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LANDSCAPING IN TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSE

This final studies is to be submitted to the Department of Architecture for the bestowal of Diploma of Architecture to fulfill the requirement of the subject ARC 471

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ABSTRACT

The Malays are well known for their craftsmanship in building traditional houses. As time passed by, the tradition is still kept on.

A glimpse on Malay tradition, it is a ritual that has been produced in the same manner over the years, passes through generations. It is "adat" or a way or behavioural norm of the Malays. In short, the Malay tradition has been kept the same style through several generations. Equally fascinating is the creation of the traditional landscape around the house.

In this final studies the main core is focussed to the landscape of traditional Malay architecture. At the end of the study, I hope some obvious trend in traditional malay house landscape could be understood and highlighted.

This is a need to identify the role of landscape in traditional malay architecture in terms of space barrier, communal integration close to nature feeling and others.

As there is no specific document on malay traditional landscape, I hope this studies will help in recording the use of local plants in Malaysia as well others exotics from others countries which have been adopted for local use.

The objective is also to study and highlight local kitchen plants in use such as Serai, Pinang, Coconut trees and so on. The scope of this studies has been narrowed to two, that is the importance of landscape treatment and their application. The first scope is focuses on the types of landscape applied in traditional malay house development in terms of softscapes and hardscapes.

This include the identification of plants that are used commonly in kampung areas, where the rich tradition of local landscape is still adopted by the kampung folks.

Another important scope that will be covered is the purpose of its planning wheather it's for recording positioning of boundary lines, for food and other purpose.

To further reinforce the scope, the studies of Malay istana landscaping will also be done. It will be incomplete to talk about Malay landscape without the presence of royal landscaping as feudalism is part of the malay culture.

The studies methodology focus on case studies that covers istana and kampung areas. Istana Sultan in Melaka is chosen as it is well planted with local plant and it has the resemblance of the istana that was built 500 years ago, around the year 1400.

Kampung areas in Melaka will also be studied since the State has one of the richest Malay culture. Other places including a house in Bukit Chandan, Perak which belong to the ancestors of Perak Sultanate.

Visual perception on places that give serious attention on local landscaping will also be noted down. This include the special methods that are used to enhance local landscape such as building bamboo fence, ' use kayu ' fencing and so on.

Lastly, I would appreciate if this studies is further continued in the years to come.

CHAPTER 1

LANDSCAPE ART

Plants, People And Environment Quality

1. Architectural Uses

Plants singly or in group form walls, canopies or floors of varying height and density. These are architectural characteristics in design. When designing a building an architect uses materials such as wood, steel or bricks to give privacy to screen, to progressively reveal a view or to articulate space. Should privacy begin to users of an area?. Is there an unsightly area to be screened?. Should a significant view be progressively revealed so as to make it more interesting. The planning designer answers these questions by using plants architecturally for these purpose.

2. Architectural Elements

Wood and wood products, masonry and metal are used by architect to give shelter, warmth and protection. They used to direct filter or block views. Plants are used in much the same way to form architectural elements. Under the canopy of a shade tree, one senses a feeling of shelter. Children who play hide and seek behind tree trunks and bushes enjoy the feeling of concealment.

Vistas and panoramas are enjoyed more when first glimpsed through openings and then revealed in their entirety hedges of plants may be used to screen landsirable views.

The basic for a planning designer is an understanding of plants as architectural material. It is easy to walk on turf (the floor), under the canopy of a shade tree (the roof), but it is difficult to see through a hedge (the wall). These ideas provide an elementary understanding of the functional uses of plant materials as architecture elements.

3. Plants As Articulators

Plants are able to form walls, canopies or floors in the landscape. They are able to articulate, define, enclose or delimit exterior spaces either by themselves or in consumption with other landscape components. Plant materials are the objects in the outdoor enviroment which are absent in architectural interior spaces. They are less well understood or documented as potential space defining elements that are other architectural materials.

The individual plant is able to articulate space by itself and at times within itself as when a small boy perched high in the central branches of a weeping mangoesteen tree is within the green domed roof and walls formed by the falling branches.

Plants are widely recognised as positive sculptural elements possessing seasonably changing beauty, particularly when they stand alone as specimens. However these same plants when planted with others may become autonomous parts of larger components which define exciting spaces, through which the users of the landscape move. A series of single plants placed adjacent to one another may form a nearly solid barrier and may cover or give edge to an outdoor room.

Since vegetation is dynamic, changing and growing plants may not define space as envisioned by their designer until they have reached maturity. They may not be able to form the density of an architectural screen or covering of another material. However they do have the added advantage of change a bleness and seasonal interest.

