

By Marilyn Ten
reporters@thehomepost.com

COMING up with ideas to transform a dilapidated building into something entirely different from its initial intended purpose takes a great deal of creative imagination and foresight.

When IDC Architects Sdn Bhd was roped in to take on a project which required the architect firm to convert an old rundown building at Wayang Street into an F&B space, known today as The Granary Kitchen + Bar, its directors Ng Chee Wee, Alan Lau Kor Loong, Tina Lau Kor Ting and Jeffrey Yeung Lok Hin knew they had to give this old space a new life while at the same time, preserving its unique architectural traits.

“Our client Urban Village Sdn Bhd fell in love with the building, so did we when we first went to take a look because it’s not very often you see this kind of infrastructure around Kuching,” Ng told *thesundaypost*.

According to him, the building was formerly an old warehouse that bore signs it previously served as a workshop where workers repaired motors while its mezzanine floor doubled as the workers’ quarters.

“It was completely run down and the roof was also collapsing. But the building had a lot of character and charm. Old buildings always have that kind of patina and acquire a sense of character which new buildings don’t have.”

Going into the project, Ng and his fellow architects were aware it was not going to be easy. They came up with a model of the building to scrutinise the whole structure and the component parts. From this, they were able to form a firm idea of how to lay out the space inside the building.

“While we wanted to maintain the character of the building, we also discovered that a lot of the existing structure was not strong enough, including the mezzanine floor. We had to remove and rebuild all the timber support. We also had to remove the whole roof and replace it with new steel rafters,” he explained.

Ng pointed out that they were also very fortunate to have been able to use recycled materials such as timber, steel and glass and incorporate them into the building plan.

“Urban Village kept a lot of old materials such as windows, doors, timber and so on which can be reused. Most contractors would usually throw these materials away because it isn’t easy to remove them from the existing spot and there’s also the hassle of transporting them to a warehouse for keepsake and bringing them back to the site again.

“But we’re very lucky to have a client who doesn’t throw anything away,” he chuckled, noting that this had enabled them to ‘play’ with a lot of recycled materials.

The tables, for instance, are made from recycled window frames while a section of the bar counter uses recycled timber door frames.

The architects also strove to make the building sustainable by minimising energy usage.

“Originally, the building was closed up with metal corrugated walls on the first floor. We removed all these and replaced them with recycled top-hung windows which will enable air to flow easily but also keep the rain out.

“There’s also the high ceiling and we decided to installed a big industrial fan to circulate the air, so when inside the restaurant, guests will feel quite comfortable,” Ng said.

It’s been five years since IDC Architects took on the project and today, dining at The Granary Kitchen + Bar is a one-of-a-kind experience that engages the public’s imagination with its iconic look that exudes an old charm and imparts a sense of history.

