

We'd
away
Bintan Island

TIERRA
ARTICULO
ONE PLACE
Technolite

APARTMENT

FINISH

R Children's
Room
Chic

the well-made bed
(and six silly stories)

Restoration
Renovation
Recreation

AUG/SEPT 1996 4/96

S\$4.50 RM7.20



attitudes

Why are Zen gardens so beautiful — so simple? The answer must lie in the quality of the design, and good design should be timeless.



spiritual
quality
of timeless design



Landscape architects, Martin Palleros and Franklin Po belong to a small but growing number of designers in Singapore who believe fervently in the importance of aesthetics. "It's all about quality; the difference between a shirt from K-mart and one from Armani," says Franklin. The latter may well set you back a bit but the difference in the cut, fabric, finish and most importantly the feel will be incomparable — this shirt should make you feel good.

One glance at their office makes this commitment abundantly clear. Its minimalist interior exudes quality, practicality and simplicity. In order to combat the problem of inflating rental prices and landlords unwillingness to grant long leases, they have cleverly designed a clean lined MDF furniture system which allows them to up sticks with the minimum fuss and simply re-arrange it in another space.

Unfortunately good design is not big in Singapore. So often developments are sold off the drawing board making attention to aesthetics an unnecessary expense. The end result, as the architect Richard Ho so succinctly put it, is an environment which is "financially empowered but spiritually bereft."



fierra Design was initially established by Martin and his wife, Natalie, two years ago with Franklin joining the practice in March 1995, after Natalie temporarily bowed out to look after the kids. Each brings particular skills to the practice, Martin from Argentina, is a qualified architect, landscape architect and planner, Natalie is also a landscape architect with a particular interest in the socially conscious issues of ecology, and Franklin, from Singapore, has over twenty years of experience as an architect and planner, spending much of this time working in Los Angeles. Together they have set about making their mark on the landscape here, with projects running the gamut from private houses to HDBs.



Hand crafted lanterns topped with plants lead the eye to the main focal point in the landscape.



Top Water and light are used to dramatize the effect of an ancient urn.

Above Clean lined paving on lawn provides a threshold between hard and soft landscaping.





← However, one of the most difficult hurdles to overcome has been to explain exactly what their profession involves. There is a popular misconception that landscape architects deal with plants, period. However, this is only a very small part of the picture. "The real task of the landscape architect is to define the spatial qualities of an exterior arena, so it really transcends the plant materials. Plants are just one palette of the landscape architect's materials," says Franklin.

Being qualified architects, they are more than capable of tackling both the interior and exterior of the site but Martin is adamant: "if you want to do something right, you have to focus on one thing." They there-

fore prefer to work with architects who are like-minded, who "also want quality and good design because that's very important to maintain when you work together as a team. You have to know you are looking for the same type of quality project." They have therefore tended to work well with small design orientated firms such as Kerry Hill Architects and William Lim, but certainly not to the exclusion of larger practices such as DP Architects and Architects 61.

Personally, I don't think you can do good landscape architecture if you don't understand architecture," says Franklin, "because the spatial quality of an interior space is what architects try to come up with, it's using materials to enclose space, to create moods, excitement and drama and whatever you are trying to achieve for clients and for the public, if it's a public building. The same is true of exterior spaces."

Their minimalist exteriors are both simple and dramatic: preferring to work with the architect from day one, they stress the relationship between interior and exterior. "I mean there must be an interplay between both spatial qualities. That's what we try to do. We look at the materials of the interior and what we would

like to see on the outside that your eye can then rest on. We are always looking for things we can focus on... one lonely mountain or something amidst a wasteland can create excitement, especially as the sky and moods change with the light." Water, lighting, shadow, wind and often sound, as well as plant and building materials, play important parts in evoking emotion and spirituality, whilst essentials such as drainage and electrics are carefully concealed within clever design details: the step of a swimming pool may often conceal its mechanics.

Their designs bear no standard hallmark as each project is assessed individually, but says Martin, "the things we take into consideration are context, the way the architecture works, the



Left top A water filled inner courtyard evokes a pervasive feeling of calm.

Above A water sculpture provides a focal point of a small atrium garden.



TechnoLife



person that will use the place and our own intuition as designers as to how we perceive the site.”

“Another major challenge for the landscape architect, and this is the main difference with architecture, is time. Gardens grow, where as walls remain the same. Our challenge is not only to try to get a good garden from day one, but also how the garden will evolve and change,” explains Martin.

So given the enormous demand for quantity, rather than quality, what does the future hold? Martin explains: “We think that Singapore is reaching international standards and also now if you see the



measures the Government has implemented to calm down speculation, people will become more discerning, so as landscape architects and architects, we will have to come up with better products.” With real buyers no longer having to compete with speculators, aesthetics will have a far greater role to play in future decades.

With professionals such as Martin and Franklin, who firmly believe that all designers have a moral responsibility to the public to produce quality design, the landscape of Singapore seems in safe hands. “That’s what we’re looking for: timeless design. Not fad, not just architecture, but something that transcends all that, for the benefit of future generations.” ■