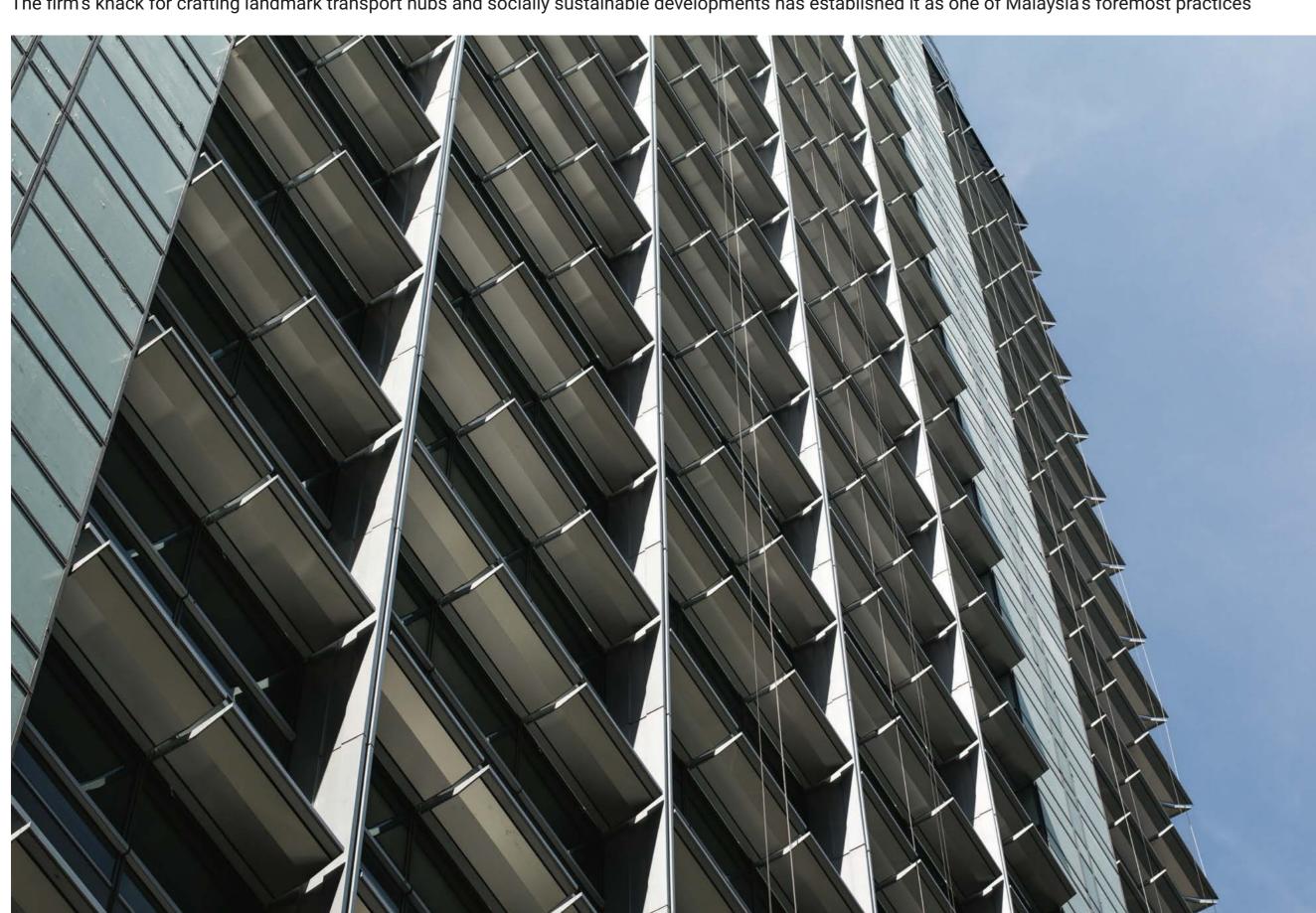
## Jul 24, 2023 | By Liam Aran Barnes

## Arkitek MAA shapes the nation

The firm's knack for crafting landmark transport hubs and socially sustainable developments has established it as one of Malaysia's foremost practices



The evening of 13 May 1969 was a dark night for Malaysia. In the immediate aftermath of only its second general election since independence, Kuala Lumpur was plunged into sectarian violence. Race riots between the ethnic Chinese and Malay population stunned the country, culminating in the death of hundreds of mostly Chinese citizens. The events of

The award-winning development provided lower-income residents with "better opportunities to find jobs and elevate their socioeconomic prospects."

that night hinted at a bloody, fractious future for the young nation. Yet what unfolded was a gradual, albeit fragile, unity between the ethnic groups and the eventual emergence of a Malaysian identity. A major step on the road to reconciliation was the formation of Kuala Lumpur as a federal state and the national capital. Formerly a predominantly ethnic Chinese area, the new city underwent a transformation aimed at fostering a multi-racial society. New residential neighbourhoods were subsequently developed, beginning with Bangsar in the early 1970s. Within a decade, the southwestern suburb had transformed from a rubber plantation into a bustling township thanks largely to the vision of master planners Arkitek MAA.

