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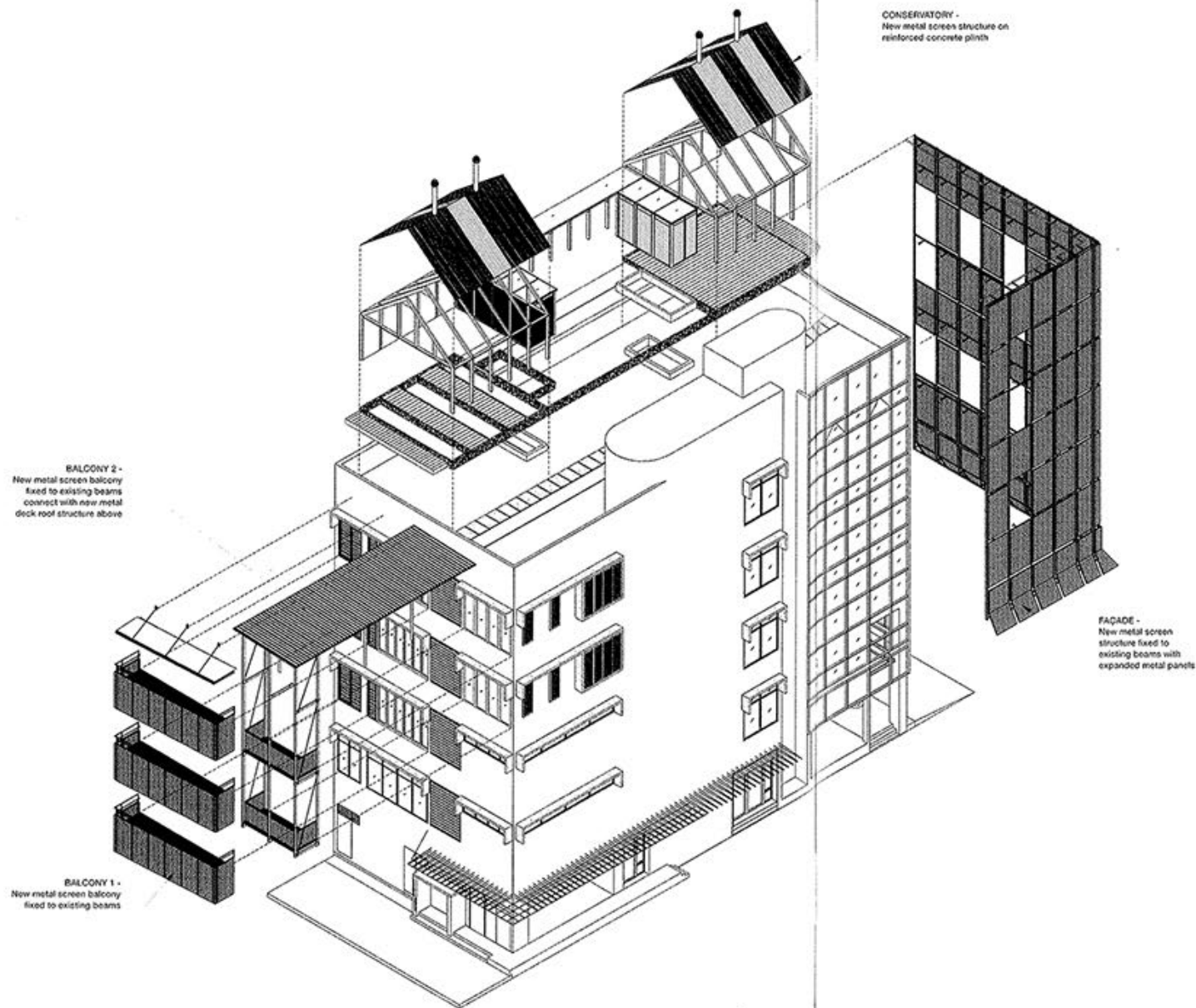
Jan-Feb 2016 | volume 46

Retail Therapy

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THE OLD BLOCK AT IPOH

by Baey Yan Ling

Although once Malaysia's richest city, Ipoh glory days have long since passed. With the end of the tin mining industry boom, families and businesses had moved out of Old Town, leaving only traditional trades run mainly by senior citizens. Without the UNESCO World Heritage status enjoyed by Malacca and Penang, a sure tourist draw, Ipoh is attempting to rejuvenate its nostalgic charm through local entrepreneurs and investors.

CONSTRUCTION

The Old Block at Ipoh was previously an old bank building and has been repurposed to become a hotel, serviced residences and a gallery.

During the design stage, there was much discussion about the right programmes for this project to serve its aim of revitalising Ipoh. The focus was not to create the most attention-grabbing façade, but rather to emphasise the programmatic functions of the brief. The architect and client believed that a careful selection and design of the programmes would cause a ripple effect on the surrounding neighbourhood, enlivening Ipoh.

The building structure and façade were left untouched. The main architectural intervention came in the form of a new skin of expanded wire mesh. Climbers were planted with the hope that it would envelope the façade.

