



CONCRETE INVERSION

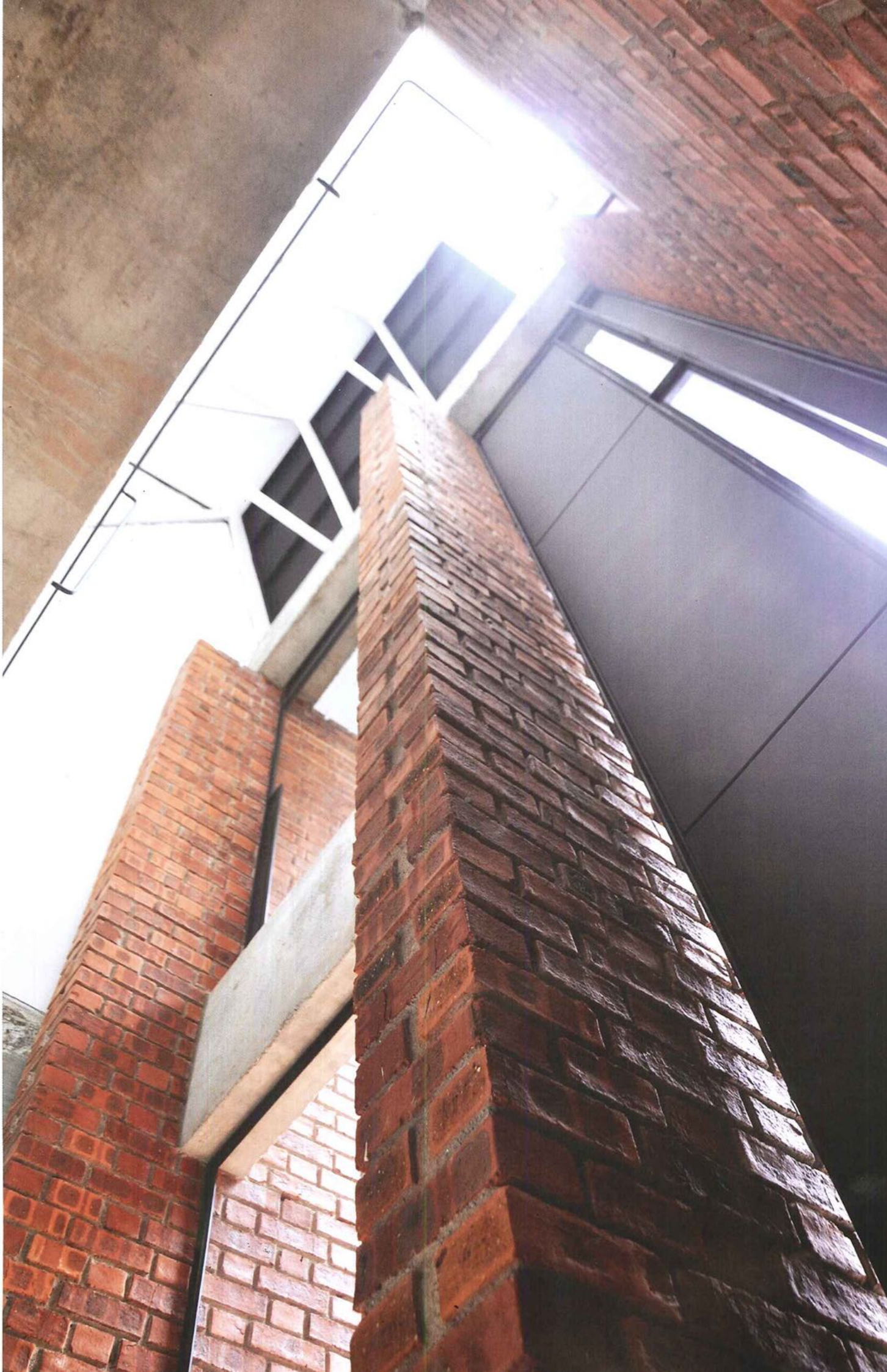
BY KENNETH CHEONG | IMAGES COURTESY STUDIO BIKIN

The elevation of a row of terrace houses in Taman Desa, Kuala Lumpur, is disrupted by an unusually transparent façade. The Desa House, designed by Farah Azizan of Studio Bikin, further disrupts the archetypal terrace house by inverting the vertical stacking of the internal spaces. Farah Azizan interrogates conventional space-planning in the classic terrace house to unconventional effect



On the front façade, fin walls in exposed brick stretching two storeys are offset from the party walls and inserted into the cavity of the demolished front walls. The 2m deep fin walls become a threshold between interior and exterior, and offer visual privacy from its neighbours. Pivot steel-framed glass doors are infilled between the vertical fins on the ground and upper floors as a transparent skin to reveal the interior of the house to the street.

