

# INDIVIDUAL GENIUS COLLECTIVE SPIRIT

IN AN ARCHITECTURAL FIRST IN SINGAPORE, SYDNEY PILLAI HAS DESIGNED A NEW HOME FOR THE VANGUARD OF THE SINGAPOREAN DESIGN COMMUNITY. THE HOUSE WAS CONCEPTUALIZED BY ARCHITECTURAL FIRM K29 AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY EDWARD HENRICKS FOR FRAME. THE HOUSE IS LOCATED IN THE EAST SINGAPORE DISTRICT OF SENGANG, NEAR THE SINGAPORE AIR FORCE BASE. THE HOUSE IS A COLLECTIVE WORK OF ART, WITH EACH ROOM DESIGNED BY A DIFFERENT ARCHITECT. THE HOUSE IS A COLLECTIVE WORK OF ART, WITH EACH ROOM DESIGNED BY A DIFFERENT ARCHITECT.

## Articulating the

complex, this difference in architectural evolution in the Lion City is reflected in the design of the house. The project was commissioned by the Singaporean government and the house was designed by the firm K29, a collective of architects from the Singaporean design community. The house was designed by the firm K29, a collective of architects from the Singaporean design community. The house was designed by the firm K29, a collective of architects from the Singaporean design community.

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## EDMUND NG, 37 METROPOLITAN OFFICE EXPERIMENTAL

**You must have received numerous comments on the black-painted solid concrete wall which blindsided the entire facade of the house facing Queensway. Conceived to reduce noise pollution, visually it has also piqued the curiosity of motorists on the expressway. Tell us why this wall is an architectural linchpin to understanding this house and how it has affected the design.**

**EN:** One of the greatest challenges for us when we came onboard was to seek some form of identity to the place. We needed something to stand out from the rest. We wanted an architectural statement feature to give an identity, a strong identity to the house itself. And the black wall was conceived through resolving contextual issues such as noise, sight and sun path as well. All these contextual parameters were steered in such a way towards this architectural manifestation: the huge, great black wall that fronts the whole house.

**You mean the black wall was based on your site analysis?**


**EN:** Yes, it's something that evolved when we began to work on the house. The site itself faces the expressway and we need a barrier that cuts the house off visually from the public and the noise from the traffic. We also need to provide a form of protection from the harsh west sun.

**There is a strong yin-yang trait in the facade treatment as the length facing the conserved patriarch house is light, open and transparent, looking directly onto the patriarch house. Tell us how you resolved the relationship between the modern architecture of your house and the vintage style of the patriarch's and whether you attempted to make any physical connection or metaphorical links and in what shape, form or material.**

**EN:** The rear facade of the house facing the patriarch house is completely in glass. Glass is a 'super cool liquid material', meaning it is actually a liquid but in frozen state at room temp/normal temp. The metaphysical characteristic of the glass is the affect that is almost mythical. It dissolves the whole facade and it is non-confrontational. We want to purposely strike that contrast with the patriarch house which has the architectural language of plaster paint finish, timber wood with dark stain and pitched roofs.



Facing Queensway expressway, the solid black-painted concrete wall is a quite strong architectural statement that resolves the concerns of passing motorists even as it resolves the contextual issues of traffic noise, visual privacy and west sun.

