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INDESIGN®

INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

WOHA
WEAVES
A PLAYFUL
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN THE
OLD AND THE NEW

PETER TAY | WY-TO AND FUUR ASSOCIATES | THE BLACK SWAN BY TAKENOUCHI WEBB | MOUNT
SINAI AVENUE BY SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO | KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL BY CPG CONSULTANTS



SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO'S LATEST CONSTRUCT IS AN EXERCISE IN RESTRAINT AND TROPICALITY, WITH A SMALL SIDE OF RISK-TAKING.

TEXT » ROSS LOGIE
PHOTOGRAPHY » EDWARD HENDRICKS

RAW



WHEN KEVIN AND JOYCE TEO approached architect, Edmund Ng of Suying Metropolitan Studio, the brief was to design a comfortable home for themselves and their four young children. They had bought a semi-detached property on Mount Sinai Avenue with the intention of converting and extending it. The location seemed like a typical suburban street: 10 metre frontage, a jumble of architectural styles and a ground level dominated by car porches. However, the land had particular features that could be exploited. It overlooked a lushly planted park across the street. There was also a significant level difference across its 34m length, with retaining walls extending for two full floors at the back of the property.

The original house was constrained by restrictively low floor to floor heights so it was decided to demolish and build afresh. The level difference along the site meant that the Urban

Above: A facade of timber screens is a protective guard against the elements

Opposite: A choreographed entry into the house begins with a sheltered foyer



ASPIRATIONS

Redevelopment Authority designated the ground level as a basement. The URA guidelines permitted a two-storey home plus basement and attic, effectively allowing four full floors.

The organisational advantages of a four-storey house are immediately apparent upon arrival at the ground floor. Rather than a living room, there is a courtyard, generous lobby, powder room and media room – spaces to greet guests and relax in before ascending to the living room.

Ng conceptualised the project as two blocks separated by a two-metre wide light well. On the second floor, at the base of this light well, a black granite reflection pond divides the living room from the open kitchen and dining. A

narrow, internal courtyard is a familiar feature of the traditional Singaporean shophouse that Ng successfully reinterpreted for its environmental benefits – cross ventilation and natural light. Moreover, by pulling the blocks apart, the family kitchen is separated spatially but not visually. Viewed across the moat, the rooms appear like stages for the daily theatre of family life.

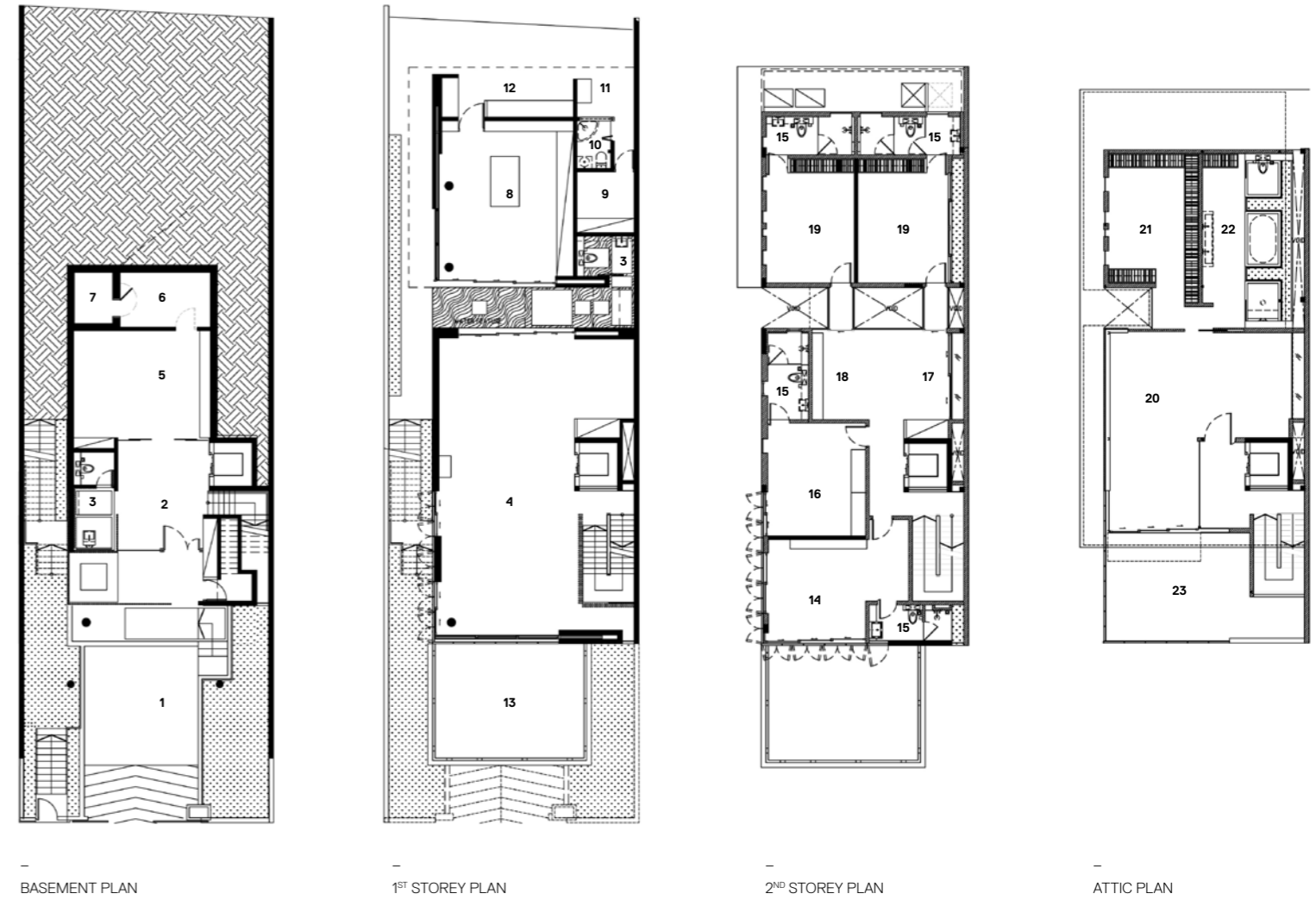
Throughout his portfolio of houses in Singapore, Ng has restricted materials to a carefully restrained palette. “When we have control, we like things to be monochromatic,” he states. The living room at Mount Sinai Avenue illustrates his preferences: smooth, white plaster internal walls with shadow reveals at base and top, white marble or white oak floors and delicate hardwood screens. There are sliding windows, framed in charcoal grey, matte aluminium that disappear into pockets. Everything is elegant, even if this aesthetic is becoming overly familiar. Therefore, it is a relief to see off-form concrete walls with a raw, uneven finish.

