

SINGAPORE \$8 MALAYSIA RM18 HONGKONG HKD90 AUSTRALIA AUSS\$14 OTHERS US\$10

da

design and architecture

www.designandarchitecture.com

YTL LAND'S BIRD ISLAND GREEN HOMES COMPETITION WINNERS
HOUSE ON JOHANNA BEACH (VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA)
MARCEL WANDERS' INSPIRING MOMENTS
100% DESIGN LONDON
PGCC: THE INSIDE STORY



ISSN 0219-5143
9 770219 514001 >

ISSUE 041. 2008 | S\$8



a global icon

BY T Y AU

The much chin-wagged-about Penang Global City Centre, reported to take 15 years to complete, is set to be Penang's answer to Kuala Lumpur's KLCC. T Y AU looks at the facts that fuelled the buzz that surrounds it.





Malaysia has always attracted internationally acclaimed architects to her shore for projects that require public exposure. Amongst those that have buildings completed include firms like Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo, Foster and Associates and of course, Cesar Pelli. Recently, Asymptote Architects have been in the limelight for the Penang Global City Centre project. Since its launch in Sept 2007, replete with Malaysia's version of Cirque de Soleil performers, the project has been brilliantly promoted. There is even an entry in Wikipedia, and a search engine such as Google will reveal a lot of hits on the subject.

Expected to cost approximately RM25 billion, the project comprises landmark towers, highrise housing, a civic centre and conference facilities, five-star hotels and commercial outlets. It is Penang's answer to Kuala Lumpur's KLCC.

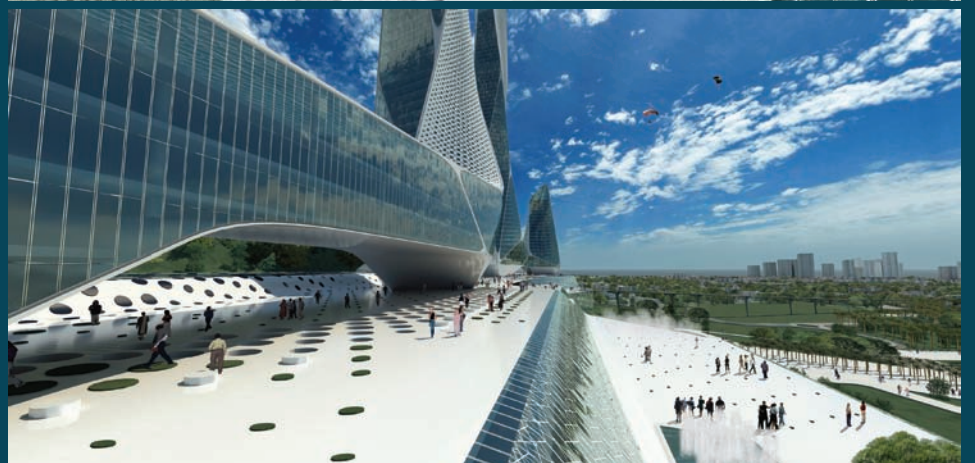
How did PGCC come about? It all began in late 2003, when members and trustees of the Penang Turf Club voted to accept a proposal from Abad Naluri Sdn Bhd to relocate the turf club from the island of Penang to the mainland in an area called Batu Kawan for RM488mil. Abad had initially secured the development rights to a 750-acre piece of land in Batu Kawan in 2002. Having the Batu Kawan land served as a big advantage for Abad Naluri to win the tender for the turf club land, as it was ideal for the existing turf club relocation.

