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INDESIGN

INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE DESIGN



## PARK + ASSOCIATES TEST THE EDGE



LOOK ARCHITECTS | LANZAVECCHIA + WAI | ARCHIFEST 2015 | RICELAB BY STUDIOGOTO  
LEO BURNETT HONG KONG BY BEAN BURO | ECOWORLD FLOW GALLERY BY MINISTRY OF DESIGN

# HERITAGE



Above: The new temporary part of the building emerged as an extension of the old — a unusual continuum of then and now

MINISTRY OF DESIGN FORGES  
AN OLD-AND-NEW OFFSPRING  
FROM A COLONIAL BUILDING  
TO FULFIL THE SPATIAL  
REQUIREMENTS OF A SHOW  
GALLERY IN PENANG.

# NOW





TEXT » STEPHANIE PEH  
PHOTOGRAPHY » EDWARD HENDRICKS  
(COURTESY OF MINISTRY OF DESIGN)



IN A RECENTLY completed project, Ministry of Design (MOD) was commissioned by Malaysian developer EcoWorld to integrate an additional 8,000 square feet of showroom space with a 100-year-old colonial bungalow situated on the sidelines of a relatively large plot. Located within Penang's UNESCO heritage district along Macalister Road, the old and new building serves as a semi-permanent office and show gallery for EcoWorld's Penang-based developments, with a projected life span (for the new portion) of five to six years.

With its portfolio containing Macalister Mansion, Loke Thye Kee Residences, and The Majestic – an upcoming transformation of Penang's oldest cinema into a boutique hotel – MOD is no stranger to adaptive reuse projects in Penang. However, the EcoWorld Flow Gallery marks the team's first architectural effort within the heritage realm. MOD worked with Malaysian firm BYG Architecture Sdn Bhd on the project.

According to MOD's Director Colin Seah, two appropriate design responses emerged after consideration of the site and the existing structure. The first, a common practice in Penang, would be to erect an aesthetically 'neutral' and 'invisible' building purely for function's sake. Despite allowing the heritage block to remain in the spotlight, this approach would have created a jarring distinction, dispelling any opportunities for finding continuity between old and new worlds.

"The new extruded from the old" was the second approach identified by the team, and was adopted. "When you see it, you wonder whether it's old or new," suggests Seah. "It is like saying you and I would not exist if our parents didn't exist – that kind of relationship is as tight as it can possibly be, and that was our starting point." The team established that the unification of old and new had to be intrinsically profound, where the modern building was only made possible because of the old.

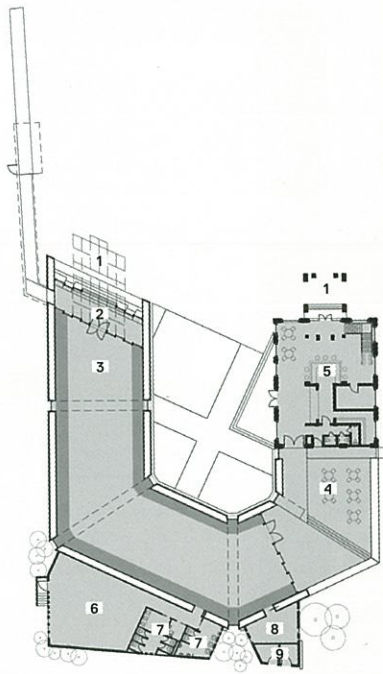
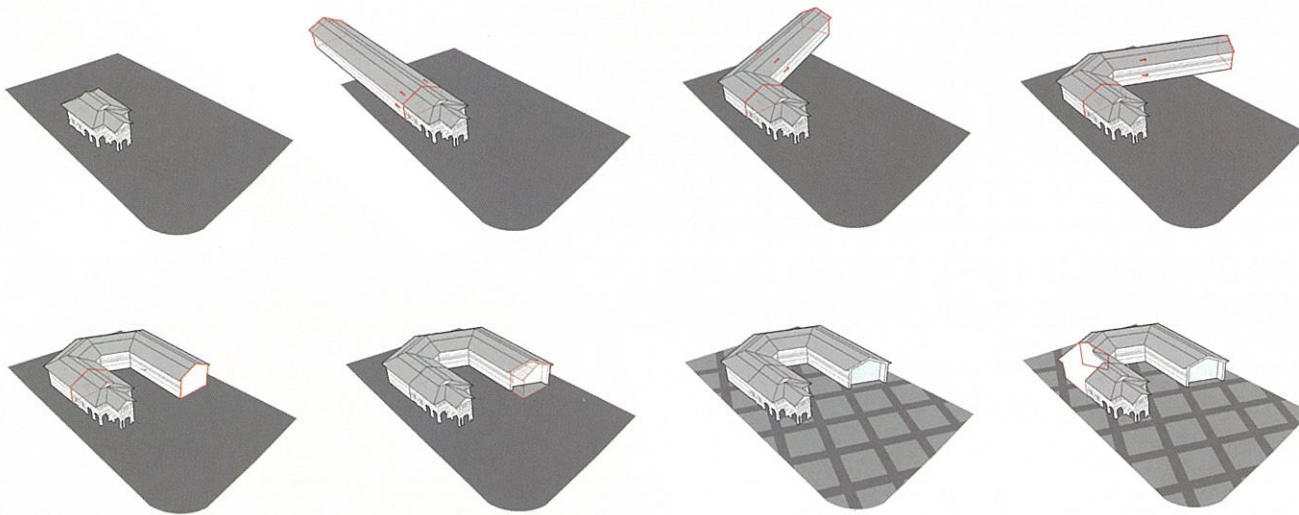
Top: The site is located in zone two of Penang's UNESCO heritage district and houses a 100-year old colonial bungalow

