



Expressions and Stylistic Trends of Homeowners in Terrace Housing

Masran Saruwono¹, Abdurrahman Mohd Rashid², Erdayu Os'hara Omar¹

¹ Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia
²GDP Architects Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

masran697@salam.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

This study attempts to discover the alteration trends of house renovations focusing on terrace houses. Thirty renovated houses located in Shah Alam were identified, visually observed and analysed. The houses were photographed and sorting process was carried out for analysis at the studio. The results show the altered houses could be classified into four established styles namely; traditional, modern, post-modern and "others". There is no one particular style of facade that was significantly more popular among them. Something that can be learnt from this study is that people are expressive of their stylistic preferences even under the constraints of the typically narrow-frontaged terrace houses.

Keywords: higher institutions; performance evaluation; performance concept- learning efficiency

eISSN 2514-751X © 2018. The Authors. Published for AMER ABRA cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), ABRA (Association of Behavioural Researchers on Asians) and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/aje-bs.v3i6.240>

1.0 Introduction

The physical characteristic of housing in Malaysia urban areas is a monotonous and repetitive housing units arranged in straight rows. Informal observation would suggest that residents eventually carry out alterations of the houses sooner or later, even before they moved in. The extent and approach of alteration vary greatly. It may be a minor alteration of non- structural components such as doors and windows. Others may include addition or extension of the porch area may involve demolition of a very substantial portion of the original building or a complete makeover.

Such observation shows that people have certain preferences, even taste with regard to their houses. This is expected due to the fact that method of house provision, do not usually provide the opportunity for house purchasers to involve in the process of designing. Hence, it often results in designs that are not only unsuitable, but apparently rejected. Consequently, the real design process actually begins when the owners are about to move in or during any stage of occupancy.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to discover whether there are certain trends, patterns or “stylistic trends” in house alterations. In order to achieve the aim of study, a visual survey and observation of terrace houses that had been altered from the original design was carried out to find out whether there is any identifiable trend or style in alteration.

1.2 Characteristics of the Neighbourhood

The study covers a small sample of houses located in a housing neighbourhood. The site selected was at Section 7 Shah Alam. Initial visual surveys in the area found that this considerably new housing neighbourhood indicated as much as 25 percent of houses had been altered. The focus of the investigation was to look at what and how house-owners altered their houses as seen from the outside.

Generally, the original design of the housing units features simple pitched roof with hipped-end roofing at the car porch. The building materials comprised plastered brickwork, concrete or clay tile roofing, casement glass windows and doors, and originally painted in cream colour. There were no significant features in the design which can be described as to be of fashionable style except the existence of identifiable “bay-window” for each unit. The design of each unit of the house is repeated throughout the neighbourhood.

2.0 Literature Review

The house may be simply defined as building that provides living spaces for the family. This contains the idea of something more than a simple form that shelters the family. Within the context of this definition, the house can vary in meaning, depending on the individual conception about living. A person may consider the house as just to shelter his family from the elements. On the other hand, to another person the house carries special meaning which mirrors about his status within the society (Munro & Madigan 1999).

The present day society has developed certain view about house ownership. Generally,

house is considered as a valuable property which at the same time provides living spaces for the family (Rukwaro & Olima 2003). They assert that buying a house is a form of investment where financial returns are expected over the years since the house was purchased.

In a modern and developing country like Malaysia, the society in general has advanced to a higher level of needs in accordance to the Maslow's model of hierarchy of needs (Saruwono 2006). At higher level of the hierarchy, people tend to have certain goal in live to achieve and they acquire certain aesthetic taste that reflects their image. This is carried through in the choice and aesthetics of their houses. The current method of house purchase provides limited involvement of the buyers. As a result, many residences renovated their houses at the certain stage in order to fulfill their higher level needs.

