

# DARKNESS AND LIGHT

KUALA LUMPUR-BASED STUDIO TETAWOWE ATELIER  
RE-INTERPRETS AND INVERTS THE AUTOMOBILE  
SHOWROOM FOR LEXUS IN IPOH.

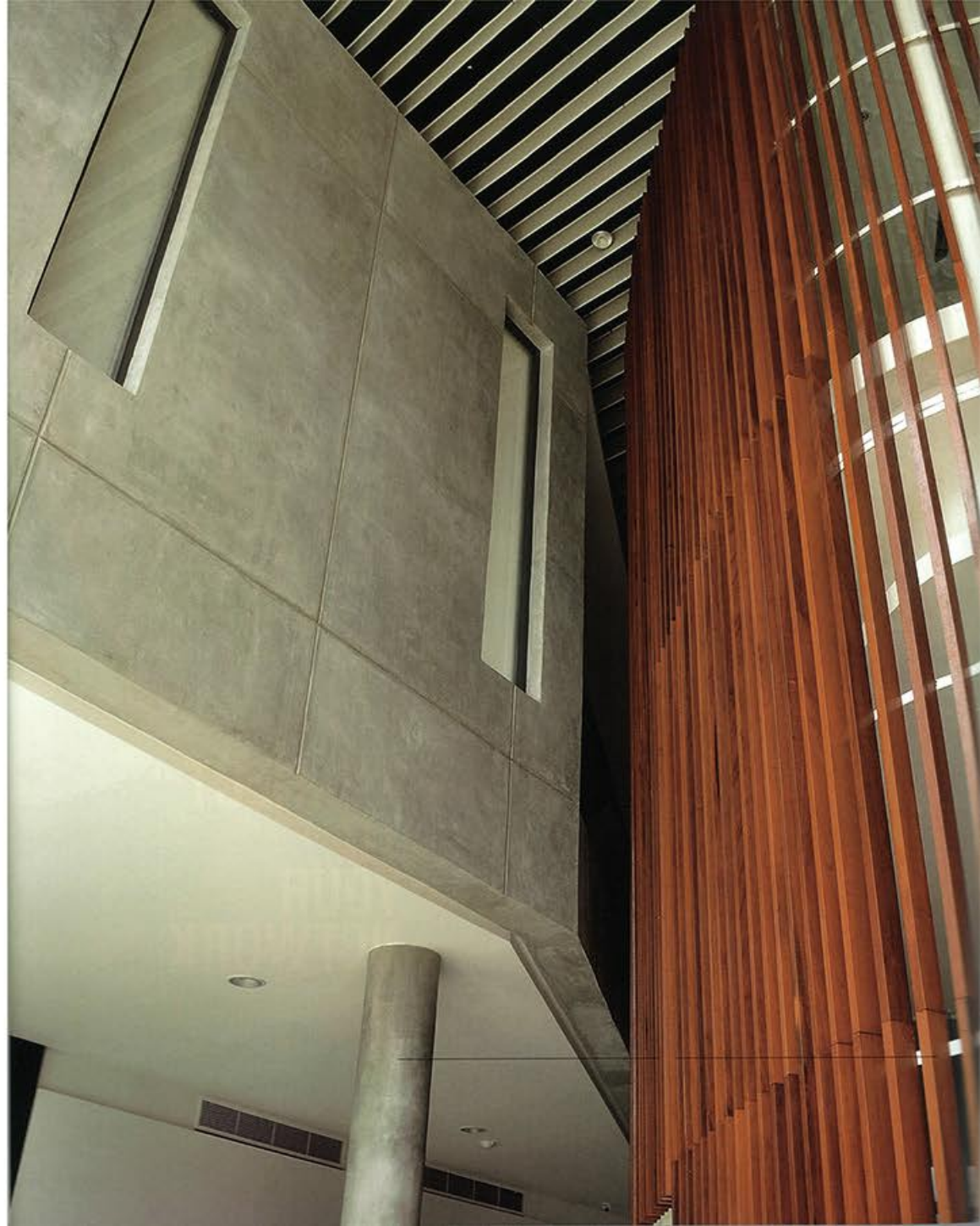


Left: On the mezzanine level, the timber-screened conference room comes evocatively close to an office

Above: The typical showroom format has been inverted, with vehicles partially concealed by a timber screen. Photo credit: Telagamas Motors Sdn Bhd

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TEXT  
IMAGES

• VERONICA NG FOONG PENG

• TETAWOWE ATELIER UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

THE MAJOR THOROUGHFARE OF JALAN KUALA KANGSAR in the north of Ipoh is commonly referred to as an automobile strip. There stands the Lexus Showroom and Sales Centre. Contrary to typical sleek and glazed car showrooms, the design grew from what design studio Tetawowe Atelier describes as a "modest yet sublime approach." The resulting showroom is modest in its form, and sublime in its spatial experience.

