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## The Residential Issue

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**Lollipop House** Hoon Moon licks Korean peanut homes  
**New work** Nishizawa, Collins & Turner, Simeoni, Russe  
K2LD, RTA Studio, Bild / **Healthabitat** New Indigenous  
housing / **Deviant Domestic** Serial killers at home

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# Tropical Expression

Review & Photography Patrick Bingham-Hall

Project Winged House, Singapore

Architect K2LD Architects



With the **Winged House**, K2LD have fashioned an architecture responsive to Southeast Asian conditions. Here we have a ‘tropical expressionism’, an abstracted acknowledgement of traditional regional architecture, but with a flamboyance to challenge the contemporary context



Singapore



01

In an ideal world, the phrase ‘tropical expressionism’ would appropriately describe Southeast Asian architecture. After all, the region’s historical precedents, climatic prerequisites and available materials are conducive to a style revelling in the sultry luxuriance of the context. However, to the dismay of those seeking occasional relief from the orthodoxies of the 20th-century canon, the terminology, and the form, remains little used. The architects of the region continue to pull on their hair shirts and genuflect to the constraints of the orthogonal volume, with the flow of recent domestic architecture in particular funnelled into the oxymoronic swamp of ‘tropical modernism’.

Most contemporary architects are oblivious to the ultra expressionism of the Minangkabau traditionalists, whose sweeping, upturned roof forms subjugated the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago long before the arrival of the colonial neo-classicists. Instead, they’ve retreated into sealed flat-roofed boxes, presumably stamped with the approval of a clientele caring little for the tropical context.

We might define ‘tropical expressionism’ as an architecture characterised by flamboyant roofs required to serve as giant umbrellas, mainly confined to the compounds of resorts

and ethnological museums. The putative idiom has been sighted in recent houses by Malaysian architects Jimmy Lim, Lok Wooi and Ling Fah Shing, but, apart from resorts, appears to have been precluded from commercial projects, for financial reasons (structural experimentation can be costly) and generic, global imaging imperatives. However, the design and construction of suburban houses for affluent Singaporeans can only be constrained by local imaging imperatives. Perhaps the time is ripe for a demonstrative display of locally appropriate architecture.

Preoccupied with social standing and real estate valorisation, the owners of Singapore’s landed villas have generally steered clear of architectonic wilfulness, so any adventurousness must be accompanied by the reassurance that the material requirements will come as part of the package. Singapore doesn’t do follies, at least in private housing. However, the houses K2LD have built over the last decade have revealed a restless formal imagination and an eclectic range of influences, and have not impinged upon their abilities to satisfy the requirements of a moneyed marketplace.

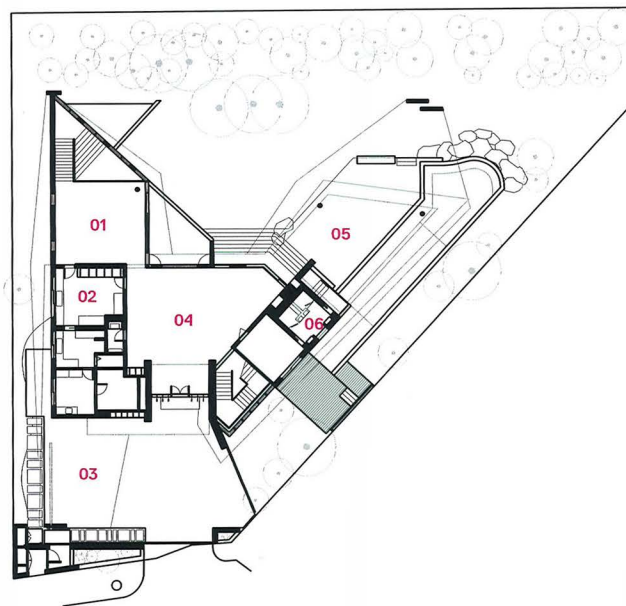
K2LD are neatly placed as they can think outside the orthogonal volume and they can reconfigure the orthogonal volume without →

### | 01 & 02

The Winged House: locally appropriate architecture?



Ground floor



- 01 Dining  
02 Kitchen  
03 Car ports  
04 Living  
05 Outdoor living  
06 Bathroom



→ veering too far from the 'trophy house' paradigm. K2LD principal Ko Shiou Hee, educated at Rice University, is equipped with a degree in architectonic logic and formal composition but his inclinations are to the ephemeral and the tactile, to the abstraction of elements. He is also a ceramicist and a collector of artefacts and he works upon the schematic models for each project as one might expect, teasing out the permutations from a rational geometry.

The clients specified an 'entertainment house', and so trapezoidal geometry (and the desire to party) determined the parti of the

Winged House – a trapezoidal site sloped down from flat ground at the street level to a broad embankment above a stormwater drain. Two double-storey blocks with trapezoidal plans were placed as a V splaying out from the entry on the obtuse edges of the site, allowing the enclosed space to serve as an internal and external entertainment area. The architects then distended the pitches and the angles of the blocks and, most dramatically, dissected and filleted the roof planes so the pavilions are shielded by two floating timber parasols. The split between the roof planes appears as a clerestory above

the second-floor corridor in the eastern wing and above the double-height dining room in the western wing, providing daylight, ventilation and an aid to convection.

A glazed gallery in the hinge between the two pavilions forms the entry to the house, which is framed by rusticated granite walls, a monumental gateway with a mass and texture quite at odds with the enclosure's ethereal transparency. The juxtaposition of such a heavy, resolute massing with the delicate proportions of the expressed structure creates an additional tension within the set piece, tactile rather than



geometric, and confounding interpretation of the house as an elegantly composed pair of lightweight pavilions.

The entry opens directly to a low, wide living room that appears to extend through a series of sliding glass doors to the lawns, the continuous space occupying the entire triangle between pavilions. As intended, the site has become a party venue, overlooked by the dining room and sloping down to the swimming pool and patio in the northeastern corner. The patio and swimming pool are roofed by a cantilevered balcony and by an elongation of the filleted roof planes of the eastern pavilion, a soaring

timber canopy tethered by a slender pair of concrete supports at the base of the slope.

The exaggerated structure denotes an abstracted acknowledgement of traditional local architecture, such as that of the Minangkabau, whose forms were motivated as much by animist beliefs as a need for shelter. It also marks a return to the sheer thrill of the ingenious organic indulgences that marked the (western) expressionist modernism of the 1950s and 60s. K2LD cite formal inspiration from the folded triangular forms of Tadao Ando's 21\_21 Design Sight Museum in Tokyo, clearly evident in the configurations of the

guestroom and courtyard, sunken beneath and between the dining room and the lawn. The spirit and the flamboyance of the design, however, had another source: the wings of the roofs evoke the swooping 'bird in flight' carapace of Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal, and the expressed geometries of the entertainment areas are nothing if not Lautner.

With the example of the Winged House, tropical expressionism might well be the new direction for Singaporean architecture, marking a return to common sense and regional pride after the malaise of obsequious introversion. **ar**

## | 03

From the interior, the design's spirited flamboyance is obvious

## | 04

The soaring timber canopy shields the entertainment space below

## | 05

The house's massed entry belies the delicacy within

## Project Details

Project team Ko Shiou Hee, Leong Lai Ping, Elita Ong /  
Main contractor Holden Tiling & Construction / Mechanical & electrical engineering PTA Consultants /  
Structural engineer MSE Engineering & Management Consultants /  
Quantity surveyor Ian Chng Cost Consultants / Landscape design Watermount Gardens /  
Interior design A2Zen Consulting Ltd / Project size 1475.70sqm