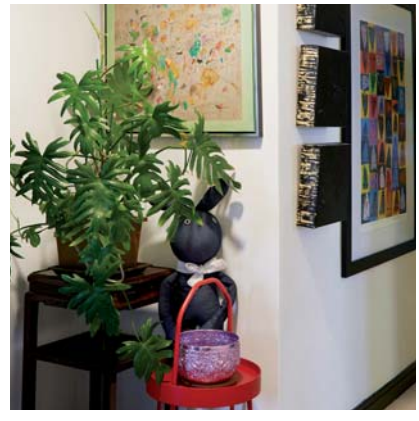
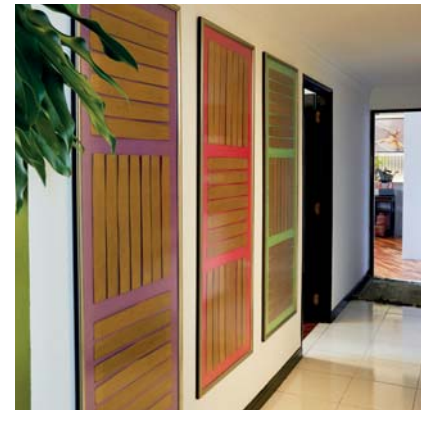
The acrylic coffee table is a lucky find from Shopee and Rafy is all for mixing special pieces with bargain finds. "I don't subscribe to the school of thought where expensive means good," he grimaces. "A home should reflect who you are, and not copied and pasted from the pages of some furniture catalogue. Taste is subjective. Most of us also need to work with budgets and I love being able to mix and match special things with finds from garage sales. It makes the space unique, with everything having its own story to tell."

Looking around, the signs of a rich, full life — filled with endless adventure and enriching escapades — abound. There are miniature terracotta warriors from Xi'an, rich rugs from Iran ("We were so lucky to have done a three-week trip in 2019, blissfully unaware the pandemic would lock us down for three years after"), vases from Hangzhou,













a turquoise hand-painted rice basket from Laos, a celadon horse from Chiang Mai and even a swan figurine picked up during a visit to the Indonesian contemporary art fair, ArtJog. "And, of course, anytime there's a chance, I would jump to stay in a Bill Bensely-designed resort or hotel," he grins. "I have been to the InterContinental in Da Nang and Khao Yai, The Siam in Bangkok and The Slate in Phuket. I even visited the Capella in Ubud, which he also designed, but only for a drink. It was good enough being able to be there. The dream, however, is a stay at Shinta Mani Wild in the jungles of Cambodia. I am a long-time fan of good architecture and design but there is something extraordinary about Bill's work. I am inspired by how he is so maximalist yet always delivers a sense of composure and structure in the end result. For Bill, more is always more — and I *love* that." **H**

EXTRAVAGANT + ESSENTIAL

Consider these eccentrically pleasing picks to spruce up your dining room

Text **Lee Charmynn**













1 The Halys rug from **Rugsea** is woven with floral motifs in shades of beige, red and black, making for a striking embellishment to any room **(From RM1,574, rugsea.com)**

2 Minas Halaj's one-of-a-kind oil painting, titled *Rabbit* and available at **Saatchi Art**, depicts a pure-white coney against a sombre backdrop, contrasting with its unblemished fur **(US$6,760, saatchiart.com)**

3 Heliconia, tiger lily and pincushions are nestled among tropical foliage in **Bloomspace**'s Sunburst Orange bouquet, channelling passion and positivity with their vibrant colours **(From RM299, bloomspace.co)**

4 The bunny stoneware decorations from **Anthropologie** add a whimsical touch. Pick between the grey one sitting among flowers or the brown befriending a butterfly. **(From US$40, anthropologie.com)**

5 The 34-piece dinner set from **Ginori 1735**'s Granduca Coreana collection consists of porcelain plates, cups and other tableware printed with peonies and framed with gold threading **(RM22,290, artelia.com.my)**

6 Sporting a slight and elegant frame, the dark-oak Hauge dining table by **BoConcept** is a balanced product that comes with an extension leaf tucked underneath the tabletop **(From RM7,595, boconcept.com)**



A magnificent Morrut or wild olive tree from Spain takes centre stage at the driveway

VIEW FROM *THE TOP*

Light, water, natural materials and clever use of space are the four design cornerstones of a modern tropical bungalow occupying the highest point of a hillock right in the heart of one of Kuala Lumpur's most sought-after neighbourhoods

Text **Diana Khoo** Photography **SooPhye**









MEI EE ARCHITECT

There is silence, stillness and noise all at once in the immediate surrounds of this jaw-droppingly expansive hilltop home, located in one of Kuala Lumpur's toniest neighbourhoods. The cacophony comes from the abundance of bird life — and the occasional chattering of troops of monkeys — that congregate around the old, old trees of this part of Taman Duta, while the palpable peace stems from the sheer vastness of the space, crafted using quietly elegant natural materials such as tropical timber and stone.

Comprising two storeys but with a sub-basement, Bungalow 19 is a new build, measuring just under 43,000 sq ft spread across a land area of 53,760 sq ft. Tasked to handle this gargantuan project was Penang-based Loh Mei Ee, who partly collaborated with PT Paramita Abirama Istasadhya of Jakarta in the initial stages of construction. "The house took five years and six months to complete, taking into account the restrictions imposed during Covid-19," says the principal of Mei Ee Architect.

The homeowner's brief was simple: maximise the astounding view the property's unique location affords while retaining the towering trees as much as possible. "Hence, the house is designed to dissolve the boundaries between indoors and outdoors. It merges form-making with a sensitive response to site, climate and materiality, resulting in architecture that is refined yet grounded," says Loh.

Certainly, an unrivalled panorama awaits. Upon entering the home, a sudden and dramatic vista


MEI EE ARCHITECT


MEI EE ARCHITECT



encompassing the entire KL city skyline — from the double-barrelled marvel that is the Petronas Twin Towers to the new Merdeka 118 — awaits, courtesy of a central axial alignment stretching from the main entrance through the heart of the house, and which culminates in a perfectly framed view of the César Pelli-designed towers.

"This deliberate spatial gesture creates a sense of procession and hierarchy, anchoring the entire layout while reinforcing the relationship between architecture and its urban context," she explains.

Light and water are other focal design aspects of the house. A reflective water feature serves as both spatial pivot and cooling element, embodying the tropical ideal of integrating water and nature as active architectural elements. The central swimming pool, adorned with top-end Bisazza glass mosaics, meanwhile, becomes a visual and experiential anchor, enhancing both the thermal comfort and calming atmosphere of the internal environment.

Within, full-height double glazing and operable panels let the outdoors in while maintaining a sense of connection and openness between the various spaces. "All these work to promote visual transparency and natural cross-ventilation, while forming the foundation of a climate-responsive strategy that complements the home's tropical setting," says Loh. "The double-glazed windows are not meant to reduce noise, but heat. Besides, the only noise you get in such a secluded high point comes not from the traffic, but the birds and cicadas."

