

PURI IBU – A KAMPONG RETREAT

INTRODUCTION

Puri ibu is a house specifically designed for a mother. It is a small house and to consider a clearly identifiable building typology, is the most recent of its kind. In the history of architecture, a basic unit would usually set the precedent to a larger complex. Looking in retrospect at traditional architectural build form for the Malays, a *rumah bujang* or *rumah ibu* (small house) is usually the first basic unit to be built.

FORMS AND SPACES

Puri Ibu was designed to deal with climate and environment of the tropic. It can be seen in her open verandah that we called *serambi luar*, the fluid interaction between inside and outside, a body of water in the form of a fish pond positioned in between *anjung tamu* (living area) and *ruang santapan* (dining area), steeply pitched roofs with wide eaves and deep overhangs to keep out the rain and to provide shade, provisions for cross-ventilation through ‘breathing’ wall slats made out of timber. The use of timber, which has a low thermal mass, as building material and composed in a contemporary manner, is suitable for **Puri Ibu**.

Architectural forms for **Puri Ibu** are by no means immutable. They are congruent hybrid of indigenous and imported types; where the modern and the traditional are fused into a new model that generates transformations of spaces and forms. A simple palette of materials namely timber, concrete structure, brick plastered wall, glass and tiles come together to give the effect of a new kampong house. **Puri Ibu** consists of a double-storey structure that houses a mother’s bedroom on the ground floor and guest’s bedroom on the upper floor. This is connected to separate single-storey pavilions on the ground consisting of *anjung tamu* and *rumah dapur*. Spaces that are incorporated into the *rumah dapur* are *ruang santapan*, kitchen and bathroom.

Most of the spaces are designed to capture the winds and breezes of the surrounding area, bequeathing **Puri Ibu** with natural ventilated spaces. At night when the lights are switched on, the ‘breathing’ outer timber wall slats on the upper floor become enchanting glowing feature.

A combination of internally adjusted glass-louvred walls in the guest’s bedroom and the outer timber wall slats allow for the control of air movement into the room. Timber frames, parquet and ceramic tiles are arranged into a strong composition to create depth and contrast in **Puri Ibu**.

ROOFSCAPE

The roof is a very important visual and practical element in **Puri Ibu**. Pure roof form and shape was entirely used in **Puri Ibu** to reflect the image of tropical architecture. Pyramidal shape roof or ‘*bumbung meru*’ is used for *anjung tamu* and hip roof form or

'*bumbung limas*' is used for *rumah dapur*. A huge mono-pitch roof, derived from the traditional *bumbung panjang*, is composed for the upper floor of this double-storey structure.

A strong geometry, both in plans and three-dimensional form was a major design intention for **Puri Ibu**. The combination of modulated roofscape with the surrounding environment makes **Puri Ibu** visually attractive.

WATER AND LANDSCAPE

A central focal element at **Puri Ibu** is the fishpond complete with waterspout. The pool of water acts as an external bonding space for the *anjung tamu* and *ruang makan*. Water features symbolically represent contemplation for life and the unifying factor in the origins of all creations. In a humble manner, this element becomes the most attractive and compelling design feature of **Puri Ibu**.

Puri Ibu is placed in the middle of the lot and basically surrounded by the plants and orchard trees. The natural landscape of kampong evoked a strong spiritual feel of a garden with natural setting. This kind of surrounding not only offers delightful nuances through their colours, fragrances, forms and composition, but is also enchanting with contemplative qualities. Potted plants are used in **Puri Ibu** to define spaces and to demarcate territorial boundaries. Tiles of pebbles and river stones are used as external landscape finishes surrounding the building.

CONCLUSION

Tropical architecture allows for a symbiotic relationship between man-made elements and nature to exist. The smells of nature; of decaying leaves, the aroma of flowers, of earth as heat surrenders itself after the rain and the sound of water; of the rain fall and of the wind blowing through the foliage of leaves. All these are composed into **Puri Ibu** to signify a kampong retreat.

PURI IBU – FROM THE VIEW OF A VISITOR

*'Kasihnya ibu membawa ke syurga...
hai kasihlah ayah berkorban nyawa'
(Mother's love takes one to heaven...
While father's love is selfless sacrifice)*

Goes the lyric to a traditional malay song, an evocation of maternal love. A love that is exalted, unparalleled and by far the most important. One that goes beyond the realm of this world onto the hereafter.

