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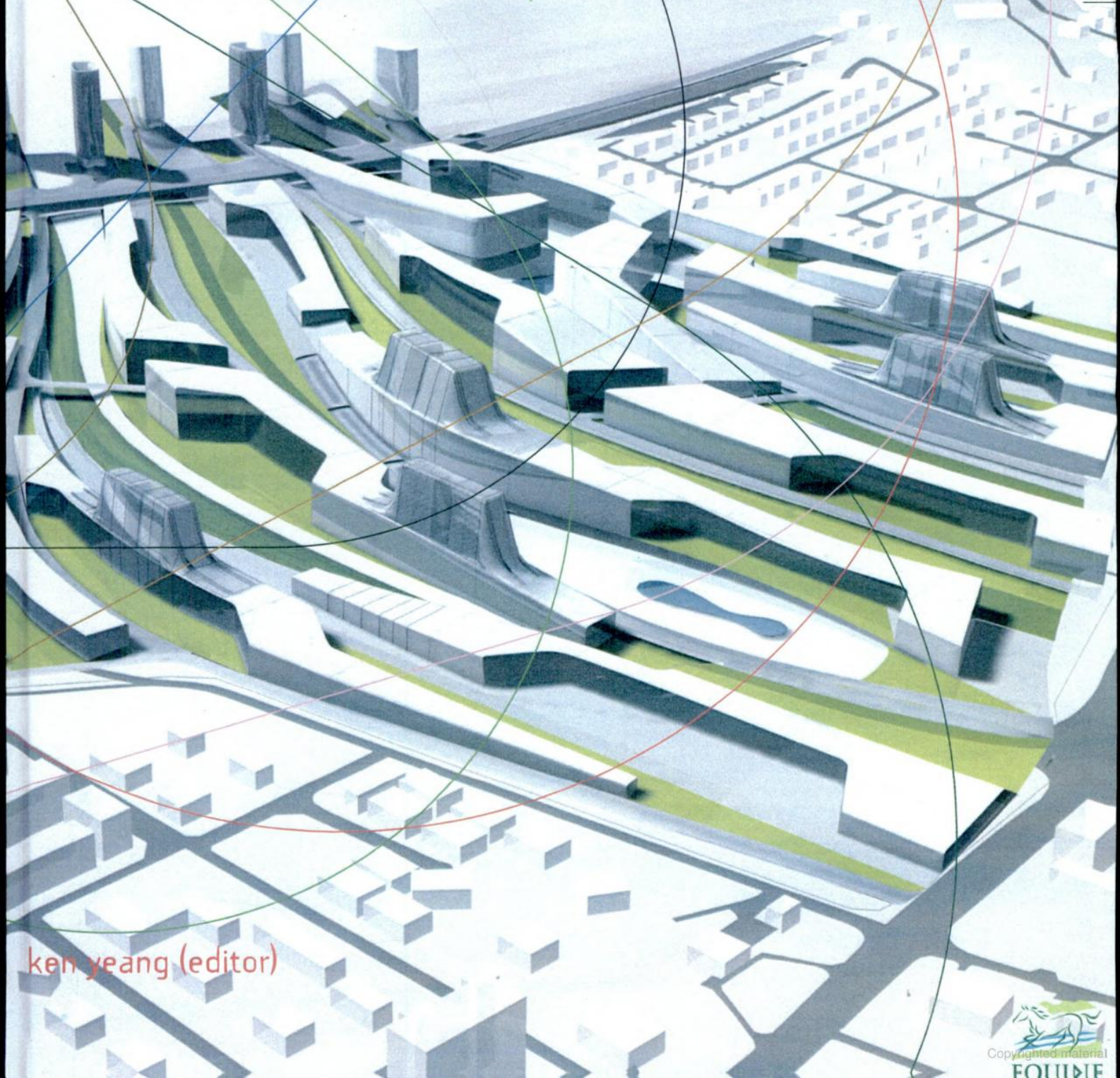
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ken yeang (editor)

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EQUINE

by ken yeang

The intention at the outset was to create a new focus and regional urban hub that will reposition the Malaysian city of Penang as the third apex in a regional trade triangle that will consist of Jakarta in Indonesia, Bangkok in Thailand and Penang in Malaysia.

This site in Penang with its unique location provides the opportunity to reposition Penang in this triangular nexus, together with the potential of crafting a new Asian urbanism that can be differentiated itself in the region and in aggregate assert a greater regional role for Penang.

The process of deriving a design solution that was adopted by the Sponsor was a methodology that is a combination of a series of focused public symposiums that are woven into the limited design competition process that had participation from a number of invited international and local architects.

