

## The Meaning of Conservation

It is almost a cliché to say that conservation of old important buildings is essential to our cultural well-being. Everyone senses that but it is usually difficult to articulate what the statement means. We know that it is an emotive issue because it has something to do with our identity and, without the presence of our past we feel that we have lost something in our soul. There is also the matter of group identification: we are identifiable by mannerisms and appearances. As a people, Malaysians could easily be identified by other Malaysians wherever we are – in the streets of another city far away or by our audible accent in the background. We could be recognised by our gait, by the way our skins are tanned and by our physical structures. In a way these are all symbols – things of appearances that represent us. In the same way, our historical buildings are also our cultural and psychological symbols.

Notable buildings of the past are more than just historical records. They are like emblems of our culture, the link between periods of history that tell the story of the progression of us as a people. The KLPAC for example was, in the nineteenth century, the largest railway workshop for the British Empire east of India. It employed several thousand people, most of whom were Indian immigrants, which explains still, the ethnic composition of the people around the Sentul area. The retention of old in the rehabilitation of the old building into a performance arts centre marks also the transformation of an area of Kuala Lumpur, underpinning the change of circumstances for both the vicinity and the city as a whole – from what the city once was to what it now has become. While the new is finished in plaster, glass, steel and aluminium, the old 9 inch brickwalls in English bond encase a historical fact about what the country once was – a British outpost.

Mostly, conservation is about life. Every significant building tells of how life was once lived. The Bok House for example, speaks of a luxuriant life of the compradors in the 1920s and 1930s, with its Palladian expression and large entertainment gardens. It is only one of the many large bungalows that once lined Jalan Ampang, on the way to the tin mines at the far end of the long road. Many other cities are blessed by having many remnants of the past. Indeed for many of these other cities, the past and the present are seamlessly connected. Unfortunately, Kuala Lumpur has very little left of its past. Whatever of significance can be counted numerically without being mentally taxed. For a city of 2 million inhabitants, this speaks only of cultural demise – if we are not too late, we are unfortunately already late.

**Ngjom**

ngjom@ngiom.com

# am

VOLUME 18 ISSUE 3 JUNE 2006 **RENOVATION, CONSERVATION & ADAPTIVE RE-USE**

**PUBLISHER**

Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) / Malaysian Institute of Architects  
4 & 6 Jalan Tangsi 50480 Kuala Lumpur PO Box 10855 50726 Kuala Lumpur Malaysia  
Tel 03-2698 4136 / 2692 8733 / 2691 8605 Fax 03-2692 8782  
Email info@pam.org.my Website pam.org.my Publications Committee Email publications@pam.org.my

**PAM COUNCIL 2005-2006**

**PRESIDENT**

Ar Dr Tan Loke Mun

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT**

Ar Lee Chor Wah

**VICE-PRESIDENT**

Ar Boon Che Wee

**HON. SECRETARY**

Ar Chong Lee Siong

**HON. TREASURER**

Ar Mohamad Shah Dato' Sanad

**IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT**

Ar Paul Lai Chu

**PAST PRESIDENTS ON COUNCIL**

Ar Tan Pei Ing  
Ar Hj Hussein Hamzah  
Dato' Ar Hj Esa Hj Mohamed

**COUNCIL MEMBERS**

Ar Abdul Halim Suhor  
Ar Abu Zarim Abu Bakar  
Ar David Chan Weng Cheong  
Ar Jasmeet Sidhu  
Ar Hamdan Abdul Jamal  
Ar Meor Wazir Zul'aidin  
Ar Mohd Zulhernlee An  
Ar Sarizal Yusman Yusoff  
Ar See Kim Piow  
Ar Jerry Sum Phoon Mun

**NORTHERN CHAPTER CHAIRMAN**

Ar Au Tai Yeow

**SOUTHERN CHAPTER CHAIRMAN**

Ar Hajjah Nor Aini binti Juffery

**SABAH CHAPTER CHAIRMAN**

Ar Yong Ming Cheong

**SARAWAK CHAPTER CHAIRMAN**

Ar David Ong Yaw Hian

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

Ar Jasmeet Sidhu  
Ar Lee Chor Wah  
Ar David Chan Weng Cheong  
Ar Hamdan Abdul Jamal  
Ar Lim Teng Ngjom  
Ar Ken Lim  
Ar Anthony Too

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Ar Jasmeet Sidhu  
jaz@jazsidhu.com

**GUEST EDITOR**

Ar Lim Teng Ngjom

**PUBLISHING MANAGER**

blueinemedi  
Block B Suite 3A16 Kelana Square  
Jalan SS7/26 Kelana Jaya  
47301 Petaling Jaya Malaysia  
Tel 03-7880 0730  
Fax 03-7880 2736  
www.lineofblue.com

**EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES**

Amy  
amy@lineofblue.com

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Yasmin  
yasmin@lineofblue.com

*Architecture Malaysia* (Majalah Akitek) is the official journal of Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM). PAM is not responsible for any statements or opinions expressed in *Architecture Malaysia*, nor do such statements or opinions necessarily express the views of PAM or its committees, unless expressly stated. While every reasonable effort has been made to provide accurate information, neither the publisher, editors, contributors, their employees and agents shall be held liable for any actions taken based on the views expressed or information provided within this publication. All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.