

(RE)PRESENTING THE VERNACULAR/(RE)INVENTING AUTHENTICITY: RESORT ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

H O C K - B E N G T A N

The tremendous growth in economic development in the countries of Southeast Asia has resulted in a dramatic increase in intraregional travel. As a result, tourist developments are being built at a tremendous speed and scale. Such buildings are bringing into sharp focus the definitions of terms such as "tradition/al" and "modern/ity," as well as redefining notions of "authenticity" within various cultural settings. The paper explores tourists' quest for authenticity by examining three sensitively designed resorts which use the vernacular to perpetuate an architectural language that assumes the status of authenticity by ensuring a perceived historical continuity. The paper also argues that the concept of authenticity is one way of articulating the experience of modernity and postmodernity. It proposes that authenticity can only be addressed by opening the references of figuration to the multiple imperatives of contemporary culture.

The problem of reality is man's ultimate problem; his judgment, "Such-or-such is more real, or more deeply real, than something else," is a major expression of his intellectual faith.

Philip Wheelwright, The Real Thing

... the real is not only that which can be reproduced, but that which is already reproduced. the hyperreal which is entirely simulations.

Jean Baudrillard, Simulations

HOCK-BENG TAN teaches architectural design at the School of Architecture, National University of Singapore.

In many Third World countries economic development involves the active promotion of international tourism as a generator of foreign-exchange income. The tremendous growth in economic development, and the resultant rising levels of

disposable income in the countries of Southeast Asia especially, has resulted in a dramatic increase in intraregional travel. Over the last few years an ever-widening spectrum of hotel development has occurred at a mind-boggling pace and scale.

“Time-space convergence,” as defined by Giddens, is the way in which time-space distanciation occurs in capitalist modernity: a phenomenon of the “shrinking of distance” between locales under the influence particularly of advanced transportation and communication technology.¹ Space, Giddens argues, is entwined in the logic of commodity production and exchange in complex ways. He terms this process the “commodification of space.” Time-space convergence and commodification have arguably led to tourism becoming a general phenomenon.

As Wolfgang Schivelbush comments, “From now on, the places visited by the traveller become ever more similar to the commodities that are part of the same circulatory system. For twentieth century tourism, the world has become one big department store of landscapes and cities.”²

As we move into a new epoch of global culture, tourist amenities, in particular, are readily subjected to the rigors of the global marketplace. They have developed in response to these new influences. The “international standard” hotel, whether owned by the state but run by an international hotel chain, or privately owned, is one of the most conspicuous symbols of modernity in many parts of the Third World. Such buildings bring into sharp focus the definition of terms such as “tradition/al” and “modern/ity,” as well as redefine notions of “authenticity” within the culture involved.

CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY

In Southeast Asia established tourist locations like Bali in Indonesia and Phuket in Thailand, as well as prospective locations like Langkawi in Malaysia and Indonesia’s Bintan Island, are earmarked for elaborate developments in order to attract the growing numbers of regional and international travelers. For example, developers of the U.S. \$2.2 billion Bintan Beach International Resort in the Riau Archipelago have planned for thirteen golf courses on 23,000 hectares, while the Langkawi Development Authority of Malaysia has plans to spend U.S. \$500 million on infrastructure by the end of this year.

Over the last few years there has been an increasing body of sensitively designed works in resort architecture in Southeast Asia. Architects of such works have produced architectural ensembles that are environmentally tuned and possess both a sensual refinement and sure sense of place. However, a larger

issue concerns whether these buildings can both contribute to the generation of vital forms of regional culture and at the same time make claims of “authenticity.” To attract the ever-increasing number of tourists, entrepreneurs and tour operators often use traditions and heritage, both authentic and manufactured, for mass consumption. Resorts are building types that are precisely tailored to fulfill this need. Being intrinsically contrived, many of them are now paradoxically being marketed for their architectural merits, which are being hailed for their “authenticity.”

The increasingly anthropological interest of the world’s traveling middle class, in search of ethnic tourism, has led to ever-greater numbers of people arriving in host countries seeking to “experience” and pursue proofs of their “authentic” contact with exotic cultures. Many host countries are providing such material symbols, both for touristic consumption as well as for their own cultural self-fulfillment in the development of “secondary ethnicity.” Dean MacCannell has described the phenomena as having a “front stage” for outsiders, and a “back stage” where “things really happen.”³ He has argued that touristic consciousness now is increasingly motivated by a desire for the latter, as more visitors actively seek “authenticity” in back-stage regions. However, many such back-stage regions may be just as inauthentic as their front-stage counterparts — staged purely to satisfy a new form of touristic consumption.

In response to this new imperative, tour operators continue to market new resorts, especially those of a much more intimate scale, that claim to be more authentic than many ill-conceived large developments. For example, The Lodge at Koele, on Lanai, Hawaii, is being advertised as “a destination for the kind of affluent world traveler who craves a more traditional and authentic Hawaiian experience than the commercial luaus of Waikiki and the crass excesses of ‘fantasy’ resorts elsewhere in Hawaii.”⁴

Joanne Watkins, group public relations manager of Shangri-La International, observes that many guests “stay at resorts because they find a resort property better reflects the local flavour and ambience than a city hotel; resorts are, if you like, more authentic. There is a growing trend for properties to better reflect the culture of the host country while maintaining high standards of customer service.”⁵

This claim to “authenticity” is usually substantiated and validated by comparisons with two other categories of buildings: “place-less” modernist high-rise structures, and the bogus regionalist work which uses surface applications of traditional motifs in a gratuitous and eclectic manner. (Unfortunately, the majority of high-rise hotels and beach-front

condominiums in Southeast Asia are still based on economic dictates, and are often hastily designed in an odd agglomeration of postmodern kitsch, in which ready-made symbols are used in ways totally unrelated to the means of construction.)

