SINGAPORE TATLER

HOMES

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO LUXURIOUS LIVING

LUXE IT OUT

Stylish homes designed to let the inside out

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The geometric architectural design was inspired by Tadao Ando's 21_21 project

ALL THE RIGHT ANGLES

A triangular-shaped plot provides the backdrop for a spectacular private residence with a winged roof that celebrates the joy of living in the tropics

BY Y-JEAN MUN-DELSALLE **PHOTOGRAPHY** BOONWEI/BEEBOX

The grand entrance leads into the expansive living space

The space around the house is surrounded by lush greenery

Floor to ceiling glass panels help to open up the corner stairway

The brief was to design the most stunning tropically-sensitive house in Singapore, which could be transformed several times a year into a party venue capable of hosting up to 100 guests. The challenge was the unusual triangle shape of the site.

The clients were investment banker Cheah Sui Ling, her husband and their dog Monty. The starting point was three majestic 20m high palms located at the centre of the plot. As they were preserved, the house was built around them, split into two adjacent trapezium forms to frame the trees in the middle and make the best use of a triangular land parcel.

The result was a two-storey detached with study, basement, gym and swimming pool near the Singapore Botanic Gardens, which was rebuilt from scratch, after the original 1970's house was torn down. The pair of trapeziums opens towards the back of the site, inviting the lush, tropical vegetation into the living spaces and encircling a central garden for relaxed gatherings.

Though the home is called the "Winged House" (referring to the winged style of the roof, which is the most prominent architectural feature), the couple have chosen the name "Phinda". Cheah discloses, "Phinda is a private game reserve situated in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where my husband and I got married. Phinda is the name on the plaque at our front gate and what we use on our stationery. Our objective was to build a house that was unique in shape and design with a balanced combination of the elements of garden, sun and water to create a tranquil retreat. It is also a dynamic space that is welcoming for our friends and guests, as we entertain extensively for social and work purposes. We like large rooms with a lot of light, and prefer a glass, stone and wood combination to glass and steel."

To this end, Design Principal Ko Shiou Hee and his team at K2LD Architects came highly recommended as they had worked on the house of a friend of the couple's on Sentosa, which they liked a lot, and the two sides ultimately connected through in 2009.

Transforming the homeowners' vision into reality was a journey of discovery of their personalities and tastes over several dinners and drinks. "With a little alcohol, it quickly became a very candid sharing of lifestyle and preferences," Ko recalls. "It was also very easy to read from their art collection that the couple had very bold and eclectic tastes. I knew that they could accept new and adventurous forms and spaces.

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Climate Control

Though the house's form is interpreted into folding trapeziums, it actually takes its cues from traditional Malay architecture, and therefore retains its purpose of being climatically responsive in tropical environments to bring comfort to its inhabitants, including sloping roofs that allow hot air to rise and rainwater not to collect, and timber screens to block out heat. Ko describes the inspirations behind his creative process: "The geometry was lifted from Gallery 21_21 by Tadao Ando in Roppongi, Tokyo. Without having experienced the magic of his manipulation of the 45-degree geometry and the spatial quality of the stairs, I would not have been that confident in setting out to challenge the site with another 45-degree geometry. The roof form was inspired by the

The homeowner made full use of the high ceilings in the dining area by adding a modern chandellier to the space

An elephant sculpture by Om Mee Ai, commisioned for the Elephant Parade Charity, graces the lawn

The homeowners are avid art collector and worked with New York based artists Chon Shatz to create the colourful mural at the back of the dining room

Artwork from the homeowner's private collections

"The roof form was inspired by the Minangkabau roof found in indigenous Malay architecture, but abstracted and transposed to give a new interpretation and expression."

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A major challenge was resolving the geometrical problems of the finish levels of the roof because of structural deviations during the installation of the steel members. Therefore, Ko spent three days straight squatting beneath the roof, requesting for multiple mock-ups until the geometry was perfected.

In response to Singapore's unforgiving tropical climate, openings were cut from the trapezium forms and the roof detached from the form. Thus, the soaring double-pitched Burmese teak roofs welcome fresh air into the interior for naturally-ventilated spaces, with extensive overhanging eaves offering shade and shelter. But that's not all. Experimenting with the roof form, K2LD Architects separated and staggered the roof form, creating an overlapping split roof, which resulted in a play of light and shadows indoors.

At night, concealed lights illuminate and accentuate the amazing split rooflines. The intermediate space between the two building structures houses the main entrance foyer and living room, which are flanked by feature granite walls (the architects handpicked 300 stones from a quarry in China) that continue up to the first floor, their hefty presence balancing out the sense of space, lightness and freedom provided by the roofs. Dark Chengai wood is used for the vertical sun-shading screens along the façades, which blend in with the surrounding greenery.