The ground level comprises the dining areas, living space, study and kitchens while access to the bedrooms is via a stunning cantilevered spiral staircase. Its organic curved structure appears to be suspended, floating effortlessly, while making a forcefully strong statement. Depending on which angle one looks from, its appearance changes, transforms … but always remains beautiful. Beyond mere aesthetics, however, one is reminded of the immense ingenuity and engineering precision it took to create it.



MEI EE ARCHITECT





The mood of the home changes dramatically as day gives way to night

Eating in can be a serious or casual affair. The formal dining room easily seats 20, with two round tables complete with lazy Susans, while simpler meals can be enjoyed closer to the living hall where a bar, coffee machine and Chinese *gongfu* tea table await. Despite the vastness of the interiors, it is clear that the homeowners enjoy being outdoors, with specially crafted spaces to, say, enjoy a morning coffee almost enveloped by the treetops or the large terrace, perfect for weekend barbecues with the family.

The sub-basement, where there is ample room to park at least a dozen vehicles, is the preferred spot to work out or wind down. Here, one may find a ping-pong table and bicycles at the ready as well as the Technogym-equipped fitness, steam and halotherapy rooms. The latter, a salt sauna, is both a therapeutic as well as visually pleasing space. Incorporating Himalayan pink salt crystal bricks into the walls, they attract moisture once heated, thus triggering the ionisation process by releasing negative ions into the air.

Although the house is imposingly grand, it succeeds in retaining an air of understated elegance, courtesy of a natural stone-cladded façade that allows the structure to seamlessly blend in amid the abundant nature.



The floating cantilevered spiral staircase combines stunning aesthetics with architectural precision











Created to respond to the sun and natural terrain of the site, it is a rich yet restrained architectural statement. A pitched roof with generous overhangs, expansive eaves and elegant timber screens carved from *kayu belian* (Borneo ironwood) all work to provide greater privacy while serving to integrate the home further with its surroundings. As almost no paintwork was required, future maintenance and upkeep are kept to a bare minimum.

"The *kayu belian* is lacquered. But once it is faded by the harsh equatorial sun, the client intends to fully enjoy the natural patinated beauty," says Loh.

Despite the overarching tropical refinement, the homeowners did insist on having a distinctively continental touch, by way of a magnificent ornamental olive tree. Taking pride of place at the small roundabout before the porte-cochère, it is a stunning, centuries-old specimen, carefully chosen from Spain and then shipped to Thailand, where it spent many months to ensure it acclimatised well before being transported overland to its present location. Special attention was also paid to the landscaping, with the plants specifically picked and planted to enhance the home's good energy.

Light, water, natural materials and Mother Nature herself underpin the creation of this modern tropical bungalow which, somehow, blends in with the verdant surroundings yet holds its own. It is imposing, of course, due to its sheer size but the structure does not shout out to you, not at all. The home stands quietly and majestically, yet taking care not to draw attention to itself. But once within, the architectural language will dazzle. There is no doubt about that. **H**



ABOVE
The formal living room is adorned with lighting that doubles as an art installation. Boasting 300 pieces of handblown glass, this piece, titled *Flutter*, is by Stephanie Ng Design.

RIGHT
The halotherapy room with its Himalayan pink salt crystal bricks

SMOOTH SOPHISTICATION

Simple additions for a crisp, clean interior

Text **Lee Charmynn**



1 The Malfoy floor lamp by **Majuhome** oozes class with its black and gold colour combination. It has a marble base and an adjustable head that is attached to a light iron body. **(RM858, online.majuhome.com.my)**

2 Padded with foam and Dacron, the slate-blue Ivan lounge chair by **Ruma** has a soft, plush shape that is as cosy as it looks. It is supported by sturdy iron legs. **(RM1,300, rumahome.com)**

3 This satin-finished pewter teapot from **Royal Selangor** is inspired by a pair of jade imperial seals from the Qing dynasty, and comes with bone china teacups and a tray with sculpted handles **(RM3,300, royalselangor.com)**

4 Add a splash of warmth to your living space with **Nitori**'s accent cushion, which has a textured cotton cover with a pattern of white and yellow leaves **(RM94.90, nitori.my)**

5 Invite a touch of the Mediterranean into your home with a small olive tree from **Floristika**. The evergreen plant boasts silvery-green leaves but requires some extra attention to thrive in the tropical heat. **(RM159, floristika.com.my)**

6 The Pogoro coffee table from **Janine** has an MDF top covered in black wood veneer. The table is fluted all round, and held up by a brass steel frame. **(RM3,225, janine.com.my)**

Tanah Airku

There is no better time than now to infuse your home with a touch of Malaysiana

ART DIRECTION **LILY G + DAPHANY C**
PHOTOGRAPHY **SOOPHYE**
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT **RICK KEW**
RETOUCHER **CARMEN H**





THIS PAGE, FROM BOTTOM RIGHT:
ROUND SEAGRASS WATER HYACINTH PLACEMAT, RM49, **OBJET**; RATTAN HAT, ASSORTED DESIGNS, RM230-RM360, **GUDANG HOME**; STORAGE BOX, RM119, **OBJET**; SMALL RATTAN LED NIGHTSTAND LAMP, RM119, **OBJET**; RATTAN BASKET, RM180, **GUDANG HOME**; CUSHION COVER, RM5.20, **VALOOBUY**

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM BOTTOM RIGHT:
BAMBOO SERVING TRAY WITH HANDLE, RM13, **OBJET**; TIGER TUMBLER, RM350, **ROYAL SELANGOR**; HEAT-RESISTANT HANDWOVEN ROUND RATTAN MAT, RM2.50, **KAISON**; DRAGON DIFFUSION LEATHER WEAVER BAG, ROSANNA YELLOW, RM2,100, **GUDANG HOME**; RATTAN STOOL, RM400, **HABITAT**


KAPTEN BATEK
KUALA LUMPUR
JOHOR



FRONT ROW, FROM RIGHT:
MALAYSIA LANDMARKS TRAVEL CADDY, RM350, **ROYAL SELANGOR**; CATARINA RIVA WATER GLASS, 350ML, RM60 PER PIECE, **JANINE**; NAPKIN, RM59.90, **KAPTEN BATIK**; TRIANGLE POUCH, RM69.90, **KAPTEN BATIK**; PUMPKIN DINNER PLATE, RM191, **JANINE**; ARTISANAL BATIK PLACEMAT, RM79.90 PER PIECE, **KAPTEN BATIK**; RUSTIC FLOOR RUG, RM89, **HABITAT**; ARTISANAL CUTLERY POUCH, RM59.90, **KAPTEN BATIK**; STAINLESS STEEL 16-PIECE BAGUETTE CUTLERY SET, RM106, **EQUINOX**; ARTISANAL BATIK COASTER, RM29, **KAPTEN BATIK**

BACK ROW FROM RIGHT:
MALAYSIA LANDMARKS PLAQUE, RM1,500, **ROYAL SELANGOR**; SILICON TUMBLERS (BLACK OR WHITE), RM119, **KAPTEN BATIK**; STAINLESS STEEL 2-TIER MINI TIFFIN CARRIER, RM29, **PARKSON**; MAH MERI BOOKMARK, RM19, **EARTH HEIR**; BATIK PLANNER, RM129, **KAPTEN BATIK**; MAH MERI PROCESSED PANDANUS STRIP CURLWORK HANDMADE POUCH, RM23, **EARTH HEIR**; READYMADE CURTAIN, RING, RM45.90 PER PIECE, **KAISON**



FRENCH REVIVAL

Alliance Française Kuala Lumpur unveils its newly refurbished L'Espace, designed by Californian architect Brian Quirk

Text **Quincy Tan** Photography **Shahrill Basri**

For more than 60 years, Alliance Française Kuala Lumpur (AFKL) has called a beautiful colonial bungalow in Lorong Gurney, KL, its home. The language centre and cultural hub, established in 1961, caters to students of all ages and demographics, frequently hosting exhibitions and programmes out of its long-standing location.