The tourism industry has thus successfully constructed a new niche by marketing the concept of authenticity and claiming to offer tourists a more “culturally sensitive” and “politically correct” form of travel accommodation. The status of authenticity is often drawn from the perpetuation of an architectural language that ensures a perceived historical continuity. According to Karsten Harries: “buildings that deserve to be called works of architecture . . . do indeed represent . . . other buildings that tradition has endowed with a special aura, perhaps because they are associated with a more original and presumably more genuine dwelling. Representing such buildings, works of architecture at the same time re-present themselves, drawing from the aura of the represented buildings a special significance for themselves.”⁶

Authenticity has become one of the primary concerns of architects practicing in many parts of Southeast Asia today. However, the concept of authenticity is a nebulous, emotive and elusive term, a minefield of conflicting notions. Nevertheless, the mapping out of the term’s limits is essential both if we are to enter into any discourse on the difference between the genuine and the fake, and if we are to search for a culturally vital contemporary architectural expression for Southeast Asian societies.

Ultimately, the root of present concern for authenticity can be traced to a major shift that occurred within the American arts and material cultural scene from the late nineteenth century to the twentieth century. The then-popular arts of imitation and illusion were replaced by a quest for values of authenticity, one that was obsessed with “the real thing.” Authenticity is hence an essentially modern value, associated with the impacts of modernity (and in today’s context — postmodernity) upon contemporary society.

The condition of modernity can perhaps be best summarized by Marshall Berman’s claim:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world — and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of

struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air.”⁷

Many other writers have echoed this claim that modern life is filled with an overwhelming sense of fragmentation, transitoriness and ephemerality. In his essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire defined modernity as “the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable.”⁸ If change and ephemerality formed the material basis of modernity, then the successful artist, as defined by Baudelaire, was one who understood such chaos, fragmentation and ephemerality, and at the same time extracted the universal and the eternal. Harvey argues that “Modernism from its very beginning, therefore, became preoccupied with language, with finding some special mode of representation of eternal truths.”⁹ In order to be authentic to its age, the aesthetic response exhibited a fascination with modern techniques, new conditions for production, new transport and communication systems, and other new commodities of daily life.

The impact of modernity upon social existence has thus resulted in a consuming effort to get beyond imitation. Berger has said, “If nothing on ‘the outside’ can be relied upon to give weight to the individual’s sense of reality, he is left no option but to burrow into himself in search of the real. Whatever this *ens realissimum* may then turn out to be, it must necessarily be in opposition to any external (modern) social formation. The opposition between self and society has now reached its maximum. The concept of authenticity is one way of articulating this experience.”¹⁰

In the current literature of the postmodern condition, many critics have reiterated that postmodernist thought (as did earlier modernist values) accepts ephemerality, fragmentation and discontinuity. The world is seen as being comprised of perpetually shifting fragments. The loss of temporality and the search for instantaneous impact have also given rise to a loss of depth. Jameson describes contemporary cultural production’s fixation with appearances and postmodern architecture’s preoccupation with surfaces as “contrived depthlessness.” Kenneth Frampton concurs in noting that “stripped by science of its magical coalescence, the modern world began to fragment. Since appearance now belied truth, it became necessary to regard form as being separate from content. . . .”¹¹

One result of these changes is that history and cultural forms have been commercialized. According to Hewison: “Post-modernism and the heritage industry are linked. . . . Both conspire to create a shallow screen that intervenes between our present lives, our history. We have no understanding of history

in depth, but instead are offered a contemporary creation, more costume drama and re-enactment than critical discourse.”¹² In terms of architecture, this has meant that, through the media, past styles are viewed as an archive to be raided in order to achieve historical legitimacy, and thus authenticity.

AUTHENTICITY AS A “NEGOTIABLE” CONCEPT

Modern man, since the nineteenth century, can thus be seen as a being in quest of authenticity, while living in “inauthentic” societies. MacCannell has forcefully argued that this quest for authenticity has become an important characteristic of modern tourism.¹³ In tourism studies the concept of authenticity is used to characterize a criterion of evaluation used by the modern tourist as observer. Erik Cohen has, however, objected to MacCannell’s conceptual framework, on grounds it does not raise the possibility that the tourist may conceive of authenticity in different terms. According to Cohen:

*“authenticity” is a socially constructed concept and its social (as against philosophical) connotation is, therefore, not given, but “negotiable”. . . . It follows that intellectuals and other more alienated individuals will engage in a more serious quest for authenticity than most rank-and-file members of society. It is hypothesized further that, the greater their concern for authenticity, the stricter will be the criteria by which they conceive of it. Less alienated and hence less concerned individuals, including most rank-and-file tourists, will be content with much wider, less strict criteria of authenticity.*¹⁴

Hence, tourists may be thought of as seeking authenticity with varying degrees of intensity. They also will conceive of authenticity with varying degrees of rigor, and adopt different criteria for judging it. In fact, Cohen argues that “since authenticity is not a given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence in the eyes of visitors to the host culture. In other words, a cultural product, or a trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognised as authentic.”¹⁵

Cohen looks into the approach to “authenticity” among curators and ethnographers as a means to clarify the socially constructed nature of the concept. For example, an increasing number of objects have been declared to be “fakes” by curators and art historians, not because new information on the objects has been discovered, but because the concept of fakery has slowly changed. Authenticity in primitive and ethnic art in particular is being conceived in ever more rigorous criteria. One such criterion is that the product should not be manufactured

specifically for commercial purposes. Hence, the absence of commodification has become an important factor in evaluating authenticity. Authenticity, for curators, is then a quality of premodern life and of cultural artifacts untainted in any way by Western influences. Emphasis is also placed on the difference between hand-made objects and those produced by machines.

The above discussion shows there can be various interpretations of the term “authenticity,” where the form and content of the interpretation vary greatly depending on the mode and object as well as operational structure of the relationship. Posing the question “What is the notion of authenticity?” is hence unsatisfactory. The question should instead be directed at uncovering the qualitative and quantitative aspects of different notions of authenticity, and comprehending the intricate intercausal relationships between them.

FORM AND CONTENT IN AUTHENTICITY

Resorts are essentially luxurious architectural stage sets. Because of their manifestations of a unique life-style, they have always served as models in a “filtering down” effect, and, as such, they are an important source of inspiration for many subsequent local works. The moment such exquisite works are perceived as constituting a particular style, they possess a symbolic ability to create an illusory transcendence of class. When touted as being authentic, these consumable styles further may enter the popular imagination as “the real thing,” assuming a forceful validity of their own.

