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## FIABCI Malaysia Property Awards

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# Unconventional office design works better, say architects—and so do the people inside it

Prize for inspiring building with potential to boost quality of work, staff morale and productivity

By Helen Jones

WHEN the developers of the PJ Trade Centre decided to develop a new office building in Petaling Jaya, some 10 kilometers from the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, they wanted to create something different. “We didn’t want a typical aluminum-and-glass box. We wanted an office development unlike any other in the country; something that is bold, different, impactful and has a strong message,” says Janie Cheng, head of sales and marketing for Tujan Gemilang Sdn Bhd which is based in Petaling Jaya.

The business was set up by Ahmad Khalif Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal and Peter Chan in 2005 and the PJ Trade Centre is the company’s first project. “Both had worked in a public-listed property company and had left with the aspiration to do property development in a way that was more meaningful to them. The aim is to create unique projects with bold ideas, to challenge convention and to inspire people,” explains Ms. Cheng.

### Cultural and contextual

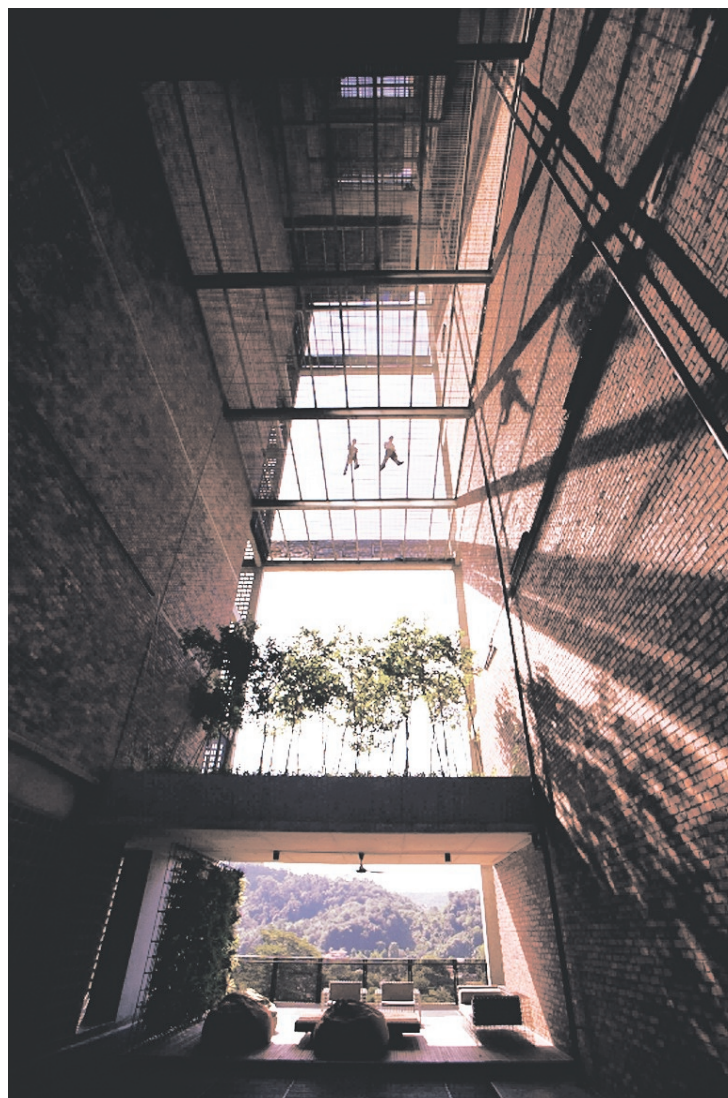
Rather than focus on the usual Western-style office designs, which proliferate across Malaysian cities, the developers asked the Kuala Lumpur-based architect Kevin Mark Low to come up with an idea based on local culture, climate and context and which is designed to cope with Malaysia’s high rainfall and humidity. It features four high-rise office towers



**“It has become a distinctive landmark and has captured the imagination of the design community.”**

and a three-story annex set in a lushly landscaped plaza of 2.5 acres. In addition there are 12 “sky terraces” with hanging vines and wall creepers, plus two terraces with fish ponds and pavilions. Many of the office units have wide balconies and private gardens. There is also a range of facilities on site, including cafes and restaurants and a health center with a swimming pool.

“The concept and theme of the project was to craft a modern office building with a unique character,” says Ms. Cheng. “We used simple local materials and construction methods designed to suit the local climate. At the same time, the



The PJ Trade Centre, in Petaling Jaya, near Kuala Lumpur, has won a number of architecture, landscaping and interior design awards.

building should weather elegantly in the harsh monsoon climate, as moss grows on the façade and will require little maintenance.”

