

## AM

Reynolds' House

Falanchity  
House

SMJK Jit Sin

Angkor Stretch

Sarawak Tourism  
Board OfficeHalab  
Restaurant#speakeasy  
Amongst  
Tall Men

KLAF 2019

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AwardThe Buzz.ar by Eleena Jamil ArchitectTHE OFFICIAL  
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INSTITUTE OF  
ARCHITECTS



Designed to accommodate both communal and private spaces for brainstorming and innovation while allowing for focussed work, the newly renovated Sarawak Tourism Board (STB) office adopts a largely open plan design with private work areas worked in. Its public spaces are functional yet flexible enough for diverse uses.

# Functionally Flexible





The Sarawak Tourism Board (STB) has, for decades, helped to shape Sarawak's overseas image as a major eco-tourism destination, with world-class natural attractions such as the famed Mulu Caves, and international festivals such as the Rainforest World Music Festival. Their previous headquarters, housed rather inconveniently across three stories of an office block, was now insufficient for their future needs. So they chose to move into a new 1,000sqm office within a 1960s office building, which had also once been one of Kuching's earliest modern shopping malls.

The new premises would accommodate all the departments of STB, which had hitherto been spread across several storeys, within a single floor plate. IDC Architects' response to STB's history and new circumstances was two-fold. Firstly, there was the need to address STB's public image at the vanguard of publicising Sarawak's unique cultural and natural beauty to the world. What face might such a uniquely Sarawakian institution present to the world in terms of design inspiration, mood and ethos? What might a contemporary Sarawak office interior look and feel like?

Secondly, the designers also wanted to capitalise on the fact that the disparate departments of STB would now share a single space. Can the design of an office improve opportunities for internal collaborations and exchange of ideas? Can a balance be achieved between spaces required for focussed work, while encouraging those chance encounters between staff that might be the catalyst for brainstorming and innovation? Also, rather than having the existing form dictate or limit function, how might a 21st century office be made to embrace the increasingly diverse ways the occupants use the spaces?

To address the first concern, the designers drew on the rich cultural history of Sarawak's many indigenous peoples. The visitor enters via an open steel-and-glass entrance that visually and physically extends the space of the reception area well beyond the physical boundaries of the office space. The open reception area links all the major public spaces including the pantry, boardroom and meeting room into a giant ruai, the expansive common corridor in Iban longhouses, which forms a major socialising and communal space for all occupants.

The palette of materials contrasts sleek, modern surfaces (polished concrete, perforated metal, glass) with the more rustic (stained timber, oxidised steel).

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
Basketry motifs behind the reception counter;  
Public spaces within the office are accessible via the open reception area;  
Large workspaces with suspended cabinets create a sense of space for uninterrupted work;  
Pivot doors open up to the reception area





The reception counter is inspired by the indigenous architecture of Sarawak, and houses a selection of artefacts and reading material. The backdrop is consciously inspired by Sarawak's rich weaving traditions; a basketry motif is re-interpreted using variously stained blocks of local timber. Strips of brass, a prestigious material in local tradition, etches an abstracted pattern in the polished concrete floor, a motif also carried by the custom strip lights on the ceiling. Abstracted ethnic motifs also provide the design for the frosting of the glass walls that enable natural light to penetrate into the deepest parts of the office, as well as the custom ceiling panels that provide acoustic buffering.

To address the second concern, the designers opted for a largely open plan office with casual meeting spaces scattered throughout, to encourage cross-departmental collaboration, while also reserving space for focussed work. Special attention was made to create multi-functional spaces such as a library and pantry that can also double as casual meeting spaces. Furthermore, the boardroom can be completely opened up to the reception via pivot doors, further extending the usability and flexibility of the public spaces. The result is that the public areas can host anything from small gatherings to large press conferences.

The brief called for officers of various departments to be grouped around the offices of the supervising directors, which posed a design challenge given that the office is a relatively shallow 'U' shape arranged about a central service core. The designers responded by using glass walls for the offices so that even fairly remote parts of the space would benefit from natural light and visibility. The workstations were designed as large sleek surfaces with suspended cabinets above that allow more uninterrupted working surfaces while avoiding the sense of enclosure that bedevil many offices. Casual meeting tables are also built in at the ends of workstations to encourage collaboration and off-the-cuff discussions.

For those open workstation areas that lack privacy, a 'phone booth' area is provided nearby with specially-designed seating and acoustic panels so as not to disturb occupants involved in focussed work. These 'phone booths' are equipped to enable ad hoc discussions at two to five people away from the main workstations, without having to resort to complete enclosure. AM

TEXT BY THE ARCHITECT

RIGHT COLUMN, FROM TOP  
Recreation area that leads to the pantry; The office corridor leads to the largely open plan work area; The library is another multi-functional space for focussed work or meetings; In-between spaces