Because plants can control both the size and quality of exterior space. They can control to large extent human perception of the space designed. Plants that articulate space by themselves, with other plants in conjunction with landforms, buliding and architectural landscape features such as walls, fences, canopies and paving.

4. Plants For Screening

There are myraid materials for the enviromental designers use in creating elements for screening. Some of the elements are architecture topography walls fences, sculpture, water and plants.

The most obiquitous enviromental screening elements ant the ones least analysed and categorised or understood for their effectiveness as screening elements are plants.

Even though plants are growing, changing, elements and as such are less defendable and predictable in their density or ultimate form that are fences, walls, or architecture they may be used in much the same way as any others screening element they have the benefit of a natural apperance and they have a rich inherent design characteristic because of their diversity of form, texture and color.

When plants are used for screening, considerations are given to perceptibility of unsighliness i.e, how much and what is ugly to an individual or where is the offensive view in relation to the viewer in regard to direction, distance and mobility. The further away the object is the larger it must be before it becomes objectionable on the other hand, a relatnely small object close to an observer may be disagreeable and require

screening. Close objects require denser plantings and close spacing because of perceptual capabilities the size of an object area or activity coupled with its relative distance from the viewer is the determining principle screening.

Speed of movement is directly related to width of perceptibility. The faster the motion the narrower the cone of vision. Therefore an opaque planting screen may be needed to relieve a stationary viewer from unpleasantness. The density of a plant screen may vary from extreme transparency through translucency to near opacity.

In summary screening involves the isolation and sometimes the amalgamation of desirable aspects for the purpose of obscuring unwanted views while permitting free access to the landscape. Exterior screening may be accomplished with the number of elements including plant materials. Plants can do an efficient job of screening ugliness if they are well chosen placed and maintained.

CHAPTER 2

IN HARMONY WITH THE PEOPLE'S WAY OF LIFE

We have seen how the design of the traditional Malay house embodies numerous features that help to relieve the climatic stress faced by its occupants and make for comfortable living conditions. I shall now discuss in more detail culture and lifestyle of the Malay community. This will give an insights into how form and utilisation of the Malay house are moulded by cultural practices and living patterns of its owner. Indeed the Malay house is an integral part of the Malay culture.

Malay Culture And Society

The Malays have been Muslims for many generations ,but Islam in its widespread development and expansion,has absorbed many local practices and so there exists within Malay culture,elements of a religious nature which have nothing to do with Islam but go back much further in time to animism and Hinduism .

Perhaps one of the more important aspects of these two earlier influences on Malay culture was the belief in semangat or "vital force" which exists in both men , living and non living things (Winstedt : 1961) . There follows from this the Malay belief in spirits,ghosts or hantu which may inhabit particular trees and rivers and

to whom offerings may be made at these places in order to placate them. In the case of housebuilding the Malays must appease the spirit of the house and its site in order that the wellbeing of the house occupants will be safeguarded.

The influence of Islam on Malay culture however was much more subtle and penetrative. Islam affects much more than the method of worship of the Malays for it involves their whole way of life.

Family Structure and Sex Roles

Except for the strongly matrilineal societies found in Negri Sembilan the rest of traditional Malay society is patriarchal. Thus the husband is the symbol of authority and leadership. He is regarded as the major decision maker and provider for the family. It is customary for him to handle the heavier types of jobs like fishing, weeding and preparing the padi fields, but this does not mean that the women do less work.

An important duty for a wife is to care for her husband and children. Towards this end she assumes major responsibility for the ordinary domestic duties of the household and in the case of the padi farmer helps to supplement the husband efforts by transplanting and harvesting.

Children are brought up in an atmosphere where the authoritative element essential in the parent-child relationship is reduced to a minimum. Punishment is rare and children are allowed to wander off the confines of their home and compound to mix freely with other children of the open spaces in the kampong which can be used as a children playground. These spaces are free from vehicular traffic and thus give parents the assurance to allow their children to interact healthily with the other children in the kampong.

As the children grow older, distinctions are made approximating to appropriate adult roles. As she approaches puberty, a girl increasingly confined to the household, helping her mother with domestic tasks although for reasons of modesty not going to the padi fields. For a boy the situation is different. Becoming an adolescent means increasing independence and freedom to roam visit friends, or work to earn as much money as desired.

According to adat [customary laws] women are separated from men in all formal social interactions. This is a reflection of the social norms which restrict male-female relationships for young unmarried persons. Clear domains for the male and female can be seen in the traditional Malay house. The kitchen at the back of the house is a clear female domain where womenfolk cook, wash and chat. Close women visitors and friends often stay at

the back portion of the house to chat. Sometimes they will also sit in the selang which is a walkway joining the kitchen to the main house. Young females are generally kept away from the public domains of the house. These areas include the serambi gantung and the anjung where guests are received and entertained.