In an incisive essay, Hassan-Uddin Khan wrote: “Constructing buildings using the same materials, the same colours, the same vocabularies . . . but with everything obviously more sophisticated, polished, shinier, and so on, means that historical information is so absorbed it assumes the aspect of reincarnation.”¹⁶ He goes on to question the relationship between this architectural expression and the “real thing — the vernacular born of the tradition of a hundred years. Or is this the real thing?”

Many of these buildings are definitely improved versions of the vernacular, at least at the perceptual level. Umberto Eco echoes this point when writing about the Palace of Living Arts in Los Angeles. He describes its philosophy not as “We are giving you the reproduction so you will want the original,” but rather, “We are giving you the reproduction so that you will no longer feel any need for the original.”¹⁷ The reproduction always conditions perceptions of the original to the extent that the former can even replace the latter to become “the real thing”: where, as Chambers writes, “the referents are

swept away by the signs, where the artificial is more 'real' than the real."¹⁸

However, in their rush to embrace an aesthetic for a new touristic consciousness through the use of preexisting elements, architects have irrevocably isolated form from production and meaning. These sumptuous tourist developments are unable to reconcile form with content, or technique with technology. One way of thinking of this is that meaning has been both "transformed" and "transposed." Manfredo Tafuri defines the former as "the insertion of a theme deeply rooted in a particular, totally different context," and the latter as a "definite symbolic charge in asymbolic contexts."¹⁹

According to Frampton, an architectural form that is simply a nostalgic appropriation of picturesque relics "seeks to evoke not a critical perception of reality, but rather the sublimation of a desire for direct experience through the provision of information. Its tactical aim is to attain as economically as possible, a preconceived level of gratification in behavioristic terms."²⁰ Such superficial mimicry is a sign of regressive sentimentalism, and normally results in merely hackneyed works. Authenticity certainly cannot be sought in such self-conscious application of cultural signs.

Authenticity comes from the Greek root, *authentes*, which refers to "one who does anything with his own hand."²¹ It thus suggests a strong association with craft. Human identity in the production of architecture has always been an instrumental aspect of its authenticity. Trilling argues that "the machine . . . could make only inauthentic things, dead things. . . ."²² However, contemporary methods of building production are more opaque than traditional ones. Hence, the links between fabrication and signification, construction and metaphor, are increasingly hard to identify.

In a similar argument, Hannah Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, observes that the societal concerns of modern collective systems have devalued the concept of "labor" (a natural, almost biological concomitant of life) to that of "work" (an artificial, static separation of life from the natural world around us). Contemporary architecture represents "the world of work" (which is artificial) more than "the world of labor" (which is biological). D. Andrew Vernooy has also argued that "the metaphysical implications of material and detail are reduced to gestures which imply, but do not denote; they express ideas which represent architecture's customary functions — the registration of built form with its physical and cultural context — but they are phenomenally weak."²³

An authentic architecture would thus appear to be the product of labor, in which the building acts as a mediation between the

natural world and the artificial world. The role of representation in architecture must include societal intentions produced by labor and technical intentions produced by work. However, in trying to distinguish each notion of authenticity relative to the other — social/cultural necessities versus technical/ethical necessities — the two become irrevocably dislocated. Vernooy points out that architectural authenticity expects cultural recognition and presumes technical originality. Recent stylistic ideologies attempt to define an authentic architecture by reconfiguring the built world such that they express particular aspects of contemporary culture. Each contributes an aspect to the discourse, but each fails as well. Vernooy writes:

Modernism idealised an industrial society that was rapidly rebuilding the world in its own image, but without a sense of place, either physically or temporally. Post-modernism idealised traditional formal patterns, but, uncritically; the illusion had priority over the more local condition of fabrication. Deconstructionism idealised formal schizophrenia, but never made the distinction between textuality as a condition of thought and textuality as a condition of experience; just the conception of a form alternative does not make it relevant.²⁴

Authenticity is commonly viewed as the result of specificities to place and time. Ismail Serageldin, in *Space For Freedom*, suggests that "the issue is not whether the structure conforms exactly to the criteria of the past; it clearly cannot do so and remain relevant to today's concerns. Instead, the issue is whether the designer has learnt the lessons of the past, internalised them, and used them as an input, although partial, in defining the solution to a contemporary problem for contemporary clients."²⁵

Vernooy feels that the problem of authenticity cannot be addressed by formal idealizations, but only by opening the references of figuration to the multiple imperatives of contemporary culture. These imperatives include that of technology, economics and culture. Architecture is the physical manifestation of multitudinous factors pertaining to the temporal, cultural, climatic, geographic, social, political and economic milieu of a society. Hence, any attempt at defining authenticity in an architectural project must address such contexts. An authentic architecture explores how spaces can heighten, not blur the relationships of man to these contexts.

The best examples of recent resort architecture in Southeast Asia possess levels of sophistication and quality that other trite hotels clearly lack. Materials are used in a manner which delights, while the spaces created are a pleasure to experience. Three of these remarkable buildings are briefly examined here with reference to how the designers have tackled the issue of authenticity.

CASE STUDY 1: AMANPURI, PHUKET, THAILAND

The exclusive resort of Amanpuri, which means “Place of Peace” in Sanskrit, is arguably one of Southeast Asia’s best resorts.²⁶ Located on the island of Phuket, Amanpuri avoids the standard room formula by having 40 individual pavilions (FIG. 1). The light and elegant pavilions are dramatically set among leaning palms on the sprawling 40-hectare plot of a century-old coconut plantation. Most of the existing trees on the site have been preserved. The site rises steeply from the long horizontal sweep of Pansea Beach to an elevation of 40 meters.

The evocative formal language expressed in the pavilion suites and the voluminous lobby pavilion sought inspiration in the traditional forms and techniques of Thai temple construction (FIG. 2). Paris-based American architect Ed Tuttle’s research was given new vitality after he visited the finest gilded and decorated Buddhist temples of northern Thailand. His final design is executed with fine control of the Thai vernacular of the Ayutthaya period, resulting in an architecture that is more faithful to the original, than deviatory (FIG. 3).