A dramatic double-storey height steel door visually elongates the new transparent façade. On the roof, the original roof tiles were removed with two thirds infilled with glazing and the balance fitted with fibrous cementitious lining boards. The front door pivots open into a breath-taking triple-storey height foyer space. The





DESA HOUSE

LOCATION	TAMAN DESA, KUALA LUMPUR
LAND AREA	1.862FT ²
BUILT-UP AREA	2.915FT ²
COMPLETION	2016
ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN	STUDIO BIKIN
PROJECT TEAM	FARAH AZIZAN (PROJECT DIRECTOR) TIA AHMAD (PROJECT ARCHITECT)
MAIN CONTRACTOR	BINA IMPERIAL
C&S CONSULTANT	PROJURUTEK SDN BHD

light-filled living spaces on the upper floor leads the eye soar upwards though a cut-out in the floor above to allow for the door to swing open.

On the ground floor, the double-storey height door is aligned with a corridor which leads to the sleeping quarters of the house. The conventional space-planning of a classic terrace house is turned topsy-turvy in the Desa House. What was once above is relocated below with the public living spaces and private sleeping quarters inverted. Not only is this inversion intentional for living in a terrace house, but a demand of the context, says Azizan.

The row of terrace houses the Desa House sits in faces a slope with a park at the top which is at the same level of the upper floor of the original house. It was only logical to locate the spaces which benefit from the view and natural light to the upper floors. The inversion of the living spaces to the upper floor also meant that the living spaces enjoy views of the tree tops lining the street and an unobstructed view beyond the front street into the

park. While the living and entertainment spaces are bright and airy, the sleeping quarters, where views and natural light are not essential for the function of the spaces, are located on the lower level like a cavernous air.

unconventional arrangements

Three bedrooms are arranged on the ground floor. A guest suite faces the front lawn. An intermediate bedroom and a third bedroom at the rear of the house are located on a lower platform level as the house steps down.

Two courtyards bring light from the skylight above into the corridor of the ground floor. Steel-framed glass sliding doors to the bedrooms allow light to filter in, but generally the sleeping quarters are kept dark and cool as a space of rest. The ensuite bathrooms to the bedrooms are ventilated via oscillating mirrored panels opening into the corridor like saucy peepholes.

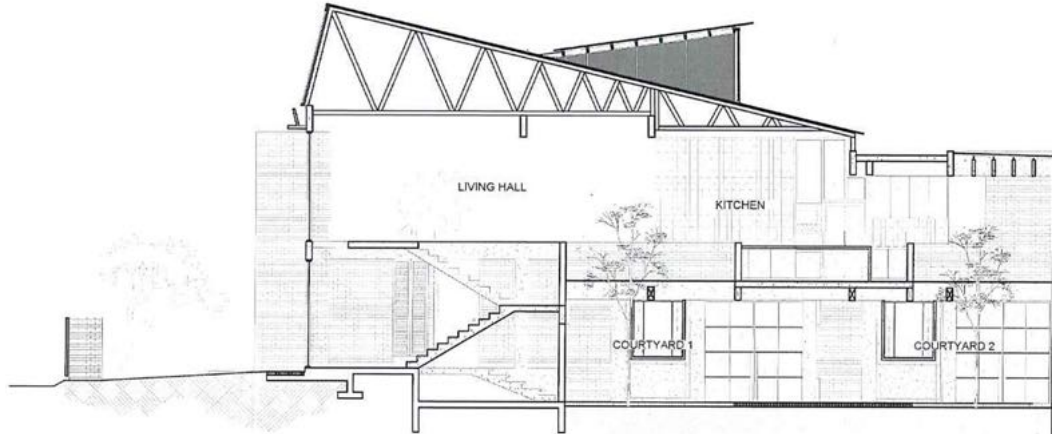
The edge of the corridor fringing the courtyard is finished in textured grade A red brick to contrast with the smooth, cool, polished concrete floors. A pantry is

inserted in-between the two courtyards, with red brick as a floor finish folding up to become the wall. Concrete cabinetry and a concrete counter with a homogeneous concrete sink define the pantry area.

