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INSTAGRAMABLE BACKDROP FOR KAED HERITAGE LIVING LAB

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the backdrop design features of Rumah Kutai, a living Malay heritage lab of Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED) for the university project. The objectives of the study are to identify the existing backdrop design elements for the project references and to formulate the appropriate backdrop design that applies to the context. The rapid development of information technology nowadays and the domination of the internet as the medium to the contemporary human activities are the factors in the transformation of this heritage living lab into an 'instagramable architectural' place. Methodologically, three case studies were selected based on different purposes; as a signage and landmark of a place, a monument of a place, and a public gathering space. The attributes of the design elements, materials, techniques of installation and colour selection were studied with respect to the contextual issues and requirements.

Keywords: *Instagramable, Rumah Kutai, IIUM logo*
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Figure 1: Plot 1 – Aerial view of the whole site of Rumah Kutai project.

INTRODUCTION

Backdrop design of Rumah Kutai is a unique university project where the site (Figure 1) becomes a living lab of Malay heritage as well as a public attraction to many prestigious events of the university. As the university embraces the establishment, there arises a question of how the backdrop would be able to portray the identity of the faculty, Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED), reflects the university's mission and vision, responds to the site context itself, and importantly is 'architecturally instagramable'. According to Hammouda, Mansour & Kamel (2019), 'instagramable' architecture refers to the alteration of a building's meaning into tangible and intangible branding elements of prominent symbolic values or markers of the cities. Hence, enhancement of its existing architectural elements such as having a backdrop for this Rumah Kutai is also a work of marking the university and its local identity.

Historically, backdrop was used as an artistic scene for entertainment such as at the theatre and studio. For decades, its function has been revolutionized to various context and purposes, including for outdoors. Nowadays, a backdrop is frequently used to highlight a location or event outstandingly to the viewers based on the theme or objective of the event. In terms of design, as found in many commercial projects such as backdrop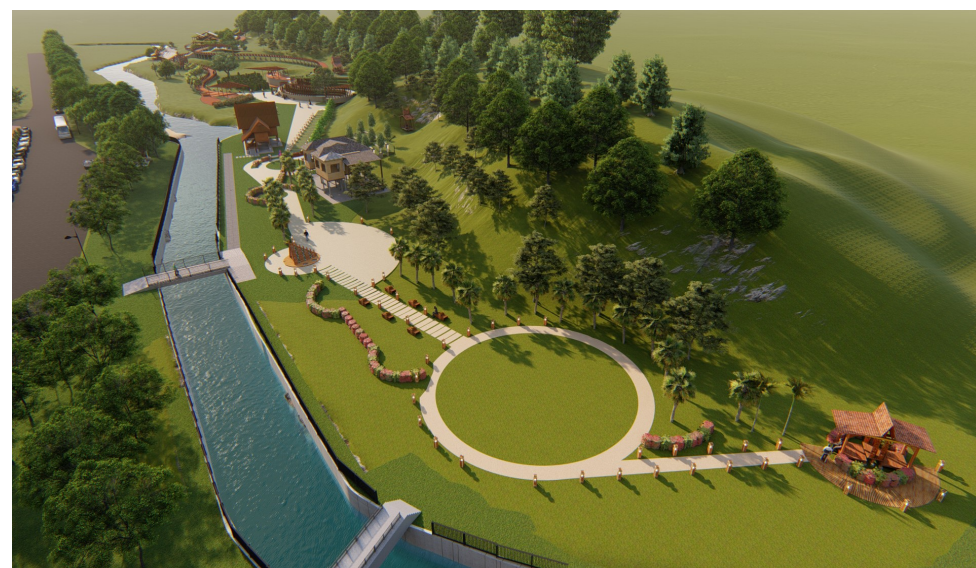 at the hotel lobby (Figure 2) and many fine restaurant, the design is more innovative in many ways such as in its presentations, materials and technology used. Moreover, the design can be found in 3D, backlit and lighted with new materials used such as acrylics, LED lighting, moulded plastic, which are similarly found in signage designs. Although there are hundreds of design resources available in the market that could serves as references to the project, the Rumah Kutai backdrop design should be inline to the context and cost-effective. Hence, this study intends to identify a suitable design for the project based on various attributes from selected backdrop designs.

Figure 2: Example of backdrop design at the lobby of Alila Solo Hotel, Indonesia.

