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the bare mark

Making his mark in a larger scale at PJ Trade Centre is Kevin Mark Low's latest green humid aesthetics project



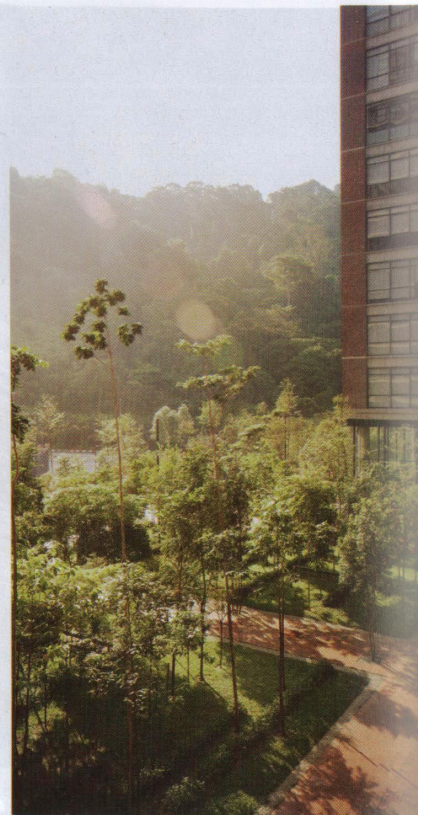
If you frequent the last stretch of Lebuhraya Damansara-Puchong fringing Kepong, the colossal concrete façade screen with its undulating vegetation backdrop at Damansara Perdana is often a big question mark; its troika verticality flanked by another lone mass of red bricks and more exposed concrete culminating into a podium of pixelated frontage. Depending on your route or destination, the PJ Trade Centre (PJTC) greets you in its multi-faceted configuration of rusticity, and it is actually more conducive to experience Kevin Mark Low's leap from his signature "small projects" from a distance. Upfront, PJTC looms, overwhelms and

is misunderstood; yet taunts one's curiosity. What is hiding behind the great concrete curtain?

Kevin Mark Low's often-philosophical approach to his signature tropical houses is now available in a larger scale for public scrutiny. The architect poetically nicknames it the Gardenwall office. Perhaps if you pay close attention, greening spots are gradually and randomly forming on its massive garden space. After all, it is still a work-in-progress. An excerpt from *smallprojects.com* noted that *the project began with a subversion of commonly held beliefs concerning the office building; a*



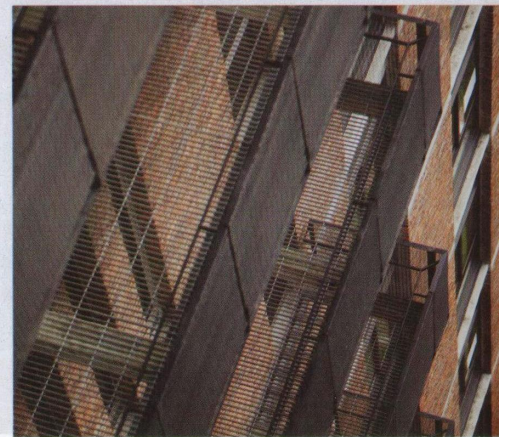
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is a misnomer, yet it is a common one. What is it that makes a building a building? Kevin Mark Low's often philosophical approach to his signature tropical houses is now available in a larger scale for public scrutiny. The architect poetically nicknames it the Gardenway Office Parkway. It is a place where the building is not the end, but the beginning of a journey. The building is a canvas, and the landscape is the paint. The building is a stage, and the landscape is the set. The building is a story, and the landscape is the plot. The building is a dream, and the landscape is the reality. The building is a vision, and the landscape is the execution. The building is a masterpiece, and the landscape is the masterpiece.

dismantling of western concepts and the creation of a tropical monsoon paradigm. Developed by Tujan Gemilang Sdn Bhd, the 5.4-acre site houses the L-shaped plan where a generous 2.5-acre is dedicated to lush landscaping.