The building was designed to

include plenty of natural light and cross-ventilation. Energy-efficient and eco-friendly design features also result in lower maintenance costs, but more importantly, says

Ms. Cheng, they have the potential to enhance productivity through reduced absenteeism, improved staff morale and higher quality of work.

The building—which regularly features in design and architecture magazines—has won a number of architecture awards, along with some for its landscaping and interior design. “Many architects from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia have visited the PJ Trade Centre, as have busloads of design students from universities across the region,” Ms. Cheng says. “It has become a distinctive landmark and has captured the imagination of the design community.”

### Successfully sold

The development was 95% sold within 18 months of launch and is now fully occupied by more than 25 companies, including Gamauda Bhd, one of Malaysia’s leading infrastructure companies; footwear company BATA Malaysia; the Malaysian Inland Revenue Board; Materalise, a Belgian high-tech company specializing in 3D printing; and the sports companies Adidas and Puma.

Following the success of the PJ Trade Centre, Tujan Gemilang Sdn Bhd has completed a second project, an office tower called Point 92, which boasts a distinctive design and is intended to become the headquarters of a major corporation. It is also at the planning stage of a new commercial development in Cyberjaya, a town and science park located some 50 kilometers south of Kuala Lumpur. The new project, called Tamarind Square, is an office complex and shopping mall centered round a series of gardens.

## Designs for luxurious, private and peaceful living

RESIDENTIAL properties are always well represented in submissions for the annual Malaysia Property Awards—and this year was no exception. “Residential is the most active sector,” says Dr. Yu Kee Su, organizing chairman, but among the high standard of entries he says that two stood out—20trees in the low-rise category and U-Thant Residence in the high-rise category.

20trees is a development of 83 homes and 118 apartments in the Melawati area of Kuala Lumpur—sometimes described as the Hollywood of Malaysia, owing to the number of celebrities that choose to live there. The most expensive homes in the development are based around a traditional Asian courtyard and come complete with a courtyard garden and plunge pool at a cost of around two million Malaysian ringgits (\$656,000). The slightly smaller “Garden” design is also based around a courtyard, while the “Terrace” design features a private garden elevated at a story above street level.

20trees was built by developers SDB, who have acquired a reputation for



Located in the Melawati area of Kuala Lumpur, 20trees features a range of facilities, including swimming pool, clubhouse, tennis court and children’s play area.

creating niche luxury developments with a sense of space and light. “Every project we are involved in is built using spatial planning, which ensures we maximize the space we work with so that every inch of the unit can be used and there are no wasted corners,” says Yeoh Guan Jin, corporate affairs manager for SDB, which is based in Kuala Lumpur.

20trees is located in one of Kuala

Lumpur’s greenest areas and boasts a panoramic view of Melawati’s quartz-and-granite ridge mountains, but is also close to some of the city’s best schools and shopping facilities. It is designed to follow the natural contours of the land in the form of cascading terraces. The development, which is completely sold, features a number of differently styled homes as well as a range of facilities for residents, including a swimming pool, clubhouse, tennis court and children’s play area.

“Every aspect of the enclave has been designed to draw one’s attention to the beauty of the natural landscape,” says Mr. Yeoh. Each of the homes has a natural flow of light and air, while also providing its inhabitants with privacy and a sense of peace.

By contrast, the winner in the high-rise category—U-Thant Residence—is located in busy central Kuala Lumpur, in the exclusive embassy area. Created by Kuala Lumpur-based Tan & Tan Developments, part of the IGB Corporation, it is a low-density building comprising 77 luxury homes and has attracted a mixture of wealthy Malaysians and expat residents,

who mainly work in the local embassies or for oil and gas companies. Tan Boon Lee, executive director of the company, says: “The architectural theme is inspired by modern, tropical, contemporary design and blended with what we call an urban oasis of greenery.”

Three residential blocks enclose gardens, water features and a large infinity pool, and each apartment is designed to ensure maximum light and natural cross-ventilation.

The design concept for U-Thant Residence was launched before the introduction of the Green Building Index—Malaysia’s green-building rating system, which is based on a range of criteria, including energy and water efficiency and sustainable management.

However, Mr. Lee says: “The development team has factored in some green features, either in passive or active designs. We also continue to be green at U-Thant in terms of the running of the building, which focuses on the ‘three Rs’—recycle, reuse and reduce.”

—Helen Jones