

LIFE&TIMES GREEN

Eco design wins it for Yew

Award-winning young architect Yew Wooi Seng is inspired by nature and culture, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

HE had always wanted to be an architect. So says Yew Wooi Seng, the 30-year-old who won Honourable Mention for his Eco-Retreat House design for the NS BlueScope Lysaght Malaysia Young Architect Award 2013.

"I was born near Gurun, Kedah. Our house was surrounded by other kampung houses. I grew up with Malay culture all around me. We used to share each other's food," he says.

Yew studied in UTM Johor. "I'd always liked art, but I wanted to study the kind of art that turned into reality. People must be able to feel and touch art. This was why I wanted to be an architect. Architects have ideas and concepts. But it's the engineer who does the necessary calculations to see to it that the building is structurally sound.

The eldest of five siblings explains that the design he created for the competition can be described as

responsive architecture. In his design statement, he wrote: "This design highlights these basic elements and gives it form using materials and control systems reflective of the progress of the current technology. The result is an architecture that is not out of place within its time, and yet maintains the regional quality, responsive to its context."

Yew says comfort, security and culture are the main elements of traditional dwelling places. The raised platform of his kampung house addresses issues of safety and security, separating the living area from animals like wild boars. In addition, a raised platform prevents inundation during flooding.

Full length louvred-windows provide ventilation in warm climate. He

added a *serambi* (verandah) in his design as cultural element.

He says: "My design was of a house that was responsive to its surroundings. I wanted to use a kampung design and modify it. It's a raised platform but there's a hydraulic system underneath the structure. This means that during floods, the structure can be raised. Instead of dialling 999 for help, the owner can raise the house until the water recedes.

"It is important for the designer to visit the construction site every two weeks. It's the only way you'll know if what you've designed on paper becomes reality.

Seeing it will give you an idea of the scale and proportion of the structure. For example, theoretically, a column can be 600cm x 600cm. But this may

The MYAA ran from last July to September. A total of 50 entries were submitted, comprising the works of young architects and students.



Yew's vision draws inspiration from his childhood surroundings in Kedah.





The hydraulic system enables the entire structure to be raised during floods.



Yew describes his design as 'responsive architecture'.

that these compressors could be serviced. So, we had to hack the wall."

Yew is most at ease when he talks about his home State. "Many people think there is nothing to do in Kedah. You know, we actually have four seasons in the paddy fields. During the harvest season, we can go fishing. That's my earliest memory. Fishing with my friends in the paddy fields. We will run after the combine harvester and catch *ikan keli*. After the paddy is harvested and the fields have to be burnt, you need an experienced farmer.

"If he does not understand the direction of the wind, he can cause a fire to burn the wrong way. People have lost their lives because of this. But, for us children, this is kite season. It's also the time we play football in the dry fields. When the water is let in again, it creates a mirror image of the sky which is beautiful. The last season is when the seedlings are transplanted. This is the time all the paddy fields look green and, for us children, it's the time to catch frogs.

"Kedah is the place to experience culture and enjoy the process of living."

be too big for a bungalow."

Sharing stories of previous mishaps, he says: "Let me ask you: When you open the door to the toilet, what do you first see? The sink or the wc? Once, I created a design where the sink was behind the door. It looked good, design-wise. But, this meant that every time someone wanted to use the sink, he had to shut the door. On another occasion, we designed an entire office tower with aircon compressors placed outside. But, no one thought of making a window so

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