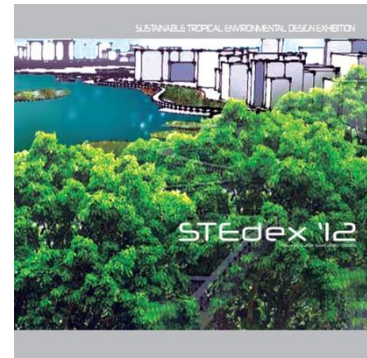


Jury Review - Habitat for Humanity Regional Head Office, Jalan Tabuan, Kuching Utara, Sarawak

Sustainable Tropical Environmental Design Exhibition 2012

<http://www.vlmp.upm.edu.my>



STEdex'12 – Faridah Adnan, *Jury Review - Habitat for Humanity Regional Head Office, Jalan Tabuan, Kuching Utara, Sarawak, Sustainable Tropical Environmental Design Exhibition 2012*, ISSN : 2180-0685, Vol : 4, [185], Faculty of Design and Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia

In line with the aspirations of Habitat for Humanity, the concept statements for the various proposals were well written and these were aptly accompanied by thumbnail sketches to further explain the ideas and approaches. As an NGO that strived to advise, assist and assemble while being attentive, the building for their regional head office had to portray certain qualities. The building must be welcoming and yet had a sense of solidity. It needed to be reassuring and it was important to lead people to the building. It must possess a sense of openness while retaining its corporate entity. The form must be modern plus conducive for the Malaysian equatorial climate. At the entrance level, the consensus solutions applied by the students were the hollowed-out ground floor as well as setting the building back to create public plazas that beckoned.

The first objective of the project was to integrate limited urban contextual issues in building design. To this end, photographs of the site within the context were included and the concept sketches took these urban design aspects into serious consideration. However when the building was designed it was very much by itself. In the sections, elevations and 3-dimensional drawings the new regional head office was not shown with the neighbouring existing buildings. The urban context that was evident in the development of the ideas, approaches and concepts were missing in most of the finalised schemes. These drawings were important to test the scale, proportion and rhythm of the new building within its existing context. From the site photographs it seemed that the surrounding buildings were very low-key, banal even. So how did the new iconic form blend in with that existing context?

The second objective was to develop awareness and skills in spatial-technical qualities. The students embraced this notion and responded boldly with conventional rectilinear planning as well as the unorthodox angular planning. In one of the rectilinear plans interest was created by a subtractive concept whereby multiple-volume spaces were hollowed out from the conventional box. With angular planning it was always easy to go overboard in utilising acute angles thus resulting in very non-functional spaces. However, the students have applied restraint and, in a matured manner, articulated the angular planning with certain rectilinear planning. This paid off not only in catering for practicality, but also to create balance and contrast, within the planning.

Another objective was to apply secondary structural system and develop detail design of key components of the building. Since the building had a basement parking, it was easy to get an efficient parking layout with a rectilinear plan for the office floors above the basement. It was more difficult with angular planning. But even so this was competently done with the structural grid following through from the higher floors down to the basement. There were several proposals that pushed the conventional methods, one of which was to rotate the rectilinear floor plans with respect to the lower floor thus generating a very dynamic twisting form. The student probably adopted the structural concept of Sendai Mediatheque by Toyo Ito and Phaeno Science Centre by Zaha Hadid whereby columns were not merely structural but they manifested as architectural spaces. There were 10 or 11 of these circular 'arch-columns' within the confines of the rectilinear floor plan. They appeared and disappeared, such that when the plan form was rotated the floor structure became cantilevered at an economical distance from the 'arch-columns'. This exemplary structure with the architecture to match should certainly increase the level of confidence in the people to approach Habitat for Humanity in sorting out their house problems!