"We've always loved this bungalow. There was talk in the past about modernising and moving into an office block, but we're very attached to this place. It's really our pride, somewhere we can call our own," shares president Tengku Datin Paduka Setia Zatashah Idris.

Over time, the structure has undergone multiple phases of reconstruction, most recently the refurbishment of a 3,000 sq ft area that was unveiled on March 23 and named L'Espace — an airy, breathable redesign of the café, library, office and garden areas. What was once a dreary and drab courtyard is now flooded with light and punctuated with vibrant foliage both in and out, modelled after the chic and







contemporary aesthetics of a *boulangerie* (French bakery) with a touch of local tropicality.

The non-profit organisation tapped renowned Californian architect and interior designer Brian Quirk, known for his work on various lifestyle and F&B projects in Malaysia, to reimagine this zone adjacent to the central hall. Given the volume of families and visitors to the venue on Saturdays, the committee handed Quirk a brief to create a common area that could accommodate everybody and endow visitors with a sense of belonging.

On why they felt now was the time for change, the president says, "We realised it gets so busy here on Saturdays: There are a lot of families, plenty of programmes happening, and as a bungalow, you can imagine the layout before was very enclosed.

"The plan was to build what we call in French a *tiers-lieux*, or third place — not home or work, but something in between. That's what we wanted to push forward, a social hub," notes executive director Laurent Elisio Bordier.

Persuading students to return to in-person learning after the pandemic was a key consideration as well. Both Zatashah and vice-president Datuk Setia Aubry Rahim Mennesson remark that remaining at this property, as opposed to relocating to an office block, enables AFKL to collaborate with brands and host various cultural events.

"The thing I noticed first was that there was a lack of variety in spaces. I wanted to create an almost origami-like sequence where you could open and close doors to form different combinations," explains Quirk.

He adds how this revised set-up provides more spots and corners for people to meet within and retire to. Given the sparsity of doors and windows in older heritage constructions, he prioritised

TOP RIGHT
(from left) Mennesson, Bordier, Zatashah and Quirk

RIGHT
AFKL has been based in Lorong Gurney for 64 years





expanding these openings to achieve a more organic and intuitive flow between the rooms, facilitated by the existing grey structures which were extruded into transitionary portals. "Individually, each zone was very dark, so the absolute top concern was light."

Favouring brevity over poetry, the renovated portion was simply dubbed L'Espace — "space" in French. The committee describes how, despite having deliberated on several other options, the sheer succinctness of the title felt fitting.

The overall black-and-white palette, particularly applied to the slim frames and outdoor blinds, complements the old colonial style, here presented with a modern flavour. A high slatted ceiling imbues the room with natural brightness and levity, comfortably blending the external and internal domains. Plush vermillion seats and brilliant green palms in the central area add contrasting pops of colour and texture, and are arranged in pockets with smaller tables to create miniature nooks where one may enjoy a quiet read.

Red had to have a prominent place in the composition, being AFKL's brand colour, and appears in the iconic Tolix chairs ("We tried where possible to use French designers," says Quirk) as well as the bar, tile wall and library shelves.

The new L'Espace also preserves several existing elements of the heritage bungalow: the polished terrazzo floors, once neglected and haphazardly



TOP
Raised shelves help to minimise damage in the event of flash floods

RIGHT
Tolix chairs are a Parisian staple, here in bright red to represent the organisation





The previously unused garden now flourishes as a colourful outdoor social space

waxed over, now glimmer in the sunlight. Likewise, Quirk discovered a series of original wooden beams after crawling into a manhole in the ceiling, which now forms an elegant highlight above the café.

Outside, the garden has been revitalised and populated with edible local fauna as an immersive learning portion for students. Given the location's susceptibility to floods, the architect also ensured water would be able to stream through the area, elevating the bookshelves to mitigate damage.

Since the launch — inaugurated by French ambassador to Malaysia Axel Cruau at the 2025 International Festival of Francophone Authors in Malaysia — attendees, students and teachers alike have responded with overwhelming enthusiasm to the inspiring new environment. Quirk's reinterpretation of the boxed-up rooms into a fluid spatial stream allowed them to boost the event's capacity, holding a total of 2,000 people throughout the day and around 500 at peak time.

Asked what attracted him to this opportunity in the first place, Quirk says, "I like creating spaces that make a difference. Doing a project [like this] changes the whole dynamic of an institution — I could see potential in this bungalow. I love doing modern insertions into old buildings that respect the existing structure but are still contemporary. You've got to find a balance." **H**



Recess redefined

Sitting on the site of a former high school, creative hub New Bahru in Singapore transforms concrete corridors into conduits for cultural exchange and everyday discovery

Text **Kong Wai Yeng** Photographer **Finbarr Fallon**



Once filled with the hum of morning roll calls and scratch of chalk on blackboards, the former Nan Chiau High School on Kim Yam Road in Singapore has been thoughtfully rejuvenated into a 20,156 sq m lifestyle destination in River Valley, faithfully preserving much of its initial form and intent. Education persists within its storied halls, now unfolding across the landscape of culture and community, where people of all ages come to unlearn, relearn and connect.

"New Bahru" may sound redundant to a Malay speaker, but developer The Lo & Behold Group aims to foster a creative spirit that cheekily celebrates Singaporeans' fondness for repeating words to emphasise meaning, like *swee-swee* (beautiful or excellent in Hokkien), play-play and *jalan-jalan*.



The playground reshapes the traditional notion of a schoolyard into a fertile ground for discovery

For over 80 years, 46 and 58 Kim Yam Road has witnessed the shifting tides in Singapore's social and architectural history. Formerly a strategic headquarters for volunteer soldiers resisting enemy forces during the Japanese Occupation, and later a prestigious institution for young girls at a time when education for women was not yet a given, the site has long functioned as a vessel for progress — its walls have echoed with resilience, reform and reinvention.

Today, that narrative — especially in a booming metropolis where relatively young structures are routinely demolished or ripe for revamping — is not merely retained, it has been reactivated to empower a new generation to engage with its spaces and, by extension, its stories. To materialise this, The Lo & Behold Group assembled a cross-disciplinary team blending local expertise and global sensibilities, collaborating with London-based Singaporean creative consultant Sacha Leong of Nice Projects, architecture studio Farm, as well as renowned botanical design and landscaping studio This Humid House.