We proceed to the "glass side", where the building is designed to embrace visitors. While its reserved and introvert shell with its many acts of buffering is anything but forthcoming, the informal entrance devoid of any ubiquitous porte-cochère is a clear indication of invitation. Ascending a short flight of stairs to the landscaped forecourt - where the usual



developer would demand on minimising in order to maximise on built-up area - young saplings, brick façade, larger-than-life pivoting glass doors and the celebration of human scale is adopted here. Pedestrianisation is highly recommended at this vehicle-free zone. It almost feels like a foreign location until you are smacked back to Petaling Jaya and are reminded of paying your tax as the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia occupies Tower C.

One can't help but notice the slight dip of temperature and the occasional breeze while strolling around the central plaza, taking in the

negative space that has been positively utilised. At the arrival of dusk, the only bar on the plaza level is transformed into a hip clubbing location with the latest R&B music pulsating in the background and patrons borrowing bean bags provided by the establishment to lounge on the lawn with their respective pints. Glass lanterns are one of the highlights of the central plaza. Eames Lounge chairs gather beneath rotating ceiling fans by one of the arbitrary trees planted in the middle of the glass lantern.

Details in architecture are always so annoyingly endearing. It's like striking lottery when you observe that the architect specified something

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the building's design is a blend of modern and traditional architecture. The building's facade is made of glass and concrete, and it is surrounded by a lush green landscape with many young trees planted in rows. The building's design is a blend of modern and traditional architecture. The building's facade is made of glass and concrete, and it is surrounded by a lush green landscape with many young trees planted in rows.

different to something common, and it leaves you hankering for more. In this case, it is the subtle graphic signage design that is so simple yet effective, or the floating staircases within the glass lanterns with its tapering bottom flight, the customised metal railings folded neatly into the concrete wall, and the Banksy reference on the *Bomba Lift*, where instead of a regular plastic sign, a stencil sprayed on version takes place. The list goes on.

Poetics aside, the trade literature promotes PJTC as a boutique property that is rooted in the Malaysian context of heat, humidity,



materials and construction practices. The finishing or the lack of finishes dictates the timelessness of the architecture coupled by the simplicity of its form. The whole unpretentious package is inspired by the knit between Malaysian natural history and its ethnology - as seen in weavings of *batik*, *kain songket*, *pelekat* and *tenun* - and this is expressed by a gentle wrapping of the building in a breathing skin that is like a pattern cloth, at a scale of 20 storeys.

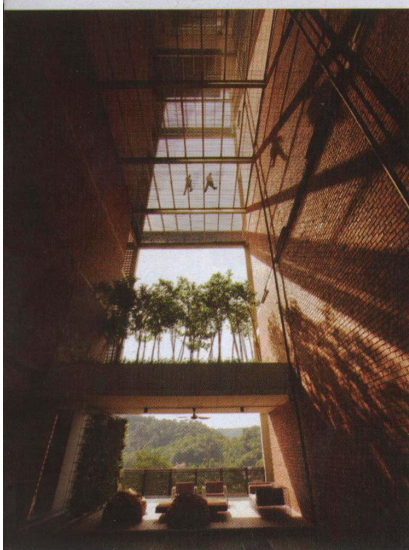
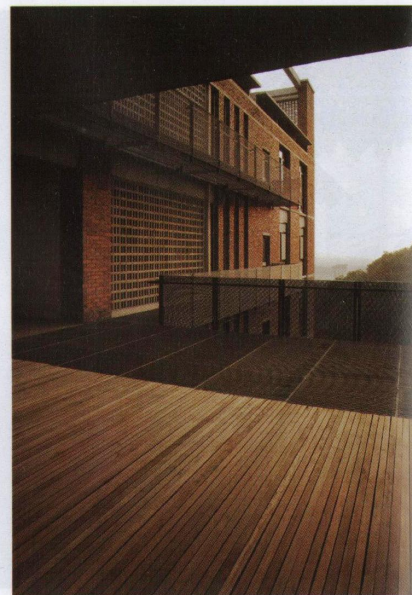
There are only four units to a floor, where the offices have a ceiling height of 3.8 metres. Once indoors, the concrete autocracy begins to

make sense. Sky terraces punctuate the space between the screen and the offices giving the space and its occupants a break from their busy work schedules. The single loaded design also means that cross ventilation is effective when the office balcony doors and main doors are opened. The concrete screen also helps deflect excessive sunlight. Many office units have balconies of about 325 sq ft and all washrooms are open-to-sky thus are naturally lighted and ventilated.