Fourteen teams of international architects were short listed and they were then twined synergistically into seven teams to participate in the competition. Two public conferences were organized that allowed each competition team to present their urban design and architectural ideas, not specific to the competition site but discursively to create an anticipatory environment for the local community.

Being a commercially driven enterprise, members of the jury included a real estate valuer and a quantity surveyor, and each submission was required to include a financial viability assessment based on marketing information provided by the Sponsor together with a parcellation proposal.

After the first round, three teams were short listed, whereupon the Jurors selected the winner and out of which, the architect to handle the Master plan and another to do the key Urban Hub were identified together with the promise by the Sponsor to offer work to all non-winning competitors either on this site or on others owned by the Sponsor.

SEVEN TEAMS


This One



LWPB-UY4-KLY9

Penang : A Day at the Races

**"What we are, we owe to the past.
The present is experiential reality,
the future is vision"
(Yi-fu Tuan, Space and Place)**



The island of Penang, at the North-West of the Malaysian Peninsular was founded in the 18th century by Sir Francis Light of the East India Company. Its urban center is Georgetown and it is also the site of its first settlement on the island. It is now home to approximately a population of 500,000. Besides this resident population are the teeming tourists to this popular destination. With the recent intensive developments on the island, it is struggling to retain its charm as well as the conservation of its eclectic mix of Chinese, Indian, Malay and British colonial architecture.

The city of Georgetown has outgrown its boundaries and there is an increasing blurring of the distinction between the old Georgetown and the newer suburbs on the island. Urban expansion on prominent sites in the island now includes the existing turf club land.

For the local community, the Penang Turf Club land which is visually prominent from Scotland Road grandstand track had always remained an enigma. Many would not have the opportunity to go inside nor spend a day at the races. Children are prohibited from entering, and of course most parents would not in any case want their offsprings to indulge in horse racing.

The land is located approximately 3 miles west of Georgetown, bounded by Scotland Road, Batu Gantong Road, the Batu Gantong Hills and Jesselton Heights. In particular, Scotland Road had been a delightful road to drive through with the towering majestic Flame of the Forests trees aligning both sides of the road. The Batu Gantong hills provide a magnificent vegetated backdrop for the vast green of the racecourse. Jesselton Heights, at the other end of the land is regarded as the 'Beverly Hills' of Penang. Here are the luxurious mansions for the wealthy. Those fortunate enough to have a house along the boundary of the club will get a privileged view of the race track and the races.

For many, their most vivid memory of the turf club are the occasional glimpses along Scotland Road of the racehorses at the starting gates opposite the Penang Chinese Girls School. This was accompanied by shouts and screams at the start of each race and at the final stretch. Cars were parked by the roadsides, which were filled with motorcycles and bicycles. These bystanders would be straining their necks to see the horses reaching the finishing post. And of course, there will be the inevitable massive traffic jams that occur each time there were races. Traffic would stop and crawl once it reaches Batu Gantong.







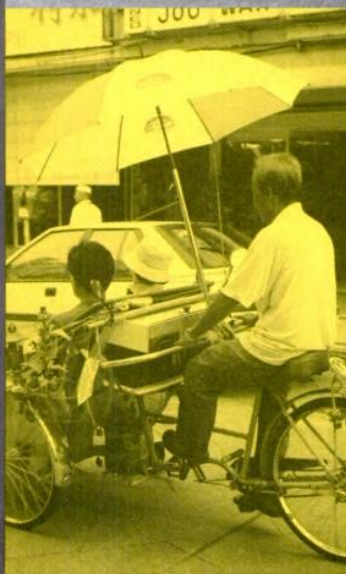
By virtue of the island's topography, Penang obviously has limited land for urban growth. The island is surrounded by hills in the middle and development has to be generally along the coast line. The hills are green and steep and legislative guidelines and Acts are in place restricting building development on high land. This led to pressures on the Governmental Authorities to allow dense development to occur in the flat terrain along the coast line and along the foot of the hills.