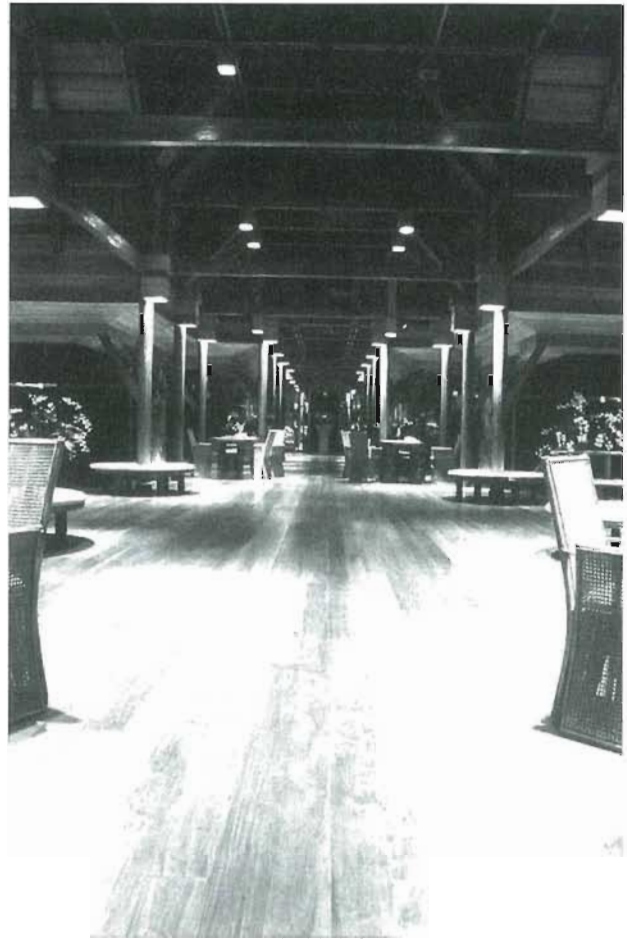
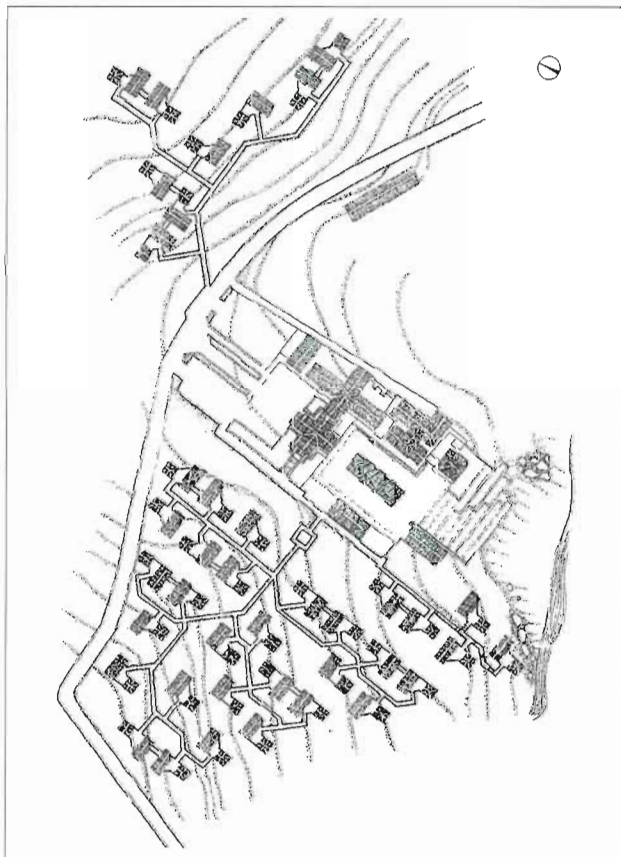


FIGURE 1. (LEFT) Site plan of Amanpuri showing the layout of the reception pavilion and the 40 private pavilion suites. Source: Tan Hock Beng, *Tropical Architecture and Interiors* (Singapore: Page One Publishing, 1994), p. 26.

FIGURE 2. (TOP RIGHT) The lobby pavilion’s roof structure is based on traditional constructional methods and built by highly skilled artisans.

Photo by author.

FIGURE 3. (BOTTOM RIGHT) The pavilion’s design is executed with fine control of the Thai vernacular of the Ayutthaya period, resulting in an architecture that is more faithful to the original, than deviatory. Photo by author.

The pavilions and the connecting walkways of Amanpuri are supported by concrete slabs and stilts to protect the land from erosion. Each timber pavilion consists of a bedroom unit incorporating a spacious bathroom, totaling about 100 sq. m. in size. An adjoining open-air *sala*, or covered reception area, is linked by a verandah. The picturesque high gable ends of the gray shingled roofs are closed off by the distinctive design of the barge board, the most poignant symbol of Thai architecture.

Tuttle fully exploited the local craft traditions: for example, the construction technology as well as the labor is local, all the veneer for the columns, moldings and framing is of *maka*, a local hardwood, and the floors are of another indigenous timber called *tabak*. The monochromatic interior finishes also utilize local materials. Even the cotton fabrics were woven by the famous Jim Thompson factory in Bangkok.

The beauty of the resort is further enhanced by sensitive hard landscaping, with pools and lotus ponds surrounding the public pavilions and restaurant buildings. Lined with blue-black tiles, the centrally located swimming pool is a visual complement to the sea in the background. Amanpuri offers compelling evidence that an invigorating pursuit of traditional archetypes can produce a graceful resort. However, a work of architecture like this one, despite being meticulously crafted by highly skilled artisans, merely reproduces the vernacular in a more lavish manner amid an obviously theatrical setting.