2.1 The Shape of Present Housing

In the present day, the authority to shape the form of the built environment is given to the professional designers (Saruwono 2010). They are given licence to organise and characteristic the form and structure of building which enable certain function to be carried out. The functionality of the building and well-being of occupants and users depend on how well the designers able to translate the needs requirements users. Individual aesthetic preferences and the taste for "style" vary greatly. Designers make design choices based on their own preferences or that of uuthe developers'. At times, with the intention to appear attractive, some buildings are designed with exaggerated style which is not connected to the visions of consumers (Rukwaro & Olima 2003). Thus, various types of architectural styles are created particularly in housing design which is often contradicts with the aspirations of the consumers.

2.2 The Need to Alter

The facade of the building is often the most visible from the outside. In terrace housing neighbourhood, virtually all units are similar in design and appearance. Therefore, the visual environment of this type of housing is often considered as monotonous and to certain extent, boring. To the individual owners, they felt that their houses are not distinctly identified except for their unique house number. While there seems to be no evidence that the main reason for altering the houses is to make the house unique, informal visit to a housing neighbourhood gives some indications of the probable cause. Saruwono (2010) aptly suggests that the beauty of renovation is that people are free to express themselves, communicating with the outside world about who they are. People did what they think best from the individual point of view which is supposed to lead a more desirable living environment.

3.0 Methodology

The study employs a simple observational technique. Observational approach of data collection is commonly employed in environmental and behavioural studies. The main advantage of this approach is that data are collected without intruding into people's personal space. Since the main aim of the present study is to discover the trend in house alteration,

an observational method can be considered most appropriate. However, the setback of observational approach is often the difficulty for objective analysis. This was overcome by formulating a clear objective and scope of what to find out at the initial stage. For instance, observing a variety of elements and components in renovated houses would be made easier if a conceptual framework is devised. In this study, since the aim was to look at the 'trend' and 'style' of alteration, the categories of established architectural style were identified and become the term of reference in classifying the alteration stylistic approach.

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The procedure was performed in three stages. In the first stage, a visit to all the identified houses was made for photographing and note taking. Each house was photographed using a digital camera from approximately similar angle for each house facing the front facade. This process was carried out within the first week of September 2010. It should be noted that there was no attempt to communicate with the house occupants during the process. This was to avoid delay to complete all the 30 houses within a short period of time. During this period, the investigator had observed certain anxiousness or curiosity of some occupants when their houses were observed and photograph taken. However, there was no incident where occupants approached the investigator during the process.

The second stage involved compilation and sorting of photographic and written notes for analysis. The process involved examination of features shown on the photograph particularly and the altered items and components. Each photograph is assigned with a number in order to make classification to be done easily. At this stage, the photographs are sorted based on similarity of features being altered. Three main categories of "architectural style" were identified during the process namely; "Modern-tropical", "Post-Modern" and "Neo-Classical". There are some cases where alteration of features did not fall under the above categories. Such cases are classified under "Others". The following third stage involved in analysing the data qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.2 Features of the Original House Design

The original design for the 2-storey intermediate units features a pitched roof for the main structure and for the car porch. The main visible element of the houses is the presence of a bay-window on the first floor for each unit. The car porch, which is "twin sharing", is supported by square columns. The 5ft high mild steel gate is of simple pattern design. The original colour of the houses was light cream for the wall and the roof were of red tiles complete with exposed gutters and a matching colour (Fig 1).

4.0 Results and Discussions

Visual observation found that around 25 percent of about 300 houses at this neighbourhood were renovated in one way or the other. This observation was limited to changes that were visible from the outside in particular, the frontage area of the housing units. Indeed, there could also be houses which had been renovated but could not be visibly identified from the outside.

From the 30 houses that were included in the sample, about 80 percent (24 cases) of the houses were involved in “major alteration” and the remaining 20 percent (6 cases) can be considered as “minor”. Whereas major alteration involved remarkable changes on the features visible from the outside such as extending and changing roofing form and material, minor ones were those that involved in just a small extension of the porch area with awning, new floor materials and so on (Figs 2a and 2b).