ISSUE

Several site issues need to be address at the first phase of design. The site has a hilly background and the placement of the Rumah Kutai itself limits the potential location for the backdrop. Consequently, the location affects the 'instagramable' angles for the visitors. The site in its current state is not at the most developed area and requires an attractive design to beckon more visitors to the site.

POTENTIAL

The Rumah Kutai's backdrop has the potential to become a landmark and attraction to the university's population as well as to the surrounding society with its 'instagramable architecture' element. The project also promotes the Malay heritage as reflected in the identity of the faculty/kulliyyah.

METHOD / PROCEDURE

This project adapted content analysis approach where three (3) case studies of backdrop designs in the market are studied (refer to Figure 3 to Figure 5). Attributes reviewed in this case studies are;

- Functionality
- Material
- Techniques/installation
- Design element
- Colours

PROJECT FINDINGS

The line-up study of existing backdrop designs revealed that most of the backdrops have multipurpose features, such as, as a signage and landmark of other structures, as a monument, and as a gathering area with ergonomic design sitting. The study also found that in all case studies, the text is used to define the building or space as it is a convenient way for a silent communication. Table 1 of the comparative study below is the evaluation of the case studies of backdrop designs in terms of its design style, sustainability and costing.

Table 1: Summary of findings on case studies.

ATTRI-BUTES	CASE STUDY 1	CASE STUDY 2	CASE STUDY 3	REMARKS
Design Elements	Geometrical patterns	Floral pattern	Letters	Letters give a bolder look than intricate patterns.

ATTRI-BUTES	CASE STUDY 1	CASE STUDY 2	CASE STUDY 3	REMARKS
Material	Steel plates	Steel plates	Acrylics & LED lights	Steel plates are more lasting but expensive LED requires future maintenance & cost
Colour	White	White	Colourful	Colour should be in contrast to the background
Installation / Techniques	Laser-cut, welding & spraypaint	Laser-cut, welding & spraypaint	Cutting, bending, glue, screw, LED wiring	Minimal installation & maintenance.
Function	Monument of the event & public gathering	Signage / landmark	Signage / landmark, monument & sitting	Multipurpose design is preferred.

For the proposed site, the green design would best in adapting to the site context. Several principles were first drawn from the university's reflection of the masterplan concept in conceptualising the backdrop design, as explained in the Schematic diagram. Findings from the case studies were used to guide the selection of patterns, materials and functions for the backdrop design.

The repetitive geometric design in the design proposal symbolises the equality of Islam to Mankind regardless of their background and differences. In Islam, faith or Iman in Allah/God is the utmost importance. The repeated pattern creates uniformity and unity in the submission to Allah. The hollow and framed lettering with geometries designs, on the other hand, represents a symbiosis between the symbolism of Islam and the Malay culture. The complexity of the proposed design is balanced by a flat surface placed as footing also served as the structure that symbolises the foundation of faith or Aqidah, knowledge and Iman of a Muslim. The identity of the kulliyyah was also adapted in the backdrop design in KAED's abbreviation as well as KAED's corporate purple colour.
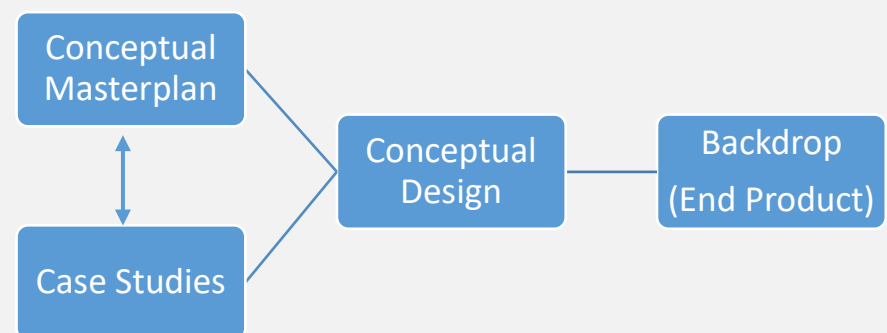
SCHEMATIC