"From the off, it was designed to be economically efficient and socially sustainable for all races, genders and generations," explains the practice's director Datuk Ezumi Harzani. "After the Kuala Lumpur racial tension in 1969, we studied the pattern of population settlement and implemented it in our projects. We believed the right composition of different social statuses in a multi-racial neighbourhood was very important. "Bangsar Kuala Lumpur is a testament to good planning that elevates the social status of the occupants, and it became an example to many developers over the years."

The model has come to define the firm, founded in 1965 under the name Malaysian Associate Architects, as one of the country's foremost nongovernmental nation builders. A few miles west of Bangsar, now considered one of the capital's hippest enclaves, lies another of Arkitek MAA's largescale township achievements. Launched in 1997, the 138-hectare Mutiara Damansara followed a similar ethos to Bangsar, ensuring opportunities abound for all income groups

and providing employment opportunities.

was also inspired from an early age by his grandfather, a self-taught carpenter, who specialised in constructing traditional stilted Malay houses, and his artteacher father. "I guess I inherited his artistic genes in the sense that I enjoy art, both in creating and also appreciating it."

Datuk Ezumi Harzani, the director of Arkitek MAA, is a proponent of imaginative planning that elevates the social status of occupants

According to Harzani, the award-winning development provided lower income residents with "better opportunities to find jobs and elevate their socioeconomic

For the self-described "kampung boy", the chance to contribute towards the greater good is what initially encouraged him to pursue a career in architecture. He

prospects. Today, many residents have moved on to higher end homes and are collecting rental income from their previous apartments."

for his role with Arkitek MAA.

primarily located beyond KL's borders.

element.

In our design approach and presentation to our clients, the selection of sustainable materials, carbon-smart construction methods and adoption of renewable energy will always be our top priority Harzani joined Arkitek MAA in 1997, after graduating with a Bachelor of Architecture from Universiti Sains Malaysia and a Master of Philosophy (Policy Studies) from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and was made a director in 2006. He has also been a board member of the Board of Architects Malaysia and was appointed

Arguably the firm's highest-profile contribution to national infrastructure to date is its work on Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). Following an expansion in the 1980s and 90s into China, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, Arkitek MAA refocused its attention on KL, working with Japanese 'starchitect' Kisho Kurokawa to make his vision for KLIA a reality. Arkitek MAA also collaborated with Kurokawa in building Malaysia's largest transit hub KL Sentral Station. Beyond Arkitek MAA's knack for crafting landmark transport hubs and socially sustainable developments lies a firm commitment to green design and, in partic

and presentation to our clients, the selection of sustainable materials, carbon-smart construction methods and adoption of renewable energy will always be our

to the advisory board for Kuala Lumpur City Hall, as well as undertaking roles in various government working groups and committees—invaluable experiences

top priority. "We also believe that retrofitting existing buildings with modern technologies and better-performance equipment is paramount for improving energy consumption and reducing carbon emissions." Recent retrofitting projects include the reinvention of the historic Sultan Abdul Samad Building into facilities for the Ministry of Information, Communications and Culture, Royale Chulan Penang hotel and DoubleTree by Hilton Putrajaya Lakeside. In fact, hospitality developments have become something of a speciality for

Arkitek MAA of late. But unlike most of the practice's residential and commercial endeavours, its hotel projects—whether retrofits or new properties—are

ular, retrofitting. "Incorporating passive design elements with minimum impact on the environment is essential," Harzani explains. "In our design approach

Harzani is keen to stress that major factors in the company's sustained success are its sectorspanning expertise—it also designs office, retail, civic, healthcare, and industrial projects—and dynamism in new environments. "When working in a new destination, we must understand the historical, political, economic and social features of the society before carefully selecting the acce nt that best reflects the society," he explains. "However, it will never be a direct copy of any existing cultural structure. Instead, we adopt the accent of the cultural

"After all, architecture is a frame for society." Indeed, it is arguably this mentality that has shaped Harzani and Arkitek MAA's work over the decades and contin ues to help bind Malaysia's many cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds





The Curve at Mutiara Damansara

"I would say The Curve at Mutiara Damansara is our most ambitious project to date," says Harzani. "The first open-air pedestrianised lifestyle shopping mall in Malaysia, it was a highly experimental project to undertake 25 years ago. We wanted to design spaces for people that blurred the boundary between public and commercial areas. Creating spaces with quality is the key to success in place-making for The Curve. "Learning from this, we went on to successfully design Plaza Arkadia at DesaPark City with a similar approach."



