

# Fondness for fauna and flora

Story and photos by CHIN MUI YOON

WITH a passion for horses, dogs, fish and nature, it is little wonder that the owner of a beautiful house in Damansara Heights opted to dedicate over half of his land to a garden.

“Not everyone will choose to have their 10,000sq ft of land left half empty for a patch of grass, but it was the first condition I was given,” says Almaz Rahim, principal of Almaz Architect.

The house owner, who declined to be named, loves wide, open spaces.



The double-storey structure has lots of wide, wraparound terraces and balconies from which to enjoy the lush greenery surrounding it.

His love for the outdoors is evident in his resume, which includes being a former horse-riding champion who had won medals in show jumping at the international level.

“Many people opt to have large, stately structures for homes and use up nearly all of their land,” explains the owner.

“But my wife and I love gardens and gardening. The tract of open land attracted me with the possibility of being able to return home after a stressful work day and just unwind in my little garden jacuzzi.”

Hence, Almaz designed an uncomplicated double-storey structure that maximises the generous space through the use of wide, wraparound terraces and balconies.



This little back door was carved out of the wooden fence separating the property from the road.

The land, which is in an uncommon triangular shape, is sited several feet lower than a road running along it. The main entrance opens out into a quiet, unobtrusive cul-de-sac while the back portion is parallel with a road facing a school.

The lower level of the land used to let passers-by peek into the property. A wooden fence soon took care of that and a screen of ginger plants and heliconia gave added privacy. The large terrace on the ground floor and balcony upstairs also act as a buffer zone against passing traffic on the road.

An enticing cube of a turquoise pool is tucked in the apex of the garden surrounded by coconut palms and pink frangipanis. All the plants are grown and cared for by the owners themselves.

The slightly elevated side of the land has little stone steps leading to a small back door. The built-up area fills the wider end of the triangle-shape, taking up less than 5,000sq ft.

Inside the house, the living room commands most of the space on the lower level with wide windows overlooking the garden and pool. The front door is framed by rustling bamboo growing beside a fish pond containing the owners' award-winning Japanese carp.

"I didn't want an overpowering structure, but just something we can live in comfortably for my wife and I seeing we don't have children," explains the owner, who moved in here two years ago.

A distinctive feature of the house is its natural rubble stone cladding obtained from the Karak quarries. The large stone slabs wear beautiful earthy tones of browns, plums, brick reds, ochre and rust that give an immediate resort-like ambience to the architecture.

A rustic, earthy red terracotta tile and natural hard woods are used for the flooring while Palimanan, a creamy white stone, is used for the exposed balcony upstairs. It is selected for its non-slip surface as well as its good looks with natural coloured veins.

"I try to create a unique Malaysian style for my houses by using local materials like stones and timber and incorporating elements from our own traditional houses," Almaz explains.

"Raised roofs with overhanging eaves and spacious verandas are common features in our *kampung* houses. Trees and plants were often the only necessary screens. My idea for this house was to have it wrapped in natural greenery which can be enjoyed from all corners of the building."



An enticing cube of a turquoise pool is tucked in the apex of the garden surrounded by coconut palms and pink frangipanis. This is an outdoor jacuzzi for the owners who enjoy a soak several times a week.

The living room is painted lime green across one wall that ties in with the earthy elements perfectly, giving it a fresh, contemporary look. Almaz designed floor to ceiling windows that let in plenty of natural light with clean, simple lines.

The couple has five huge dogs, including a lovely pair of Great Pyrenees weighing over 50kg each. The canines have full run of the house and sleep in the master bedroom upstairs in an assortment of doggie beds and mattresses.

The owners' fondness for dogs and horses is further seen in the framed pictures of the animals in pencil sketches and watercolours decorating the walls. A wall on the staircase landing is covered with ribbons the owner won during his years as a show jumping champion.

The en-suite bathroom is fitted with a jacuzzi tucked underneath a skylight.

Tumblestones and slate cover the bathroom walls to enhance the natural feel.

And the best is yet to come with an extra room rising from the front portion of the house that acts as a lounge and doubles up as a viewing tower. A superb view of the city, including the landmark Twin Towers and KL Towers, can be sighted in the hazy distance..



The master bedroom commands a view of the garden from the balcony which runs along the length of the room. The space is sparsely furnished with a double bed, a treadmill, a massage chair and five large doggie beds!

"My friends like to converge here on New Year's Eve where we can all enjoy the spectacular fireworks displays held around the city!" says the owner.

"We love being able to sit at our living room to watch TV, or just chatting on the patio overlooking the garden. It's very restful.

"Best of all, there's nothing like having a soak in the heated jacuzzi when it's raining at night, as the contrast between the chilly raindrops and hot water is stimulating! To me, this is living at its best."