As a conservation project, the main challenge was to work within the structural capacities of the existing building. Lightweight materials were incorporated into the overall structure through the use of lightweight concrete blocks as walls and partitions, and corrugated polycarbonate sheets as bathroom partitions for the interior.

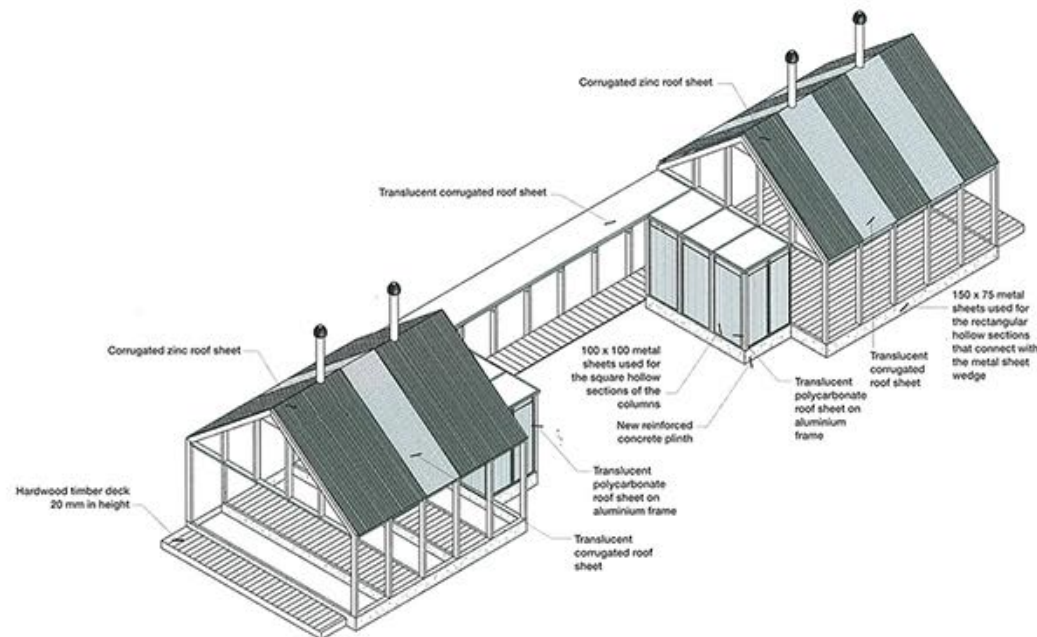
1 Axonometric diagram showing building elements



2 Internal courtyard 3 The façade from across the street 4 Corridor running alongside a serviced apartment, next to an internal courtyard 5 Living room of a serviced apartment



PROJECTS



PROGRAMME

The public square at the back plays host to local weekend flea markets. The ground floor is open to local traders. Kars Newsstand, a traditional newspaper vendor, greets visitors with its rustic charm. The temporary newsstand would move away once the construction of the capsule hotel from the Container Hotel Group begins.

The back entrance leads to the second floor, where the Gallery of Yasmin Ahmad is. The late Yasmin was an internationally acclaimed film director, writer and scriptwriter whose advertisements and films have galvanised the hearts of Malaysians. As most of her works were filmed in Ipoh, this gallery pays homage to both her great contribution to the film industry in Malaysia and to the history of Ipoh.

On its upper floors, there are eight serviced apartments arranged around two internal courtyards. This plan allows for natural daylighting and ventilation within each apartment. Tastefully furnished, the architect's choice of materials exemplifies the aim to give new life to old objects. Materials were deliberately salvaged from previous building owners or were taken from the vicinity. Old timber planks from a demolished Chinese village were reused to create custom bedframes. The unadorned concrete ceiling highlights the exposed galvanised iron pipes used to house electrical wiring. Old office furniture was preserved to serve new owners.

The panoramic view of Ipoh awaits visitors at the rooftop where there are two greenhouses, which could also serve as a test bed for urban farming in Ipoh as well as to supply fresh produce to local eateries. The roof garden also helps to insulate the serviced apartments from the tropical heat. Rainwater harvesting is also employed on the roof to supply the needs of the garden.

PROJECT DATA

Project Name
The Old Brick

Location
Jalan Sultan Yusuff, Old Town, Ipoh, Malaysia

Expected Completion
January 2016

Site Area
292 square metres

Gross Floor Area
1,752 square metres

Number of Rooms
8 rooms

Building Height
24.5 metres

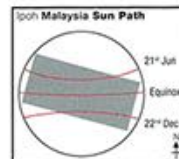
Client/Owner
Private

Architecture Firm
Tetawowe Atelier Sdn. Bhd.

Principal Architect
Wong Wei Ping

Main Contractor
Shen Chuan Renovation Works

Images/Photos
Wong Wei Ping; Tetawowe Atelier Sdn. Bhd.



6 Inside the greenhouse
7 Greenhouse on the roof garden
8 Internal courtyard
9 Sectional diagram of the greenhouses