Tetawowe Atelier was commissioned to design the Lexus Showroom and Sales Centre based on a recommendation to Lexus by a Singaporean architect. The brief called for something different, with emphasis on the Lexus brand as the frontage without obvious exposure of the Lexus automobiles. The inversion of the common showroom typology offered an alternative platform for exploration by the studio.

For Tetawowe Atelier, the genesis of design lies in the creation of a design narrative, drawing inspiration from tangible aspects (such as materiality, form and scale) and intangible ideas (poetry, light and time). What forms the narrative for Lexus? It begins with the spirit of *omotenashi*, which, say the designers, Lexus advocates worldwide. "It means bringing the spirit of hospitality to the driving experience. The showroom extends the spirit of hospitality from car design to the space," says Tey Tat Sing, a Partner at Tetawowe Atelier.

Interpreting the design brief from an alternative point of view, Tetawowe Atelier inverted the idea of spatial transparency, and conceived the Lexus Showroom as a place of visual silhouettes and spatial curiosity. Taking the idea of *omotenashi* further, the forward-tilted mono-pitch roof – not a commonly seen roof treatment in commercial showrooms – offers what the designers describe as a 'bow down' gesture of modesty and humbleness.

The application of a precisely crafted hardwood timber screen further strengthens the subtlety of hospitality. From Jalan Kuala Kangsar, one only encounters the presence of the brand 'Lexus'. The timber screen partially conceals the interior with a see-through effect, as well as the luring silhouettes of the automobile bodylines behind it. "The

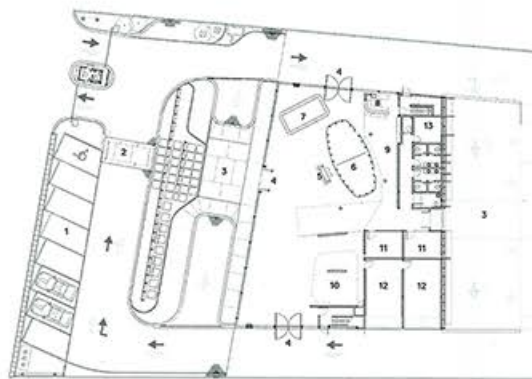
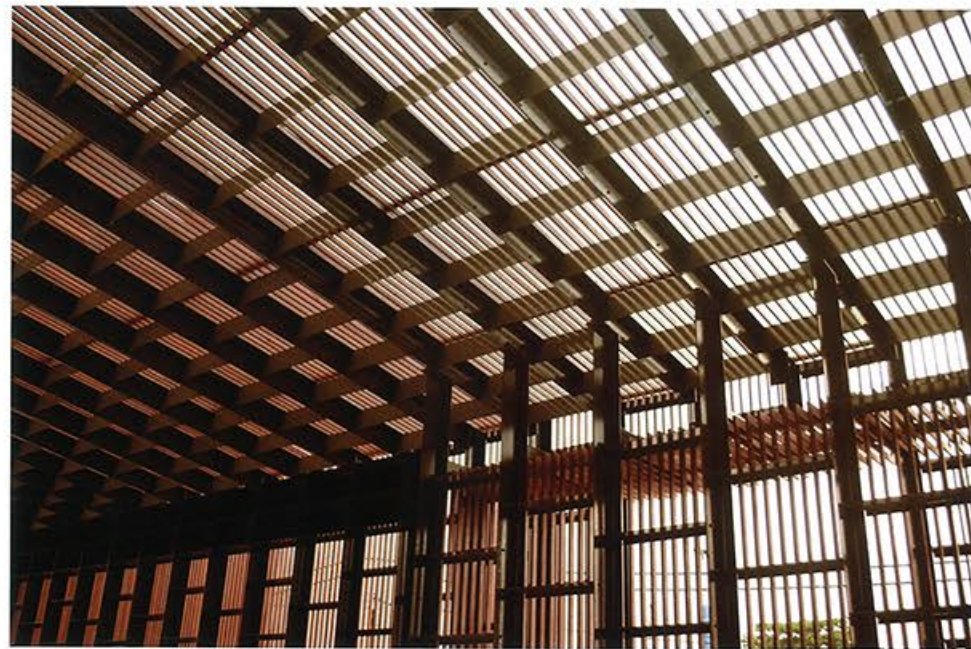
narrative strategy is to create a journey of finding the true essence of the Lexus design philosophy via meandering through and experiencing the gallery space," explains Tey.