Bottom: Facade details on the heritage building were extended along the walls of the new extrusion

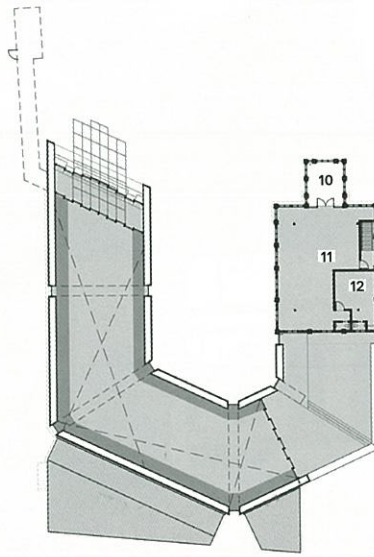
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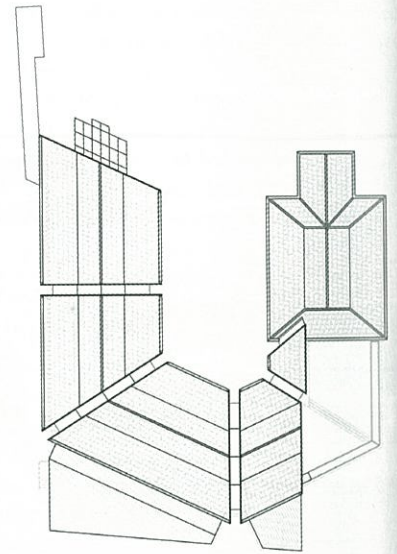
Above: A contemporary metallic portico bursts from the chamfered end of the extruded form, thoroughly distinguishing new from old



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



1ST FLOOR PLAN



ROOF PLAN

LEGEND

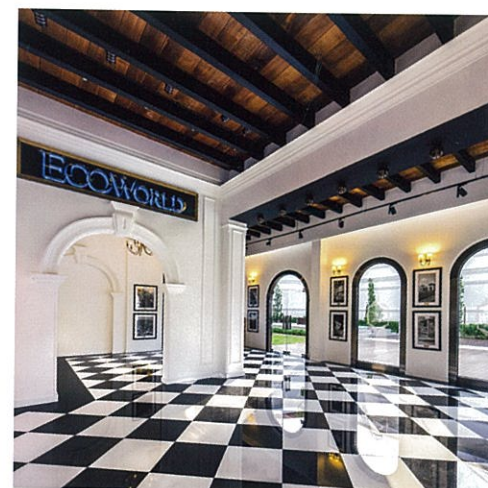
1 Covered Drop Off | 2 Main Entrance | 3 Gallery | 4 Outdoor Terrace | 5 Event Space | 6 Office | 7 Bathroom | 8 Private Room | 9 M&E Room | 10 Private Room | 11 Gallery | 12 Office

Top: The extension was modelled as an extrusion bent back around a central axis, chamfered and incised



With this guiding principle in mind, everything else was led by an intuitive and tactful execution process. The new building inherits the silhouette, architraves and pediments of the old bungalow. “If you did a sectional cut of the [old] building, you’d see that it shares the same section as our [new] building,” Seah explains. Additionally, an old-fashioned lime-mixed paint – originally used for the old – was painstakingly sourced. “We wanted the enigma of it being new or old to be suspended, so at one glance it looks like one building,” Seah says.

Once the DNA was established, the extrusion developed organically. Instead of replicating the fenestrations of the old formulaically, vertical glass slivers were introduced to hint at modern-day design and construction. Besides welcoming natural light into the show gallery, the glass bands ease the building’s changing course, as Seah explains: “The site was not infinitely large, so we had to twist the building. This forced us to think about how each new angle responded. The slivers of light played a role in helping us to negotiate the turns.”