Figure 3: Schematic Design

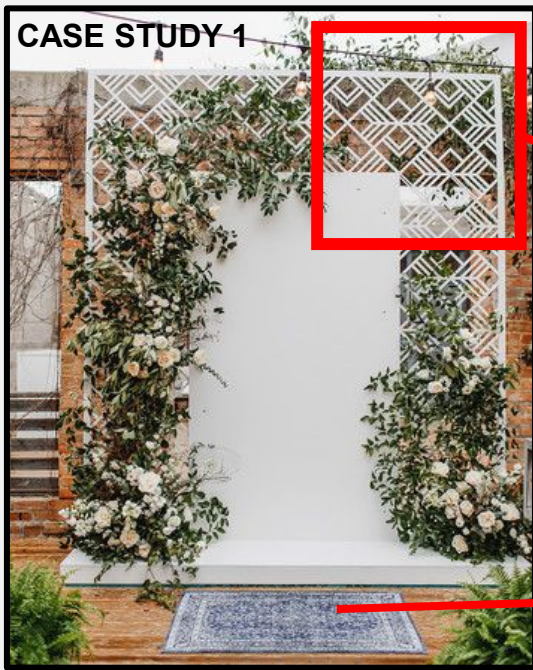## CASE STUDIES:

CASE STUDY 1

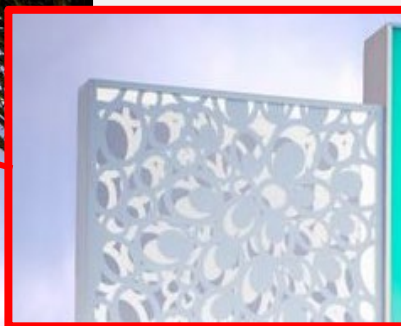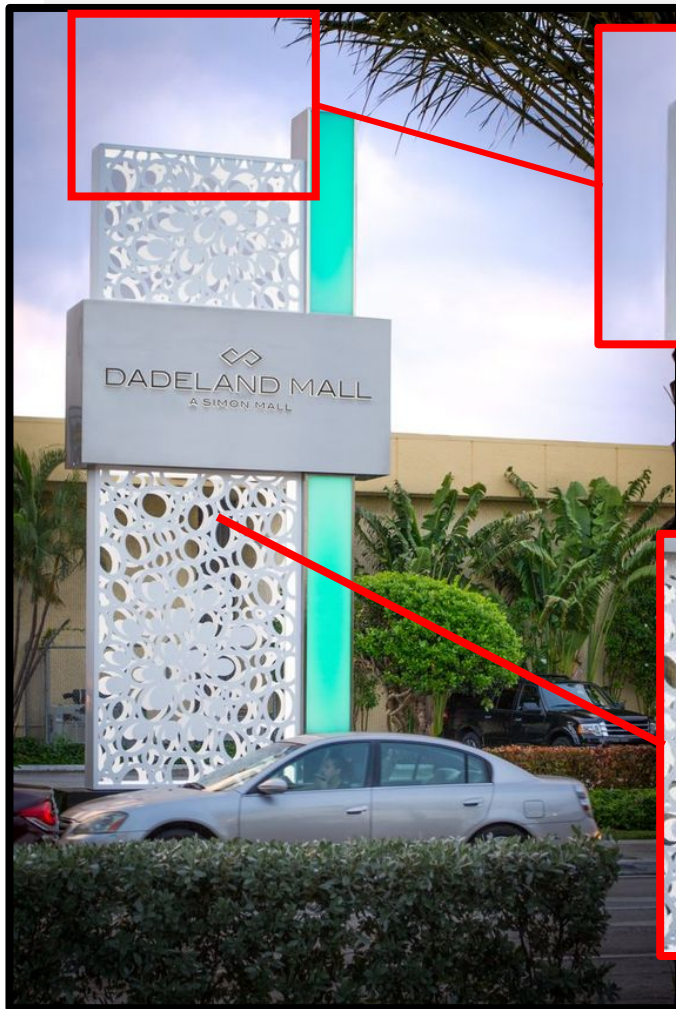Figure 4: Example of an event's photo booth (Source: Shira Savada, 2020)

Material: Steel
Technique: Laser cut
Pattern: Line/ geometric

Colour combination:
White and green

Base to support the backdrop.
May also use as a stage

Figure 6: Colorful landmark signage in letterings in Toronto (Source: Peggy, 2018)

CASE STUDY 2

Material: Steel
Technique: Laser cut
Pattern: Floral

Colour combination:
White and light turquoise

Figure 5: Example of floral motifs used on the Dadeland Mall's signage (Source: 505design.com, 2020)

