

New cool from old love

Property developer Ismail Ani Arope is the man responsible for raising PJ's phoenix from the ashes, writes Aneeta Sundararaj

YOU'VE just been invited to a reunion of former classmates. But your excitement wanes when you notice that it will be held at the same old venue that you have been going to for years on end.

You wish there was somewhere new and exciting that you can go to. Well, by the third quarter of the year, you can check out the newly-developed Jaya Shopping Centre.

Ismail Ani Arope, 40, director of Jaya Section Fourteen Sdn Bhd, says the company has invested RM400 million to redevelop Jaya Shopping Centre. "Our idea is to create an iconic lifestyle shopping centre," he says over coffee.

The new Jaya Shopping Centre will have double the retail space of the old supermarket previously known as Jaya Supermarket, one of the first supermarkets in Petaling Jaya. It will have basement car parks to accommodate up to 780 cars. Nevertheless, he says: "We didn't maximise the plot ratio. This was deliberate."

Using the metaphor of a phoenix rising from the ashes, Ismail says the idea is to rebuild a demolished icon of Petaling Jaya. "People have a lot of memories attached to the old Jaya, which was built in 1974. One man even asked me if he could save a brick from the old building," he says.

"Although we lived in Shah Alam, we'd travel to Jaya Shopping Centre. I remember Heng's Watch and the MPH bookstore. I used to save my pocket money and *duit raya* just to buy the latest *Famous 5* and *Hardy Boys*."

Ismail then rattles off names of some of the other shops — a toy shop, boutiques, cafes and an aerobics studio. Tongue-in-cheek, he adds: "You know, back when 'aerobics' was still the 'in' thing."

Nevertheless, despite serving the community since the 1970s, the 35-year-old property in Section 14, Petaling Jaya, was a hotchpotch of extensions. "They started out with the supermarket," says Ismail. It was clearly time to do something about the 'clutter'.

To rebuild Jaya Shopping Centre, Ismail relied on both his talent as an interior designer and professional know-how as a fund manager and property developer.

HE'S THE MAN

"This is my dream job" confides



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Ismail. I'm creating real estate. In my early 20s, I worked for Simon Cheong SC Global, acquiring hotels. I travelled all over Europe and Asia. It's not as glamorous as it sounds. Before buying a property, we had to check it out, including the boiler room and assess the quality of napkins used."

A self-taught designer, Ismail says his mother had an enormous influence on his life. "I was about 5 when she gave me a guide book she brought back from Versailles. I didn't even know how to pronounce the word. I thought it was Ver-sai-les. But I spent hours looking at the pictures. Salons after salons. The green damask matched the settee. And those mirrored halls. Why can't we live like this? Dreaming?"

The old boy of SM La Salle PJ, adds: "When I was older, and since my father travelled a lot, we had the opportunity to see some lovely homes abroad. If you ask me to choose just a few favourite places, I can't. My favourite places change every year."

What hasn't changed, however, is that he loves houses, mansions and palaces.

For now, Ismail's first choice is the Ritz Carlton in Singapore. He says it sets the benchmark for interior decor. "They have Frank Stella paintings everywhere, hanging like postage stamps. Then there are precious stones on the floors. I also love Jim Thompson's house in Bangkok. It's the romantic idea of an expat who adopted Thai ways. The house

is a small complex, but with lots of teakwood.

This is juxtaposed with a black and white chequered floor. It's so unpretentious. Like a little jewel box. My third choice is the Ralph Lauren boutique in US. It's an Americanised, glamorised English manor. They've dressed it up with Chippendale chairs and gilt mirrors."

Ismail adds: "I love interior designing. It's like playing with fantasy. You can enhance the mood of a room with just a few things. Let's take a living room in a house. The thing to remember is that a neat home is a well-furnished home. Have you seen some of those old houses? They will have stacks and stacks of papers."

As the discussion becomes increasingly animated, Ismail starts to pepper his speech with Bahasa Malaysia. "You know, my mother, she has those fake flowers.

And all that *bunga telur* from weddings which people give as *cenderahati* (wedding favours). She won't throw them away. Then, my father has those old cordless phones. Wrap dengan *wayar* (wire)," he says.

ANEWJAYA

Back to the new Jaya Shopping Centre. "Our team worked from inside out. We made sure there were no



"People have a lot of memories attached to the old Jaya."

Ismail Ani Arope

dead corners."

At least 30 per cent of the original tenants will be returning to the new Jaya, including Heng's Watch, De Touch Jewellery, Guardian Pharmacy, Krystal Shoes and Benchmark Alliance.

He is certain that since the population of Petaling Jaya now com-

prises educated professionals and students, the lifestyle of its people has been enhanced. As such, the new Jaya will be a perfect complement for the PJ community that yearns to be self-contained.

"We're giving the residents what they want: A clean and modern shopping centre that'll become a natural place to hang out."