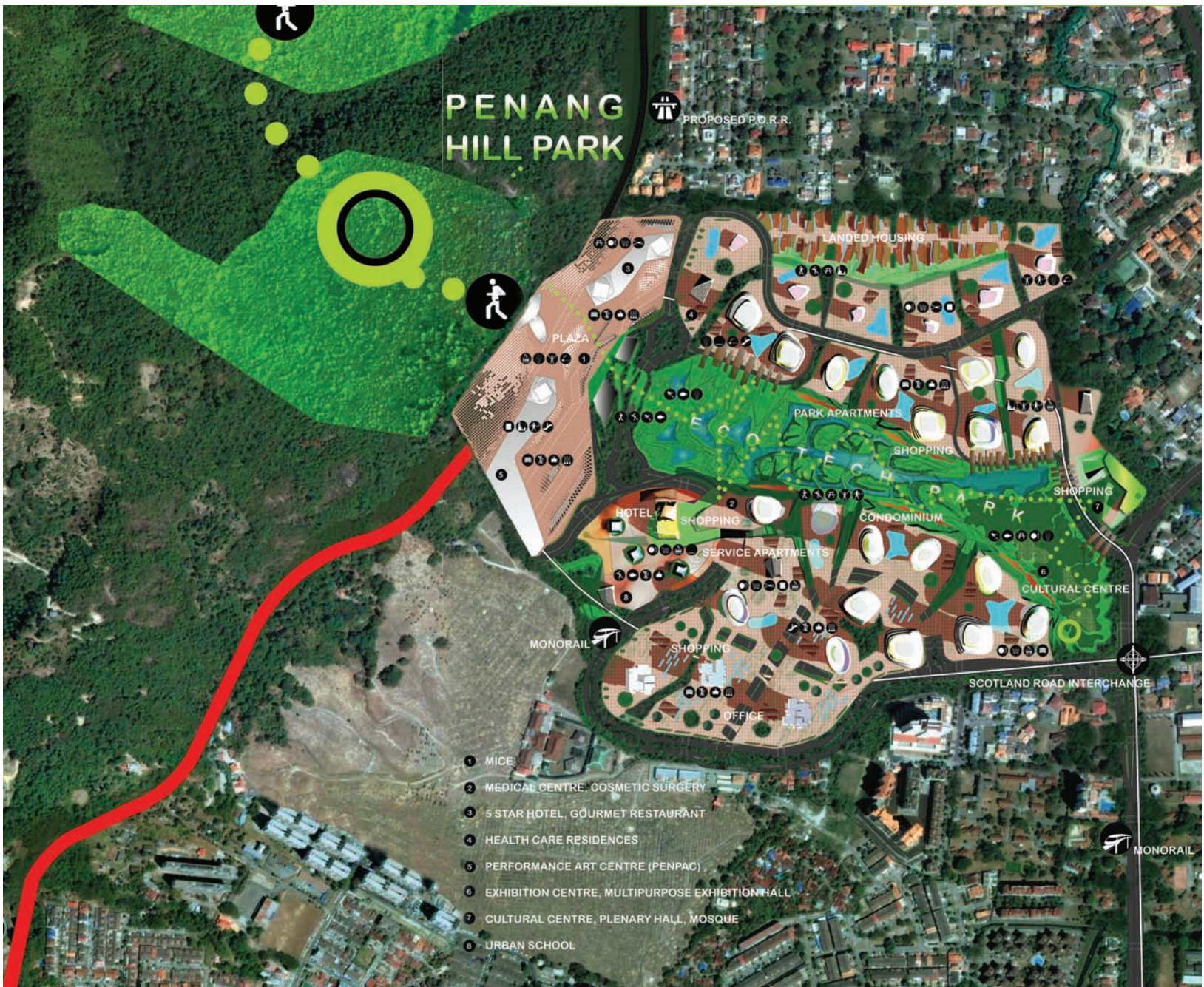
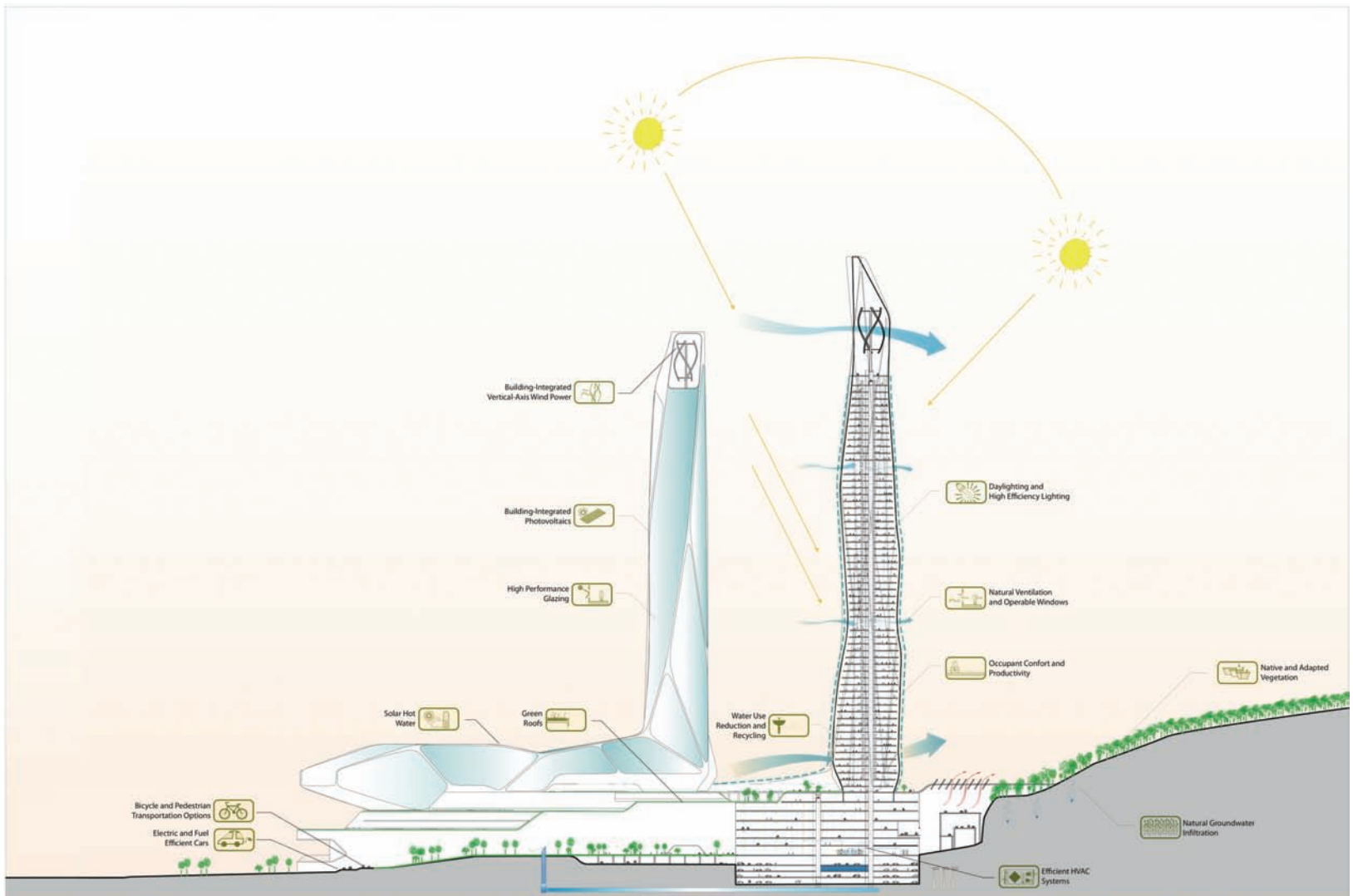
It was also fitting that these two exercises (securing the Batu Kawan land and tendering for the existing turf club land) happened almost concurrently. Abad Naluri was to construct the new race course and ancillary building for RM375 million, while paying the remaining cash payment of RM113 million to the Penang Turf Club for the 259-acre land at Batu Gantong – including a 60-acre lot that cannot be developed because it is hill land. On a per sq ft (psf) basis, the cost for the land turns out to be about RM43 psf. Based on the net developable land of about 175 acres, this works out to be around RM64 psf.