Originally designed by James Ferrie and Partners in 1969 (its eponymous founder having served as president of the Institute of Architects of Malaya from 1966 to 1968), the campus' brutalist architecture — a stark departure from the more basic, modular schools built by the Public Works Department at the time — has been largely kept across its halls, classrooms, science labs and canteen. New additions were carefully integrated to









Architectural elements of the school have been retained and woven into the interiors of modern tenants, like the serviced apartment Alma House (top) and popular *nasi lemak* haunt The Coconut Club (left)

ensure coherence with the building's existing structural and stylistic language.

Key elements of Nan Chiau — many of which would have been overlooked or discarded in a more conventional overhaul — have been treated as valuable assets. The breeze-block façade, a hallmark of mid-century modernism in the tropics, was meticulously maintained, providing both visual appeal and passive ventilation. Barrel-vaulted arches above the hall, cascading concrete steps in the science labs and the distinctive U-shaped motifs crowning the pillars all remain intact. They are not held onto out of mere nostalgia, but as integral components that infuse a landmark, previously dedicated to academic instruction, with renewed clarity and energy.

The layout and spatial planning of New Bahru reimagine how people interact with their environment. The ex-garment factory on the first floor, now called The Factory, is dedicated to a rotation of events and pop-ups. The School Hall — once the beating heart of student life — has been reinterpreted as a venue for performances and exhibitions. Perhaps the most symbolic act of revival is the creation of a central Lawn, replacing a car park that covered the original running track and basketball courts in the 1970s. This green



expanse, abutting the nation's tallest communal slide conceived by award-winning playground specialist Playpoint, reshapes the traditional notion of a schoolyard from one of order and discipline into a fertile ground for discovery.

Leong envisioned the Lawn as a "shared living room" to bring people together, complete with seating and children's play zone that evoke the iconic 1970s recreation hubs in Singapore's public housing estates.

Launched in phases since June last year, New Bahru now showcases over 40 leading creative talents and businesses, spanning F&B, retail, wellness, entertainment and the arts. The development also introduces Alma House, a new 83-key serviced apartment concept fashioned from former classrooms. Whether you are a food enthusiast or a keen shopper, the creative cluster caters to diverse interests, including microbakery and granola expert Dearborn; lifestyle label Beyond The Vines (famously known for its viral Dumpling bag series); plant studio and ceramics purveyor soilboy; artisanal coffee roasters Morning; and Odem, a handcrafted *makgeolli* (Korean sparkling rice wine) bar.

Tenants, too, have embraced Nan Chiau's artistic attributes, weaving them into their identities. Modern Middle Eastern restaurant Artichoke and Sri Lankan dining spot Kotuwa have repurposed the distinctive jalousie windows and vintage wrought-iron grilles from the canteen, while the louvres have made their way into Alma House's interior design. Leong even borrowed cues from the breeze blocks when he put together the newest outpost of The Coconut Club, a *nasi lemak* haunt that uses coconuts of Malaysia's West African (MAWA) hybrid in Selangor and the *kampung* variety from Johor, both prized for their rich, creamy texture.

As with all great schools, the legacy of this house of knowledge stretches beyond its physical form, while nurturing innovative ways of thinking. A fusion of memory and movement, New Bahru offers locals and visitors a dynamic blueprint of the future, one where heritage need not stand still. **H**

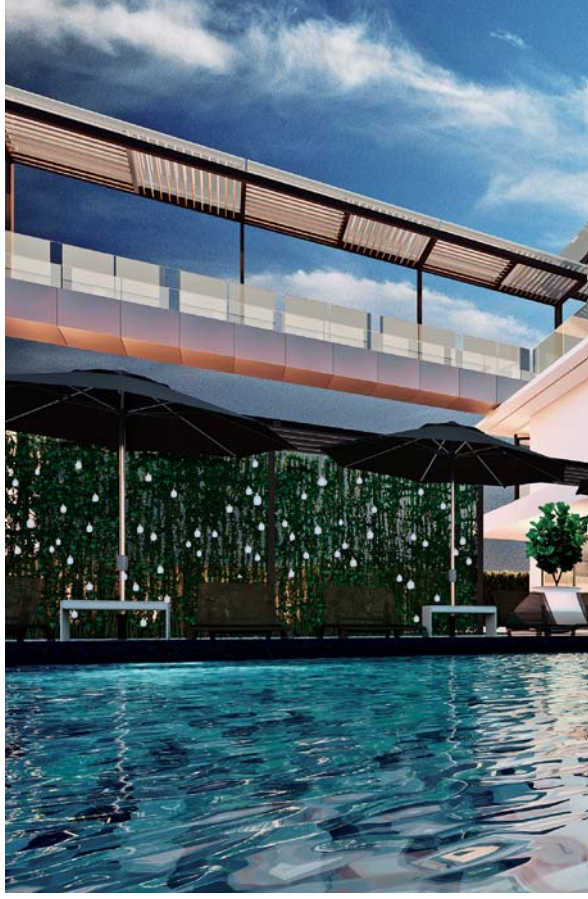




A MODERN CULTURAL TAPESTRY

With the 16th edition of the annual George Town Festival set to take place from Aug 2 to 10, consider this the best time to book your hotel for a trip to the Pearl of the Orient

Text **Diana Khoo**



Penang is always a good travel idea, even more so when the George Town Festival takes place. During the annual event incorporated to celebrate the island capital's inscription as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2008, the entire city will be enlivened by a panoply of dance, music, theatre, visual art, film and photography events, and performances.

Attending such vibrant gatherings is always better with company. And if you are not feeling the vibe of cramming your crew into a pre-war shophouse lodging or need something a little more up to date versus full-on old-world charm, consider the Penang Marriott Complex, which opened late last year. Comprising a hotel, executive apartments as well as residences, it is the hospitality behemoth's 50th property in the country.







Award-winning global architecture and design company DWP was roped in to conceptualise and refine the Penang Marriott's aesthetics while ensuring the hotel, set along historic sea-facing Gurney Drive, displayed a strong sense of place. Led by DWP's group creative director Scott Whittaker, the team's goal was simple: Celebrate the vibrancy of Penang's multicultural identity and heritage while balancing it with a sense of modernity using contemporary design codes.

The design consciousness flows throughout each space, which comprises 223 hotel rooms, 90 one- and two-bedroom suites (ideal for families and those travelling in groups) at the executive apartments and 302 residences. Local artisans

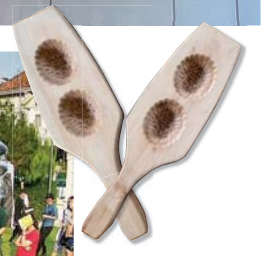












were employed to create intricate woodcarvings and batik-inspired patterns while traditional implements, such as dozens of wooden *ang ku kuih* moulds and glazed ceramic plates and bowls, serve as unconventionally creative wall art.