It is easy to recognise **Puri Ibu**, nestled in between two houses, it exudes a sense of belonging and authority. Despite being the newest addition, **Puri Ibu** looks as if it has always been there. At one glance it is like an out-sized jewellery box and another glance it is like an intimate and exclusive place of abode.

A couple of steps up take guests into the *serambi luar*(outside verandah). An area where guests are greeted or a place to sit for a chit chat or just watch the world go by. Around the house, ledges protrude from the walls providing platforms for displaying potted plants.

Proceeding into the house via glass and timber-louvred sliding doors, the *anjung tamu*(living area) where guests are received is punctured with generous openings on all sides including a balcony. During *kenduri*, this area becomes an exclusive domain for male guests to gather. The timber parquet flooring was designed and positioned like the traditional *tikar mengkuang* in malay household.

The *selang*, a most identifiable transitional space ubiquitous in traditional malay architecture, is given a refreshing new twist. Not only that it connects the *anjung tamu* to the rest of the house but it also accommodates a side entrance, also known as the female entrance, and a full height bay window. From the *selang* one proceed into *serambi dalam*(internal verandah) of *rumah ibu*(main house).

Serambi dalam lends itself as a pivotal circulation point. Left of here is mother's private chamber, to the right is *ruang santapan*(dining area) with an attached kitchen and bathrooms, further ahead is a timber staircase leading to the guest's chamber upstairs.

The *ruang santapan* is an exercise of flexible space at its most effective. This space is as much a dining area as it is an area that caters to a myriad of other activities. During *kenduri*, the female guests would usually congregate here. At night, after the dishes are put away, this area provides extra space for sleeping.

One side of the wall houses the attached kitchen and preparation area that is open to the *ruang santapan*. There are two exit doors on either side. Next to the kitchen is a nook for ritual ablution placed before the toilet and bathroom. Here, the use of pebbles as part of flooring material adds to the tactile experience.

The other side of the wall is open, through glass and timber-louvred sliding doors, to a long *pelantar* (platform) built overlooking a fishpond. Occupants and guests have the opportunity to enjoy the outside view while having their meal. This area offers an ambience of quiet serenity enhanced with the therapeutic sounds of water, perfect for contemplation or for informal socializing. The water feature, besides cooling the senses, also incidentally acts as noise barrier between the *ruang santapan* and the *anjung tamu*.

The upper floor, reached via a staircase of *Balau*(fine grained brown timber of the genus *Shorea* and of the family *Dipterocarpaceae*), is composed of a single chamber of glass louvres encased inside another enclosure of timber slats wall. The space created in between these two transparent walls becomes a hallway that leads into the guest room.

The guest room is a very special room indeed, almost ethereal in quality. This room is at once a nest and a transparent shell, it provides the occupants with a sense of security not unlike being wrapped in a mother's womb. As the day progresses, an ever-changing patterns of light and shadow can be observed casted on the floor, adding a dynamic and fleeting quality to the space. At night, as guests sleep under its sheltering roof, cool natural breeze permeates the air.

Overall, **Puri Ibu** is a little house that is almost like an artefact. With fluid and nuanced spaces abundant, it belied the intimacy of its scale. Particular attention was given not only to the sequencing of spaces, but also to the layering of filters between the outside and the inside. This economy of space, an adept handling of surrounding natural elements, the reconciliation of the traditional and the modern are all embodied into one harmonious whole. It makes **Puri Ibu** quite unique as an exquisite monument celebrating the continuing legacy of a very special person, the mother.

Location : Kg. Belukar, Gelong Rambai, Tunjang, Kedah

Architect Firm : Arkitek ibnu ADAM

Architect in charge : Ar. Mohd Kamaludin Adam

Owner : Hajjah Gayah Bt Panglima Othman

C&S and M&E : Ir. Mohd Yatin Ismail
(In-house Engineer)

Contractor : Hj. Mustafa Adam (Main Contractor)
Mr. Lim Han Heng (Timber Work)
Mr. Ooi Lay Seng (Tiling)

Landscape : Arkitek ibnu ADAM
Ar. Mohd Kamaludin Adam