In this showroom, beauty is accentuated beyond transparency and light through the sublime paradox of darkness and light, and the interplay between shadows and the automobiles. Entering the drop-off bay, the timber screen, which appears delicate and ethereal from the outside, appears to be stoic and semi-opaque. Under good afternoon sunlight, the choreography of shadows from the overhead timber sun-shading screen creates a seemingly tactile space.

While the exterior form exudes a tapestry of light and darkness, the interior space maintains an open-plan approach; the automobile is the key to the spatial narrative. Beyond the timber screen is a vast gallery space. An elevated and cantilevered car platform features the automobiles in dramatic manner. The designers deliberately explored the use

#### LEGEND

1 Customer Parking | 2 Paved Walkway | 3 Drop-Off | 4 Entrance | 5 Reception | 6 Discussion Room | 7 Feature Car Platform | 8 Lounge | 9 Gallery | 10 Customer Lounge | 11 Office | 12 Car Delivery Bay | 13 Storage | 14 Conference Room | 15 Platform | 16 VIP Lounge | 17 Corporate Pantry | 18 Store | 19 Staff Pantry



GROUND LEVEL PLAN



MEZZANINE PLAN

Above: The showroom interior and the vehicles within are finally revealed in the main drop-off area. Photo credit: Telagamas Motors Sdn Bhd

Right: While it encourages curiosity in passersby, the broad timber screen creates a space of filtered light

of raw concrete, which is richly textured and serves as an ideal canvas for the shadows of the timber screens. At one side, a fine oval-shaped structure forms the meeting rooms, clad in a timber screen echoing the exterior.

The project carefully considers the details of assembly and targets honesty in the expression of material. The timber screens, raw concrete and steel suggest a seemingly robust, yet minimalist way of presenting the automobiles. Tetawowe Atelier's emphasis on design details mirrors the finesse of Lexus automobiles.

While the architectural outcome is minimalist, Tey recalls that "... it wasn't easy to convince everyone. Throughout the process, it was difficult to convince the whole team to believe in the design direction, as this is really not a conventional way to build a car showroom. Carrying out the design required numerous persuasive meetings, the preparation of mock-up material, the sighting of built examples, and above all, a nonconformist attitude." Nevertheless, the project was well received by the client after completion, he reports.

The modesty of form and the sublime relationship between light and shadow that formed the genesis of the Lexus Showroom and Sales Centre in the quiet Ipoh town offered the propensity for re-thinking the typical typology of building. Says Tey summarily and encouragingly, "We take a fresh look at every project and breathe our sort of energy into it without subscribing to conventionality."

"[OMOTENASHI] MEANS BRINGING THE SPIRIT OF HOSPITALITY TO THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE. THE SHOWROOM EXTENDS THE SPIRIT OF HOSPITALITY FROM CAR DESIGN TO THE SPACE."

• TEY TAT SING

## LEXUS SHOWROOM AND SALES CENTRE

**CLIENT** G8 Motors Sdn Bhd

**DESIGN FIRM** Tetawowe Atelier

**LEAD DESIGNER** Tey Tat Sing

**DESIGN TEAM** Wong Wei Ping, Tey Tat Sing, Jinc Teoh, Ken Ee

**BUILDER** Nam Leun Construction Sdn Bhd

**M&E ENGINEER** Mokhtar Consult and Associates

**C&S ENGINEER** i-Selec KL

**LIGHTING CONSULTANT** Megaman Electronic Malaysia

**TIME TO COMPLETE** 12 Months

**TOTAL FLOOR AREA** 450 sqm

**TETAWOWE ATELIER**

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Top: The strip ceiling, viewed here between the VIP lounge and a staircase, echoes the language of the timber screen

Above: The openness of the customer lounge is a counterpoint to the screened discussion room behind the reception counter