**One Cochrane Residence** "We wanted to create a serene sanctuary in the heart of KL that resonated with young professionals, business executives and active individuals in search of convenient urban living," says Harzani. "One Cochrane Residence, therefore, features flexible interiors with an integrated living-dining-kitchen area and a multifunctional layout in the studio units that can be reconfigured as a workspace. This was a timely project given that we've already seen demand for such designs soar in the wake of the pandemic."

Image credit: Mutiara Rini – One Cochrane



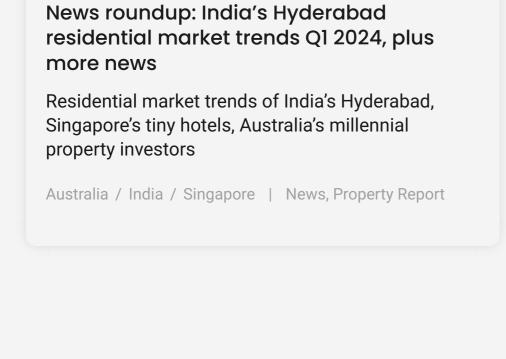
**Nucleus Tower** "We designed Nucleus Tower, a high-end corporate office building in Mutiara Damansara, with a green building approach that responds to the environment," says Harzani. "The building facade is completed with shading devices for all curtain wall openings. In addition to featuring multi- and single-tenant office spaces in the

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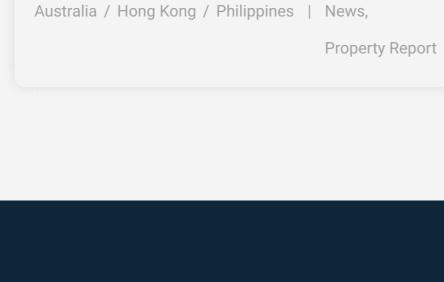
24-storey tower, the retail and commercial spaces located in the three-storey commercial block integrate smoothly into the development.

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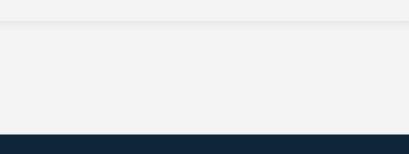
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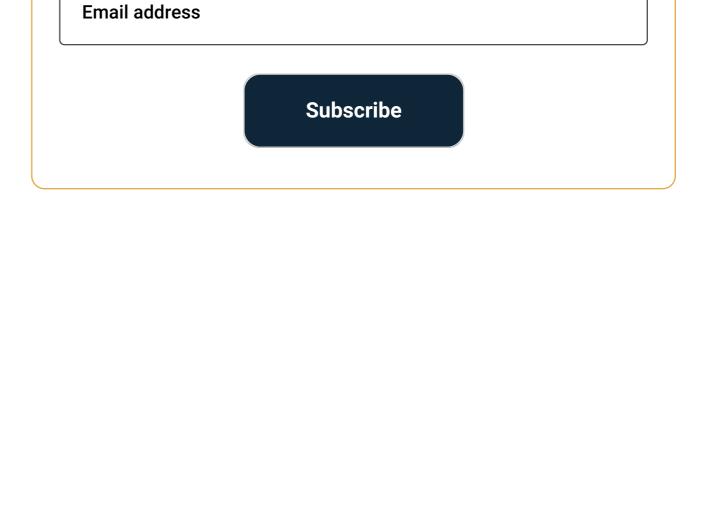
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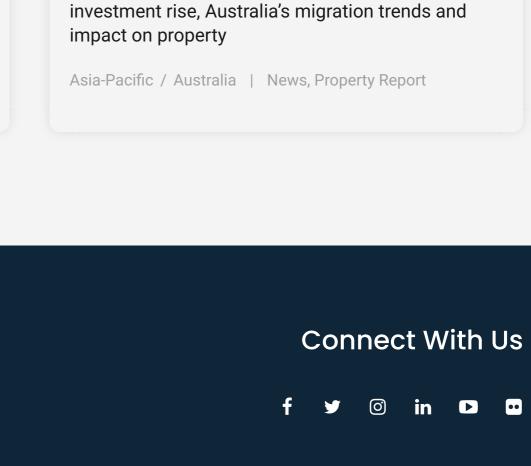
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