Like many of us, Ng has studied the smooth concrete architecture of Japanese masters such as Tadao Ando but acknowledges that with local contractors “you don’t find consistency, which appeals to us because consistency might be too flat.” He is clearly satisfied with the final texture. With the vision of an art director, he alludes to Italian furniture advertising, the seductive images where “a textured wall is set against something very refined. It makes the furniture look expensive.”

A compact elevator and concrete stairwell provide access to the children’s zone on the third



Above: The raised living area faces lush foliage through delicate timber screens



LEGEND

- 1 Car Porch | 2 Lobby | 3 Powder Room | 4 Living | 5 Entertainment Room | 6 Storage | 7 Household Shelter | 8 Dry Kitchen cum Dining Area | 9 Maid’s Room | 10 Maid’s Toilet | 11 Laundry | 12 Wet Kitchen | 13 RC Flat Roof | 14 Study Room | 15 Bathroom | 16 Activity Room | 17 Pantry | 18 Family Hall | 19 Bedroom | 20 Master Bedroom | 21 Walk-in Wardrobe | 22 Master Bathroom | 23 Open Terrace

“WHEN WE HAVE CONTROL, WE LIKE THINGS TO BE MONOCHROMATIC.”

» EDMUND NG



Right: Bridges across the void on the second floor links the family den with the children’s rooms



Above: The dining area is left as an open and airy space that is ideal for casual living

Right: A water feature expertly mediates between the living area and the dining-area-cum-dry-kitchen



floor and master suite on the top floor. The third floor has been laid out to allow flexibility as the kids grow. Currently, two bedrooms are accessed by bridges across the void. Great fun for the children! The neon-pink mosaic tiles in the girls' bathroom are a departure from the muted palette but Ng shrugs. For him, "doing architecture is different from being an artist. An artist has their own fulfilment with the things that they want. An architect has to be sensitive to the client's needs. A kid is not going to be happy with the monochromatic colours that we like. This is, after all, their space."

The master suite occupies the whole top floor and is, consequently, enormous. It is a lofty space, enjoying 4.3m ceilings. Even on the rainy day when we visited, the clerestory windows filled the space with light. It is de rigueur to have a luxurious, tropical bathroom in this type of dwelling and this is no exception. The light-filled wet-room is 70m² with a maximum ceiling height of 5m so it is easy to believe Ng when he confesses that, "I have done apartments as big as that".

Ng's clean design sensibilities are clearly defined by five years spent at W Architects, working with Mok Wei Wei. He is also influenced by the work of Kerry Hill Architects. With offices adjacent to their



Left: The dramatic master bathroom boasts a maximum height of 5m

recently completed 38 Martin Road, the reference to its use of off-form concrete was undoubtedly more than subliminal. The pivoting, hardwood screen on the entrance facade seems inspired by Hill's Genesis Building (140 Bukit Timah Road) as Ng confirms, "that screen has always been in my mind". Like that screen, this one appears dense from the exterior yet delicate and gossamer from within. When evening falls, "the two-level high screen is perceived as a lantern, like a lighthouse."

The project is completed by carefully selected furniture and artwork. It is, perhaps, fitting that the focal artwork in the living room is a bold, new portrait of Lee Kuan Yew by artist, Ren Zhen Yu. Like the brushstrokes on the painting, the finishes of this house may be raw and natural but the final image is one that undoubtedly expresses the aspirations of contemporary Singapore. «



MOUNT SINAI AVENUE HOUSE

ARCHITECTURE FIRM Metropolitan Office Experimental Pte Ltd (now known as Suying Metropolitan Studio Pte Ltd)

PROJECT TEAM Edmund Ng, Choon Geok, Tan Yunliang, Marquel Macabalug, JR Ricafrente

BUILDER Richard Goh/ Join-Aim Pte Ltd

C&S ENGINEER EPM Consultants

TIME TO COMPLETE 21 Months

TOTAL FLOOR AREA 637.3sqm

SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO
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Right: The owners' bold move to have off-form concrete in the master bedroom paid off