Figure 1: Original Design of House Unit



Figure 2a: Minor Alteration



Figure 2b: Major Alteration

4.1 Categorising Alteration Style

In order to identify the approaches taken by the house owners in altering their houses, the photographic images were examined closely to discover whether they can be classified into certain “architectural styles”. The photographic images were sorted out based on similarities of features after alteration. Consequently, the result from sorting out the images found three categories of style. The categorisation is based on the established architectural stylistic forms namely: modern-tropical, neo-classical and post-modernist. For alterations which are not fit into any of the above categories, they are classified as “other” which also indicates miscellaneous style. The description on the characteristics and features of each of the categories is given here.



Figure 3: Features of Altered Houses: Modern-Tropical (Top), Neo-Classical (Left), and Post-Modern (Right)

Modern-tropical

Main character of modern-tropical comprises the pitch roof component featuring timber as the main material and usually with open rafter. This also includes visible components such as window and fascia boards which normally made of timber (Fig 3 -Top).

Neo-classical

Dominating feature of neo-classical are full height porches supported by Doric, Ionic or Corinthian columns and windows and doors with classical pediments. Windows are rectangular with double-hung sashes. The presence of bay windows, transom lights and

arched windows is common. This style displays boxed eaves with a moderate overhang and an occasional wide frieze band beneath the cornice. Doors are also commonly have elaborate, decorative surrounds (Fig 3 – Left).

Post-modern

Dominant features include double-hung windows with one-over-one or two-over-two sash are commonly used. Simple detailing on porches and around eaves, gable and hipped roofs with various slopes. This may also include dormers and cross gables (Fig 3 – Right)

Others

The cases where alteration styles could not fit to any of the styles listed above is grouped under “other”. It may, but loosely based on a single or multiple type of architecture style. There are no specific elements in the alteration that can determine the style appropriately but there are similarities of features such as having large concrete gutters over the porch area.

4.2 Classification of the Houses Observed

Based on the categorisation of architectural style devised in this study, it was found that the tropical-modern style and “other” had equal number with eight cases each, followed by neo-classical and post-modern with seven cases each. This can be said that the tropical-modern and neo-classical are just marginally the preferred architectural styles when residents altered their houses. The data also show that the categories of architectural style preferred by the residents did not differ remarkably. This means that there is no particular style that is significantly preferred by the residents when altering their houses.

4.3 Modern-tropical Style of Alteration

From a sample consisting 30 houses, the investigation reveals that eight cases (32%) where the alterations were inclined towards the intention to have the external aesthetics to be of modern-tropical. This shows that this style is one of the commonest favoured by most residents indicating aspiration of the external aesthetics. The result suggests that probably the public has some regard to local architectural style which can be considered as suitable form for their houses.

As seen from the photographic images, virtually all the altered houses in this category have had their porches altered to having traditional-like roof. In some cases, the new roofing shape did not blend harmoniously with its immediate neighbours.

4.3 Neo-classical Style of Alteration

This is another architectural style which is quite easily identifiable by its main features are protruding columns and roof pediments. The number of cases where houses were altered in neo-classical style was seven. The neo-classical inspired alterations of houses had created a formal and dominating effect of the houses over their neighbours. In particular, the two-storey column with heavy pediments implies the ‘power’ and authority the owners might want to project on themselves.

4.4 Post-modernist Style of Alteration

Similar to the neo-classical style, an equal number of cases were recorded for houses which appeared to have been altered with post-modernist element. The alteration featured bold changes from the original design such as contrasting material and colours of the facade. The forms and shapes of the additions are clearly in contrast with the immediate neighbours. Other elements like the facade treatment of the porch are distinctively post-modern in appearance.

4.5 Other or Miscellaneous Styles of Alteration

A number of cases where alteration did not fall under specific categories mentioned are considered as miscellaneous. From the observation, it is clear that the alterations were carried out to just extend or upgrade some elements especially the roof over the porch. It is to note that even though there is no particular reference to any one style, the trend showed that emphasis were given on having concealed relatively heavy concrete gutters over the roof of the porch.

