

DesigNature

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Nature, in her grand splendour and purest form, has been a source of inspiration for artists, designers and architects throughout the ages. Vitruvius, the 1st century Roman architect, asserted that "architecture is an imitation of nature". In his treatise, *Ten Books on Architecture*, he elaborated that "as birds and bees built their nests, so humans constructed housing from natural materials that gave them shelter against the elements".

Abbe Marc-Antoine Laugier later expounded the idea in his *Essay on Architecture*. He asserted that "architecture as in all other arts: its principles are founded on simple nature, and nature's process clearly indicates its rules". He argued that a man in need of shelter against the scorching sun, retreated into the forest to seek refuge within its thick foliage. When rain came pouring down, he ventured into the cave that protected him against the dampness. However, to escape the darkness and foul air of the cave, he yearned for a dwelling that protected him against the searing heat and the dampness from the rain and yet provided him natural lighting and ventilation. Thus, with his ingenuity, the 'rustic hut' with its vertical posts, horizontal branches and inclined leafy roof, was born. From the logical creation of the 'rustic hut', Laugier deduced three essential elements of architecture – the column, the entablature and the pediment.

Organic architecture, coined by Frank Lloyd Wright, espouses the harmony between human habitation and natural world through sympathetic design approaches that blend a building with its surrounding. Architect and planner, David Pearson, through his *New Organic Architecture: The Breaking Wave*, listed rules in the design of organic architecture. He asserted that design should "be inspired by nature and be sustainable, healthy, conserving and diverse". It should "unfold like an organism, from the seed within, grow out of site and be unique".

For Academic Session 2009/2010, the Department of Architecture strived to infuse *DesigNature* in its architectural design studios. *DesigNature* encompasses the *Sign of Nature*, *Design with Nature* and *The Signature*.

The Sign of Nature reflects the approach of studying the elements of nature. Students are encouraged to seek inspiration from the purest form of nature. Some students even utilised natural elements such as tree barks, twigs and vines in their compositions. The series of installation works by the First Year students, best exemplify this notion of observing and applying the elements of nature in their designs. *Twirling Web* by Chan Chong Chong, a Second Year student, aptly portrays the intervention of a man-made object against nature and "embodies" the concept of organic ornamentation.

Design with Nature was interpreted differently by First Year, Second Year and Third Year studios. The First Year studio dwelled on designing against the backdrop of an idyllic nature of a beach front. Putrajaya and Taiping are two distinct cities providing Second Year students with challenges in designing within the nature of a structured and planned city versus a heritage city. The Third Year students explored the *Nature* of themselves in the Pavilion of Personalities – Exposition of the Self. Meanwhile, the Amphibios-Boatel offered challenges for students to design an accommodation for seafarers near a waterfront. Students had to understand the nature of relationship between *man*, his *watercrafts* and the *ocean*. The Third Year studio culminated with the notion of Design with Nature through the creation of an office complex within an urban lung.

The Signature reflects the desire of each student to create an iconic structure. As they were making their marks in the architecture field, students strived to conjure masterpieces with their studio projects. Either within the idyllic beachfront of Langkawi or the serene setting of Taiping Lake Garden or the urban park of Padang Merbok in Kuala Lumpur, students have left distinguishable styles and lyrical architectural melodies of their creations. Their creations either blended harmoniously with the surrounding or purposely "grew out of site and be unique" as noted by the jury.

The year 2010 marks 10 years of architectural studies at Universiti Putra Malaysia. The programme has trained 196 graduates in Bachelor of Design (Architecture) and 24 graduates in Bachelor of Architecture. Ten years is a short period to measure the success of a program compared with more established programs at UiTM, UTM, USM and UM. Nevertheless, within the short period of existence, the architectural programmes at UPM have received their respective accreditations from the *Lembaga Arkitek Malaysia*. These successes and achievements should be attributed to the pioneering staff who had laid a strong foundation for both programmes to grow and flourish.

To commemorate this milestone, a celebration en-titled "ArchiXture" was held on the 4th October 2010 in conjunction with the World Architecture Day. The whole day event culminated with the Appreciation Night where 10 classes of architectural students gathered, reminisced and celebrated 10 years of architectural studies at Universiti Putra Malaysia.