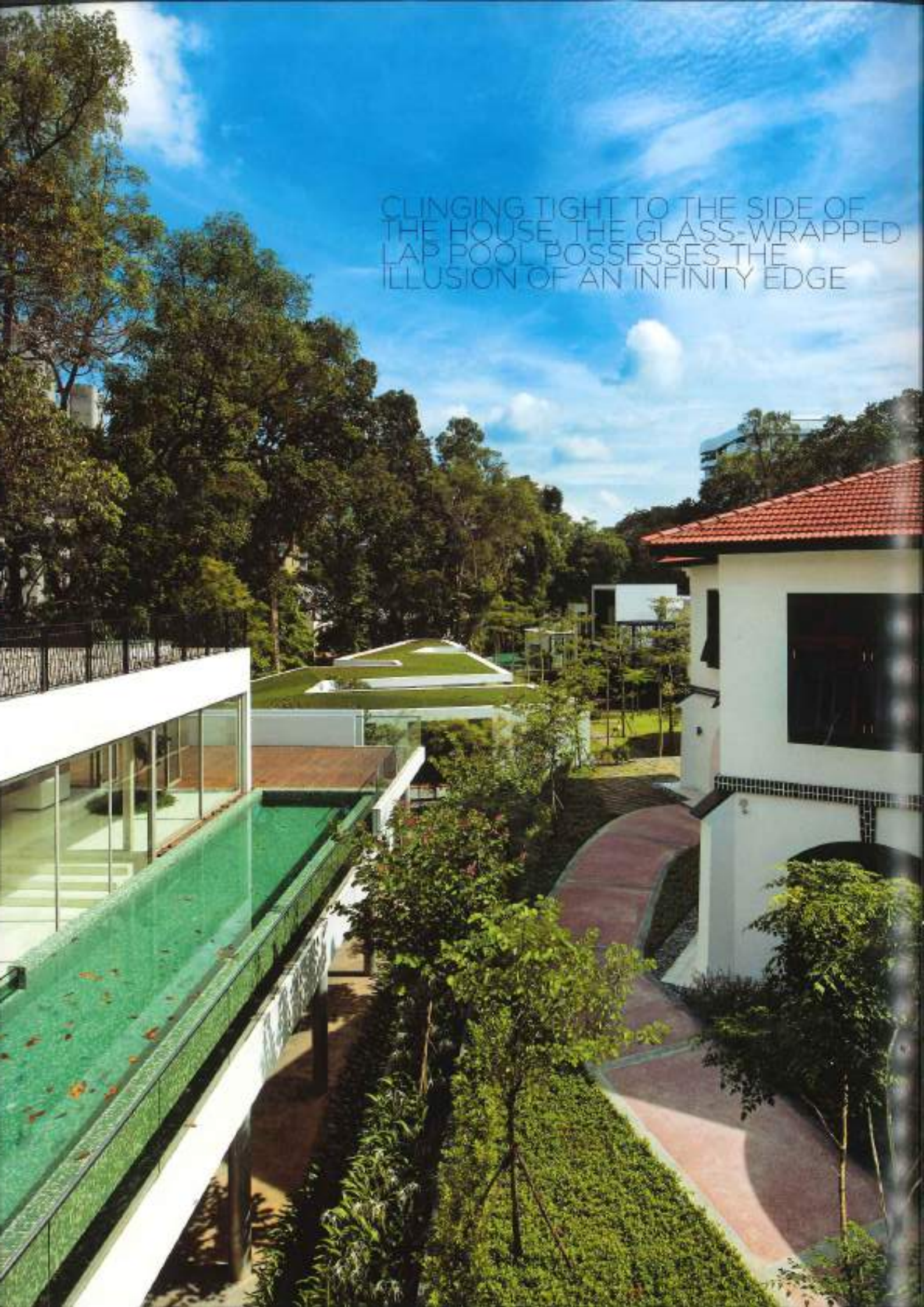
A man with glasses, wearing a light blue patterned shirt and dark blue jeans, is sitting on a large, black, modern-style chair on a balcony. The balcony has a glass railing and a wooden deck. In the background, there is a modern building with large glass windows and a dark wooden upper level. The sky is blue with some clouds. The overall scene is bright and modern.

EDMUND NG STAMPED  
THE IDENTITY OF  
THIS LIEN VILLA  
WITH A SOLID BLACK  
WALL FACING THE  
EXPRESSWAY.  
HE RAISED IT FOUR  
METRES HIGHER ON A  
BASEMENT PLATFORM  
TO SOAK IN THE VIEW  
OF THE COMMUNE AND  
DRENCH THE WHITE  
INTERIORS OF ITS  
PURIST RECTANGULAR  
BLOCKS WITH COPIOUS  
NATURAL LIGHT.