4.6 Examination of Visible Components Altered

With regards to components of the houses altered, close examination reveals that the porch is the main component that had been altered in all categories of style. It is not quite surprising as the porch is the most flexible component which can provide visually “new” image of the house. The particular style that is most revealing is the neo-classical.

The other changes or additional elements visible are the ornaments. What can be said about this is that residents may possibly want to decorate the frontages of their houses with some form of ornaments which, clearly not provided in the original design of their houses. Also visible from the outside during the observation was the change or putting up new finish materials for the wall, flooring and roofing materials. The original materials probably were not the acceptable to many house owners in terms of quality and appearance.

Other components including columns were also visibly altered but not as visible as the components mentioned previously. With regard to “space”, it is not quite possible to reveal clearly based on outside observation. Smaller items such as doors and windows had been quite obviously changed or replaced with the new ones during alteration.

5.0 Conclusion

The principal aim of the study was specifically to discover whether is any alteration trends in renovated houses. By examining the houses already altered a selected neighbourhood in Shah Alam, some interesting findings were revealed. In the analysis process, the altered houses were classified into three established categories namely modern-tropical, neo-classical and post-modernist. Alterations which did not fall under these groups were classified as others. The study has achieved its objectives in that it has revealed that there are some identifiable trends in house alterations.

From the study, it was found that there are many things which can be examined regarding the phenomenon of house renovation or alterations. The process of renovating a house takes

much effort and resources for house- owners. In fact, renovation has become an industry in Malaysia regardless of the cost and waste of resources that this process had, as the side effects. Therefore, more research should be undertaken in the immediate future so that houses that we provide will be much more “alteration-friendly”. The main agenda should be to safeguard the well-being of the ordinary people who live in ordinary terraced houses which are indeed their “home”. Quite obviously, to house-owners, style does matter.

Acknowledgement

This study was made possible with the funding from Research Management Institute, Universiti Teknologi MARA under *Dana Kecemerlangan*.

References

- Alexander, C. (1977) *A pattern language*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Brolin, Brent C. and Richards, Jean (1982) *Sourcebook of architectural ornament: designers, craftsmen, manufacturers, and distributors of exterior architectural ornament*. United States of America, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.
- Brolin, Brent. C (2002) *The designer's eye: problem solving in architectural design*. New York, W. W. Norton & Company.
- Omar, E., Endut, E. and Saruwono, M (2010). *Adapting by altering*. A paper presented in Asean Conference on Environmental Behaviour, Kuching, Sarawak.
- Jim and Rouse, P. (1999) *Creating Multifamily Rental Housing Through Renovation*. The Enterprise Foundation, Columbia, Maryland
- Lim, J. Y. (1987) *The Malay house: rediscovering Malaysia's indigenous shelter system*. Pulau Pinang, Malaysia Institut Masyarakat.
- Munro, M. and R. Madigan (1999). *Negotiating space in the family home. At home: an anthropology of domestic spaces*. I. Cieraad. Syracuse, Syracuse University Press.
- Mustafa M.M, Daizhizhong and Hong, Y (2010) *The Characteristics of Architecture Style of the Traditional Houses in the Mosul City-Analytical Study*. College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Chongqing University, Chongqing, China
- Rukwaro, R. W. and W. H. A. Olima (2003). "Developer profits undermine residents' satisfaction in Nairobi's residential neighbourhood: implications for local government in Kenya." *Habitat International* 27: 143-157.
- Said, I. (2001) *Cultural-Ethnic Landscape of Terrace Housing Community in Peninsular Malaysia* Published Journal, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Saruwono, M. B. (2010) *Shouting in Silence: Expression of self in private homes*. A paper presented in Asean Conference on Environmental Behaviour, Kuching, Sarawak.
- Saruwono, M. B. (2006) *An analysis of plans of modified houses in an urbanized area of Malaysia*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Sheffield University, UK