

12

ABADI: SAFEGUARDING THE RICH FABRICS OF MALAY ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH A CEREMONIAL ENTRANCE OF IUM MALAY ENCLAVE

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a project on "ceremonial entrance" for the existing Malay Enclave, also called the Malay Heritage Living Lab, at International Islamic University Malaysia. The proposed project incorporates a lookout platform, an entrance archway, bridge guardrails, and landscape works. The main objective of this inventive design proposal is to elevate the Malay Heritage Living Lab, infusing it with captivating elements that are not only safeguarding the rich fabric of traditional Malay architectural heritage but also function as a guiding light to both local and international audiences. In essence, the design concept *Abadi*, stands as a testament to the legacy of bygone eras, offering an immersive experience that effortlessly intertwines the delicate strands of traditional Malay architecture and the quintessential elements inherent to a traditional village setting. To accomplish this vision, an elaborate and systematic approach was carefully developed. This entailed the selection of case studies, each dedicated to exploring a unique aspect of the proposed design: the structure, the passageway, and, importantly, the platform. Throughout this process, the research team explored extensively into the venture of identifying characteristics that delineate each design element. This encompassed a thorough examination of materials, installation techniques, and a thoughtful choice of hues, all of which were scrutinised with great attention to detail, tailored precisely to the context and specific needs of the project. As the project takes shape, it would be supported by a set of core conceptions that encapsulate its essence and goals, with *Rumah Kutai* (Kutai House) being particularly prominent context to the proposed project. The notion of *Abadi*, means eternal, everlasting, or immortal, would serve as guiding principles, ensuring that the design remains rooted in the Malay cultural origins and continues to respect and celebrate the vibrant heritage it strives to preserve and promote. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary undertaking promises to be an extraordinary blend of knowledge, creativity, and appreciation for Malay heritage in the contemporary context.

Keywords: Malay heritage, Malay architecture, Ceremonial Entrance, Rumah Kutai, Architectural Heritage, Malay Enclave, Design Project.
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INTRODUCTION

The architectural legacy of the Malay culture serves as a remarkable illustration of the captivating and diverse history of Southeast Asia. With its unique elements, including intricate wooden carvings, traditional building techniques, and a seamless integration with the surrounding natural environment, Malay architecture has gained worldwide acclaim and appreciation. This architectural heritage not only showcases the aesthetic preferences of its people but also encapsulates their deep bond with nature, community, and spirituality. Nevertheless, in a period defined by swift urban expansion, advancement, and worldwide integration, the physical and non-physical aspects of the Malay architectural legacy confront unparalleled obstacles. Consequently, safeguarding and conserving these valued cultural assets have become exceedingly important, calling for inclusive strategies to ensure the protection of architectural history.

The Malay Enclave showcases the remarkable synthesis between modern architectural ingenuity and the timeless essence of history. With a deep belief in the power of built environments to bridge generations, this laboratory epitomises the mastery of adaptive transformation and serves as a melting pot for architectural approaches that seamlessly integrate heritage and contemporary sensibilities. Nevertheless, the Malay enclave is still lacking a ceremonial entrance, where an introduction to *Abadi* could be highlighted to ensure the continuance of the Malay rich fabrics of architectural heritage.

DESIGN VISION

Abadi responds to a critical juncture of safeguarding the Malay architectural heritage, where the survival of Malay legacy in built environment is threatened by interconnected challenges of modernisation, which include functionality and simplicity. To remain relevant in the modern built environment, adaptation to modernisation is required in the design of the physical environment with Malay heritage characteristics.

These challenges lead to the formulation of design objectives: to elevate the Malay Enclave, infusing it with captivating elements that not only safeguard the rich fabric of traditional Malay architectural heritage but also function as a guiding light to both local and international audiences. To achieve the objectives, first, a systematic research approach is undertaken to identify the characteristics of the Malay architectural heritage, with an emphasis on design form. All aspects are scrutinised with great attention to detail, via case and precedent studies, tailored to the context and specific needs of the project. Second, exploration of design is conducted with careful consideration of the fundamental essence of the Malay enclave. These efforts consequently empower the Malay enclave with its multifaceted role as both a guardian of the past and a source of inspiration for the future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodological approach was used to achieve an understanding and effective incorporation of Malay heritage architectural elements into the current design project. This approach combines assimilation of case studies and precedent studies, forming a content analysis that underpins the design process. These two analytical approaches work together to guide the genesis and development of the design. Their combined usefulness allows for a multifaceted approach to design analysis and synthesis. In addition, the analytical exploration in this design research focuses on the scope of architectural form, encompassing a thorough investigation into the fundamental design form that make up the essence of Malay heritage architecture.