How did Hani Rashid of Asymptote come into the picture? A limited competition for the Penang Turf Club was organized by Equine Capital Berhad in Jun 2004. Equine, a listed company in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, owns 25% of Abad Naluri Sdn Bhd. The panel of judges for the competition included Peter Cook, Clifford Pearson, Leon van Schaik, Ken Yeang, Parid Wardi, Chris Boyd and Sri Kandan. The foreign participants were Morphosis, Michael Sorkin Studio, Atelier Seraji, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Asymptote Architects, Riken Yamamoto & Field Shop collaborating with Furuichi & Associates; and Ernst & Gruntuch Architects. Their corresponding local counterparts were ATSA Architects, Veritas Architects, Axis Architectural Partnership, Chee Ang Architect, Pakatan Reka Arkitek Sdn Bhd, RSP Arkitek Sdn Bhd and SA Architects Sdn Bhd.

An interim review of the projects was organized in Sep 2004 in conjunction with a public forum on design and architecture in Kuala Lumpur. Subsequently after this review, the development brief was reduced as most if not all participants felt that the original program was too expansive in terms of its requirement. In Nov 2004, a final presentation to the jurors was made in Penang. Three competitors were subsequently shortlisted: Axis/Atelier Seraji; Asymptote/Pakatan Reka and SA/Ernst & Gruntuch. The result of the competition was supposedly announced in Sep 2005, although a check with several participants revealed that they were in the dark on this issue. There is, however, a book by Ken Yeang, entitled 'The Mutiara Masterplan' about the competition entries.







Abad Naluri has credited Nasrine Seraji of Atelier Seraji with winning the competition and being the master-planner of PGCC. Asymptote is only the architect of a commercial complex with two towers consisting of a multistorey hotel, service apartments, performance art centre and observatory at Suria KLCC and the Petronas Twin Towers. Images of these two twisting iconic towers now grace the pages of architectural publications worldwide.

Within the overall 259-acre development, approximately 25 acres of the site has been reserved as a central park. The rest of the 175-acre development consists of 10 parcels divided into 35 plots to be developed as high-rise condominiums, and one parcel as landed development. The towers within those 35 plots are approximately each more than 35-storey high, although they are conspicuously missing from sight in the 3D renderings issued for press release.

Due to the massiveness of the project, Abad Naluri also proposed traffic improvement towards existing roads leading to the project but without actually mentioning who would be footing the bill for the construction. Questions are also being asked about its highly touted carbon zero status when all the construction, development and subsequent usage of automobile will cause more pollution to the previous green lung of Batu Gantong. Provision of low cost housing within any development projects in Penang – an additional 30-percent of the total number of units developed must be provided for housing for the low income group – is fortuitously not factored in for its proposal. Abad Naluri, nevertheless, has a lot going for it. The Malaysian Prime Minister had publicly launched the project even before the plans had been approved by the local authority.

A highly publicized project will always create controversy, especially one that will alter the economics, identity and urbanscape of a place. It will be a travesty for the Pearl of the Orient if detractors who have renamed PGCC, the Penang Graveyard and Columbarium Centre owing to its proximity to the Batu Gantong cemetery, are proven correct in their concerns. +