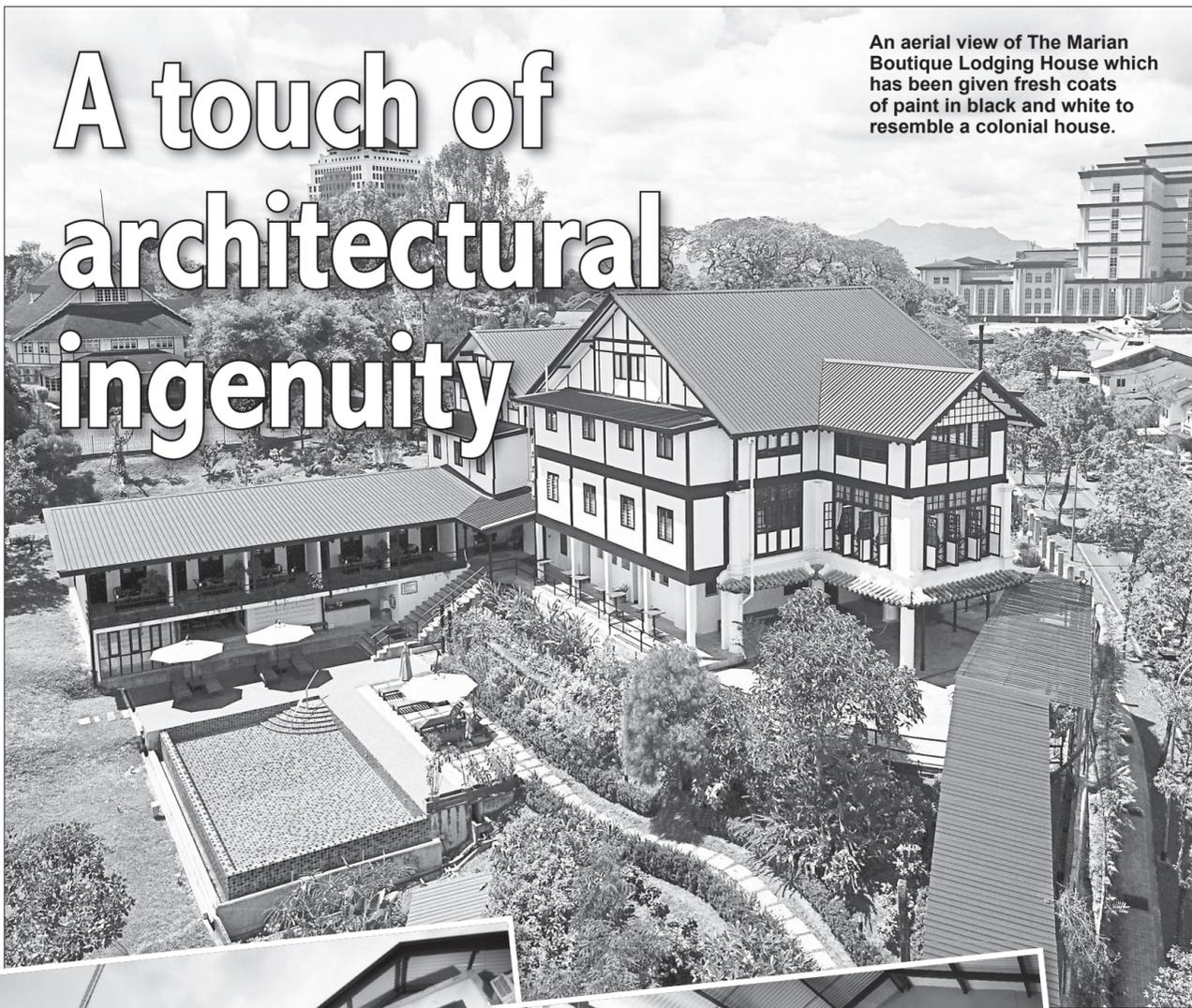
The restaurant has become one of Kuching’s go-to places not only for get-togethers with family and friends but also for events as well as wedding and fashion photoshoots.

Ng believes old buildings help people connect with the past, evoking a sense of attachment to the days of yore.

“When you enter an old building, it feels like going back in time and this is the kind of feeling people like nowadays. The old walls and old timber which have

A touch of architectural ingenuity

An aerial view of The Marian Boutique Lodging House which has been given fresh coats of paint in black and white to resemble a colonial house.



What used to be an old warehouse is now a popular F&B space.



The mezzanine floor was completely rebuilt while recycled top-hung windows were fitted in to enable air to flow easily.



(From left) Yeung, Tina, Ng and Alan with the awards they won recently at the MIID Reka Awards and PAM Awards 2018. — Photos courtesy of IDC Architects

a lot of beauty and character are what draw people to The Granary Kitchen + Bar.”

He shared that when IDC Architects first embarked on the project, the building, estimated to be at least 60 years old, was already full of character and its beauty could be seen through its old walls and timber.

“It gave us the direction to create a design which integrates the old and new by using recycled materials and incorporating them to fit into a new context, which is an F&B space.

“Things that were beautiful and in good condition, we kept them whereas those that were rotten, unsafe and did not fit in, we tried to replace with something new to complement what is already there.