Top: Vivid gold ribs and glazed incisions emphasise the contemporary character of the extension

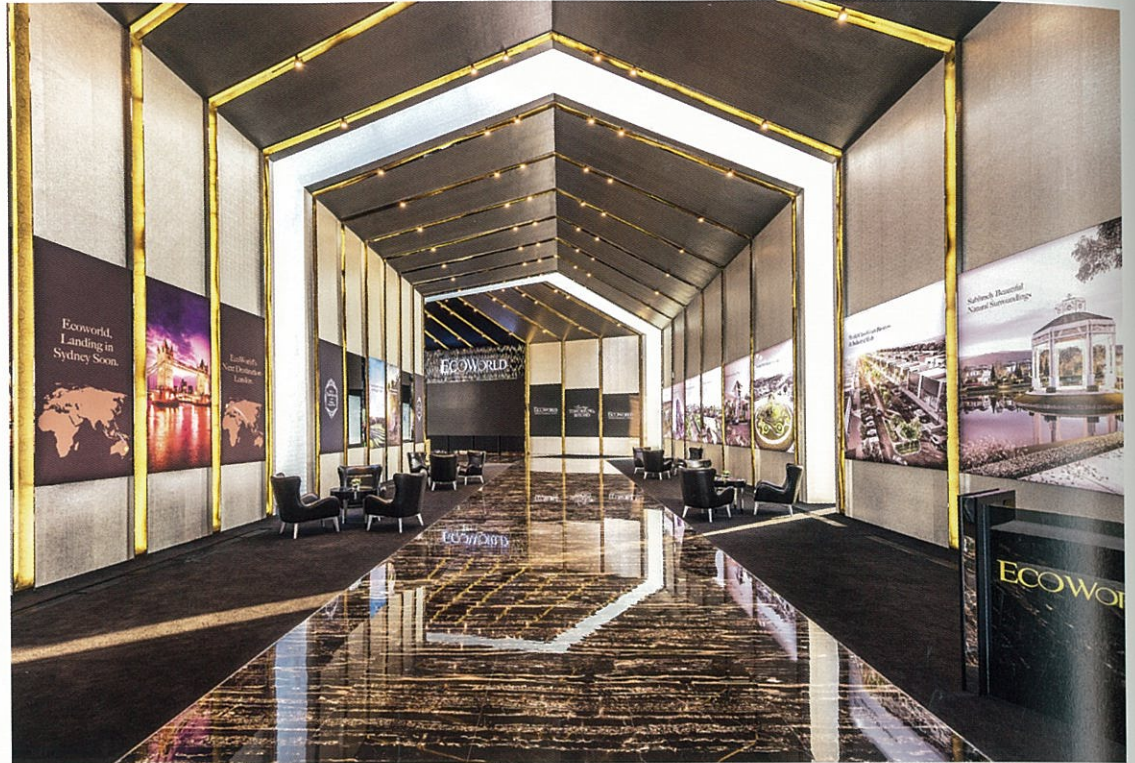
Bottom: A more muted character was preserved within the colonial bungalow

At its end point, the new building has been chamfered at an angle, subtly acknowledging the bungalow as its forerunner. Besides symbolising the makings of a modern building, a transparent glass facade at the end point grants a grand vista of the new building's interior with its eight-metre-high ceiling and clear space that fulfils functional requirements.

When asked about strong examples of heritage-related projects, Seah fondly recalls Herzog & de Meuron's take on the CaixaForum Madrid or Peter Zumthor's modern box-overs of archaeological ruins in Switzerland. "The contrast is always quite obvious and they want it that way," he says. "With EcoWorld, there is a desire to continue the old to become the new. This was an attempt to say, what else can we do beyond what has been done before?"

In fact, MOD's approach was so unorthodox that the team faced issues with the official heritage committee in Penang. Accustomed to proposals of neutral add-ons that do not relate to the old, or on the other extreme, new buildings that duplicate the old to the dot, the board did not know what to make of MOD's proposal. "They thought that our extrusion of the new from the old was treading the line of being ambiguous. They asked, 'Are you respecting the old building enough?' We suggested that respecting an old building could be done in several ways. This was paying it very high respect, given that it helped us dictate the form of the [new] building," Seah says.

He elucidates the importance of finding a balance between retaining and contemporising the old. "[Heritage structures] must be reused in a way that is comfortable for us today, so that old buildings continue living and remain relevant," he concludes. «



“THIS WAS AN ATTEMPT TO SAY, WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO BEYOND WHAT HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE?”

» COLIN SEAH



## ECOWORLD FLOW GALLERY

**CLIENT** EcoWorld Development Sdn Bhd  
**ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN CONSULTANT** Ministry of Design (MOD)  
**MOD PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS** Colin Seah, David Tan, Karen Wong, Inez Low, Marc Kho, Arnel Anonuevo, Don Castaneda  
**LOCAL ARCHITECT** BYG Architecture Sdn Bhd  
**INTERIOR DESIGNER** Art et Domain Pte Ltd  
**LANDSCAPE DESIGNER** Coen Design International  
**C&S ENGINEER** Team PDB Sdn Bhd  
**M&E ENGINEER** GH TAG Consultancy  
**BUILDER** TNH Group

**TIME TO COMPLETE** 7 months  
**TOTAL FLOOR AREA** 4,486 sqm

**MINISTRY OF DESIGN**  
 (65) 6222 5780 modonline.com

**FINISHES**  
 On facade, generally plaster and paint with glazing and powdercoated frames. Limewash on selected areas to match conservation building. Composite aluminum cladding on selected areas. On roof, heritage-replica clay tiles. Floor is a proprietary raised-floor system. Structure is steel trusses sandwiched with block walls.

Top: The spatial depth of the extrusion creates a stark contrast with the smaller rooms in the old building

Bottom: A view of the colonial bungalow prior to its extension and transformation