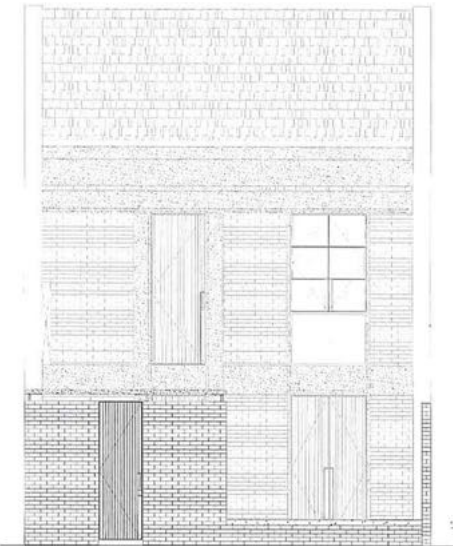
At the back of the house, an open deck is finished in an exposed washed concrete floor dotted with granite gravel. The surface appears rough visually but smooth to touch as each granite piece is hand-planted with the smoothest and flattest surface facing up, according to Azizan. Where once the original staircase was located is now a courtyard. What remains is the sectional profile of the staircase patterned with cut starter bars exposed as a graphic to the plastered wall of the courtyard. The original staircase was removed and a new staircase relocated to the front of the house.



