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MALAYSIAN TALENTS IN DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE AND ART

Life in the GREEN LANE

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photos: COURTESY OF POMEROY STUDIO



From left: The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur. The living room of a suite in the Majestic wing. The Colonial Cafe. Below: Pomeroy Studio at the tree planting event in Punggol Park, Singapore.



Seeds of growth

KUALA LUMPUR 9.05AM WEDNESDAY

The past couple of weeks in the studio have been long and hectic to say the least, with masterplanning and architectural project deadlines, business inquiries, a photoshoot, proof-reading comments on my upcoming book, a series of lectures, welcoming new members of staff and celebrating our studio's first anniversary and a tree-planting ceremony.

The National Parks Board of Singapore is celebrating 50

years of greening Singapore by planting trees in Punggol Park, so what better way to get up close and personal with nature, than by rolling up our sleeves, and to metaphorically lay the seeds for our design studio's future growth. It has been a productive and profitable first year for our interdisciplinary design studio. In the first 10 months, the studio has grown to 22 employees in Singapore, and embraces no fewer than 13 different nationalities. Needless to say, our landscape designers were on hand to direct our team on how to properly plant a tree, and to point out the idiosyncracies between a didicot and dicot.

After all that, here I am, in Kuala Lumpur, and staying at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur - an icon restored to all of its colonial splendour and glory, and a welcome retreat from the heat (and haze) of recent weeks. I am staying in the



Majestic wing, and in my usual suite, which is spacious, and furnished with keen attention to detail that never ranges into pastiche, but has enough period detail to provide a waft of nostalgia. After running from point to point for meetings, it was a welcome retreat to the Majestic last night for cocktails and dinner with my old friend, David. A quartet of double bass player, pianist, percussionist and singer chimed out 30's ditties whilst perfectly groomed waiters in white jackets sauntered through the dining room with efficiency and grace. It was as if one was transported into a PG Wodehouse novel, or perhaps more topically, onto the set of the recent film adaptation of F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

We dined at the Colonial Café on old favourites. The Mulligatawny soup was wonderfully rich and dense, the roast lamb was beautifully seared but pink on the inside. Its earthiness was offset by the tartness of a jus that must have been laced with Worcester sauce - another distinctive colonial addition to more localised cuisine. Dessert was a summer trifle - healthy lashings of crème and custard kept the sponge moist, and the sweet and sour of the berries perfectly balanced its richness.

It is refreshing that such bastions of tradition, whether in the architecture, the clothing, the music or the gastronomic offerings, still exist and serve as a healthy reminder of our

heritage of a colonial past with its distinct socio-cultural influences. Cultural identity is increasingly becoming challenged through globalisation and urbanisation. Whilst technology has helped bring people together and promoted the cross fertilisation of cultures, ideas and ideals, it has also contributed to a transcendence of modern consumer culture that arguably destroys the sense of heritage and cultural identity of a people.

Spaces, which were once imprinted with the cultural practices, beliefs and the traditions of a local people, are also being removed through continued urbanisation, which furthermore compromises cultural identity of a place. A cultural sustainability that seeks to preserve traditional social and spatial practices safeguards against the imposition of a modern built environment that lacks cultural relevance. This is why restoration projects such as the Majestic Hotel serve as healthy reminders for today and tomorrow's society as to how we used to live. **O**

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