Case Studies

The utilisation of case studies involves a thorough and systematic examination of exemplary architectural works from the realm of Malay heritage architecture. These carefully chosen case studies serve as the basis for deconstructing and reconstructing the subsequent design. The purpose is to unveil and distill the essential elements and design principles that define traditional Malay architectural expressions.

Precedent Studies

In conjunction with the case studies, precedent studies further enhance the analytical scope. Precedent studies encompass a wider range of architectural typologies, not limited to just Malay heritage architecture. These studies incorporate a comparative aspect, providing a dynamic framework for evaluating the functionality, adaptability, and contextual relevance of design elements derived from the case studies. By identifying shared characteristics and differences between the selected precedents and the specific design context, the basis for design ideation is established.

Analysis of Design Forms

The examination of design elements involves a meticulous exploration of architectural motifs, spatial arrangements, and aesthetic principles that form the basis of Malay heritage architecture. This analysis aims to unravel the complex relationship between form and function, shedding light on the practical use of design elements to create spaces that reflect cultural significance.

Analysis of Ornaments

Ornaments are essential, as one of the major elements in Malay traditional architecture. Ornaments reflect the understanding of integration between functionalism and aesthetics. They represent the uniqueness and beauty of Malay symbols, arts, and philosophy. These decorative elements are designed to signify the characteristics of traditional Malay houses. Figure 1 shows examples of wood-carved ornaments, normally used to decorate the facades of the Malay heritage architecture.



Figure 1: Examples of wood-carved ornaments

PRECEDENT AND CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1

The Korean Folk Village was the first open-air museum constructed in South Korea. Construction of the Korean Folk Village began as a way to preserve traditional Korean culture and customs, including traditional Korean architecture, food, and clothing in response to the rapid westernisation and industrialisation of Korea during the 1960s (In-Jae, 2018). Nestled in the forests of Yongin, a suburb about an hour south of Seoul, Korean Folk Village is a collection of over two hundred Korean traditional homes and other structures, either restored or relocated from other parts of the country. Founded in 1974, the village was a response to Korea's rapid modernisation of the 1960s, a time when not only much of Korea's architectural heritage was being lost to the wrecking ball, but also traditional lifestyles were giving way to newer forms of living.

The fundamental idea behind the Korean Folk Village is similar to the Malay Enclave, focusing on the preservation of the local cultural and architectural heritage, as well as promoting educational activities. Figure 2 shows a view of the Korean Folk Village, and Figure 3 shows a cultural activity carried on in the Korean Folk Village. With a similar notion of safeguarding the architectural heritage, the Malay Enclave also holds cultural activities (KAED, IIUM, 2019), as shown in Figure 4. Meanwhile, the vibrant vibe of the Malay Enclave is prominently presented by the existence of Rumah Kutai, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 2: A view of the Korean Folk Village (Service, 2023)



Figure 3: A cultural activity carried on in the Korean Folk Village (Service, 2023)



Figure 4: An activity carried on in Rumah Kutai (KAED, IIUM, 2019)



Figure 5: A view of the Rumah Kutai at the Malay Enclave (KAED, IIUM, 2019)

PRECEDENT STUDIES

Istana Seri Menanti

The diversity presented in Malay architecture extends beyond the various types of traditional houses found in different states of Malaysia. It is also evident in the architectural design of Traditional Malay Royal Palaces, which are known for their grandiosity and historical importance (Zainal Abidin, et. al., 2017a). These palaces serve as monumental structures that represent the opulence, heritage, customs, and architectural prowess of Malay culture. Each palace possesses unique architectural features that highlight the regional identities and distinctive characteristics of vernacular architecture (Zainal Abidin, et. al., 2017b). The timber palaces particularly symbolise traditional Malay houses, further emphasising this architectural wealth.

Taking the above factors into account, the researchers recognise the significance of conducting an extensive study on one specific royal palace, the *Istana Seri Menanti* (Seri Menanti Palace). This investigation aims to explore the palace's distinctive architectural attributes and its historical importance, with the ultimate goal of incorporating these unique elements into the project's overarching design. By doing so, the team not only aimed to honour the palace's architectural legacy but also infuse the project with a sense of continuity and authenticity, thus celebrating the profound architectural diversity that underlies Malay heritage.

The palace, which was designed to be symmetrical throughout, is another unique factor that separates it from other timber palaces in Malaysia. The verticality of the palace's image provides a grand architectural which can be seen from afar and differentiates itself from any other traditional Malay royal palace. Figure 6 shows the front façade of the *Istana Seri Menanti*, showing the elements of a *grave-marker*, a hilt of *Tajung kris* and a top-window ventilation panel (Unknown, 2014).