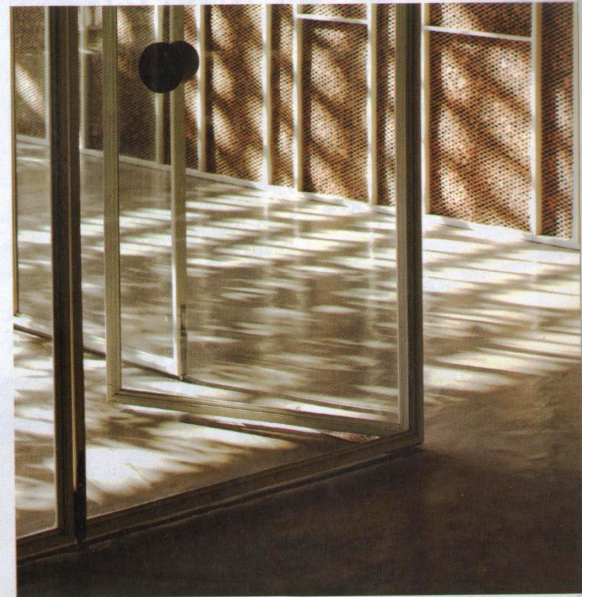
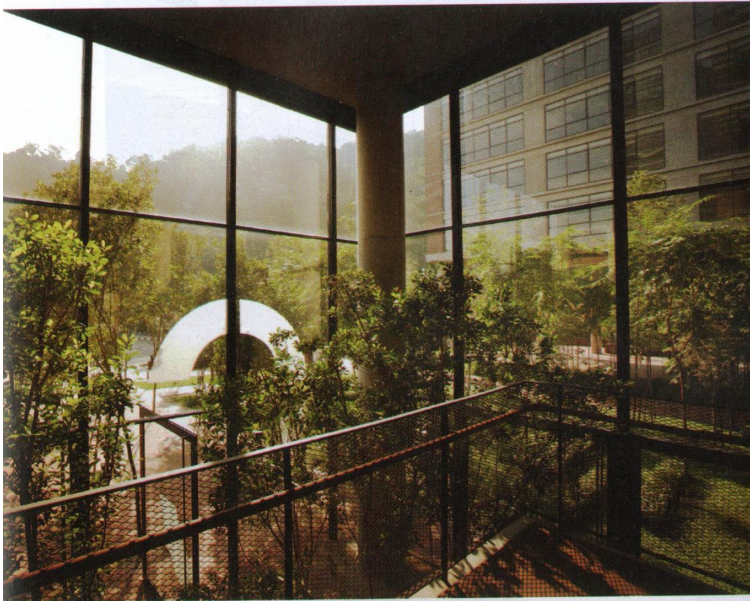
The Gardenwall office is in a sense a purist endeavour, from the materialistic demands, uncomplicated floor plans and eco efforts. In spite



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Kevin Mark Low earned a bachelors degree in architecture and a minor in architectural history from the University of Oregon, Eugene (1988) and a Master of Science degree in architecture from MIT in Cambridge (1991). He has worked in architectural practices in the United States; SRG Partnership, Portland, Oregon(1988) and GBD Architects, Portland, Oregon(1989). He has lectured at the department of planning and architecture at MIT in 1990 and has been lecturing at the University of Malaya since 2002. He joined GDP Architects upon his return to Kuala Lumpur (1992) where he stayed for the next ten years, running the research and design. smallprojects was born in 2002. Current work includes the BritishIndia Corporate Warehouse - Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2007), Overhang House - Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2007), Gardenshell House - Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2007), Cemetery - Surabaya, Indonesia (ongoing).



of that, there are rooms for improvements and a lot of work in progress whether man made or with the help of nature.

"Above and beyond merely designing for efficiency, fluid traffic flow and machine-like functionality, the gardenwall offices were conceived for passive cooling, low maintenance and the effect of sun, rain and fungal growth on its outer surfaces; a gardenwall designed not to avoid but to showcase the green humid aesthetics of a tropical monsoon climate." – Kevin Mark Low **SP**