GLASS FACADES AND FLAT  
TOPS ALLOW THE HOUSE TO  
RECEDE AND DEMATERIALISE  
WHILE ITS MODERNITY SERVES  
AS A CONTRAST TO THE  
VINTAGE ARCHITECTURE OF  
THE PATRIARCH HOUSE

CLINGING TIGHT TO THE SIDE OF  
THE HOUSE, THE GLASS-WRAPPED  
LAP POOL POSSESSES THE  
ILLUSION OF AN INFINITY EDGE





The facade of our house that faces it is just a sheer piece of glass, all glassed-up and this is a contrasting language between the houses built in different eras. The patriarch house reflects the golden days while ours is a transparent facade that assumes almost no segmental identity. It just blends in and dissolves into the environment. Our glass facade also serves as a conscious effort not to subdue the powerful nature of the patriarch house. We deliberately designed the building to be just a simple block. Basically, a stacking of blocks that break some rules of what a typical house would be. It is also a deliberate attempt to disassociate it from the patriarch house.

#### How do you compensate for the unsightly view blocked by the black wall?

EN: It is also derived from the contextual part where we inverted the whole house. Normally, the back wall is solid while the front is more opened up. In our design, we flipped it. The front is a solid wall and the back of the house is where the best view is.

As for the metaphorical link, the black wall straddles the two blocks like a gateway. It also creates the notion of a physical back gate to Lien Villas; like a gate post if one were to imagine going to the garage of the old patriarch house.



**It appears that you have designed the L-shaped configuration of the house, comprising two wings, to recede into the boundaries at the back so as to allow the patriarch house to enjoy centre stage. What were the challenges this posed and how did you overcome the constraints?**

EN: The house is conceived like a main gate to the whole development. And knowing that the patriarch house is the main star, we felt there is a need to complement them as well by not blocking their view.

Hmm... challenges? One of the greatest challenges is the terrain itself, the ground level of the patriarch house and ours has a topographic difference of close to four metres. How do we connect them? Actually, we have originally a physical connection with it other than visual connection. This is where the location of the planter box is right now.

#### How would you describe the main architectural language of the house and who or what are your major influences?

EN: Our main architectural language is clean, modern, contemporary in style. Minimalist? Hmm... yeah... Basically we didn't want to follow a fashion, trend, or fad. Rather, we want a house that evolves through its own parameters, its own needs. Where the language is concerned, it just happens that it got the minimalist look. We are inspired by Le Corbusier and greatly influenced by his works such as Villa Savoy. His work has a connection to modernist language as well as with the environment.

Flipping the house back to front away from its entrance car porch, the transparent facade brings the view of the commune into the light-finished all-white interiors.



Our plot is not the highest, in fact, ours is one of the lowest. However, we knew this would be a disadvantage. For a house to have a commanding view of the whole commune below is a form of our connection with the rest of the blocks. If our design is to sit right in like a one-storey building then we would be physically & visually cut-off from the rest of the commune. So our strategy is to build a platform basement. This helped us to overcome the 4m topographic difference and therefore our first storey now is on par with the living room of the patriarch house. We also took advantage of it by putting another slab above our living room. The residential block is perpendicular to the main axis of the whole commune (where the landscape is). That helped us to have an overall view of the whole commune itself. All these turned a problem to an advantage: assuring the house of a commanding view to connect with the rest of the commune, otherwise it would have sunk down and be hidden.

**We understand that you designed this house on a tight four-week deadline. How has this challenged your creativity and what did you gain from the experience?**

**EN:** We had a very short timeline. In fact, the conceptual design stage took only one month because it has been very straight forward from the first day. As long as there is an understanding of the surroundings and the contextual issues, it will never be difficult to design. We had always a clear solution since the beginning up to its completion, and there were no changes. The only major modification was the second-storey block arrangement. This block and the first-storey block were originally proposed to be in 'crossed' position but due to some factors, we needed to shift them to recede into the boundary at the back.

Four weeks is tight but our concept is strong and it has grasped our missing approach in relation to the whole project. This time frame is good enough to think about the architectural massing and as the project progressed, it gave us time to refine the details. **f**



Based on concrete columns to support the living room and kitchen level, the porch with that of the patriarch's house. Edmund delivered the plot from being sunken and hidden, while ensuring a commanding view of the commune.



PUNCTUATED BY A CIRCULAR  
SKYLIGHT IN THE CEILING, THE  
KITCHEN CATCHES THE MORNING  
SUN FROM THE EAST AND  
OVERHEAD AT NOON