Varying shades of blue and beige — evoking the sea right at the hotel's doorstep or perhaps Teluk Bahang further afield — feature prominently in the colour palette while rattan, timber and even moss bring the old craftsmen of George Town, heritage shophouses and even cool and misty Penang Hill to mind. Dining options are Kucina for Italian, Lava Java for brewed coffee and pastry (or an indulgent slice of cake) and Sago for local and international favourites. Events to remember are also best held under the expansive, pillarless grand ballroom's soaring ceiling while the Great Room bar and lounge offers a stylishly relaxing ambience matched with expertly crafted cocktails.

And although the fitness centre is bathed in lovely natural daylight and there is an outdoor swimming pool overlooking Gurney Bay, the Penang Marriott's location right by the first phase of the island's all-new seafront park means it would be a shame if you did not pack your trainers and sun hat to make the most of the promenade. For the younger ones, there is a playground, skatepark as well as kiosks to discover. Once fully open, the park will comprise four distinct recreational zones: a beach, coastal grove, water gardens and lifestyle. **H**

Charming touches of Penang life are captured in the hotel's décor, from the clever use of *ang ku kuih* moulds to specially commissioned illustrations of hawker favourites that double as placemats



Spiritual healing

Though rooted in Buddhist principles, Putuo Village in Kulai, Johor, appeals to a wider audience seeking solace and a deeper connection with nature's beauty

Text + photography **Emily Yap**

Amid the burgeoning industrial parks and undulating oil palm estates carpeting southern Malaysia, a pocket of serenity offers an unexpected counterpoint to the region's busy thrum. Putuo Village, a sprawling 43-acre Buddhist enclave nestled within a verdant bamboo grove on the outskirts of Kulai, Johor, is emerging as a discreet destination for those seeking not just an escape, but an immersion in tranquillity and carefully curated cultural and spiritual encounters.

Named after Mount Putuo in the Middle Kingdom, one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism, the local destination offers a contemporary interpretation of ancient devotional practices, artfully blended with the restorative power of nature.

Upon entering the main gates, the immediate sense is one of transition. The pathways, some echoing the design of the Forbidden City's moats — populated by tortoises, symbolic of longevity and wisdom, and lotus flowers, representing purity and spiritual growth — guide visitors past corridors of Tibetan-style prayer wheels, their gentle rotations a silent invitation to mindfulness.

A wishing tree towers nearby. A sacred site for devotees to offer prayers and make wishes, the tree is swathed with hundreds of red ribbons swaying in the wind. Legend has it that these tokens subtly dissolve into the tree's branches, bringing about the realisation of desires.

At the heart of the village lies its principal temple, an impressive building that speaks to a quiet grandeur. It houses what is reputed to be Southeast Asia's largest indoor statue of Guanyin, a bodhisattva of compassion and mercy whose serene gaze presides over the calm interior. The architectural style is a harmonious dialogue between traditional Chinese aesthetics — intricate carvings, ornate rooflines and symbolic colour palettes — and a certain modern restraint, avoiding ostentation in favour of a dignified presence.



Colourful prayer flags are festooned around the premises







A 12m-long dragon suspended from the ceiling guards the sanctum. Designed by the village committee in conjunction with the Year of the Dragon, the Chinese mythical creature was crafted with the help of an Indonesian weaver and took five months to construct. Venture into the bamboo forest, and a 10½m-tall golden snake structure, an ode to this year's zodiac animal, awaits. A total of 8,888 pieces of glistening scales are attached to the serpent, a symbol of wisdom, transformation and renewal.

To get to the forest, one must first pass through the Lotus Trail, festooned with colourful prayer flags. Here, religious devotees often repeat the practice of three steps and a bow to show humility and respect, making the pathway a spiritual one, too. Eagle eyes may also spot durian trees along the way. After all, Kulai is popular for cultivating the king of fruits.

Legend has it that the bamboo forest is the place where Guanyin meditates. Therefore, the Purple Bamboo Valley fans out over 8.9ha to replicate the zen environment. The air, noticeably cooler beneath the dense canopy of the evergreen plants, carries a subtle scent of damp earth and foliage. The release of phytoncides calms the nervous system, lowering cortisol and adrenaline levels. As the breeze cuts through the woody grass, its swaying leaves compose a gentle melody that soothes the soul.

The principal temple houses the largest Guanyin bodhisattva in Southeast Asia





The bamboo valley is also dotted with photo-friendly installations, making it a place of enjoyment for both young and old. A nominal entrance fee contributes to the conservation of this natural feature, a quiet nod to sustainable practices.

Beyond the architectural focal points at Putuo Village, it is the holistic experience that resonates. Aside from celebrating major festivities (over 80,000 pilgrims showed up in the first week of Chinese New Year), visitors can also partake in the simple ritual of drinking "mountain spring water", a practice believed to bestow good fortune, or wander the meticulously manicured gardens designed for peaceful contemplation. The village occasionally hosts tea ceremonies as well, a guided practice in patience and presence. Additionally, the on-site vegetarian restaurant and café offer wholesome fare, aligning with the Buddhist ethos of mindful consumption.

The development of Putuo Village speaks to a growing desire for destinations that offer more than fleeting distraction. In a region rapidly transforming, it stands as a testament to the enduring human need for sanctuaries of peace, places where the rustle of bamboo leaves and the distant chime of a temple bell can, for a few precious hours, drown out the clamour of everyday life. **H**



King Living's Haven sofa can be adapted to your liking as it has adjustable armrests, flexible backrests and a modular design that fits in any space. The soft, cloudlike seats provide lasting support while ensuring maximum comfort. (From RM30,377 for the 3-seater, kingliving.my)

ECLECTIC ASSORTMENT

Text **Lee Charmynn**





The Eternal Palace dishware set by **Noritake** will have you dining like royalty. Comprising tea cups, soup plates and dishes, the collection of 20 porcelain pieces features a Moroccan Trellis pattern in a silvery tone. (RM2,760, artelia.com.my)



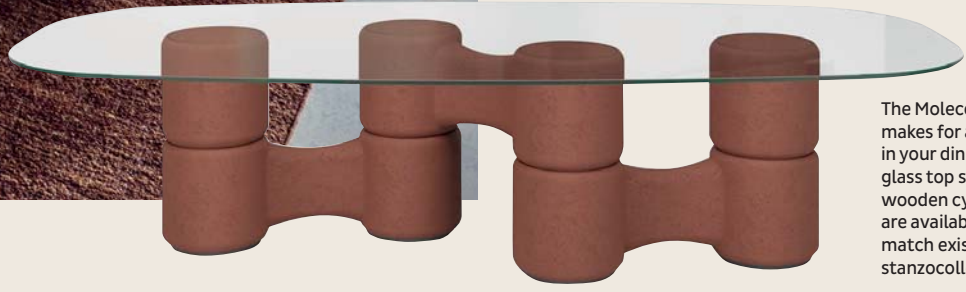
Add some opulence to the kitchen with this rose gold 1950s-style retro kettle from **Smeg**. The lid raises gently with a soft opening system, and the appliance shuts off automatically when the temperature reaches boiling point for safety. (RM1,900, harveynorman.com.my)



With built-in sensors, **Dyson**'s Purifier Cool PC1 scans for pollutants in real time, only using energy when needed to clean the surroundings and trap unpleasant scents while its Air Multiplier technology amplifies airflow and rapidly cools spaces (RM2,699, dyson.my)



The Bespoke AI Jet Ultra stick vacuum by **Samsung** has a light motor and interchangeable batteries to suit your needs, and uses artificial intelligence to adjust brush speeds and suction power on different surfaces for effective cleaning (RM4,499, samsung.com)



The Molecola table from **Stanzo** makes for a distinctive centrepiece in your dining room. A tempered glass top sits on hand-brushed wooden cylindrical legs, which are available in various shades to match existing furniture. (RM65,175, stanzocollection.my)

HOT IN HERE

The summer season, naturally, equates to vacation, pool time and pleasurable days spent sun-seeking. Find inspiration from these tropical-accented accessories.

