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ARCHITECTURE
IS A VISUAL ART
AND
THE BUIDLINGS
SPEAK FOR
THEMSELVES



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Veni, Vedi, Vici

Architecture is a passion, a vocation, and even a calling. It has been described as a social art and also an artful science, where it provides a sense of place and support for people, where it is harmonious with the environment while enriching lives aesthetically and spiritually, providing economic opportunities, and creating a legacy that reflects and symbolizes culture and traditions.

words by Vatsala Devi

A decade or two ago, it was common for parents to purchase toys based on gender as result, we could see girls be given dolls, kitchen sets, and soft toys while boys were given building blocks, cars, and the likes of it. Early childhood days and these toys should be a determining factor as to how an individual's life would shape as the grow older but Ar Dexter Koh credits his childhood for leading him to discover his passion for architecture.

"Ever since I was a young boy I loved to draw all the time. I struggled with figurative drawings - of people and animals - but I realised I was better at drawing buildings, and very detailed ones too. So I kept drawing buildings and even whole mini-cities with streets and all, by the time I was just 10!," he reminisced.

"Then there was also LEGO, where I experimented with my own building designs making use of bricks and pieces from the 7-8 sets, I had - I could only get one large set every year for my birthday so I always made a mental note of the next upcoming set I'd want to have. So this desire to design buildings and then construct them started very much early in my life, and I think by the time I was 12-13, I almost made up my mind to be an Architect!, " recalled Dexter who hails from Malacca.

With this seed of thought instilled in Dexter at a tender age, it was unsurprising that when the time came for him to actually choose a university course, he would decide to pursue Architecture as this subject has been a apart of him and his childhood. At that time, Dexter recalls his parents and those around him were asking if he was indeed sure about Architecture as the course would take longer to complete, but he was steadfast, and no amount of persuasion could change his mind.

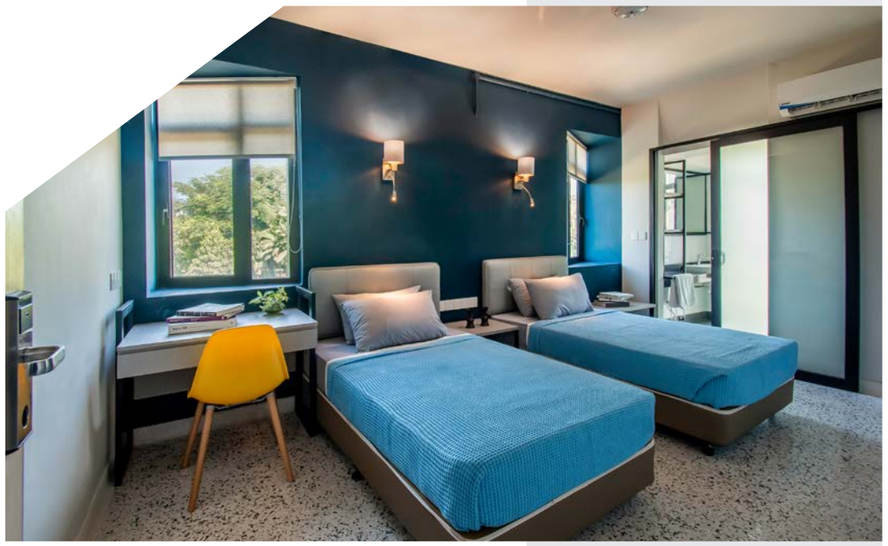
He enrolled at the University of Greenwich in United Kingdom and obtained his Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Architecture in 1999 and subsequently continued his Postgraduate Diploma in Architecture at the University of Westminster, London from 2000 to 2002. Upon graduation, Dexter joined Laurent Lim Architect until 2007, after which he joined ArchiCentre & DTLM Architect as Senior Architect and obtained his LAM Professional Architect qualification in 2008.

With an impressive roll call as Dexter's, it was only a matter of time before Dexter would consider setting up his own firm and that transpired in 2013 when he founded DEKODA (Dexter Koh Design Architect), an emerging architectural and interior design studio and practice in experimentation with new ideas and concepts in the various projects it undertakes. At DEKODA, the creation of architecture and interiors is underlined by the simple desire to engage it with people they serve, people they work with, and of course people who would be consuming their work.

Speaking about his firm, Dexter said "I was fortunate that I was exposed to Interior Design in architecture school - I did a minor in Interior Design and I have been equally passionate of both ever since. Therefore I view Architecture and Interior Design as two parts of a total sum yet holistically as an encompassing field, while most practitioners draw a distinct line between them," said the 45-year old. He went on to add that there is a wealth of cross-fertilization of concepts and ideas which can be derived from either architecture and interior design and transposed on each or the other.