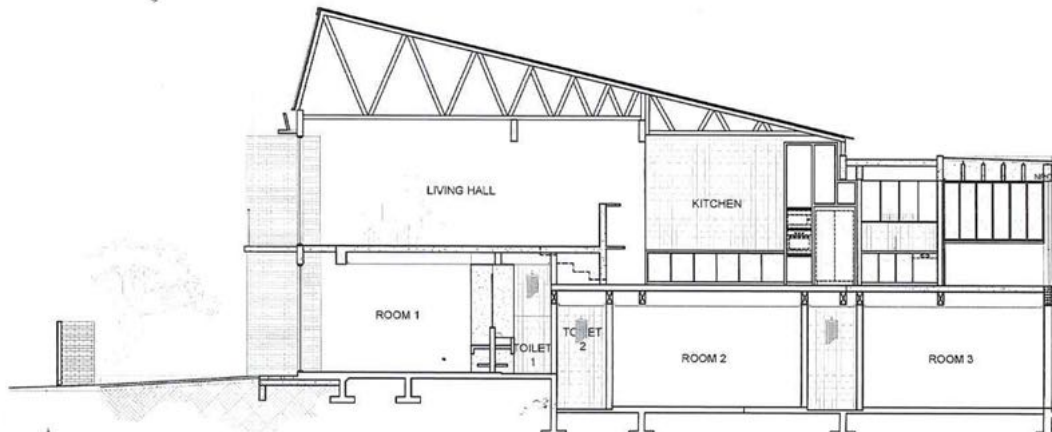
FRONT ELEVATION



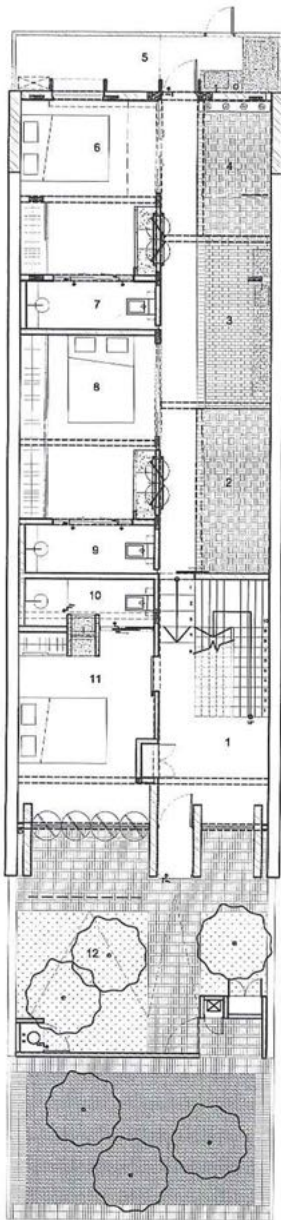
SECTION A-A



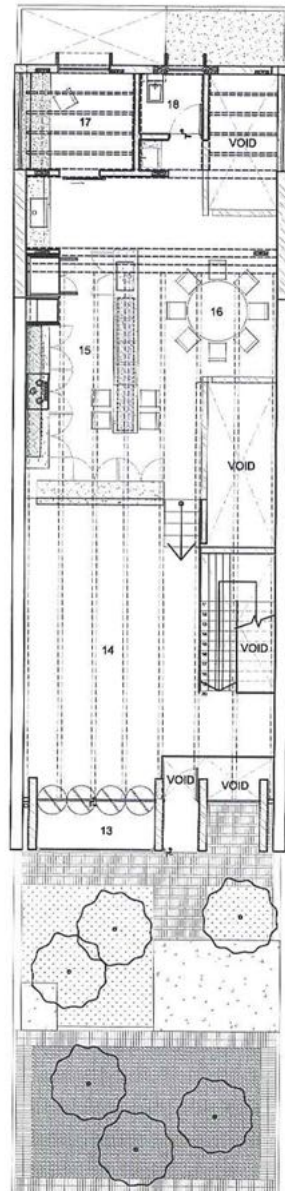
REAR ELEVATION



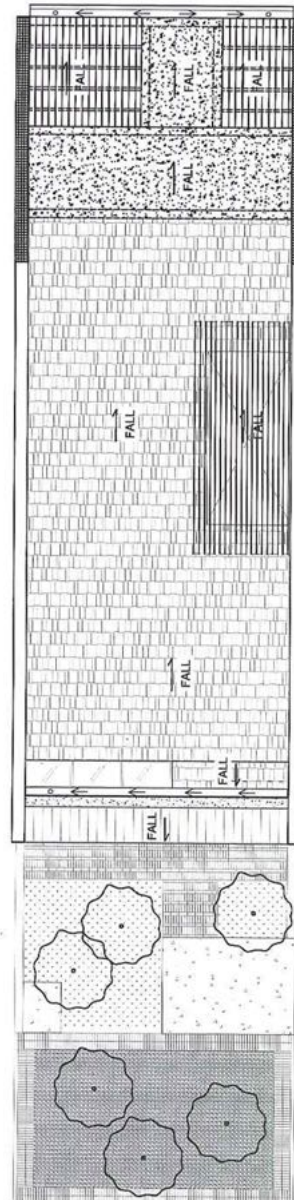
SECTION B-B



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



ROOF PLAN

KEY:

- 1 Lobby
- 2 Courtyard 1
- 3 Pantry
- 4 Courtyard 2
- 5 Backyard
- 6 Room 3
- 7 Bath 3
- 8 Room 2
- 9 Bath 2
- 10 Bath 1
- 11 Room 1
- 12 Front yard
- 13 Balcony
- 14 Living Area
- 15 Kitchen
- 16 Dining Area
- 17 Study
- 18 Bath 4

slots between every slice

The new staircase at the front of the house naturally draws people upwards towards the living spaces above and away from the private zones below. The staircase is a graphically impactful concrete concoction that seemingly traces movement along it. There is a delicious tension in the slots between every slice of concrete that make up the staircase. Visually stunning, the staircase looks extremely precarious at the same time.

Azizan reveals that each concrete slice is of pre-stressed concrete compacted with a stinger. Composed of the structural component of a conventional staircase,





the staircase in the Desa House is as structurally sound as staircases get. Delicate threads of cold-bent steel rods trace the outline of the balustrade surrounding the stairwell leading to living space on the upper floor. The white washed living room is cool and collected. Polished concrete in subtle variations in tone hints of different zones to the open plan living space. Variation in the hue of the concrete floor is achieved by mixing various shades of sand. A warmer yellow-tinted concrete finishes the edge surrounding the stairwell.

All the existing ceiling boards on the upper floor were removed, revealing the roof truss which was painted in white. The underside of the roof was finished in plaster board to achieve a greater ceiling height. Internal walls were

removed from the entire floor to create an open-plan living space. Difference in levels, subtle variations in the shade of concrete, and the tops of trees planted on the ground floor define zones in the open-plan space with a concrete island counter as the focal point to the kitchen.

