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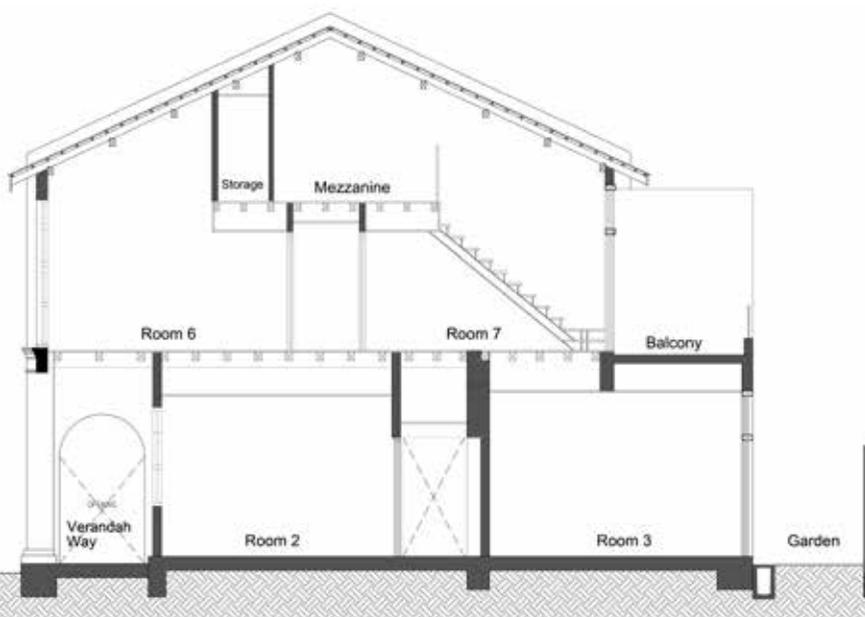
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The eight-room Spices Residence on Lumut Lane, off Lebuh Aceh or Acheen Street, is a new boutique hotel at the heart of George Town in Penang offering the quintessential shophouse homestay experience. The space is a combination of four units, restored and integrated, complete with existing brickwork and a gnarly old Bodhi tree.

The original shophouses, at nos 3, 5, 7 and 9 Lumut Lane, were of very different styles. Two were in the Penang-style typology, likely of the early 1790s to 1850s, at the time when Acheen Street was first developed, while the other two were of the 'Straits Eclectic style' with ornamentations and characteristics evident of European culture, which would have been built between 1890s and 1910s. Incidentally, the rear elevation of Spices is aligned with the compound wall of Acheen Street Mosque.

Acheen Street was once the centre of Islamic studies in Pulau Pinang and a thriving Muslim Settlement frequented by traders from the surrounding Malay Archipelago, Arab and India, and was once referred to as the Second Jeddah, as pilgrims from nearby congregate here before departing to Mecca by sea. As Haj season began, Acheen Street would be thronged with pilgrims and their families. However, all this ended with the establishment of the Lembaga Tabung Haji in the 1970s.

Meanwhile, as an offshoot of Acheen Street, Lumut Lane became part of a Muslim settlement that was occupied by Muslim traders, pilgrim brokers involved in the Haj pilgrimage and writers since the turn of the 18th century; it also had a small Indian population since the mid-19th century to the present day. From mid to late 19th Century, Lumut Lane was a path leading into the Malay village of Kampung Wakaf, a small settlement built on endowment land of the Acheen Street Mosque.