Over the years, DEKODA has enjoyed a fair share of purely 'architecture' or 'interior' projects, but when they are given the opportunity to undertake both in a single project, the team at DEKODA have been able to successfully and seamlessly weave the interiors with the building envelope – a distinctive trait that sets the apart from other architecture firms.





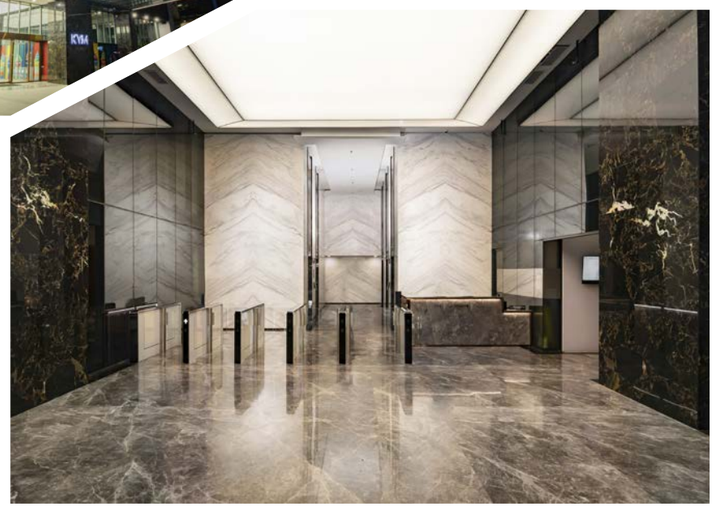




Turning a decade this year, Dexter explained the success of any establishment depends on the involvement of its founder as such Dexter believes it is important for him to be involved in projects whether directly, or indirectly via team members. "As principal I have to always have a hand in every facet of the practice, not because I am a control freak, far from that! Reason is, it is important to constantly feel the pulse and energy of the present; and to understand the realities and challenges faced by team members, be it with design, construction or even client," expounded Dexter who has been featured in PAM's publication of 30under40 Emerging Malaysian Architects in 2011.

DEKODA looks forward to its 10-year milestone in a couple of years' time, but in the meantime they are actively building a portfolio of some of their coveted works, that puts DEKODA in a league of its own. Amongst the projects it has completed are the La Salle Hall in Petaling Jaya, KYM Tower, and Jesselton Quay in Kota Kinabalu. Explaining in length about these projects, Dexter said that the La Salle Hall remains special for it is in line with La Salle's motto of Sapientia et Caritas (Wisdom and Love), where the original aspects of the building and finishes were retained and repurposed for adaptive reuse.

By preserving the original structure & terrazzo flooring, which was lovingly restored and polished, La Salle Hall is rejuvenated and reimagined with the vibe of a retro-modern boutique hotel experience with a well-equipped multi-purpose hall and meeting room for small to medium-scaled events and a dining area which can be reconfigured for multiple uses. Some of special elements that make this project special are the open space concept at public areas that allow spaces to be flexible and can cater for multiple uses as well as the openings



on the Ground Floor Public Spaces that blur the internal and external areas allowing interaction between the two areas.

As for the KYM Tower located in Mutiara Damansara, the DEKODA team had envisioned it to be a symbolic metallic 'arch' cladding enveloping the tower while low-E glass curtain walls adorn the rest of the façade. Notwithstanding its small plot size, the building commands a striking presence along the corporate district of Mutiara Damansara. Bearing the namesake of the company, it is symbolic of its rise in status in the corporate world. The interior is also a manifestation of that same aspiration, themed on corporate elegance that is contemporary yet imbued with comfort.

"The architectural and interior aspects were designed collaboratively which allows a seamless transition from the external to the internal as evidenced at the Porte Cochère and Lobby where they complement each other, extending the progressional experience. A triptych of book-matched Volakas marble walls, spanning from floor to ceiling at almost 6-metres in height also adds to the venustas of the double-columned space. Light permeates evenly throughout the ceiling from the translucent stretched-fabric panels, flooding the space with light when darkness descends. These are some of the unique elements that allow this structure to shine," said Dexter.

Set against the backdrop of Likas Bay, the Jesselton Quay is a masterplan to rehabilitate and redevelop the waterfront, creating a new and improved CBD bringing culture, entertainment and luxury together. DEKODA was commissioned to incorporate heritage with contemporary architecture as well as to use the stunning sea and mountain views to glorify the Jesselton Quay. Designed to engage with the existing community (present), memorialising the genus loci (past) and to create a new community (future). With so much thought and clever designing, it is unsurprising that the Jesselton Quay was awarded the Best Waterfront Development, IDEA iProperty Development Excellence Awards 2019
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Comprising a team of young and energetic architects, DEKODA is definitely on the right track to becoming an architecture firm that embraces a diverse typologies that allows the team to challenge and push the envelopes of architecture locally and globally.







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