ART DIRECTION **LILY G** + **DAPHANY C**
PHOTOGRAPHY **SOOPHYE**
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT **RICK KEW**
RETOUCHER **CARMEN H**





FIRST ROW, FROM RIGHT: PICNIC MAT, RM32.90. **KAISON**; AGE HIGHBALL QUARTET ACES, RM500, **ROYAL SELANGOR**; MOTHER OF PEARL SERVING TRAY, RM329, **HABITAT**; FERJA CHAMBRAY DREAM CREAMER, RM27.90 PER PIECE, **HOOGA**; FERJA CHAMBRAY DREAM JUG, RM46.90, **HOOGA**; WALL PIECE 29, CLOUDY BUTTERFLIES DECO MURALE MOYANNE, PRICE NOT AVAILABLE, **JANINE**; PLACEMAT LUIGI TABLE MAT, RM15.90, **HOOGA**

SECOND ROW, FROM RIGHT: 16-PIECE DINING SET, RM169, **OBJET**; CERAMIC FRUIT BOWL, RM49.90, **HOOGA**; ARTISANAL FOOD WRAP, RM69.90, **KAPTEN BATIK**

THIRD ROW, FROM RIGHT: COOLER BAG, RM25, **OBJET**; SMALL OUTDOOR FOLDING CHAIR, RM19.90, **KAISON**; THROW PILLOW COVER, RM5.50, **VALOOBUY**; BORDALLO PINHEIRO, ANANAS PITCHER, PRICE NOT AVAILABLE, **JANINE**; STAINLESS STEEL MULTIPURPOSE KITCHEN BASKET, HAZE BLUE, RM23, **VALOOBUY**



FROM RIGHT:
EARTH 4-TUMBLER SET, RM500, **ROYAL SELANGOR**; CRYSTAL WHISKY GLASS, RM325, **HABITAT;** SMALL DECORATIVE FROGS, RM133, **JANINE** . SPINNING GLASS, RM9, **OBJET**; AMBER SMOKE DRINKING GLASS, RM43.90, **HOOGA**; LEAF PATTERN HEXAGONAL GLASS, RM5.90, **DAISO**; POLSPOTTEN COBALT MIX, SET OF 6 ASSORTED HANDCRAFTED GLASS TUMBLERS IN MULTI COLOURS, 250ML, RM895, **GUDANG HOME**; CAYENNE MARBLE SERVING BOARD, OVAL, RM119, **HOOGA**

ROYAL SALUTE BLENDED GRAIN SCOTCH WHISKY, 21YO; GLENFIDDICH GRAN CORTES XXII SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY RARE SHERRY CASK FINISH AGED 22 YEARS.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: CASAFINA RIVA CLEAR GLASS, FLUTE 205ML, RM50 PER PIECE, **JANINE**; WATERGLASS, RM39, **HABITAT**. POLSPOTTEN BLOCK WINE GLASSES, SET OF 6, 250ML, ASSORTED COLOURS, RM1,295, **GUDANG HOME**; HIGH HEEL DESSERT BOWL, RM35, **HABITAT**; ICE BUCKET, RM170, **HABITAT;** HEXAGON BEVERAGE GLASS PAIR, RM550, **ROYAL SELANGOR**; TOOLBAR, 6-PIECE SET, RM1,800, **ROYAL SELANGOR**

CHIVAS REGAL 18 YO BLENDED SCOTCH WHISKY; THE BALVENIE FRENCH OAK 16 YEARS SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY





THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: MIDI MERINGUE STOOL, WILLOW LEAF GREEN, PRICE NOT AVAILABLE, **JANINE**; EMBROIDERED CUSHION COVER, RM45, **OBJET**; HOUSSE DE COUSSIN DOUCEUR ARDENTE IN BLUSH, RM1,192, **JANINE**; CHRISTIAN LACROIX, NOVAFRICA SUNRISE FLAMINGO, RM811, **JANINE**

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LINEN MATS, RM27.90, **KAISON**; TOUCAN FLORAL SEPIA CUSHION, RM678. **JANINE**; BUTTERFLY CUSHION, RM49, **HABITAT;** MADEMOISELLE EDEN CUSHION COVER, RM399, **GUDANG HOME**; CHRISTIAN LACROIX, LACROIX PARADISE FLAMINGO DECORATIVE PILLOW, PRICE NOT AVAILABLE, **JANINE**





BREAD + BREWS

This new Japanese fusion establishment offers a quiet shelter in vibrant downtown Kuala Lumpur

Text + photography **Aireena Azni**













Teeming with dining establishments offering a variety of cuisines, from local to international fare, Jalan Kamuning, Imbi, in downtown Kuala Lumpur is popular among foodies. A new addition to the long list of eating options on this street is Cafe Dearest.

Founded by a Malaysian and his Japanese wife, Cafe Dearest stands proud with a lofty wooden entrance — an indicator of its spacious and airy site — that is hard to miss. Upon entering, diners will spot the cashier counter next to a glass cabinet laden with fresh pastries — among its sweet selections are homemade *usagi* buns, rice flour cake and milk bread — on one side, and a dedicated beverage station on another. March forward and you will see a striking red door leading to the restricted kitchen.

This artisanal Japanese fusion bakery boasts several outdoor and indoor sections, each evoking different ambience and expressions that cater to a range of customers. Its interior is dominated by industrial aesthetics featuring a neutral palette from the exposed brick-and-mortar and metal accents. This bare construction, however, does not feel harsh nor cold, as it is softened by wooden details and furniture and strategically arranged warm light in an assortment of shapes and sizes.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Cafe Dearest's outdoor seating overlooks the city's skyscrapers; a lively space perfect for special celebrations; the café is illuminated by a variety of lighting; it offers a slew of baked goods, mains and coffee

A splash of colour enlivens a room to the left, which spotlights deep pink, purple and dark teal shelves filled with small bonsai trees and flowers housed in decorative vases. Should you choose to park yourself at the right side of the restaurant, you will be able to enjoy the view of KL's skyscrapers, including the towering Merdeka 118, while admiring the luscious plants lining the patio from the floor-to-ceiling windows, which invite ample natural light into the space and provide an airy and bright atmosphere in the daytime. Working nomads will find this place convenient to get some tasks done, as it has a dedicated area designed for those who may need to plug in and log on for a while.

