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CREATING SPACES FOR ROBOTS AND HUMANS

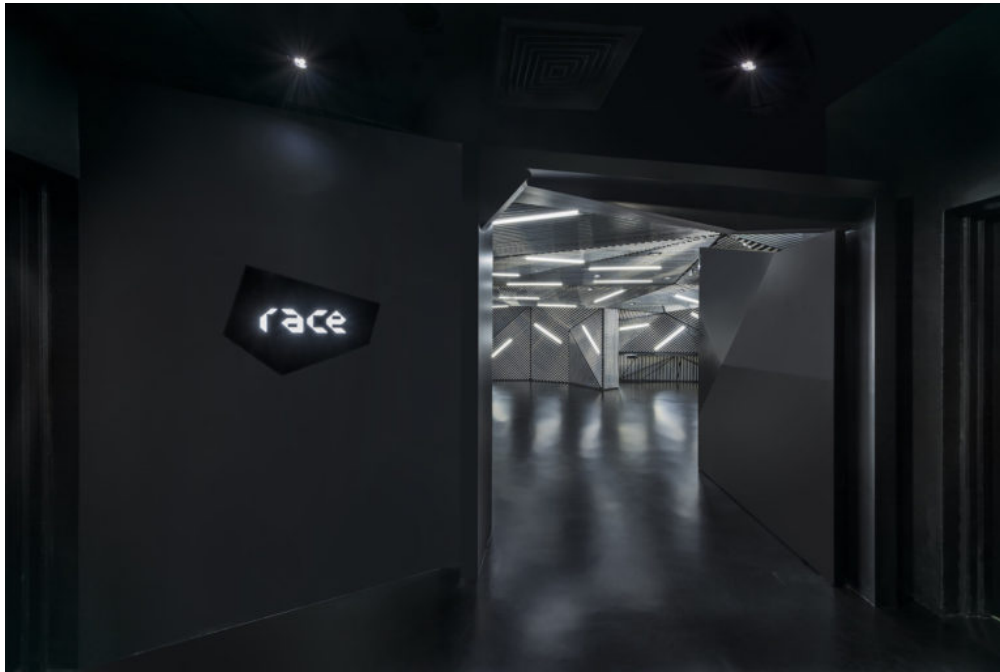


Singapore/Malaysia Interiors -

THE CONTRASTING SPATIAL EXPERIENCES OF FUTURISTIC RACE AND QUAIN T LOKE THYE KEE RESIDENCES IN PENANG SHOW THE CLEAR, CONCEPTUAL IDEAS OF MINISTRY OF DESIGN

RACE

ROBOTIC FACILITY IN SINGAPORE WITH A FUTURISTIC, FLEXIBLE DESIGN



A vivid prelude to the laboratory space, a web of soaring white lines cuts through the black space to create an anamorphic experience



Lighting and metal combine to create a seamless skin



Each facet comprises stacked layers of hand-cut aluminium hollow tubing

New robotic facility RACE required spatial flexibility as both showcase of robots for manufacturing, and education and lecture 'classroom'. Underpinning this brief, Ministry of Design (MOD) (<http://modonline.com>) sought to create an engaging and future-forward spatial experience that denotes the idea of industrial automation and precision.

Upon arrival at the lift lobby, a vivid prelude to the laboratory space, a web of soaring white lines cuts through the black space to create an anamorphic experience to disorient the floor from the ceiling. From the black envelope of the lift lobby, an oversized door pivots open to reveal a dramatic metallic faceted space, creating a contrast that is at once striking yet complementary. For maximum flexibility to the space, MOD introduced a 'second' skin - developed to seamlessly create a dynamic space by deconstructing the ceiling and wall planes into an array of dazzling facets. The random sprinkle of custom LED strips serves to highlight the multi-directional panels with a cutting-edge aesthetic.

LOKE THYE KEE RESIDENCES

BOUTIQUE HOTEL IN PENANG BALANCES THE OLD WORLD CHARM OF THE TRADITIONAL SHOPHOUSE WITH MODERN LIVING



Tradition meets modern living



Each suite is precluded by a lush garden forecourt and private balcony



Rough textured original brick walls juxtapose LED cove lighting and vanity spaces of transparent glass boxes

The project nestles in the UNESCO heritage site of Georgetown, which MOD draws inspiration from. The design specifically eludes to the historic Loke Thye Kee restaurant, its 100-year-old namesake and neighbour. Taking footprints of the traditional shophouse courtyard and alleyway, each of the 5 suites is prelude by a lush garden forecourt and an intimate private balcony.

Tradition meets the contemporary on several levels as timber hardwood floors contrast customised contemporary fixtures, and rough textured original brick walls juxtapose LED cove lighting and vanity spaces of transparent glass boxes.

MOD's balance of sensitivity to the heritage of the building, while not allowing this same respect to limit their ideas and concepts was key to the project's success. The project received the BCI Asia Interior Design 2017, Best Hotel, Malaysia.

A CHAT WITH COLIN SEAH, DESIGN DIRECTOR OF MINISTRY OF DESIGN, ABOUT SPATIAL EXPERIENCES



Colin Seah: "I think we often ask the relevance of convention, and update it for current or future culture and societal trends."

### **1 Whether the design concept is futuristic or historically vernacular – how do you achieve an underlying balance so that the experience is holistic?**

We do that by creating a clear upstream conceptual idea, something like a north star which guides and informs all our decisions holistically. We stick to this North Star religiously, but the value of the North Star is that it gives direction without being prescriptive.

### **2 What research did you need in designing a space for robots? Is this a precedent for MOD?**

We researched existing spaces which were also robotics-based, just to see how others were approaching similarly environments. We found most spaces too sterile and austere and responded by creating more emotional and dynamic spaces.

We often analyse precedents not just for visual aesthetics or style but also for programmatic layouts and flow. For instance, in our Prologue Bookstore project, our precedent studies revealed that way-finding is often an under-developed element and customers would often get lost, and we responded in our design by having ceiling-based way-finding and signage. Same goes for introducing a window display for a bookstore, where it had not existed before.

### **3 MOD is known for breaking convention in spatial/architectural design. What elements did you push beyond cliché and predictability in both the projects?**

I think we often ask the relevance of convention, and update it for current or future culture and societal trends. This could impact the typological layout (how space is used) or emotional impact.

For Loke Thye Kee Residences, we created a hybrid display wardrobe/vanity sink to "open up" the bathroom and allow the room to feel larger as a whole.

For RACE, we integrated the lighting and metal skin into a seamless skin. Also, the entire metal frame system is demountable, and can be re-erected in a different site. This was the client's request.

#### **4 Robots probably don't complain that much – but how do you deal with fussy clients who keep undermining your design vision?**

We often balance the needs and budget of the client with the design aspirations. However, if the client is undermining the vision at the fundamental level, then we try to persuade them, or even part ways if there's no common vision.

#### **5 What food do you crave for after a had day at work?**

I love cooking! So a home-cooked Chinese meal – a couple of dishes with rice – is quite relaxing for me. If we eat out, I head for a charcoal steamboat restaurant for fish head steamboat.

*Story by Carol Kraal. Photographs courtesy of Ministry of Design*

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