



14. Seductive *Simplicity*

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In this house, modernist form and materiality fuse with organic elements and openness to create social and functional harmony.

Approaching this house in the east of Singapore, I am struck first by the tactility of the dusty grey, off-form concrete walls which define it, starting from the boundary wall and continuing upwards two-and-a-half storeys in a layered stratum of beton brut and hardwood-cladd walls. But beyond that, I am drawn to how the house's rigorous rectilinear structure has been softened by a drapery of creepers and bamboo screens used in their natural round form.

This juxtaposition of the bucolic and hard edges lends the house its unique character. It is recognisably a house designed by Aamer Taher, where nature is always the protagonist, weaving its way inwards through gardens, courtyards and planters. The key strategy for the house, he explains, is to maximise shade, natural light and cross-ventilation as passive measures for comfort and sustainability – basic tenets of tropical living, but more often than not overlooked. “We achieved this with a subtle, minimalist, almost Zen-like house,” says Aamer.

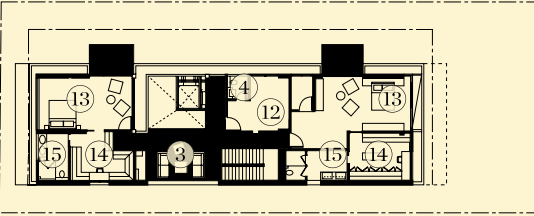
Indeed, the building emanates calm. An extremely open concept with strategies maximising greenery, natural light and wind certainly contributes to this. And using materials such as timber and concrete in their ‘natural’ state further reduces visual bustle.

Aamer's contemporary design replaces a previous Balinese-style house that the owner, who lives here with his wife, son and daughter-in-law, had built ten years back. More space for new and future family members was the impetus for the change, as was the desire for more entertainment space.

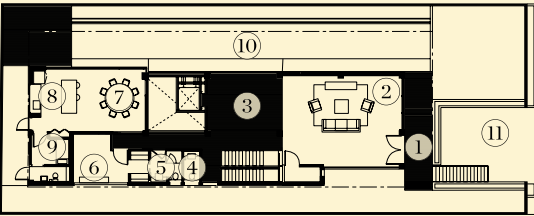
A new basement provides plenty of room for these purposes. It contains a bar, TV area, gym, spa, tearoom and steam room, all surrounding a sizeable courtyard that rises up to the roof, punctuated by a glass lift. Building regulations stipulating that the first storey (ground floor) be raised three metres above ground level to avert potential flooding meant that the basement is only partially sunken. This, coupled with plenty of light from skylights and the courtyard, results in a space that doesn't feel like a typical drab and dark basement.



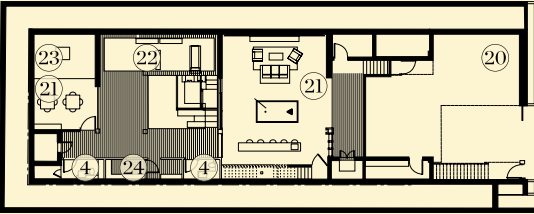
ATTIC



SECOND STOREY



FIRST STOREY



BASEMENT

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| ① TIMBERDECK/ENTRY | ⑨ SERVICE QUARTERS | ⑰ OUTDOOR TERRACE |
| ② LIVING ROOM | ⑩ POOL | ⑱ GARDEN |
| ③ COURTYARD | ⑪ DRIVE WAY | ⑲ STUDY ROOM |
| ④ POWDER ROOM | ⑫ KIDS ROOM | ⑳ GARAGE |
| ⑤ GUEST BATHROOM | ⑬ BEDROOM | ㉑ ENTERTAINMENT ROOM |
| ⑥ GUEST BEDROOM | ⑭ WALK-IN-ROBE | ㉒ GYM |
| ⑦ DINING | ⑮ ENSUITE | ㉓ TATAMI ROOM |
| ⑧ KITCHEN | ⑯ PRAYER ROOM | ㉔ STEAM ROOM |

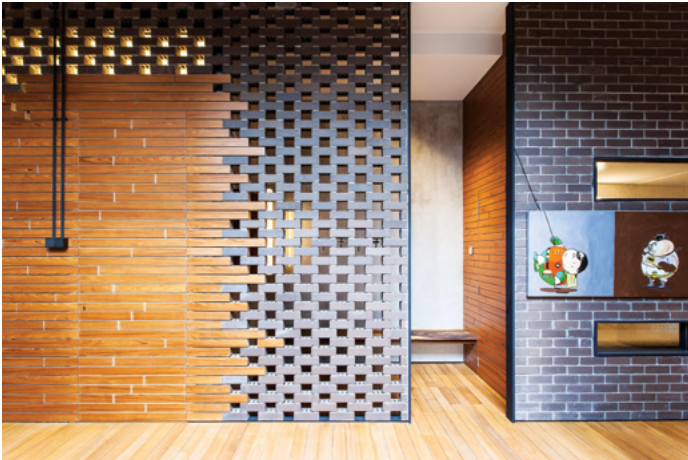
The courtyard, cutting through the heart of the plan, is the house's key datum allowing for both physical porosity and social connectivity between levels and rooms, and hence, among various family members on a daily basis, and guests on occasions. The first storey common spaces abut this breather of negative space, and on the second storey, it becomes an informal zone divider between the master and other bedrooms.

Creating an inward-looking layout is Aamer's strategy to granting the family privacy in a plot closely bound by neighbours, all except for the roof terrace that focuses outwards to the spectacular view of the Marina Bay city skyline. Taking advantage of this, Aamer introduced a lawn on the roof, which also cools the rooms below.

Throughout, full-height glass doors and windows promote the feeling of openness together with transparent and semi-opaque surfaces (cue the lift and glass-walled attic prayer room). At ground level, the swimming pool running the length of the house offers visual tranquility. Deep overhangs and bamboo screens provide sufficient shade for thermal comfort, as do the green roof and the plants. The owners point out that the house rarely feels hot, despite being so open.

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Branksome Road

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FINISHES
Cabinetry by Moment Design MFG.
Wardrobes and kitchen joinery by Artisan
Furnishing.

While the house ticks all the boxes in terms of function, it is anything but sterile. Aamer has thoughtfully crafted in details that prompt the senses to take notice: rough-hewn chunks of wood as steps leading to the lift; a wall in the basement that dissolves from interlocking fine hardwood into burnished clay bricks – small gaps in the brick patterning are an elegant solution to air the steam room within; suspended steel cables as staircase balustrades evoke a lightness of touch; a drawing of a Sakura tree by Aamer himself gracing the tea room wall that provides a personal touch.

As such, the house is imbued with a poetic sensibility elevating the mundane domesticity of house design to that of the level of art, where details slowly unveil themselves. Aamer’s christening of the house as ‘Seductive Simplicity’ is most apt.



aamertaher.com



ABOVE LEFT | A STAINLESS STEEL BAR MAKES FOR A STRONG STATEMENT. ABOVE RIGHT | THE LIVING AREA OPENS OUT TO THE POOL. BELOW RIGHT | IN THE BASEMENT IS A WALL WHERE BURNISHED CLAY BRICKS AND HARDWOOD PANELS PROVIDE TEXTURE AND A POINT OF INTEREST. BELOW LEFT | AT THE ATTIC LEVEL IS A TERRACE THAT ENJOYS VIEWS TO THE CITY, MAKING IT A PERFECT LOCATION FOR SOCIAL GATHERINGS.