

### **Adapt to trends to suit needs**

Saturday, April 19, 2008 – Star BizWeek, The Star  
Bricks & Mortar by Teh Lip Kim



*An American modernist home allows natural light and good ventilation into the living room – AP*

HOMES and buildings are signs of times. We have cycled through many architectural trends when it comes to building our homes, and these have depended on the prevailing tastes and styles. As property developers, we are often guided by these designs and trends. But what creates a trend and what do we anticipate to be future trends?

Trends are not influenced solely by the artistic muse but more so, by what people want. This, in turn, relates to the evolving changes that affect society.

For example, the 1980s was characterized by the more ornate Grecian styles – this was a time when the economy was booming and people were generally inclined to flaunt their wealth with ostentatious classical designs that quickly became trendy.

Over the years, our collective taste seems to have simplified and this is reflected in the current streamlined, minimalist look that had found its way back into favour. Less is more, as architects, homebuyers and designers search for meaning and expression in the purity of form.

There is also an increasing awareness at the environment in which they live and the role that they can play in safeguarding it. Being “green” is now an important consideration for many home buyers and as a result of this rising sensitivity, developers are building homes with more windows for better lighting and ventilation, thus cutting down on the use of electricity.

Much research is now being conducted into ways of making buildings green. Apart from the use of natural and sustainable building materials and being more energy-efficient, builders and designers are studying plants that can assist in improving air quality. They are investigating the hardiness of different plants for their use in rooftop gardens and the use of rainwater for rooftop ponds and fountains.

In Europe, for example, some buildings have vertical gardens where plants and grass are grown and cultivated on walls without the need for soil. These living walls not only look good but also help to insulate the buildings.

Closer to home the Nanyang Technological University’s School of Art Design and Media building in Singapore sports a remarkable double-sloping turf roof that sweeps from ground level up which is accessible as a communal space.

We are also becoming more conscious and aware of our collective heritage. Conservation and the adaptive use of old buildings is another popular trend.

Many first world countries are actively conserving their old buildings and using them in different ways. The old Bankside Power Station in the South Bank of London, for example, has been turned into the Tate Modern, a museum of international modern art.

Here in Kuala Lumpur, we have our own examples of conservation in the Central Market and the Asian Heritage Row in Jalan Doraisamy. These old buildings, when used efficiently and maintained well, definitely add to the city's charm.

The way building materials are used is also changing, with property developers favouring the use of materials in their "raw" form. Concrete for example, may be left in its original form without being painted over. For example, the façade of one of our developments, *Park Seven* on Persiaran KLCC, is unpainted fair-face concrete, which gives the building natural yet contemporary feel. It is now trendy to select more natural surfaces like unpolished granite and marble.

Some older materials have also been adapted to suit our contemporary tastes like the new mosaic tiles that have been given a glassy makeover.

With our increasingly fast-paced high-pressure lifestyles, the trend is that our homes have become our sanctuaries – places to which we retreat to rejuvenate. Homebuyers have very definite views about what is important in their lives.

They now appreciate a gated and guarded environment for the security that it provides, and facilities within the development for recreation.

They want to appreciate being at home and spending quality time with their loved ones. They want to entertain friends and family at home.

More space in which to relax is important and master bathrooms are now no longer considered separate rooms, but rather extensions of the master bedrooms. In other words: liveability is the key.

In order to achieve all to this, clever use of space is very important. In *Jia*, our new seven storey development in Singapore's Wilkie Road, the swimming pool has been placed on the rooftop due to limited space; it will provide an unobstructed view of Singapore's skyline as *Jia* is surrounded by low-rise buildings, a requirement of the location's proximity to the *Istana*.

At the same time, *Jia* will feature full-height sliding doors that open to long balconies, providing a large, generous living area in which to relax and entertain.

As people travel and come into contact with new and innovative concepts, trends tend to change rapidly. But we must bear in mind that trends that work in the West do not necessarily work in the East. The challenge as property developers is to avoid blindly following trends. We need to set our own standards.

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