CASE STUDY 3

Metal plate cut and shaped to the word of Toronto
The horizontal base to stand the form.
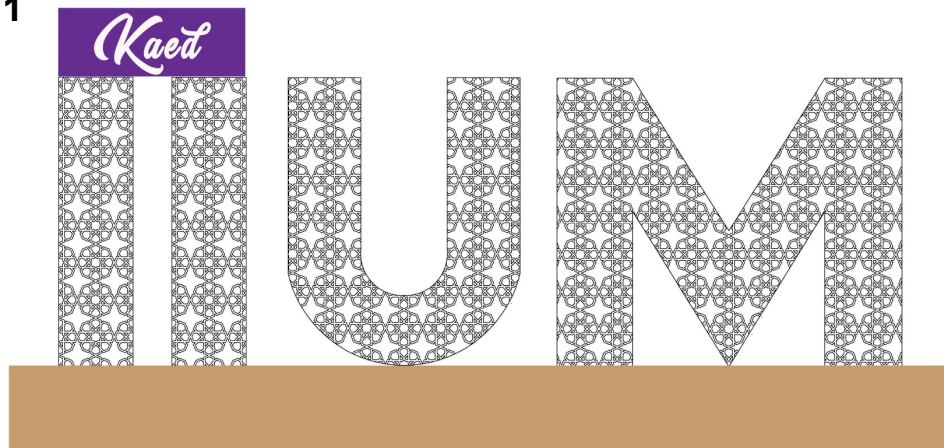The base is also used as a seating place.

Lights to enable the signage being seen at night.
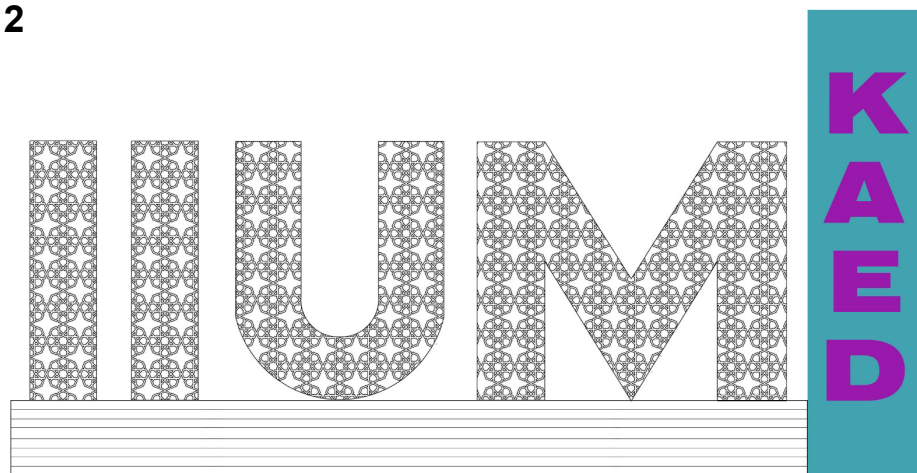To increase the aesthetics value of the design.

The colourful lights during the night attract more visitors to the site for photo shoots.
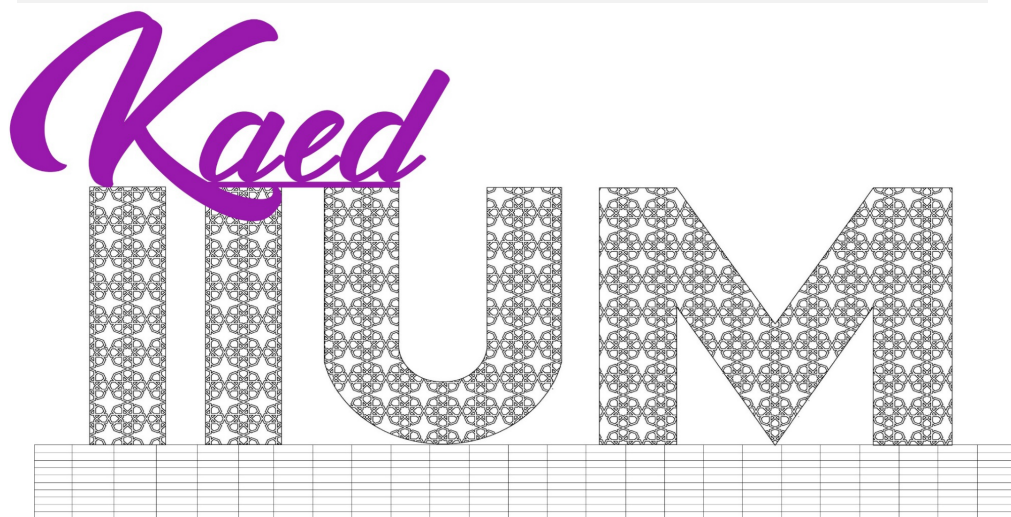
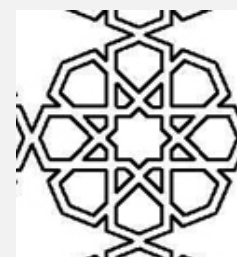## DESIGN PROPOSALS