CASE STUDY 2: THE DATAI, LANGKAWI ISLAND, MALAYSIA

Langkawi Island is part of an archipelago of 104 islands in Malaysia, of which only three are inhabited. To encourage tourism, the Malaysian government declared the island a duty-free haven in 1987. One of the latest tourist additions on Langkawi is The Datai. It was designed by the Singapore-based firm Kerry Hill Architects, which has also been responsible for the design of several other luxurious hotels in various parts of Southeast Asia.

Situated on the northwestern tip of the island, The Datai enjoys exclusivity because most of the other hotels and villages on the island are located on its southern side. The Datai consists of 84 rooms contained within slab blocks and 40 pavilion suites scattered at the foot of an artificial mount on which the main building sits. Services are tucked within this mount, which has rubble walls all around it. A series of monumental steps descends from the mount to ground level, very much in the same mode as in Amanpuri. Conceptualized

as a jungle retreat, much of the surrounding 800-hectare site has been retained in its original rainforest condition (FIG. 4).

On arrival at the Datai, guests are greeted by a low but massive shingled roof made of Belian wood from Sarawak (FIG. 5). An open courtyard with a landscaped pool then separates the reception from the lobby lounge. The lobby lounge overlooks the swimming pool and, beyond, the Andaman Sea. Pale lime-washed timber and pink sandstone are used for the finishes. A Thai restaurant's dining pavilion is spectacularly cantilevered from the mount and supported by 14 m. tall trunks of hardwood trees felled during clearing of the site.

The traditional Malay house serves as the inspiration for the design of The Datai's individual villas, which are raised above the ground. Connected to the public facilities by walkways, each villa is air-conditioned and has an attached bath and a private sun deck. The combined bedroom and living room contains a king-size bed, a private bar, a writing desk, and two day beds (FIG. 6). The interiors were designed by Frenchmen Didier Lefort and Luc Vaichere of Lefort-Vaichere Architects Associes, who have worked on various projects in Pakistan and for the Aga Khan. Timbers, such as those from red Balau and Nyatoh, two common types of local hardwood, are used extensively for interior paneling and built-in furniture.

Despite its sumptuous qualities, the design comprises an eclectic mix of architectural elements. Eddy Koh, writing in *IQ-Interiors Quarterly*, points out: "A lama from Tibet will find a familiar sight in the profile of The Datai's west wing with its long uninterrupted corridors and patchwork of doors, windows and sloping eaves that jut out precariously from a cliff. The lost peoples of Maya will enjoy the staggered flights of stone steps. . . . The Japanese will delight in the shoji screen effect of the door and window designs."²⁷ Another writer describes the layout as "reminiscent of Balinese pavilions."²⁸

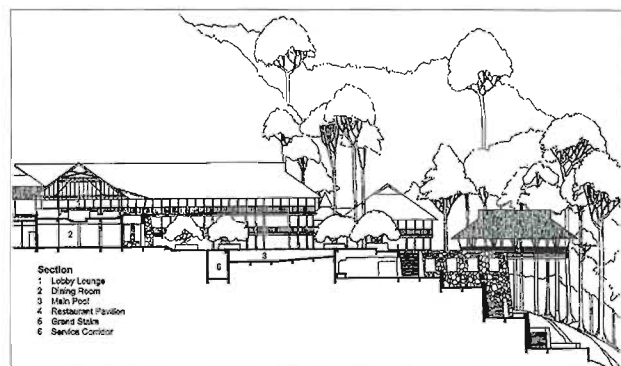
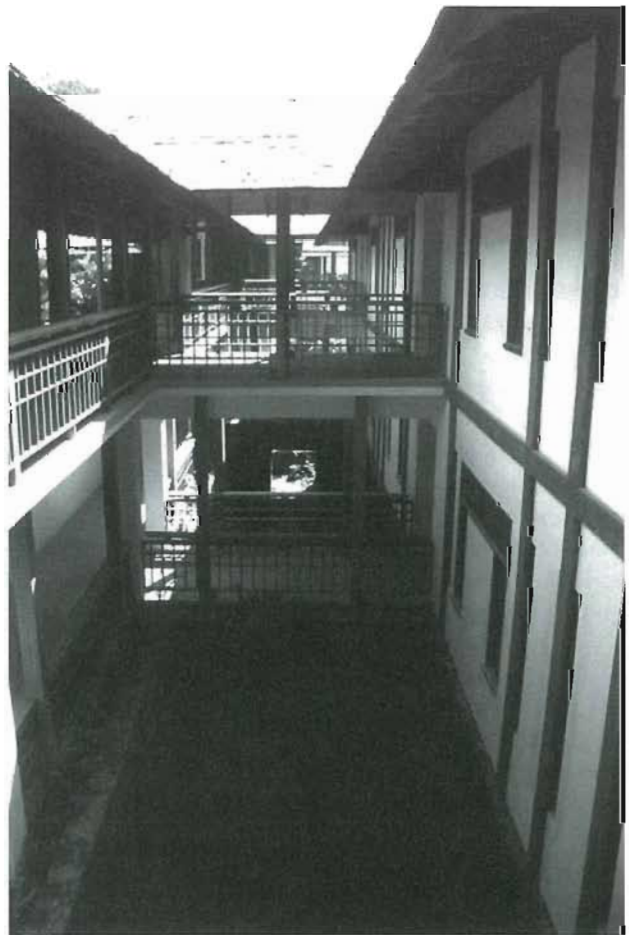
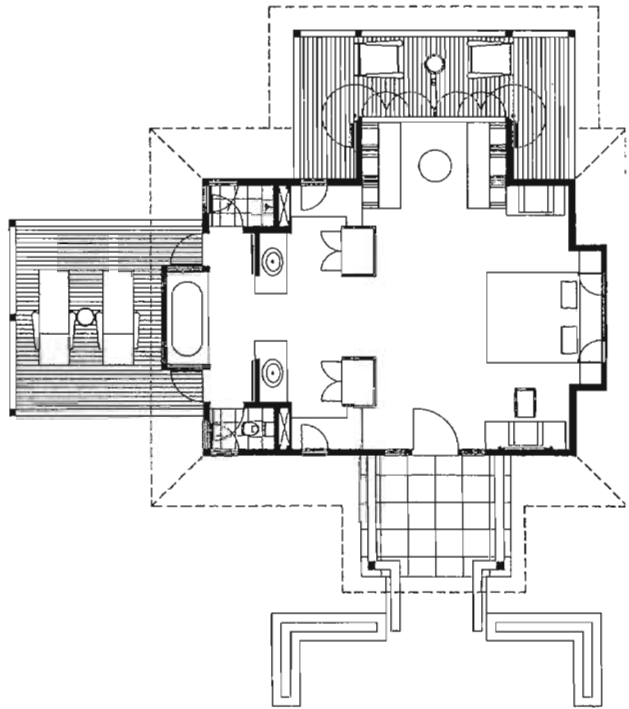
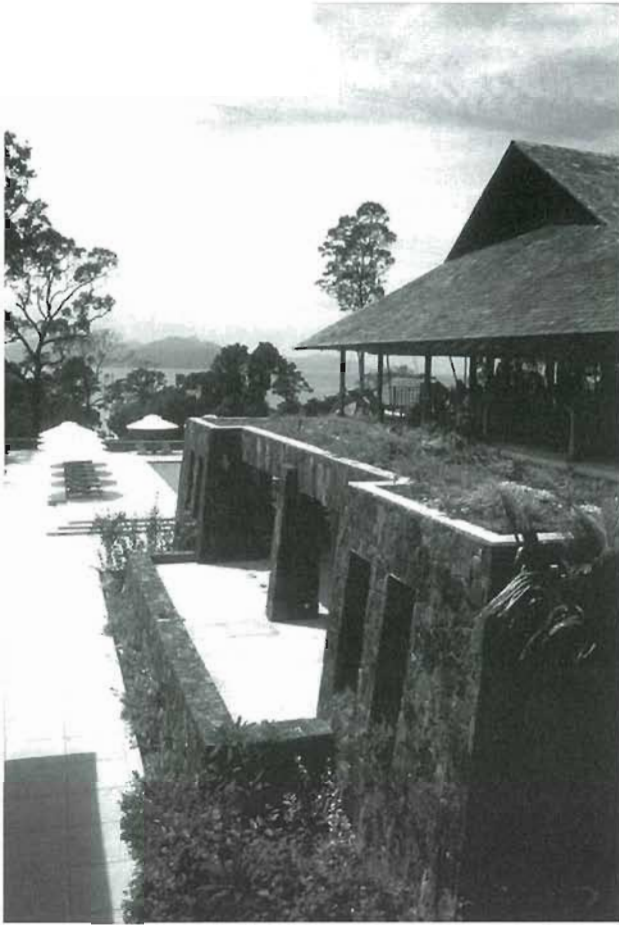


