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design and architecture

THE PUTRAJAYA CITY HALL COMPLEX BY ZDR SDN BHD **ICONIC HOLLAND ROAD HOUSE BY RT+Q**
PACIFIC HEALTHCARE NURSING HOME II BY HYL A BERLIN COOL (PART 1) : JUERGEN MAYER H ARCHITEKTEN
THE D2 IN CHIANGMAI BY IAN SHRAGER AND P49 **MARRIOT POOL TERRACE SUITES BY ECO.ID**

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monumental lightness

the putrajaya city hall complex by Zaini Dubus Richez (ZDR)

BY ANG CHEE CHEONG — PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY ZDR SDN BHD

Flushed with the profits of oil and years of 8+% economic growth, the government of Malaysia embarked on an ambitious building programme, a spectacular Promethean effort rarely seen in the region and still unsurpassed in its epic scale. Incorporating a vision of a new Malaysia, of a country claiming its place in the global village, this took form in a national project called the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). The MSC, a 50 by 15km zone that also encompasses parts of Kuala Lumpur, included the new airport by Kisho Kurokawa, a new electronic city called Cyberjaya, and Putrajaya, the new administrative capital.

city instamatic

Putrajaya, spread over 10,000 acres of reclaimed plantation land, started in 1995. Over a decade later, with the debris carted away and the dust settling somewhat, it has now taken physical form and scale. While it used to be impossible to imagine a city to be built in 10 years, recent experience has told otherwise. Rome may have taken forever, but in the new world of just-in-time, gimme-it-now, tell that to Dubai, ShenZhen, et al. The Instant City is now quite possible, entirely realisable!

As *tabula rasa*, entire new landscapes and contexts were designed anew and executed. Rivers were diverted to create an impressive new water body, terrain dug and filled to achieve new picturesque topographies. With its large lakes and floridly decorated bridges, Putrajaya sought to create a city quite unlike any other in Malaysia. With its formal axial planning and neo-european block typologies, Putrajaya has more resonance with classic European cities, even Washington DC, than it does with the spontaneous messy vitality of Kuala Lumpur or most other Asian cities. That must have been the plan.

At the epicentre of all this grandeur and magnificence is the centrepiece called the Core Island, a 4 by 1 km island which houses the key instruments of power and administration. Organised along a 'grand' 4.2km boulevard avenue with unfortunate clichéd narratives and 100m building setbacks, ministry buildings and key administrative functions parade stiffly and self consciously, punctuated with squares, parks and the usual textbook urban gestures (which remain largely empty and unused). A dominant sense of scale pervades along the lineal formal axis. But I may be missing the point. Perhaps within this elaborately contrived Potemkin stage-set city lies its main agenda, its grand political narrative. In this architectural act, the relationship between the State and the Individual is made flesh.



CLIENT
ARCHITECT
GROSS FLOOR AREA
BUILDING PROGRAM
ASSOCIATED ARCHITECT

PUTRAJAYA CORPORATION
ZAINI DUBUS RICHELZ SDN BHD (ZDR)
APPROX 70,000M2
CITY HALL, CIVIC CENTRE AND ASSOCIATED FACILITIES
ARKITEK KARYA BUDI SDN BHD





putrajaya city hall complex

Within Precinct 3, the new city hall building for the local authority, Perbadanan Putrajaya, is sited at the intersection of a 150m square on the main boulevard and bordering on the secondary processional axis which aligns towards the direction of Mecca (the Qiblat walk) and connects to the main mosque. This 70,000m² complex, which houses the offices of the local authority, also includes on one end, commercial convention and meeting facilities as well as an egg-shaped auditorium at the other. The result of a closed competition in 2000 ('closed' in that participation is limited only to those who also fulfil qualities outside of architectural merit), the project is led by Zaini Zainul of Zaini Dubus Richez (ZDR). The scope of the project included co-ordinating the parcels for the convention facilities and auditorium awarded to other architects within an architectural framework. In addition to an ever-increasing portfolio of hotels, museums, nightclubs and retail brand stores, Zaini Zainul is also a former winner of the famed international Shikenchiku House competition run by Japan Architect magazine.



At the centre of the two main blocks flanking the processional route and a landscaped garden court, a scaled-up freestanding arched gateway façade dominates the main boulevard aspect of the complex. This frames the axis connecting the square to the floating mosque behind the complex. It is not abstract in composition and in no way innocent of its representational intention. Standing alone and slightly apart from the complex, the ceremonial arch is made of a weave-like assemblage of stainless steel shards within a steel framed structure, with the intention to shine like silk threads within an overall contextual fabric of granite and concrete. Interesting more for its mode of construction than for its intended charged representational agenda, the arch gateway in its material assembly manages to somehow drain out its political nuances, leaving it to stand in isolation in its object status and shimmering materiality.

Within this gateway sculptural element conceals a set of glass lifts to access a rectangular steel glass box sitting atop the office boxes and partly obscured by the woven stainless steel arch structure. Spanning 70m across the bisecting court in a Vierendeel truss, this level contains the main meeting rooms and breakout lounges overlooking the boulevard. Above this is an open-air roof-top panoramic deck from which the public may survey the rest of Putrajaya in all its majestic manifestations. However, due to new security measures undertaken by the client, this level is now closed to public.







In the two office boxes, two symmetrical atriums face off one another across the landscaped court on the processional corridor. The atriums detach the detailed louvered glazed curtain wall skin from the office floors, offering generous views into the central outdoor court. From here, everyday office routines in turn animate the façade with the spectacle of the city hall in action. In this void space, vertical circulation is attached, and randomly distributed among the eight different floors are timber-slatted boxes containing conference rooms that penetrate the external glass skin. These projections, clad in aluminium, enliven the atriums with a sense of dynamism in contrast to the very ordered formal architectural compositions. In the words of the architects, the protruding boxes can be read much 'like a peeled mango's exposed cubes'.

ZDR's project here in the main, from the atrium devices and façade materiality to the hollowed out gateway arch object, contains a catalog of critical yet subtle palette of manipulations and executions within a larger complexity. In various moments in the project, clever and deliberate interventions transform an otherwise pedestrian programme and large volumetric demands into a building of studied poise and confidence. Perhaps ultimately the value of ZDR's city hall project in a context like Putrajaya is to offer up vital lessons to the shameless posturing of architects who have long surrendered any creative ambition or positions, incapable to participate in the interpretation and construction of new realities, residing instead in the easy and hollow gestures of the unchallenged imagination. ✦