Figure 6: The front façade of Istana Seri Menanti, showing the elements of a grave-marker, a hilt of Tajung Kris and a top-window ventilation panel (Said, 2005)

FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

Potential Design Adaptation

The precedent study of *Istana Seri Menanti* has had a significant impact on the venture to design the Archway project. The idea involves dividing the palace form into two distinct sections, each carrying specific symbolic meanings. The upper part of the ceremonial entrance represents an elevated platform, while the lower part signifies a gateway and archway. This deliberate separation serves a dual purpose of the entrance design framework. Firstly, it provides a strong visual coherence to the design. By aligning the entrance form with the architectural style of *Istana Seri Menanti*, a sense of visual continuity is created, where the front view connects the three main components of the proposed design: the platform, the gateway, and the archway. Secondly, this alignment emphasises the strong conceptual connection between the three components. The whole design composition highlights interdependence of components and showcases their intrinsic relationship within the design.

The ceremonial entrance covers a pathway, visually and symbolically linking these components and reinforcing the overarching architectural narrative. Essentially, by incorporating *Istana Seri Menanti's* front facade as a foundational reference point in the proposed design, the entrance design merges historical inspiration with contemporary innovation. The produced amalgamation pays tribute to the architectural heritage of the palace but also enhances the visual harmony and conceptual synergy of the four primary elements of the design, ultimately contributing to a balanced and meaningful architectural composition. Table 1 shows some major design elements of *Istana Sri Menanti* that would be adapted into the proposed design of the Malay Enclave entrance.

Table 1: Adapted design elements

DESIGN ELEMENT	Istana Seri Menanti (Said, 2005)	Abadi: The Ceremonial Entrance
Overall Design Form		
Two-tiered roof		
Ornaments		
Facade		

Gate Metaphor and Symbolism

A gate is an important building element for the host of a building complex to control the entry and exit to the area. According to *Adiguru* (great artisan) of Malaysian Carving, Norhaiza Nordin, the gate is a metaphor for the anatomy of the human body from the head, body to the feet (Shaifuddin, et. al., 2021). Thus, building a gate is seen as a human being standing upright as if a protector or guard in front of a residence or a palace.

According to Nakula (1985) in his book *Warisan Kelantan IV*, the gate represents the final boundary between the domestic sphere and the outside world. In the pursuit of knowledge and life experience, members of the household pass through this threshold, whether to work, travel, or learn, gaining what he describes as "inner chest" wisdom. This experience is then expressed and symbolised through the decorative elements found on the gate. Nakula explains that these carvings serve as visual embodiments of this acquired knowledge. As such, gates are often adorned vividly with bright colors, rich materials such as gold leaf, gold paint, iron, and copper, and intricate carvings. He further asserts that the gate symbolises the divine knowledge of Allah S.W.T. that is present in the natural world.

The surviving gates today often feature intricate floral motifs and calligraphic inscriptions of Quranic verses. These elements serve not only a decorative purpose but also reflect the spirit and identity of the owner or palace, functioning both as a form of security and as a symbolic "receptionist" welcoming visitors. The overall design reflects a strong alignment with the principles of Islamic art. However, classical motifs are also present, including stupas, mountains, plants, and mythical figures in the Kala style. Commonly used plant motifs include lotus flowers, bamboo shoots, wings, bean tendrils, and spinach leaves (Rashid, 2021). Figure 7 shows example of numerous gates design, found in the Malay Archipelago.



Figure 7: Various gates design, found in Kelantan, Malaysia (PPS, 2016).

DESIGN IDEATION

The primary goal of this architectural design endeavour centres around the profound objective of evoking a powerful sense of 'remembrance.' This desire is achieved through the creation of a meticulously designed environment that acts as a bridge, connecting history with the present. This ambitious aim is realized through a carefully orchestrated fusion, where traditional Malay architectural elements seamlessly blend with a cozy and nostalgic atmosphere reminiscent of a village setting.

The ultimate intention is to extend an invitation to everyone, compelling them to embark on a journey that allows them to enjoy the pleasure of nostalgic reminiscence, similar to stepping back in time, while also savouring the modern conveniences of our contemporary world. At its essence, the concept of *Abadi* strives to construct an environment where the boundaries of the past, present, and future seamlessly intertwine, forming a harmonious and continuous whole. Within this thoughtfully cultivated setting, users are immersed in an experience that transcends the confinement of time, offering a tapestry woven with the threads of historical heritage and contemporary significance.

This spirit is evident not just in the way the architecture is designed, but also in how it embraces and develops traditional architectural culture. It can be seen in the smooth shift from classic architectural forms and the continuation of centuries-old craftsmanship methods. Additionally, it encompasses the practical and wise utilisation of traditional building systems that form the foundation of the design. By respecting these timeless traditions, architectural legacy is honoured and continuously progress to meet the changing needs of today and tomorrow. Figure 8 shows the front façade of the proposed Ceremonial Entrance, where adaptation of the Malay design elements are apparent.