Situated a stone's throw from the luxury epicentre The Exchange TRX, Cafe Dearest presents a calm respite for anyone seeking a moment of tranquillity and stillness amid the vibrant pulse of the city. **H**

Cafe Dearest, 21 & 23 Jalan Kamuning, Off Jalan Imbi, KL. Opens daily from 8am to 8pm.

OF LEGACY + FAMILY

Authentic Peranakan flavours to cherish from a true-blue daughter of Melaka

Text **Diana Khoo**
Photography **SooPhye**





Tan and her mother Lily Lee Ah Toh at their home in Melaka












DONALD & LILY
Corner


RENDANG







Renowned for their love of finery, detail and opulence, the Babas and Nyonyas of yesteryear lived gilded lives. The Golden Age of the Peranakan people who made the Straits Settlements their home was said to have peaked between the late 1800s and early 1900s. Many families counted themselves among the elite of the day, owning vast sums of wealth as well as all the trappings that came with it, from chauffeured motorcars to a retinue of household staff. This is often attributed to why Nyonya cuisine is famously intricate and laborious, filled with time-consuming steps and backbreaking preparation, elements that would hardly endear it to the time-poor folk of today.

Take the famous Tok Panjang feasts that were the cornerstone of many a Peranakan celebration. Lavish and communal, the name literally means "long table" in Malay and said countertop would often be groaning under the weight of platter after platter of festive dishes.

For Jennifer Tan Kim Choo, however, a change of family fortunes did not afford her such luxuries in life. She was born into a Melakan family whose forefathers enjoyed wealth and status (old photos from the 1920s show young children smartly dressed in Western-style clothing and a Chrysler Imperial family car). But by the time her parents had her and her brother, she was accustomed to seeing them work hard to provide for the family — by selling cooked food, initially from a tricycle before progressing to a pushcart and, finally, a hard-earned shoplot, complete with a shiny signboard bearing the words "Kedai Makanan Minuman Donald & Lily Nyonya Food".

Covid-19 cruelly ended their nine-year run in Taman Kota Syahbandar in 2021 when lockdowns and uncertainty left them saddled with overheads and rental payments, with no means to cover them. "I started learning to cook only when I was in my early twenties, after I was able to help my parents run their business," says Tan. "I didn't pick up the skills earlier as both of them were usually too busy, out hawking or too tired to teach me."

Now in charge of preserving the family's culinary heritage, she has taken it upon herself to continue selling the family's popular *rempah* Nyonya (spice paste) which they began making and marketing in earnest as a necessary pandemic-era pivot. "All you need is one packet of paste to make many dishes, like curry chicken, *asam* fish or even prawn *briyani*. It's so versatile and super handy if you *toksa panday masak* (not clever to cook)," she says jokingly.

"People have this misconception that cooking Nyonya food is tedious, due to the prepping and length of time it takes to sauté spices properly … all this before you even start to cook. It's quite different compared to, say, Cantonese cooking which is straightforward, and uses soy sauce and simple techniques of steaming and stir-frying."

Those wanting a true experience of a Nyonya banquet may be interested to know Tan now runs regular Nyonya supper clubs at her mother's home, an endeavour which has Lily's full blessing. "We weren't rich growing up. There wasn't even enough money for me to further my studies," she recalls. "Dad passed away in November 2018, so we both thought it would be wonderful to be able to prepare elaborate, celebratory dishes via this home supper club concept to fill the house with richness and sumptuousness." H



IKAN PARI MASAK KUAH LADA

Serves four

A staple dish in most Peranakan families, stingray cooked in piquant, peppery sauce is known as a "rice thief" dish, meaning copious amounts of hot white rice would be demolished alongside the spicy, tangy gravy. "You can use fish like *ikan jenahak* (snapper) or *tenggiri* (Spanish mackerel)," says Tan. "Chicken is also an option. But I like to use fish to maintain authenticity as it's very hard to find this dish in restaurants."

INGREDIENTS FOR SPICE PASTE/REMPAH
3 stalks lemongrass
300g galangal
Fresh turmeric, about the size of a thumb
10 shallots
2 bulbs garlic
50g *belacan*
2 tbsp black pepper (ground into powder)
(Wash and cut all the ingredients before grinding them into a fine paste)

INGREDIENTS:
500g *ikan pari* (stingray)
1 eggplant (about 300g to 400g), cut lengthwise
3-4 tbsp tamarind paste
600-700ml water
6 tbsp oil
Sugar and salt, to taste
2 stalks lemongrass, bruised
10 kaffir lime leaves, torn up

METHOD

1. Heat up a wok and pour in the oil, ground *rempah* paste and two bruised lemongrass stalks. Sauté until fragrant and the oil *pecah minyak* or separates.
2. Add the tamarind paste and continue to sauté.
3. Add part of the water (put the rest aside for now) and bring the mixture to a boil before adding the eggplant and fish slices.
4. Lower the fire to a simmer. If it begins to get dry, add the remaining water a bit at a time.
5. Add salt and sugar, to taste.
6. Turn off the fire and leave the fish to cook in the residual heat. Be careful not to let it overcook.
7. Serve with piping hot white rice.

Tip: If it is too tedious to prepare the spice paste, substitute it for one packet of Donald & Lily's Rempah Nyonya to transform the dish into Ikan Pari Gerang Asam.

Donald & Lily's Rempah Nyonya is available on Shopee or direct by emailing mydonaldandlily@gmail.com. Parties interested in the private supper club may also email Tan.



OTAK-OTAK

Makes about 10 pieces

Steamed *otak-otak* is a popular dish among the Peranakan community, especially in Penang, where it is softer and more custardy. "The choice of fish varies from family to family, while prawns are a popular option as well," says Tan. "Muar, which is not far from Melaka, has a version where the texture is more like fishcake and with a completely different way of wrapping."

TO PREPARE

Fresh banana leaves — washed, cut into 20×20cm squares and softened over a direct flame. Alternatively, blanch with boiling hot water.
Toothpicks or small bamboo skewers with which to secure the banana leaves when folding the *otak-otak*
***Kaduk* leaves**
Kaffir lime leaves

INGREDIENTS

3 packets Donald & Lily's Rempah Nyonya
2 eggs
2 tbsp rice flour
2 tbsp corn flour
Kaffir lime leaves, julienned
500ml thick coconut milk
Turmeric leaves, julienned (optional)
600g fresh prawn meat or boneless, white-fleshed fish, coarsely chopped as above
Salt and sugar, to taste
(Mix the ingredients above properly in a mixing bowl and set aside)

METHOD

1. Lay out the banana leaves and line with one or two *kaduk* leaves. Spoon in the seafood mixture.
2. Fold each banana leaf like a purse and secure the ends with a toothpick.
3. Prepare a steamer, boil the water and let the *otak-otak* parcels cook for about 15 minutes.
4. Best eaten hot. You may also grill the parcels for about 5-10 mins each side. Check to see if the mixture is cooked by poking it with a toothpick. If the toothpick comes out clean, it is done.

