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A bird's eye view of the UTAR campus in the evening.

Glistening gem

WINNING DESIGN: Borrowed wisdom from the Chinese Imperial architecture results in a striking masterpiece of a campus

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The University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) campus at Kampar, Perak stands apart like a grand dame of a building complex. An inspiration by day and a gleaming beacon by night, it won the Gold Award (Education Category) at the Malaysian Institute of Architects or Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia's PAM Awards held last Saturday.

Representing one of the largest private community universities built in the country utilising public donations, it exemplifies how educational activities can "help to revive and revitalise the social and economic health of an otherwise diminishing old tin mining town".

Throughout the last decade, design and construction works were carried out in phases which were largely dependent on the funds made available. Besides the design being carried out in stages due to limited budgets, the design challenge presented itself in the need to create maximum spaces and facilities with minimum financial resources. Furthermore, the mission had to be accomplished without loss of quality and beauty.

Up to date, UTAR is a star in its own right, with the campus being well-equipped with adequate teaching facilities that can accommodate up to 18,000 students.

Ar. Chow Yeut Keong, Principal, The Architectural Network who undertook the design of UTAR shared that the whole campus design was "inspired by the education process".

"In front of the Library for instance, there is the Knowledge Square which acts as a place for assemblies and interaction among students. Connected to this square is the Learning Curve which is basically, a long curving block of classrooms and tutorial rooms.

"The whole campus is linked by a continuous series of covered walkways and internal courtyards which open out into interaction corners and nodes for students to interact. In fact, students can literally traverse the whole campus of 15 buildings under cover," he said, breaking down the various quarters housed within the design scheme.

Imperial grandeur amidst a modern and tropical design

Chow said his firm opted for a modern contemporary approach within the tropical context in terms of the architectural design while incorporating a Grand Hall for a striking first impression reminiscent of imperial grandeur to fulfill the client's brief.

"The overall layout and planning comfortably integrates the 15 units of major buildings that have different characteristics and design approaches. Despite the contradictions and complexities amongst the building in respect of mass, scale and different design vocabularies adopted, there was a common architectural language prevalent."

Opting for the use of "mainly inexpensive, low energy, locally available materials including concrete, cement and steel, Chow said there was no "luxury budget" for "expensive high-end materials".

"One of the fundamental design criteria was to deliver the university's massive spatial requirements with

minimal construction costs, low operating energy and maximum environmental friendliness," he added.

Most of the buildings were designed with internal courtyards and open, naturally ventilated corridors as well as student interaction areas. The surrounding water bodies from the existing lakes meanwhile help to induce the flow of natural breeze into the courtyards and verandas.

Although Chow was confident that the firm would win some mentions at the PAM Awards, in view of the high standards of the nominations, he said they were surprised and happy to have won the Gold Award this year under the Education category.

"The client was very happy and satisfied with the overall campus as the designs met their functional objectives. The attractive campus and its environment have greatly enhanced the student population.

Not satisfied to rest on his laurels, Chow said that although they were "very satisfied with the final outcome" of this project, and that they were "happy and honored" that UTAR has been recognised by industry peers at this year's awards, he said given similar design challenges in the next project, his team will "definitely be inspired by this success and motivated to equal or better the end results".



The reflecting pond makes a striking statement of style.



Chow (left) receiving the PAM Gold Award (Education Category) from PAM President Chan Seong Aun.

Insights into the UTAR Perak Campus

The UTAR Perak Campus development is located in Kampar on 1300 acres of dis-used tin mining land. The site encompasses 25 numbers of redundant mining ponds and lakes, which equates to about 40 per cent of the total site area. The mountain range to the West forms an interesting backdrop to the pristine and scenic 'lake land' setting of the site. At the center of the site lies Lake No.18, which is considered the biggest and the best kept lake. It is around the periphery of this lake that the campus building facilities were planned.

The **Heritage Building** greets visitors to this campus with its "Chinese courtyard" architecture. The Exhibition Hall, being the nucleus of this building is located in the centre and is surrounded by internal courtyards. Adjacent to the courtyards are galleries and administrative facilities.

The **Student's Pavilion Building** at UTAR was designed with wide roofs in order to respond to exceptionally heavy rainfall and the driving wind conditions of this location. A similar concept applies to the lakeside setting of the pavilion building. Here, the use of simple common building materials resulted in the "random look" of bamboo columns at the Student's Pavilion area.

The **Library** is a simple form inspired by the shape of a partially opened book. The opening down the center of the Book (Building) allows Sunlight (knowledge) to penetrate all the way down the central axis of the Building, diffusing abundant natural lighting to the library interiors. This central axis is also intentionally designed to continue down central circulation stairway, onto the floor pattern, and out to the Knowledge Square where the axis line is represented by a small water channel which flows to a miniature pool.

The **Learning Curve** is an interactive zone which consists of discussion corners, waiting areas (in between lectures), informal gathering spaces, circulation spine and other ad-hoc activities. This zone is enhanced by landscape, natural lighting and courtyard spaces. A network of covered walkways connect the Learning Curve to the Lecture Theatres, the Administration and Library buildings to the South-east, and the Student Pavilion II and the Grand Hall to the North-west.

The **Grand Hall** inspired by Chinese Imperial architecture was designed to accommodate major university events such as ceremonies, exhibitions, convocations, examinations, sports and cultural events. The hall is to have a capacity audience of 3500 for convocation events. The grandeur of the Hall was further enhanced by the reflecting pond. The fusion of external landscape with semi-outdoor spaces (colonnaded Concourse) and indoor spaces creates a conducive space that befits the gathering of students for the higher purpose in education. The water feature, whilst in keeping with Chinese landscape architecture, also contributes to a cooling effect of the Concourse.

Project Data

Project: Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman campus at Kampar, Perak
 Architect: The Architectural Network
 Client: UTAR Education Foundation
 Builder: Associated Builders and Contractors
 Total Construction Expenditure: RM272,000,000.00

*Congratulations to
 Ar. Chow Yeut Keong, The Architectural Network
 on the Gold Medal Award success in the 2013 PAM Awards.*



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Evening descends at the Grand Hall.