Even outside of the house and compound places where women and men gather to establish social ties through the exchange of news, views, gossips and greeting are markedly different. The communal well and the washing spot along the river for instance are places which are frequented by women in the course of their daily chores and which serve therefore as convenient gathering places. On the other hand the kedaikopi [coffeshop], kedai runcit [grocery] the mosque, the surau [small prayer house], the raised wooden platforms under shady trees and the wakaf [an open shed] in the East Coast are common gathering places for the men.

Weeding are among the main ceremonial and festive occasions in village life. To celebrate this feasts [kenduri] are held and all the villages are invited. Because of the important feasting and ceremony the season for weeding often follow the harvest when rice and money from sales are plentiful and the people are free from their tasks to tending to the fields. In the more traditional villages marriages are still arranged. Men may have a

certain degree of freedom to select their future mate but traditionally women do not have much to say in this matter.

The open compound of the house and the rumah ibu are used to house such feasts and ceremonies. The larger open compound of the house without fences or other physical territorial barriers allows the feasting space to overflow into the public space or the neighbours territory if the occasion calls for it. It also allows such activities to be conducted in or near the house without having to hold it in other public spaces which are far away. Temporary structures are sometimes put up for such occasions.

This flexible use of space shown above is also reflected in the open interiors of the Malay house which has minimum partitions. This allows the interiors to be also used for such feasts when required. The rumah ibu space can be enlarged to incorporate the serambi samanaik and serambi gantung spaces for such occasions.

Although Islam permits a man to take a maximum of four wives, monogamy is more the rule rather than the exception in Malay society. The Malay nuclear family of husband, wife and dependent children is the most common form of domestic grouping. It is the main producing and consuming unit, and the major social unit of day-to-day living which protects and socializes the young. However the elaborate extended family, in which there are parents with

their married children, grandchildren and other relatives, is also a significant type of family structure especially in cases where people are poor and cannot afford to construct individual houses, or where land is scarce.

Newly married couples usually live in extended families. It is customary that if circumstances permit, the newly weds will attempt to build their own house as soon as possible and thence to establish their own family as an independent unit.

The extended families are housed by traditional Malay houses which can be extended. In fact an elaborate addition system was developed to allow for such flexibilities. The addition system also allows the traditional Malay house to grow flexibly with the increasing needs and demands of the family over time. The seasonal nature of the main economic activities of fishing and agriculture is fully exploited by the addition system, allowing the villagers to improve their houses during the off seasons.

Kinship ties are strong with the nearest kin, particularly siblings and parents, being regarded as important sources of support in any crisis or during the course of daily life. Such relationships are expressed in the form of personal interaction as well as strict obligations to the family. Unity among members of the same family and among related kinsmen is highly regarded by society, resulting in such social gains as immediate

assistance where there is a crisis or a need for free labour during a feast, or when erecting a house.

Social Relations

The influence of Islam is felt when we look at the general attitudes adopted by the Malays. While it is in accord with adat [customary law] to help each other, to contribute to activities for the common good and to enhance kampong life, we see also that one of the Five Pillars of Islam exhorts the good Muslim to perform acts of kindness, for example by helping the less fortunate in cash or in kind. The traditional norms of Malay society also require that elders and adat are held in due respect, and that the latter is followed and passed on to the next generation.

In traditional Malay society there seems to be a preference for community intimacy rather than privacy. The community is closely knit with close social relationships. The strong community spirit is fostered by the homogenous culture of the villagers and subsistence economic activities like traditional padi farming and fishing that create highly interdependent relationship between the villagers. The community spirit is however quickly being eroded by free market forces which promote individualism and competition.

The preference for community intimacy is reflected in the lack of territorial markings and physical barriers in the traditional Malay house compounds. There is no clear definition of public or private exterior spaces. They constantly overlap and flow into each other. This promote social interaction and a sense of belonging to these community spaces amongst the villagers.

There appears to be no equivalent of the western concept of privacy in traditional Malay society. The Malay word which is closest to the English term of privacy is "kesunyian" a noun derived from the adjective " sunyi " which means quiet, lonesome or in the absence of human company. The low priority given to privacy is reflected in the very open interiors in the house. There are minimal partitions in the interiors and many full length windows in the house. Such open design concepts also allow plentiful ventilation and a very flexible use of space in the house which will be described later in this chapter.

With a homogenous culture and a closely knit community, social control is strong in the community where there are many agreed-upon norms and values which are passed by "adat". Crimes rate are very low in the villagers and there is no great need for security because of the social control and the relatively close nature of the villagers. This is again expressed in the very open nature of the Malay

house which has little security arrangements against theft.

Another common characteristic of Malay society is the warm hospitality shown by its own members towards visitors from both within and outside the community. Light refreshments and local cakes are often served for the visitors in the house.