The homeowners called in third-generation Italian designers Rovena Giorgi and Massimo Paradisi of A2Zen Consulting to take care of the interior decoration and, beyond furniture, they also helped the couple source travertine

The massive granite stone slabs were sourced from a quarry in China

The Ganesha guest room as the first floor doubles as a pool changing room during pool parties

The spacious dry kitchen

The Chinese room is a guest room filled with an antique Shanghainese dressing table and other oriental bric-a-brac

The sloping wooden roof is actually lined with metal beams for added support

from Tuscany, Bisazza tiles and more. Not a mere holiday home but the couple's main residence, one can feel how personal and vibrant the space is, mirroring their lives and passions. Cheah notes, "The walls were going to have a significant amount of art, and while we knew the colour palette for the furniture had to be neutral. The brief to the interior designers was 'eclectic, reflecting an international style and our personal tastes', which can range from art deco and chinoiserie to modern baroque."

The couple kept some of their old furniture representing memories and past experiences. For example, the living room coffee table is a modified Minotti square dining table at which they had had great dinner parties in the past. As it didn't suit the rectangular dining room at Phinda, they replaced the table's original legs with low cinder blocks so that it now serves as a coffee table. The bulk of the furniture comes from Baxter, Paola Lenti, Moda and Moissonnier, with a lot of the Italian pieces sourced during a trip to the Milan Furniture Fair, while the lighting is from Lu Murano, DesignHeure, Terzani, Barovier&Toso and Porta Romana. Vintage pieces were bought primarily from the Saint-Ouen flea market in Paris: a 1930's pendant lamp from a brasserie in Lyon, art deco dressing table, 1970's Italian-made chaise longue and late 19th-century chandelier. A 1930's Shanghainese dressing table was picked up in Hong Kong.

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Artistic Touch

The living room is bright with its glass doors and windows looking out onto the garden and pool, with the eye being drawn to a large painting of a solitary boy by Chinese artist Zhang Linhai. Other artworks include those by Jitish Kallat, Zhang Dali, Om Mee Ai and Gordon Onslow Ford. A baby grand sits on one side and a 16th-century sitting Buddha statue hides in a niche, while the light grey hand-woven Iranian carpet was customised by the couple's close friend Amin Bagheri of The Orientalist.

The grandest and most formal room of the house, the double-height dining area features soaring ceilings, a custom-made leather-topped 10- to 12-seat dining table and a wall tiled in travertine. On it hangs a mixed-media collage by LA-based photographer Raphael Mazzucco from his Africa collection depicting lions, zebras and the Maasai, which reminds the couple of their many holidays in Africa. A sculpture of a laughing boy by Chinese artist Chen Wenling from his Red Memories series occupies a corner.

On one side of the staircase leading to the basement is a large abstract

The earth-toned colour scheme in the bathroom creates a cosy and inviting atmosphere

The sloping roof design is one of the highlighjts in the master bedroom

mural painting reflecting the occupants' personalities by New York-based ChanSchatz – the result of a six-month-long collaboration between the artists, architects and couple.

Each of the guest bedrooms features a look matching a particular theme: Ganesha, white or Chinese. But Cheah's favourite space is the master bedroom with en suite bathroom and dressing room featuring white wall-to-wall cupboards from Poliform. The style is highly feminine with de Gournay chinoiserie wallpaper in celadon, an art deco sycamore dressing table and 19th-century chandelier. She says, "It is large, airy, bright, comfortable and looks out onto a Zen garden. The bed has an oversized headboard and the mattress is the most comfortable I've ever had (it's a Savoir mattress – fantastic investment). There is a seating area with Moissonnier furniture: a causeuse and two Louis XV-style fauteuils in modern dark purple-and-gold fabric. The room has a starry celestial piece by Gordon Onslow Ford, a painting by Chen Yu of four babies in light golden hues and an abstract in shades of light blue called Sodwana Bay by local award-winning artist and our very good friend Om Mee Ai. Sodwana Bay is in South Africa near Phinda where we held a party during our wedding and the painting is a gift from Mee Ai."

The landscape designer, Stan Lee of Watermount Gardens, is a longtime friend of Ko's and understood very well how to manipulate the different levels to achieve a spatial quality in the garden, so working together was a breeze to achieve an interesting landscape that responded to the site's natural terrain.

The couple selected a jungle luxe concept, with the pool fringed by palms and ficus lyrata. An elephant sculpture by Om Mee Ai, a piece commissioned for the Elephant Parade charity, presides over the lawn. As the couple enjoy eating alfresco, the oversized patio next to the pool contains a glass-topped eight-seat dining table and, because the area is covered, the space may be used when it rains, making for an atmospheric and pleasant experience. It's obvious that they love entertaining, and international friends visiting Singapore frequently stay at Phinda, extending the global, multicultural feel of the house. **H**

THE BRIEF

Type of Home: Landed
Number of Residents: 2
Architect: K2LD Architects
Interior Designer: A2Zen Consulting
Time Taken: 18 Months