

M Made to Measure

Three industry experts share their personal interpretations of how bespoke designs can bring unique ideas to life. BY ADRIAN WONG

the word 'bespoke' seems to pop up everywhere these days as people seek to express their personality and individuality. Bespoke, or bespoke as it was once called, has evolved far over a millennium to define things that were requested for or made-to-order. The term gained prominence in the 19th century in London's Savile Row when it was widely used to refer to the custom-made menswear. Today bespoke describes a plethora of customised products, among them, in design and architecture.

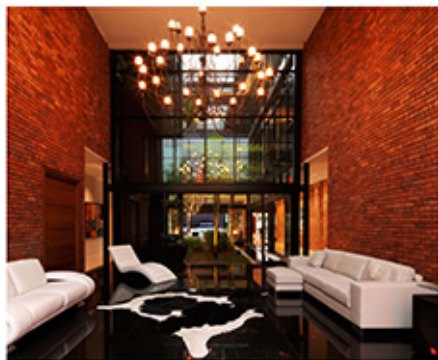
Whether regarded as a working process or a style, bespoke has since paved the way for a new approach to designing modern buildings. Unique and tailored solutions have become technologically embraced and viable, and to some extent, analogous to the book *Manufacturing the Bespoke: Making and Promoting Architecture*, editor John Shell argues that "the architectural bespoke has associations with craft, ornamentation, materiality, fit, uniqueness, and the unexpected." The trend has now shifted and it opens up a wider scope of integration for its numerous facets. "At the disposal of today's architect is an evolving array of interpenetrable tools and processes that allow the fabrication of design propositions to be increasingly complex, reconfigured and adaptive," declares Shell.

BEHIND THE SCENE
Bespoke architecture is integrated as more than just a customised or client-specific piece of design, according to Dr Tan Loke Man, principal at DTZ|LM Architect and director of Architecture 5618.

"Great work comes from skilled and talented architects and artists who are able to customise and create something beyond just functional needs and transform the project into a critical work of art. It should not be a poor copy or mirror of something from another country or epoch of history. It should be an expression of the requirements of the client as well as the technology and operations of this age," he says.

Dr Tan believes that with increased knowledge and affluent building owners are now seeking avenues and options beyond the standard run-of-the-mill to express and live out their ambitions and aspirations. He stresses the importance of approaching bespoke designs with careful thought and consideration. "Increasing demand for customised designs and solutions, however, does not necessarily correlate to approved tastes or even the ability to perceive the difference between art and trends. A bespoke piece of work should clearly show the knowledge, skill and talent of the architect or artist merged into the custom needs of the client or patron."

The Malaysian architect is an authority on tailoring designs to the site's and client's requirements,



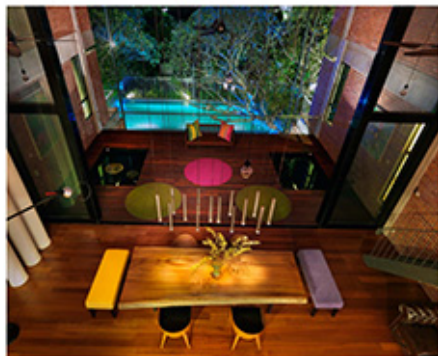
having been the sole driving force of numerous award-winning projects, including a series of modern tropical and green, sustainable houses, such as the 201 and 203 Courtyard House in Penang Jaya.

The 203 is Malaysia's first GRI Platinum (GRI) rated house that is constructed along the lines of a tree and designed to incorporate sustainable architectural methods. Meanwhile, the 202 Courtyard House was conceived as a series of six stone deep spaces around a central landscaped courtyard for a young family who spends a lot of time outdoors. Apart from these, Dr Tan had also converted and refurbished a 1970s three-storey shop house dubbed 3015 in Dataran Jaya into his own green-rated multi-gallery.

"Bespoke projects are ready and to work with because each one is different. Each project has its own site condition, climate and cultural setting, client's needs and aspirations. It is like a blank new canvas for the artist to express himself with," says Dr Tan.

"The most important challenge is to interpret and find a soul to the DNA of that project to bring it to life. This takes time and patience, some level of inspiration and a lot of hard work."

Dr Tan reveals that he is currently working on the design of several bespoke homes for the children of his previous clients for whom he designed and built their family homes years ago. He recalls, "In a recent meeting, the older client told his son that he should trust his architect. From this episode, I have come to realise that having trust in the architect is a critical element to enable successful and enduring bespoke designs. I see the light of day. In fact, most of my best works have resulted from such relationships."



THE NEW 5618 OFFICES, SINGAPORE (DR. LOKE MAN)