FIGURE 4. Section through the main public spaces of The Datai. Drawing courtesy of Kerry Hill Architects.



The architect himself attributes the grid patterns and *shoji* screen effect to studies of the Katsura Palace in Kyoto. The west wing, with balconies cantilevered from a base clad in rubble, is reminiscent of Tibetan and Nepalese architecture (FIG. 7). While ostensibly avoiding mimicry of the traditional Malay house forms, the resultant architecture thus has an uneasy air of eclecticism.

CASE STUDY 3: AMANDARI, BALI, INDONESIA

Based on the concept of the traditional Balinese village of walled compounds, Amandari's 27 pavilions are designed with great restraint and craft (FIG. 8). Architect Peter Muller took full advantage of the enchanting qualities of Bali in

FIGURE 5. (ABOVE) View of the lobby lounge. Photo by author.

FIGURE 6. (TOP RIGHT) Plan of a typical villa suite. Drawing courtesy of Kerry Hill Architects.

FIGURE 7. (BOTTOM RIGHT) View of the guest room wing. Photo by author.

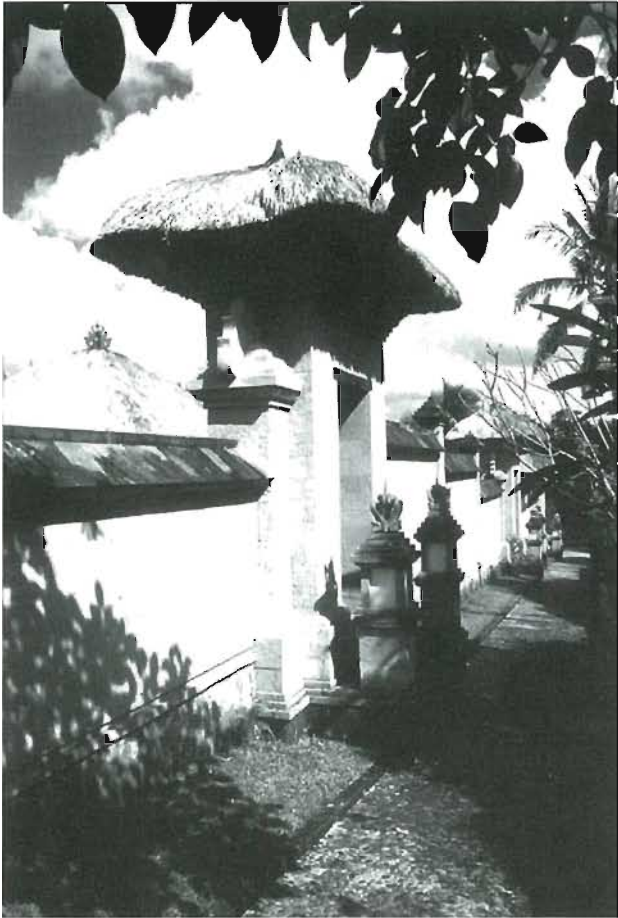


FIGURE 8. *Amandari's* design is based on the concept of the traditional Balinese village of courtyard compounds and wall-lined lanes. Photo by author.

conceiving the sybaritic haven of Amandari. Officially opened in December 1989, the intimate and low-key resort is located in the picturesque Sayan ridge, near the town of Ubud and away from the overcrowded tourist belt. This town on the southern flank of the central mountains of Bali has been a haven for visiting artists, writers and students of Balinese culture since the 1920s. In many ways Ubud resembles an extended village and is home to numerous talented musicians, dancers and wood carvers.