“At the end of the day, the building has been given a new purpose and a new lease on life as it is now an F&B venue where people can come and enjoy themselves.”

Not only has The Granary Kitchen + Bar project charmed its patrons, but also won recognition from Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia (PAM) and Malaysian Institute of Interior Designers (MIID).

Ng said the project took the Gold Award for design excellence



Ng (left) showing the recycled materials incorporated into The Granary Kitchen + Bar project as Alan looks on.

in the Green Interior & Adaptive Reuse category at the MIID Reka Awards in November last year and also the Commendation Award at the PAM Awards 2018 under the Adaptive Re-Use category.

“We’re quite happy we got the Commendation Award from PAM in May last year and later the MIID Reka Awards — which is

something we recently joined.”

Chiming in, Tina said they were pleasantly surprised to be given the Gold Award from MIID, particularly when the projects shortlisted were mostly big and ‘very sleek and very new’.

“You can tell they have a much more comfortable budget compared to ours which is

Our client Urban Village Sdn Bhd fell in love with the building, so did we when we first went to take a look because it’s not very often you see this kind of infrastructure around Kuching.

— Ng Chee Wee, a director of The Granary Kitchen + Bar

project,” Ng said.

“When we first visited the building, situated, coincidentally, right behind The Granary, we found that workmanship on some of the features was very good such as the glass louver windows.

“So we decided to maintain those still in good condition and replace the worn down parts like the leaking roof. We also gave the building fresh coats of paint in black and white so that it becomes more striking and similar to a colonial house.”

Since it was completed, The Marian Boutique Lodging House, atop a hill in the heart of Kuching city, is considered as one of the city’s architectural landmarks.

It was shortlisted in the Adaptive Re-Use category at PAM Awards 2018 along with Borneo 744, another project of IDC Architects.

Alan said IDC Architects is thrilled to be recognised for carrying out its projects, especially when the firm was the sole representative from Sarawak at PAM Awards 2018 and MIID Reka Awards.

“A lot of times, projects, shortlisted for these architectural awards, are mostly from peninsular Malaysia, so we’re happy to not only have been shortlisted but also won the top award for The Granary Kitchen + Bar.”

He said what was interesting about IDC Architects’ two projects was that it showed preservation is not necessarily at odds with economic development.

“Both are very successful projects, so preservation does not mean you can’t make money out of the projects. Moreover, we also get to preserve the good places of Kuching.”

The projects, he added, also showed two very different approaches to conservation.

“Conservation doesn’t mean we have to keep every single thing exactly the same way it was. With The Marian, we put back pretty much what was there, filled in the missing pieces and restored the building to its original grandeur while The Granary

represented a creative imagination where it isn’t exactly what it was but we brought back all these old and new things and created a vibrant exciting space unlike any other place in Kuching.

“These two projects show two ways in which a mind inclined towards conservation can create meaningful, memorable and very special places and these are what make Kuching special.”

He stressed for Kuching to remain as a ‘special place’, it was necessary to ensure the heritage buildings of the city were preserved and conserved.

“At this point in time, we believe it’s really up to the partnership between clients, developers, architects and other professionals to bring about more awareness on preservation of historic buildings.

“Otherwise, the heritage of Kuching could disappear just like that — especially when Sarawak has no heritage or preservation laws which prevent historic buildings from being demolished.”

Doors at the entrance of The Granary Kitchen + Bar were gently sanded to reveal the different layers of colours left behind from the olden days.

considered quite small and humble.”

She credited the success of the project to Urban Village, especially its director Rosemarie Wong, saying: “We have a good relationship with our client and were on the same page with them in terms of vision and that ultimately contributed to the success of the project.”

The partnership between IDC Architects and Urban Village also led to another collaboration between the two companies in restoring and converting the old St Mary’s Boarding House and Diocesan guesthouse into The Marian Boutique Lodging House.

“For this project, we also used a similar approach we applied to The Granary Kitchen + Bar



IDC Architects kept most of the existing structure of The Marian Boutique Lodging House while the floor was also repolished to give it a new shine.