The Desa House is radical and elegant to say the least. The genius of its design lies in the inversion of the spaces to disrupt a typical terrace renovation project into a space for an unconventional lifestyle. +

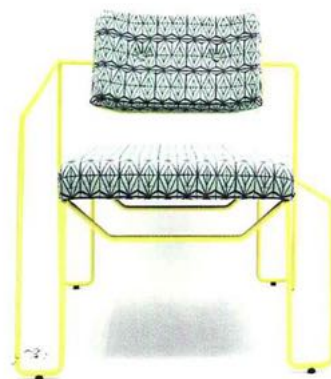
(see story 'Building Shop' p114)

BUILDING SHOP

BY KENNETH CHEONG | IMAGES COURTESY KEDAI BIKIN



There is a curious intimacy to the work of Studio Bikin. Tactile surfaces of concrete in various permutations invite touch. Concrete cabinetry contiguous with polished concrete floors and walls demand to be filled with objects. Cold-bent steelwork to the operable machinations of windows and doors encourage movement and play. These are the primary materials of choice for Adela Askandar and Farah Azizan of Studio Bikin in their built work. In every completed project, the experience of the space is inextricably linked to functional fabrications that seamlessly integrate the architecture to furniture. With direct access to a wealth of craftsmen and tradesmen who execute their built work, it was only natural that Studio Bikin set up shop to extend their expertise from building to furniture.





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designer family

Adela and Farah first started Kedai Bikin in 2013 with a range of premium hand-crafted furniture. That range has been developed and has grown with permutations in different materials and finishing. Central to this range and as with their built work are the exquisitely-skilled steel craftsmen. A single continuous steel rod is bent and formed into a single piece of furniture to eliminate seams. The lines of Ms Gray is traced in powder-coated steel into a single-arm low chair. Premium finishes are a trademark of this range with custom-printed fabric and natural stone.

Architectural finishes also come into play in the Mr series. Mr Parquet as its name suggest is a table which employ parquet flooring hand-sanded as a table top. Mr Parquet pays homage to the ubiquitous flooring typical in Malaysian terrace houses. The table top of Mr Parquet hovers on delicate bent steel legs.

In another variation, Mr Concrete Chintz exploit Studio Bikin's expertise in concrete finishing. Patterns are cast into the thinnest sliver of concrete. A recurring theme in their work, pattern casting in concrete involves a specific concrete mix and grade which remains a Studio Bikin trade secret.

string family

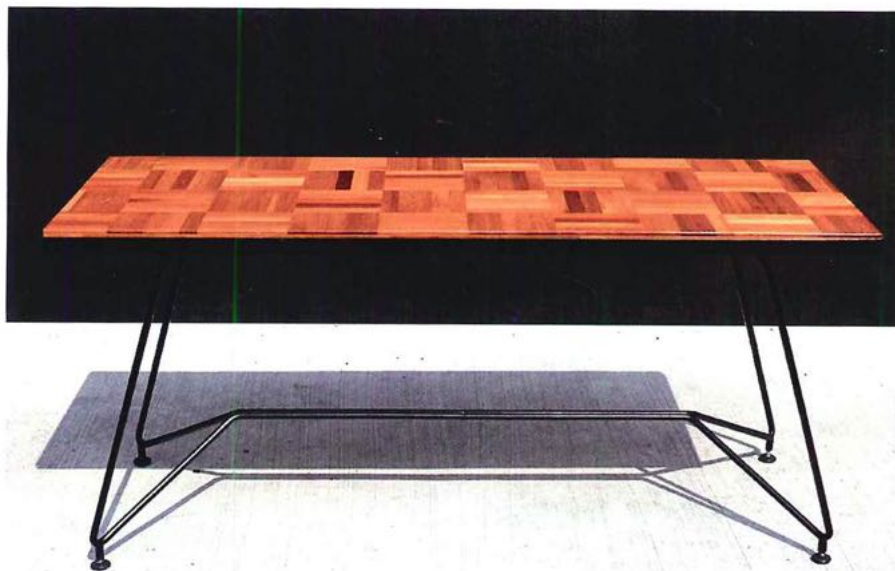
The String series is the reproduction of classic mid-century chairs found in almost all Malaysian homes up to the late 90s. Still produced in its original specifications and colour by a small family-run business, Adela and Farah amped the specifications and tweaked the design to bring a Malaysian icon back from the past.

The nostalgia-evoking circular form and aptly named Merdeka chair is something all Malaysian are familiar with. The manufacturing process of this Malaysian icon

remains the same with the PVC strings woven by hand in the original manufacturing facility. The thickness of the steel frame is increased with the finishing updated with powder coating.

Of late, according to Farah, the *auntie* from the manufacturer of the Merdeka chair came into additional colours for the PVC strings as an order was made outside of the standard black, blue, white and red. Immediately, Farah saw this as an opportunity to run wild with the colour combinations, culminating in the Tropicalia series. The *auntie* found it odd that Farah would want anything from the tried and tested. The new colour combinations have resulted in bringing a truly Malaysian classic into a contemporary lifestyle.