Tip: YouTube is full of handy tutorials on how to fold banana leaves for *otak-otak*.

NYONYA LAKSA (LAKSA LEMAK)

Serves five or six

Malaysia offers many iterations of *laksa* — the ubiquitous noodle dish that undergoes slight tweaks and variations as one journeys from state to state. In Melaka, the foundation for the broth is a power-packed combination of prawn or chicken stock, spice paste and, as a final anointing, creamy coconut milk. Here is a version of a heritage recipe made easy. "This is not a *lauk hari-hari* (everyday dish) for sure," says Tan. "But if it is to be eaten, it is normally for breakfast or lunch. It is popular, though, to serve it during family gatherings or on a weekend when there's more time to prepare and enjoy it."



INGREDIENTS

1 packet of Donald & Lily's Rempah Nyonya
3 tbsp cooking oil
3 stalks of lemongrass, cut and crushed
Coconut milk — 500ml boxed coconut milk to 1 litre water or soup stock
Or, 500ml fresh coconut milk to 750ml water or soup stock
10 fried tofu puffs, halved
½ cup (300g) beansprouts
10 fishballs or 15 slices of fishcake
1 cup noodles — *mee* and/or *beehoon* per serving or to preference
3 hardboiled eggs, halved
***Daun kesum* (polygonum leaves), julienned**
Ginger torch flower, julienned (optional)
Salt and sugar, to taste
Two fresh prawns (cooked) per serving or 1 tbsp of fresh cockles (optional)

METHOD

1. In a pot, sauté crushed lemongrass with the oil and Donald & Lily's Rempah Nyonya.
2. Add 1 litre of coconut milk with 700ml to 800ml of water or soup stock, depending on how thick you like the gravy to be. Simmer over a low fire.
3. Add fried tofu puffs, salt and sugar to taste.
4. When the gravy is cooked, pour over blanched noodles.
5. Before serving, garnish with personal favourites such as prawns, cockles, fishcake, hardboiled egg, *daun kesum* and torch ginger.
6. Serve with a dollop of *sambal* (chilli paste) as a condiment for that added kick!

Tip: *Daun kesum* is not only used for fragrance, but also to help prevent bloating, which is believed to be caused by eating rich foods like coconut milk.



SUP SOTONG SUMBAT

Serves six

One of the more unusual Peranakan soups, this is oftentimes a home-cooked treat and very rarely available in commercial Nyonya restaurants. "Many of my friends enjoyed this dish when they were young. I made it recently when I held a pop-up at the luxury Raffles Hotel in Singapore. I paired it with *kerabu* beehoon," says Tan.

Tip: Boil the stock for as long as possible to have an intense yet clean flavour. Some chefs like to add a bit of salted radish as well as glass noodles to make a more-ish offering.

INGREDIENTS
6 white squid, washed and cleaned, with the tentacles still attached
1 chicken carcass or pork ribs
Prawn shells (optional)
Sugar and salt, to taste
Light soy sauce, to taste
Fresh coriander leaves
Crispy fried shallots

INGREDIENTS FOR THE STUFFING
500g minced meat (chicken or pork)
1 carrot, finely chopped
200g spring onions, finely chopped
300g fresh prawns, chopped
Sesame oil
1 tbsp soy sauce
2 tbsp cornflour
1 tbsp salt
½ tbsp sugar
(Mix together all the ingredients and set aside)

METHOD

1. Bring a pot of water to boil and let simmer with the chicken carcass (or ribs) and prawn shells for about an hour, consistently skimming the scum off the top.
2. Adjust the taste of the stock by seasoning accordingly.
3. Stuff the squid with the minced meat mixture and secure the ends with a bamboo skewer or toothpick.
4. Once the soup is boiled, strain it and carefully add the squid.
5. Cook for about five minutes. Be careful not to overcook as this will result in a tough, rubbery texture. You may slit open the belly of the squid to check if the meat mixture is done.
6. Remove the toothpicks or skewers from the squid before serving.
7. Ladle the broth into bowls with a piece of squid in each.
8. Garnish with fresh coriander leaves and fried shallots.

MY SPACE: CLORIS WOON

The Penang-based architectural façade lighting designer on her new series of whimsical illustrations for the Penang Marriott Hotel, favourite sources of inspiration and what lies ahead

Text **Diana Khoo**

Tell us about your work as an architectural façade lighting designer.
My job is to design lighting solutions that enhance the appeal, functionality and energy-efficiency of various structures, including commercial, industrial and residential buildings, and landscape projects. I consult with clients to understand their project needs and create conceptual lighting designs as well as perform 3D lighting simulations to ensure light distribution accuracy and visual appeal. Once the design is finalised, I prepare technical drawings for precise installation planning and quantity finalisation.

What are some of the projects you have worked on in your nine-year career?
I have done both residential, commercial and industrial projects as well as landscape and public space lighting for Tanjung Bungah Tree Square, the George Town Penang Buddhist Association and more.

What are the key challenges in the work you do?
Since my background is in graphic design, the electric technical side is the most challenging part. But I love how this job keeps me learning and growing. Nothing beats the feeling of seeing my designs come to life.

How did your creative journey begin?
I have been passionate about drawing and visual storytelling since young, leading me to study graphic design where I refined my artistic skills and learnt how to integrate them into my professional work. As a personal passion, I also explored both digital and traditional painting and illustrations. Over time, this foundation not just influenced my career but allowed me to approach lighting as a form of visual art.


SOOPHYE

Where did you study?
A true George Town girl, I attended Convent Datuk Keramat primary and secondary schools and later studied graphic design at Equator College.

Who are some of the artists you admire?
Hayao Miyazaki from Studio Ghibli and Kim Jung Gi. The former has been my idol since childhood while the latter is a true master of line work and imagination. Kim's ability to draw complex scenes from memory is something I deeply admire and the way he plays with lines and shading prove that, sometimes, the most basic elements, when mastered, can be the most powerful.

You designed the placemats depicting famous Penang hawker dishes for the Penang Marriott Hotel. Tell us about it.
I was given the opportunity via Su May from Other Half Studio who recommended me to them. I am thankful for their trust and, after discussing with the Penang Marriott Hotel's F&B director, Suryaprakash Ponnudurai, we chose *nasi kandar*, Hokkien *mee*, *char kway teow*, oyster omelette, *nasi lemak* and *asam laksa* as representatives of the state's food, truly embodying our food culture's heart and soul. Each dish is rich in unique history and flavour and reflects Penang's diversity. I am also working on a series of cocktail illustrations for them.

How do you stay inspired?
I enjoy attending art events and exhibitions as they inspire and help me learn while introducing me to new people in the creative community. I also like to just spend time in nature, exploring Penang's green spaces and walking the city. To slow down and observe lets me 'feel' while taking in all the details around me.

What's next for you?
I have not held an exhibition yet as I feel there's still more to learn and improve on. But that would be something I would love to work towards in the future. For now, creating art helps me skill up, open doors for opportunities and collaborations, meet amazing people and, basically, reinforce my belief in the value of doing something I love. **H**

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