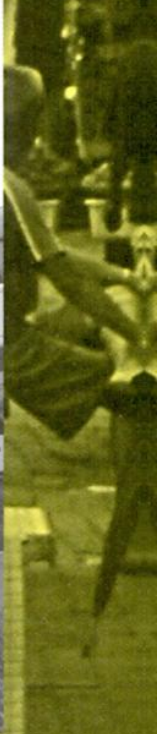
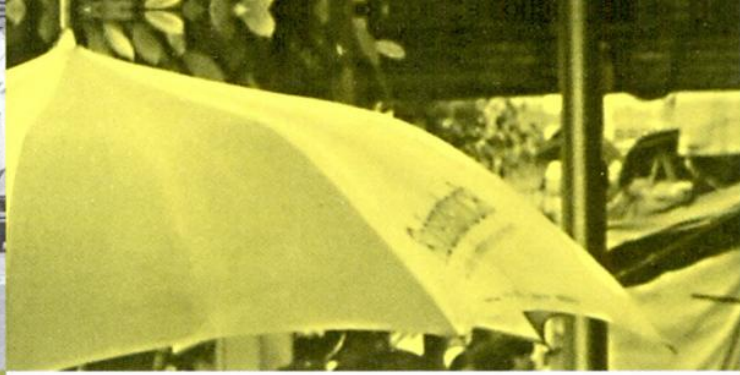
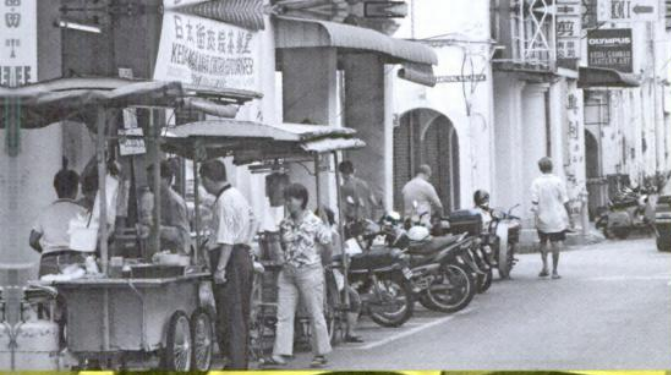


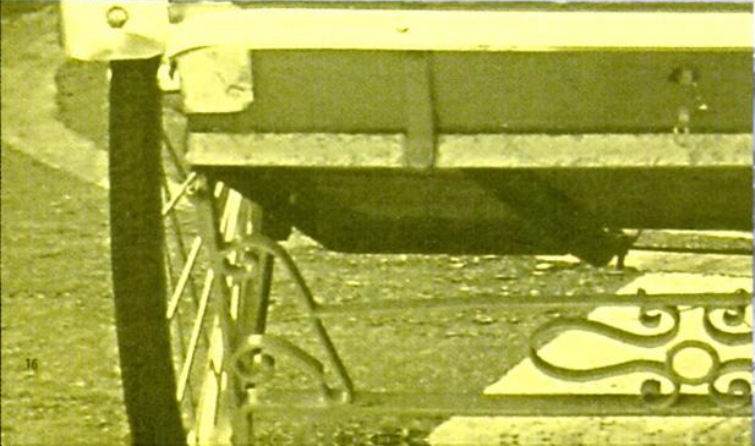


It became inevitable that the Penang Turf Club race track would be relocated and a new site was then identified at the mainland at Batu Kawan. The Club intending to expand its equestrian related events other than horse racing has also outgrown its existing boundaries. Many of the Penang residents regard this with mixed feelings. Many concerned that this piece of green lung would be totally lost. Many also felt that a different approach towards development was needed. The local Penang community might be regarded as one that is generally averse to change, physically as well as socially. Visitors returning to the island are often comforted by familiar surroundings. Change then is often gradual, rarely noticed or incremental. The idea then of a design competition created a buzz amongst the architectural fraternity in Penang who saw with anticipation seven teams of Malaysian architects collaborating with international architects for the design competition. The stage was set to put in place a master plan which many felt would be different from the normal developer-led design.

In recent years, the island, under pressure to adapt to the realities of the developing nation, had sanctioned a number of major decisions that would radically transform the island: a proposed 2nd link bridge to the mainland, the construction of the Penang Outer Ring Road (PORR) and the decision to focus on tourism as its prime industry of growth.







With the redevelopment of the former Penang Turf Club land, the urbanity of the locality will be changed forever. The existing open space bounded by the race track which the public is currently unable to intrude into, must be transformed into an integrated township with residential, shopping, hotels, a convention center and other related facilities with a compatibly accessible public realm. An integrated traffic network must be in place to ease local vehicular traffic on the island as well as accommodate the incoming traffic from across the mainland. Clearly, an efficient public transport system is needed and it is with foresight that the competition brief requires the integration of a transportation master plan with the physical master plan. The new open spaces within the new development must benefit all and certainly not just those with addresses at this locality. The new development must have its own signature identity, and be talked about in the same breath as easily as the KLCC Park in Kuala Lumpur or the Central Park in New York.



'Kevin Lynch:
Our real task is not to prevent the world from changing but to cause it to change in a growth-conducive and life-enhancing direction. The environmental image of time-places can play a role in speeding that necessary change and its analysis can tell us what some of the features of a life-enhancing universe would be. We can change our minds so that we enjoy the dynamics of the world. We can also change the world to correspond more closely to the structure of our minds.

Au Tai Yeow