1

2

3

4

FINALISED

Pattern: 8-pointed octagonal star or 'Islamic' geometric pattern- forms the 8 folded rosette pattern
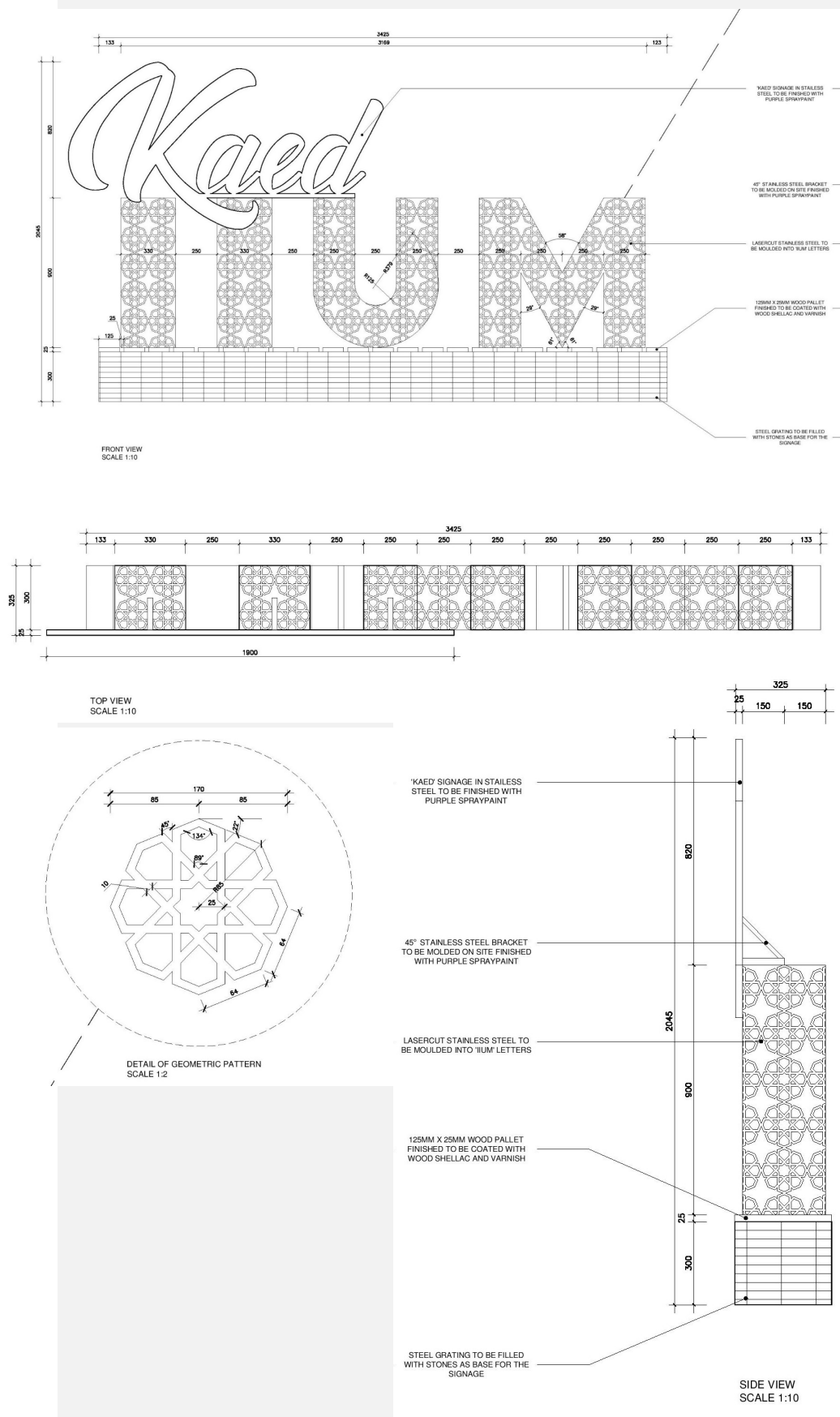
To represent the pattern of IIUM logo