SECTION

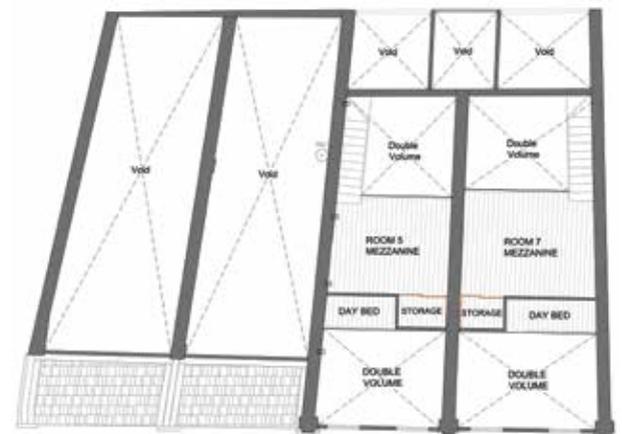




LEVEL 1 FLOOR PLAN



LEVEL 2 FLOOR PLAN



LEVEL MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN



### living old tree

In 2010, when the unoccupied shophouses were finally acquired, each with footprints of merely 500ft<sup>2</sup>, they were severely decrepit and near collapse. Yet, despite the properties' sad state, the owners were drawn to the pristine foliage and brawny trunk of a Bodhi Tree which had colonised the parti wall of unit no 5, as it reminded them of the ones they had seen in the ruins of Angkor Wat. The tree has been retained in the rebuilding of the houses for the hotel, and is now a signature element in the garden courtyard today.

### inside

From the street, the external façade of the four shophouses – the ornagements, pilasters, doors and windows – are restored to their original forms, except the ground floor façade of unit no 5, where a glass door, integrated with vertical flat bars as security grilles, is installed to grace this main entrance.

Upon entry, one is greeted by a generous lobby with a direct view through to the open courtyard at the rear, breezy under the canopy of the Bodhi tree and enhanced with randomly planted local forest species, *hopea odorata* and *sindora wallichii*. To the left of the lobby through exposed brick archways is the dining hall.



### rooms layout

The stairs to the upper level are located outdoor alongside the wall of the Bodhi tree, allowing one to sense, feel and touch its tenacious grandeur while ascending the staircase. The upper floor of unit no 5 is a semi-outdoor lounge that buffers the owners' studio suite at the upper floor of unit no 3 from the guestrooms which are located in units no 7 and 9. Openings are created at the parti wall between units no 5 and 7 on each level to connect to the hallways leading to the guestrooms. The ground floor of units 7 and 9 are subdivided into a library and a garden-view room at the rear portion, and two standard rooms with direct access to the verandah via the original main doors of units nos 7 and 9 at the front portion. Meanwhile, the upper floor is subdivided into two loft suites each with a terrace that overlooks the compound of Acheen street mosque at the rear portion, and two street-facing superior rooms at the front portion.

### decor

The inspiration for the interior architecture and decoration of Spices Residence is drawn from the historical context of Lumut Lane. Efforts are made to echo the function of the shophouses when they were then homestays to pilgrims and traders from the 18th



to 20th century, whilst furniture and lighting fixtures are picked and collected by the owners/architect from their travels to depict Moroccan and Indian Muslim influences – which is a far cry from the usual Peranakan interiors in almost all the conservation projects in Penang.

### materials and finishes

In compliance to the prescribed conservation guidelines for a Category 2 building, the finishes of the ground floors are clay tiles whilst upper floors are maintained as timber flooring. Where new bathrooms are created on the timber flooring, localized areas are strengthened with additional joists before applying fibreglass as water proof trays to contain wet areas. Subsequently, floor patch, a special mixed of cement, sand and specialist hardener is applied to form a rustic and contiguous wall and floor finish. However, the selected bathroom fittings and sanitary wares are adequate and modern to ensure comfort to guests. For other parts of the building, walls are finished with lime plaster to promote breathability of the walls, thus creating natural cooling to the internal spaces.

Volumes created for the rooms and spaces on the upper floor where internal ceilings are installed, consistent with the profile of the roof pitch, have successfully broke away space limitations. Recycled and reused timber roof beams are deliberately exposed as architectural features. Likewise, newly incorporated elements such as steel balusters and steel frames for staircases are also exposed to reveal new and old.

### rejuvenated urban landscape

The most interesting idea in the project is the marrying of the courtyard and the back lanes behind Spices to recreate a whole new urban landscape. The lanes which were once unkempt and not maintained is now a nice landscaped garden that is borrowed as a view for the library and the garden unit on the ground floor. The wall supporting the Bodhi tree has been strengthened with structural steel frames and rafters within, to ensure support to the weight of the growing tree. The warm and inviting interior of Spices Residence with a private landscaped courtyard is likened to that of a little secret known only to a few. The fact that it is right in the middle of the heritage city, yet away from the bustle of the mainstream tourist route, makes it even more unique and unforgettable. +