Lifestyle

There was no great pressure from kampong society to cause the individual to strive for excessive material gains. In fact Islamic teachings stress the far greater importance of leading a strict moral life (in order to be close to Allah in this life and to have communion with Him in the thereafter) over a life spent in worldly pursuits of wealth fame or power. Such concepts of life that were dominant in the past are, however, quickly changing today towards more conspicuous consumption of luxury goods.

The lack of regard for ostentatious living in traditional Malay society is reflected in the rudimentary and functional nature of the traditional Malay house and its fittings.

Traditionally the Malays do not have furniture such as chairs, benches, stools, table etc. Within the house, the activities of sleeping, sitting and resting are carried out directly on the lantai (raised floor of the house). As such visitors and inhabitants are required to remove their

footwear on entering the house to keep it clean. Outside the house near the staircases, one often finds a large jar of water for washing one's feet before entering the house.

The mengkuang mats (made from the leaves of the pandanus plant) are indispensable and often are the first item to greet visitors in the house. The mats are spread over the floor for seating but also used as carpets, table mats and bedding as the necessity arises. In most traditinoal houses women and childern sleep together in one large space separated only by the placing of the mats on the floor. Sleeping areas are commonly screend by mosqutio nets. Curtains are sometimes used to partition areas into cubicles.

Traditionally, the Malays sleep on mats on the floor. Only on some occasions are beds used. Iron bedsteads are commonly seen in the rumah ibu, used as bridal beds for newly married couples. Sometimes a small bed made of bamboo or wood, slightly raised from the floor is made for women giving birth.

Prayer are an important aspect in the daily life of the Malays. Five prayers are performed daily at definite times, namely, at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and nightfall. Congregational prayers are held in the mosque at noon pn Fridays. Prayers at home are usually performed at the serambi or the rumah ibu of the house. A special area where the floor is made with gaps is sometimes found in the serambi. This area is used for bathing the dead.

This is an example of how a culture and ritual necessity is integrated into the very structure of the house.

Cooking, washing and dining are usually carried out in the kitchen. Food is served on the mats with people sitting either on the mats or on the floor around the dishes. It is not unusual to find that men, women and children eat in separate domains within the house at separate times, usually men first.

Bathing and toilet activities are usually carried out outside the house. Islam stresses the importance of modesty for both men and women. Thus Malay women who bathe at a family well or in the stream wears sarong fastened above the breast, reaching below their knees. Malay women usually bathe at different times from the men and it is bad manners to look at bathers at a well or stream. Similarly, Malay men must wrap a cloth called kain basahan around the lower half of their bodies before bathing in the wells or streams. Modesty is also strictly applied to other toilet activities.

Conception And Used Of Space

The interior spaces in the traditional Malay houses are moulded by the culture, values and lifestyle of the Malays. As seen earlier, the low priority for privacy but a preference for community intimacy; the seasonal needs of feasting and other cultural activities the lack of regard

for ostentatious living; and the deep understanding of thermal comfort requirements have all led to open flexible interior spaces in the traditional Malay houses.

The interior spaces of the Malay houses are generally not defined by the use of the space but rather by houseform itself. The interior spaces are instead named by zones created by the houseform. The only exception where the spaces are named by its use are the kitchen and the toilet.

There are no area names like living-room, bed-room, dining-room, hall, drawing-room, study-room which are directly named after specific activities, as in the Western and modern houses. This reflects the multi-functional and non-specialised use of space in the Malay house. This definition of space leads to more flexible and optimal use of space and its consistent with the inclination towards simple living as described earlier.

Non specialisation of the use of space means that the same space is used for many different purpose at different times of the day and year. A living area can be used for sleeping at night with a mat laid out, which in the morning could be rolled up and stored. This same place can be used during the day for sitting, prayers, entertaining friends, sewing or other activities. During a marriage or other ceremonies, the same place may even be used for feasting.

Interior spaces in the Malay house are not defined by interior partitions or walls, but rather by the less obstructing minor change in levels. The change in levels of up to seven inches (one step up) is used to define certain areas. This allows the defined spaces to be merged and provides a larger expanse when the occasion calls for it. With walls and partitions, the spaces cannot be merged unless the partition is removed. Sometimes curtains and sliding panels are used as partitions to define areas, and these are more flexible than fixed partitions.

The use of minimal furniture in the Malay house also helps to create a more flexible interior space. Bulky furniture not only clutters and breaks up interior spaces, it also defines and confines the space to certain uses only.

The Malay house is, thus, an example of the economical, flexible and optimal use of space. Openness and emptiness are the essence of the interior spaces in the traditional Malay house. Such qualities also facilitate good ventilation, lighting and views in the house.