The resort's *raison d'être* is definitely its excellent setting, resting at 80 meters above the perennially lush Ayung River gorge. The special nature of the site deserves mention. During the fifth century, a great sage in India was supposedly asked by an angel to follow a ball of blue light to Bali. It landed at the gorge below the site at a great spring. Amandari thus means "Abode of Tranquillity" in Sanskrit. For the last 1,500 years villagers have visited this site in a massive procession every six months.

The design of Amandari is based on the traditional Balinese village of wall-lined lanes and intimate courtyards. Muller's

achievement is the creation of a tightly controlled sequence of indoor and outdoor spaces, related to the surviving vernacular but reinterpreted to suit the larger scale of a new program. The architect has laid out the pavilions brilliantly from the standpoint of the surrounding scale, and integrated them with the adjacent rice-terraced village of Kedewatan (FIG. 9).

Each pavilion has a living area of 100-150 sq.m., and each draws on tangible sources of Balinese culture (FIG. 10). The most obvious architectural theme is the rustic elemental style suggested by the pavilions' steeply pitched roofs. Each also has a thatched canopy with deep overhangs built in the Balinese tradition. Thus, tectonically, the overall pavilion design is a clear expression of material and construction, revealing the existence of a poetry of order.

In sixteen duplex pavilion suites, a spiral staircase leads to the bedroom above. All suites also feature a sunken outdoor bath enclosed by high walls, and two duplexes have their own private swimming pools. The furniture and fabrics are supplied by local firms and designed with great restraint by Australian Neville Marsh, while the sensitive integration of lush greenery with tectonic forms is the work of landscape architect Michael White.

In every respect Amandari is an affectionate personal ode to the enigmatic landscape of Bali. Deceptively simple, it is a beguiling piece of work. Muller has described it thus:

[Amandari] is honest architecture. Its integrity rests on the truth of its structure and materials. Nothing is fake. The construction technology is exactly what you see, extremely beautiful in its naturalness, its natural materials and human craftsmanship. . . . Amandari exemplifies the difference between the real and the false. So much is said about hotels being designed in local style using local craftsmanship, but generally speaking, what is being offered is just lip service to an intrinsic idea. Concrete structure is covered with fake skins of local "finishes." Thatch roofs, paper-thin, are laid on top of corrugated roofing surfaces. Interiors are wall-papered with tack-on imitations of real finishes. . . . Unwittingly, the deceiver is deceived.²⁹

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT MEANINGFUL ARCHITECTURE

Currently, buildings around the world are rarely produced by craftsmen, and traditional forms no longer represent how buildings are being constructed. Once, the logic of construction of traditional architecture was visually apparent to everyone: the architecture represented directly the materials used

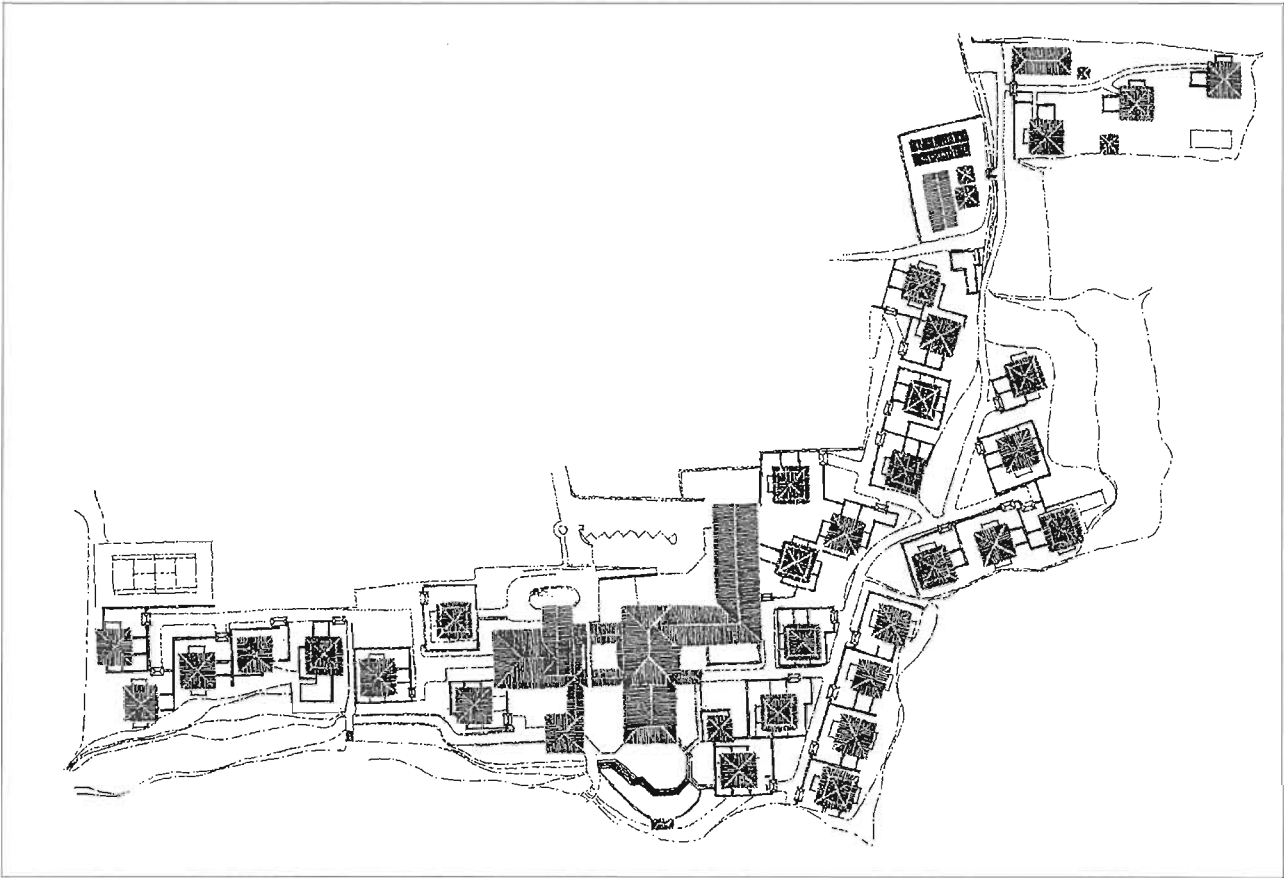


FIGURE 9. (TOP) Site plan of Amandari. Source: Tan Hock Beng, *Tropical Architecture and Interiors* (Singapore: Page One Publishing, 1994), p. 44.
 FIGURE 10. (BOTTOM) Interior view of the pavilion suite. Photo by author.

and the method of construction employed. But these “transparent” technologies are now being displaced by the evolution of material science. Quality now is not judged by the skill of fabrication, but more by the skill of installation. Workman-

ship is thus valued above craftsmanship, and figuration in architecture has come to have less to do with response to materials than with the associative attributes of particular shapes and forms.

