Re-emergence of “nature” in the dwellings of Southeast Asia
Fashion trend or cultural re-awakening?
by
Ng Sien Ching
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about the many “Balinese-style” houses seen in glossy magazines and books. It is about the increasing use of courtyards, water-features and landscaping in today’s houses, especially in Southeast Asia. The interest of this dissertation is to investigate this re-emerging trend of “naturalising” the dwelling in Southeast Asia. It is concerned with the relationship between “nature” and dwelling, how and why there has been a conscious move towards re-unifying man’s living environment and “nature”. It further explores the relevance and “appropriation” of nature to adapt into man’s present multi-dimensional, cultural climate. It questions whether the very “conscious” effort towards symbiosis with “nature” is merely a construct of our consumerist society (a fashion trend or a stylistic phase) or the result of a deep rooted cultural re-awakening of the Asian people today. With the thriving of tropical resorts like Four Seasons, Amandari, Aman Nusa in Bali, The Datai in Langkawi, and The Banyan Tree in Bintan and Phuket, it is difficult for people not to come out yearning for such life styles back in their own homes. On the other hand, the region is also facing a period where it is in need of its own Asian, cultural identity.

Hence, are we part of a natural process, in search of our place in Nature, or simply following a trend? What is this Nature we are referring to? (This will be discussed in The Primacy of the Dwelling)

How does our culture generally affect our perception of “nature”? Why is there this sudden affinity, specifically in this region, towards seeking a balance with “nature”? (This will be discussed in “Naturalising” the dwelling environment: - a cultural perspective)

When did it all begin in Southeast Asia? Can this “nature” really become a trendy thing? (This will be discussed in Re-emergence of “naturalised” environments: - Development of the Southeast Asian scenario)

In what ways is it manifested or “appropriated” for today’s living environment? How has our shifting relationship and perception of “nature” changed the way we live and want to live? (This will be discussed in “ Appropriations” of “nature” in dwelling:- Appropriating Landscapes and the Building envelope)

The question of whether this phenomenon is a fashion trend or a cultural re-awakening will finally be weighed in the Conclusion: our quest for timelessness, drawing mainly from the overall picture painted by the selection of case studies. This dissertation will therefore be a kind of diagnostic study, offering insight into the structure and dynamics of the whole situation, giving an overall understanding and suggestive evidence of this contemporary phenomenon of “naturalising” the dwelling. In so doing, it attempts see if this trend would contribute to the development of Architecture in the region, or simply constitute a passing stylistic phase in our history.

Dissertation Supervisor: (Senior Lecturer) Mrs. Tse Swee Ling