

New home for old trees

Developer Datuk Ricque Liew shows **Aneeta Sundararaj** his efforts to create an environmentally sustainable housing project

YOU'RE at a networking party. The drinks are flowing and you're conversing with a fellow land developer. He's thinking of levelling a piece of land he owns. He tells you that all the trees will be destroyed.

Do you commiserate with him over the loss of these trees? Or, do you do what Datuk Ricque Liew, 53, does, and that is to say, "I'll take them"?

"When I knew that the trees were going to be felled to make way for development in Sierra Mas (Sungai Buloh), I decided to transplant them to my new development project," says the managing director of Paramount Property, a division of Paramount Corporation Berhad.

The development is a new luxury residential development in Cyberjaya called Sejati Residences. Preparing to replant the first tree, Liew apologises for the muddy conditions of the site.

"It was dark and stormy last night," he explains before elaborating on his plans to be more eco-sensitive. "It all starts with the design. I asked, 'How should the buyers be treated?'. You see, they are more discerning today. They have travelled and they know what they want and they want the same thing here.

"In Sejati Residences, all units come with double volume ceilings and roofs that are ventilated for a constant flow of fresh air. The north-south orientation also keeps temperatures down, with large windows that let in natural light and invite the outdoors in."

As he walks to the area that will eventually be the roundabout in the visitor's car park, he adds: "My plan is to plant over 1,200 trees so that they can offer shade to all the homes from direct sunlight. We'll have an eight kilometre jogging track around the whole property."

Such an uneven surface is bound to mean that Liew will have to create steps in some parts of the jogging track. Instead of laying concrete steps, Liew



A computer-generated picture of how the 'sleepers' will look like when placed on the ground at **Sejati Residences**.



Laying the foundation for a greener development.

is planning something different. "In the north, the government undertook the Electrification of Double Track Project (EDTP) a few years ago. They are laying a new double track near the existing track that runs from Ipoh to Padang Besar. When they do this, they'll remove what's called 'sleepers' and replace them with concrete. These 'sleepers' are pieces of timber under the track to keep the rails in place. I have about 6,000 sleepers and I'm going to use half of that here as wooden steps."



Liew's green vision.



Ng, the tree doctor.

TREE EXPERTS

As the first tree is lowered into the ground, Liew describes what Sejati Residences will eventually look like. "The clubhouse will be about 1,021 sq metres and, even there, the columns are made from wood salvaged from a 73-year-old property in Klang. The factory is closing down. Why waste the chengal wood?"

In between puffs of his cigarette, he says: "And we will have what's called

the Five Senses Gardens. We'll have plants that have beautiful flowers, plants that smell nice and so on. We'll also have a herb and spice garden."

He asks: "Do you know, there are plants that can attract butterflies? And there are some that can repel insects? There's also the plant that Indians use to treat chicken pox, the neem tree."

Aware that tree roots tend to grow unwieldy and may cause damage to buildings, he quickly adds: "We're using root guard for all the trees. What this does is to make the roots grow downwards rather than sideways."

Admitting that he is no expert on horticultural issues, he says: "When I don't know, I ask. I have consultants, contractors and specialists."

He points to Ng Kin Siong, 44, a landscape architect from Nation Park Sdn Bhd, saying "he's what I call the tree doctor."

Staying faithful to his efforts to create an environmentally sustainable project, Liew has chosen to transplant the *Khaya senegalensis*, listed as vulnerable on the International Union For Conservation Of Nature and Natural Resources' Red List of Threatened Species.

Ng says: "We call them khaya. We have harvested 47 trees for planting."

These trees can grow to 30 metres in height. What makes them special is that they provide ample shade. "This is why they're normally planted by the side of roads."



'Sleepers' from the **Electrification of Double Track Project (EDTP)** in the northern region.

HOW IT'S DONE

The transplanting process is not to be undertaken lightly. First, the chosen trees have to be pruned. "If we don't, we won't be able to transport them as the branches and leaves will be all over the place," says Ng.

Next is trenching. "What we do is to cut into the ground, about 60-90cm deep. We have to cut off all the roots. The tree is then left alone for two to three months, sometimes longer. It will be dehydrated. We need to see if it survives. If you see new shoots, you'll know the tree will survive."

Ng will watch over the transplanted khaya trees in the coming months. "We have to water them carefully to avoid them being water-logged. Suitable manure must also be given."

Wouldn't it be easier and cheaper to buy saplings from a nursery? "Yes," says Liew. "But I'm from the old school. I grew up in Penang and went to Free School. My parents used to say, 'Can save, save. Why burn and waste when you can re-use?'. These are all treasures."

After the tree is planted, Liew decides, in a somewhat melancholic tone: "We'll put a plaque to say that this is the first tree we have planted here."

As the tree-planting exercise ends, a sense of impatience permeates the air and the question on everyone's mind is: "What's it going to look like when all the trees are planted?" Hopefully, they'll reflect Liew's dream of a "tree-lined driveway" when you drive through the gates of Sejati Residences.