However, craftsmanship is still highly evident in the projects in Phuket and Bali cited here due to the availability of a large pool of skilled craftsman. As such, both Amanpuri and Amandari achieve material authenticity through the logic of traditional construction. But, as pointed out earlier, the search for an authentic architecture must combine aspects of contemporary culture and traditions into works of significance, not just in the local cultural milieu, but in wider spatial and temporal contexts.

At Amandari, Amanpuri, and to a lesser extent at the Datai, even though they are exquisitely detailed works of architecture, the problem of authenticity has been addressed only by formal idealizations. It has not been tackled by opening the references of figuration to the multiple imperatives of contemporary culture. Such historicism can be avoided if the design has been based on the generating principles of the past rather than on acknowledged forms and symbols. The contin-

ued regeneration of traditional forms or hybrid versions of them, no matter how sensually or carefully crafted, can only result in the stagnation of the operational idea of tradition.

A true search for authenticity must thus be seen as a self-conscious commitment to uncover a particular tradition's unique response to place and climate, and thereafter exteriorize these formal and symbolic underpinnings into creative new forms through a designer's eye that is in touch with contemporary realities. Authenticity can perhaps best be viewed as the attainment of an integrated totality derived from a meaningful dialectical relationship between these different contexts.

Vernooy observes that "authenticity is an issue of perception and social consciousness that invokes technical, economic and cultural considerations. These are the imperatives of the modern world. They are the obligations that motivate the configuration of architecture, and they are the conceptual poles that direct the development of its technology."³⁰

The predicament cannot simply be assuaged by the re-presentation of the vernacular. The resultant work of such an activity will be image based and will merely aestheticize the landscape. The famous quotation from French historian Paul Ricoeur, in his essay "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," remains a challenge: "There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilisation and take part in universal civilisation. . . ."³¹

Meaningful directions in contemporary architecture in Southeast Asia can only evolve if there is a deeper understanding and protracted reevaluation of indigenous building traditions in an ever-expanding field of possibilities than is practiced at the moment. Architects must understand the fundamental lessons found in the rich local traditions of Southeast Asia, and learn to combine them into forms appropriate to changing conditions. With more luxurious resorts being designed in various parts of Southeast Asia, the discourse in this part of the world, which has been going on for more than a decade now, looks set to intensify and will hopefully bring about greater transformations.

REFERENCE NOTES

- Giddens, *Sociology: A Brief, But Critical Introduction* (1982), p.142.
- W. Schivelbusch, "Railroad Space And Railroad Time," *New German Critique* 14 (1978), p.40.
- D. MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).
- R. Reinhold, "'Private' Lanai is Private No More," *New York Times*, June 3, 1990.
- Y. Wong, "Sunny Scenario?" *Asia Travel Trade* (Sept. 1990) Interasia Publications, Ltd., Singapore, p.43.
- K. Harries, "Representation and Re-Presentation in Architecture," in *VIA No.9*. The Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania, 1988, p.18.
- M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p.15.
- As cited in D. Harvey, *The Condition of Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), p.10.
- Ibid.*, p.20.
- P.L. Berger, B. Berger, and H. Kellner, *The Homeless Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.88.
- K. Frampton, "The Status of Man and the Status of His Objects," in *Modern Architecture and the Critical Present* (London: Garden House Press, 1982), pp.6-19.
- R. Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* (London: Methuen London, 1987), p.135.
- MacCannell, *The Tourist*.
- E. Cohen, "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism," in *Annals of Tourism Research* 15 (1988), pp.371-86.
- Ibid.*
- H.-U. Khan, "Houses: A Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity," *MIMAR: Architecture in Development* 39 (June 1991), p.28.
- U. Eco, *Travels in Hyper-Reality* (London: Picador, 1987), pp.3-58.
- f. Chambets, "Maps for the Metropolis: A Possible guide to the Postmodern," *Cultural Studies*.
- M. Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture* (New York: Hatper & Row, 1976), p.110.
- K. Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in H. Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.16-30.
- Webster's New International Dictionary*, Second ed., G. & C. Merriam Company, 1934, p.185.
- L. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), as quoted in Cohen, "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism."
- D.A. Vernooy, "Crisis of Figuration in Contemporary Architecture," *Center — The Final Decade*, Vol.7 (1992), p.95.
- Ibid.*, pp.102-3.
- I. Serageldin, "The Collective Message of

- the Award," in *Space For Freedom: The Search For Architectural Excellence in Muslim Societies* (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), p.58.
26. H.-B. Tan, *Tropical Architecture and Interiors*, (Singapore: Page One Publishing, 1994), pp.26-28.
27. E. Koh, "Universal Facets," *IQ-Interiors Quarterly* (March – May 1994), Shusse Publishing (S.E.A.) Pre. Ltd., Singapore, p.96.
28. T. Allison, "A World of your Own," *Asia Magazine*, Vol.32 No.1-17 (June 3-5, 1994) Asia Magazines Ltd., Hong Kong, p.22.
29. Perer Muller, in a private letter to the author describing his approach to the design of Amandari Resort, 1991.
30. Vernoooy, "Crisis of Figuration," p.99.
31. P. Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," in *History and Truth*, C. A. Kelbley, trans. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p.277.
-