Figure 8: The front facade of the Ceremonial Entrance

Promoting Tradition

A ceremonial entrance is an important introduction to a place, giving a nice impression to users, either the occupants or visitors, to a place. Function as a gate, it allows the hosts of a building complex to have a sense of control to their properties. For this proposed project, creating spaces that are educational, engaging, and culturally valuable is the main focus of this proposal. These spaces aim to serve as channels for the spread of education, active participation, and the development of a deep appreciation for the intrinsic value of Malay cultural and societal traditions. Careful thought and curation have gone into the design of these spaces to foster a collective commitment to preserving and celebrating the diverse tapestry of Malay heritage. The following are the envisioned channels of the project.

Significance in Education: At the core of this concept is the importance of providing educational opportunities that offer structured avenues for individuals to gain a profound understanding of the multifaceted aspects of Malay culture and society. These educational spaces act as fertile grounds for the cultivation of knowledge, allowing individuals to explore the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of Malay traditions. Such educational initiatives play a crucial role in nurturing an informed population capable of carrying forward the legacy of Malay heritage into the future. Figure 9 shows an illustration of a modern girl standing at the welcoming entrance of the Malay Enclave.



Figure 9: A perspective view of the entrance to the Malay Enclave, welcoming modern society to the area.

Captivating Environments: In addition to the educational aspect, the envisioned spaces are strategically crafted to create captivating environments. They are carefully curated to ignite enthusiasm and foster interaction among people, consequently fostering a vibrant and dynamic cultural community. These spaces possess the ability to stimulate dialogues, workshops, exhibitions, and various interactive platforms that inspire individuals to actively contribute to the preservation and promotion of Malay cultural traditions. Figure 10 shows a captivating environment, designed to ignite enthusiasm and foster interaction.



Figure 10: A captivation environment to ignite enthusiasm and foster interaction

Nurturing Cultural Significance: A primary objective of these spaces is to foster a deep sense of cultural significance and appreciation among individuals. By offering immersive experiences that encapsulate the richness of Malay traditions, these spaces empower participants to recognise the inherent value of their cultural heritage. The act of celebrating, venerating, and safeguarding Malay customs is undeniably connected to the cultivation of a profound sense of cultural identity and belonging. Figure 11 shows how the ceremonial entrance caters to cultural activity in the *serambi* (verandah) of the platform.



Figure 11: Cultural activities in the *serambi* of the platform

Conserving Heritage Through Exposure: One of the fundamental outcomes of these educational and immersive environments is the preservation and protection of diverse elements of Malaysian culture. By experiencing the rich activities and customs deeply rooted in Malay traditions, not only are they ensured to carry on, but the gradual erosion they face due to modernisation and globalisation is also mitigated. As a result, these spaces serve as dynamic reservoirs where Malaysian cultural heritage is not only safeguarded but also revitalised. To summarize, this concept emphasises the paramount importance of architecturally designed spaces that go beyond mere physical structures, but includes educational immersive, and culturally focused attributes. The spaces act as essential tools for perpetuating and celebrating Malay cultural and societal traditions, fostering an enduring appreciation and preservation of culture for future generations. Figure 12 shows how the Ceremonial Entrance also function as gathering area for visitors.



Figure 12: The platform of the Ceremonial Entrance functions as a gathering area.

CONCLUSION

The central premise of the concept, Abadi, lies in the deliberate integration of diverse architectural elements within a built environment. Such elements mainly focus on the architectural design form, supported with ornamental details and distinctive design motifs. Each component is purposefully selected or designed to fulfill a specific intention, whether to refer to a particular historical period, represent an architectural style, or embody cultural heritage. The proposed project also offers a dedicated space for the campus community and the general public to explore significant historical eras, architectural design traditions, and cultural heritage. The proposed Malay Enclave seeks to create an impression of timelessness while fostering a meaningful connection between the past and the present.

The proposed Malay enclave represents the modern exemplar of architectural styles of Malaysia and serves as a testament to the region's abundant history and cultural richness. Deftly crafted and in perfect harmony with nature, the design resonates universally, emphasising the deep connection between aesthetics, community, and spirituality. However, with the rapid pace of urban development and global influence, it is crucial to safeguard the heritage of Malay architecture. To tackle these challenges, inclusive approaches that strike a balance between modern necessities and historical conservation are essential. As we move ahead, it is vital to acknowledge that preserving this architectural legacy is not solely about safeguarding the past, but also about nurturing a profound comprehension of our shared heritage.

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