- 1\\ Designer family
- 2\\ Ms Gray
- 3\\ Mr Concrete Chintz
- 4\\ Mr Parquet



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The increased orders also meant that one of the last manufacturing vestiges of the Malaysian classic will remain in business for the long run.

rattan family

The Rattan Family naturally evolved from Kedai Bikin's ethos of supporting small scale manufacturers. Another dying breed, rattan weaving involves a tedious and labour-intensive process. As all of the pieces of furniture are derived from a steel structural frame, the infill can easily be adaptable to other materials. Rattan is woven in traditional patterns such as the 'tofu', 'pulut' and octagonal mesh weave to almost all of the chairs in all the ranges – modernising a traditional handmade material into contemporary designs.

bikin home

To complement the exhaustive range of furniture, Kedai Bikin also curates a range of home objects under

the umbrella of Bikin Home. The range culminates in a collection of sustainable, thoughtfully-designed and crafted homeware products from Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

A key consideration is the use of up-cycled materials. Sourced from the region, Kedai Bikin carries an eclectic range of wares, from light fittings made from the negative cuts in steel production, to picnic mats manufactured from upcycled plastic bottle caps – all of which encapsulate the Studio Bikin aesthetic.

On the other end of the spectrum, local handmade crafts such as fine and rare *Penan* and *Bidayuh* basketry and traditional silk weavings from Kelantan are displayed and re-appropriated for contemporary lifestyle aspirations. These are sustainably sourced direct from the makers to eliminate unnecessary costs, with the bulk of profits ploughed back to the makers in order to sustain these dying crafts. The more architectural objects



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are produced by Studio Bikin, for instance, the *tiang lilin* candlestick holders are constructed from balustrades sourced from Penang shophouses. Typical in Studio Bikin designed residences, bent copper-pipe taps with stop valves cast with concrete are also available.

bikin social

As an extension of Kedai Bikin's ethos of sustaining craftsmen, Bikin Social looks at empowering people with special needs towards a more sustainable life. In collaboration with The Asia Community Service (ACS) in Balik Pulau, Penang, Adela has developed a range of



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5\\ Granddaddy lounger

6\\ String family

7\\ Tropicalia series

8\\ Rattan family

9\\ Bikin Home

10\\ Bikin Social

11\\ Adela Askandar (left) and Farah Azizan

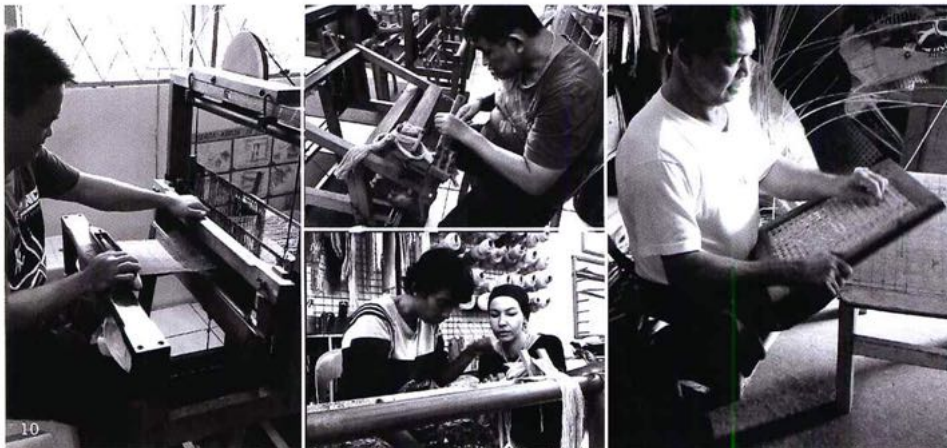
tactile handlooms incorporating the magnetic tape from the now defunct cassette tape. 'We were humbled by the amazing abilities (which the centre focused on, rather than the workers' disabilities) and positive energy of the Stepping Stone members. We have much to learn from each other and we are pretty sure you will love the fruits of their labour and support this wonderful set-up at the same time,' says Adela.

Kedai Bikin is still in its infancy stage – a step away from bigger things. To Adela and Farah, Kedai Bikin is a small step to revive and sustain the small holders in the local crafts and manufacturing industry. +

www.kedaibikin.com



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