The base is designed as a seating area (for the photoshoot session) Material: Gabion and concrete

Material: Stainless steel
Technique: Laser cut

DETAILS – WORKING DRAWING

FRONT VIEW
SCALE 1:10

'KAED' SIGNAGE IN STAILESS
STEEL TO BE FINISHED WITH
PURPLE SPRAYPAINT

45° STAINLESS STEEL BRACKET
TO BE MOLDED ON SITE FINISHED
WITH PURPLE SPRAYPAINT

LASERCUT STAINLESS STEEL TO
BE MOULDED INTO 'IIUM' LETTERS

125MM X 25MM WOOD PALLET
FINISHED TO BE COATED WITH
WOOD SHELLAC AND VARNISH

STEEL GRATING TO BE FILLED
WITH STONES AS BASE FOR THE
SIGNAGE

TOP VIEW
SCALE 1:10

DETAIL OF GEOMETRIC PATTERN
SCALE 1:2

'KAED' SIGNAGE IN STAILESS
STEEL TO BE FINISHED WITH
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45° STAINLESS STEEL BRACKET
TO BE MOLDED ON SITE FINISHED
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LASERCUT STAINLESS STEEL TO
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125MM X 25MM WOOD PALLET
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STEEL GRATING TO BE FILLED
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SIGNAGE

SIDE VIEW
SCALE 1:10

ERGONOMICS, PROPOSED FUNCTION AND LOCATION

Figure 7: Landmark at the site

The dimensions of the structure is proposed to be in 2 meters high and 3.4 meters wide. The size makes the backdrop moderately bold and noticeable from its surrounding context as the focal point of the area. The location of the backdrop is in between the Rumah Kutai and the proposed Rumah Pak Ali, as this location provides good angle for the photoshoot of each houses at one time. The size of the backdrop was determined after simulation of various heights and adjustments were made in the SketchUp software. In the test, a camera was placed at the average human visual height. The views were captured and the best angle determined the specific dimension for the backdrop.

Figure 8: View simulation for view to the hill side.

MATERIALS SELECTION

Selection of materials defines the overall probability as well as the practicality of achieving the criteria mentioned previously in the design principles of the concept chosen. To attain such quality, a frame that is made of wire mesh is filled with medium size rocks and stones to cover the gaps. The use of wire mesh is to allow the rocks and stones to be seen visually by the user or visitors who passes by the area. As this will become the base for the backdrop, such materials are selected as they bind between nature and man-made elements, and grass or vines could grow around it. Stones are chosen as they can be stacked, while still allowing water to flow through it, and this maintains its correlation to nature.

Proceeding further, for the structure of the 'Islamic' geometric pattern that forms the word IIUM, steel is chosen due to its malleability and strength characteristics to carry out the function of appearance as well as reflects itself as the framing structure. In detail, stainless steel is recommended as it could accommodate the environment of the proposed site, with a long-term capability in terms of being exposed to the rain and sun daily. To maintain the structure, it is also recommended that the wire mesh be coated with white paint—symbolising Islam as the purity embracing nature - the green. The structure will be freestanding thus some inner framing system is required to add support.
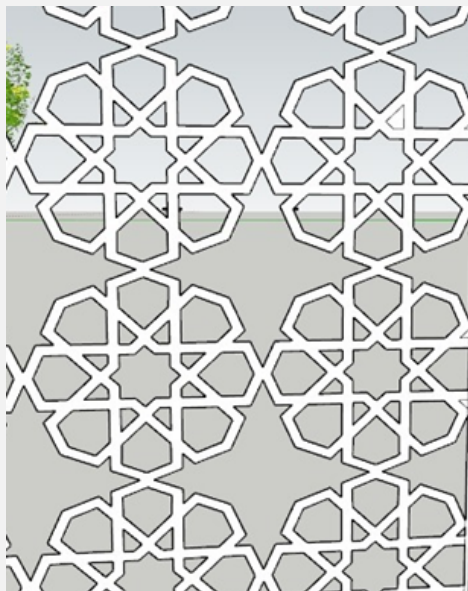

Figure 9: 'Islamic' Geometric Pattern

The last part of the backdrop Nyatoh timber is used. Nyatoh timber is a natural material which is not just aesthetically pleasing, but more importantly could sustain in the Malaysian weather. For this purpose, the timber will be painted glossy purple according to the proposed design. This pain will also extend the lifespan of the timber and thus able to avoid it to being replaced in a short term.

PROTOTYPE – REPRESENTATIVE MODEL

MASTERPLAN
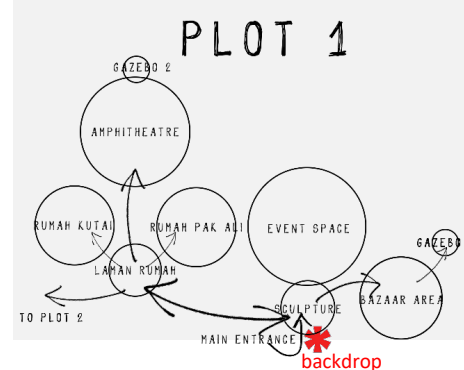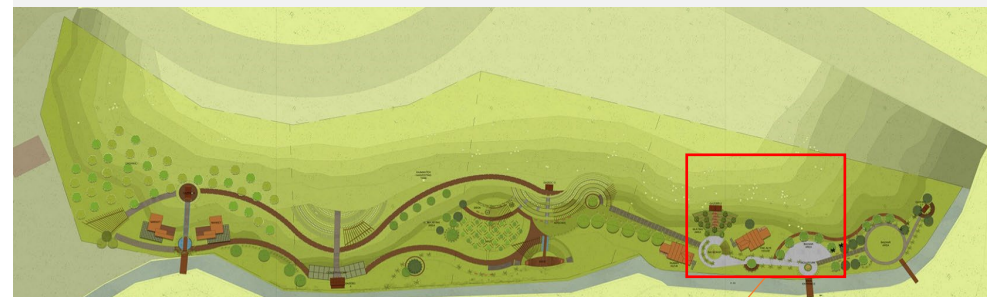
CONCLUSION

Backdrop design is seen as a multifunctional structure that plays an essential role in making Rumah Kutai as a Malay heritage living lab within the IIUM campus to the Gombak society and nationwide. The rapid development of information technology and the domination of the internet as the medium of networking in the contemporary human activities are the factors of the transformation of this heritage living lab into an 'instagramable architectural' place. It is the right move at the right time for the institution to makes the site as an attraction and at the same time, promote Islamic values intrinsic within the Malay heritage values into the next level accordingly. The project exposed students to tangible and intangible design attributes on-site and trends of new design requirements for backdrops worldwide.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks to all lecturers involved; Asst. Prof. Dr Mohamad Saiful Nizam Mohd Suhaimi, Asst. Prof. Dr Khairusy Syakirin Has-Yun Hashim, Prof. Dato' Sri Ar. Dr Asiah Abdul Rahim, Asst. Prof. Dr Zeenat Begam Yusof, Asst. Prof. Dr Aliyah Nur Zafirah Sanusi, Asst. Prof. Dr Ts. Arita Hanim Awang and Asst. Prof. Dr Nurlelawati Abd. Jalil for their guidance, understanding, patience and most importantly, they had provided positive encouragement and a warm spirit to complete the project. It has been a great pleasure and honour to have them as our coordinators.

Our special thanks to Sr. Anis Syazana Azizan, the designer of this photobooth backdrop and the technical team, Br. Ahmad Hareez Adlan Moha Asri, Sr. Nur Aini Nabihah Mohd Azman, Sr. Siti Noorliyana Juhari that contributed to the success of the design process. We offer special thanks to our surveyor team, Sr. Nurul Syazwanie Saifulnizam and Br. Khaizizi Amri Mizan that provide budget estimating and cost planning to control the cost of this project. We would sincerely like to thank our editor, Br. Muhammad Zulhilmi Mohd Zuki for his contribution in recording all the data and proceedings of this project. Lastly, we would also like to extend our thanks to all members of Lakar Studio team that were with us from inception to the successful completion of this project.

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