

SEEKING OUT GREEN AND NOVEL IDEAS

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MLAA to benchmark local landscape architecture for global community.

The Malaysian Landscape Architect Awards (MLAA) will return this year to feature some of the greenest and most sustainable ideas in the industry.

Celebrating 11 years of excellence in landscape architecture, the 2019 awards will recognise outstanding consultancy firms, NGOs, foundations, media, individuals, developers and researchers in Malaysia and overseas. The MLAA is among the activities held in conjunction with the World Landscape Architecture Month celebrations.

According to the Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia (ILAM) president Assoc Prof Dr Suhardi Maulan, the awards will bring to the fore those projects that support sustainable development and the new urban agenda.



Dr Suhardi Maulan says the government should enact a Landscape Architect Act.

This year's awards will include a new category that involves corporate social responsibility.

"This category recognises work done by NGOs, corporate sectors and consultants in using landscape for CSR purposes," said Dr Suhardi, adding that ILAM encourages more voluntarism in society.

The work can be in the form of space, a place-making exercise or simply tree-planting.



Eco World Foundation chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye (right) participating in a tree planting ceremony after launching a corporate social responsibility programme by Eco World Foundation at SJKC Tampoi, Johor Baru on May 25, 2016. Looking on is Eco World Development Group Berhad president & CEO Datuk Chang Khim Wah (left).

Dr Suhardi said the judging system this year will incorporate visits to participating project sites for the judges to have a more holistic view.

The awards will endorse high-quality landscape work and the inclusion of novel ideas from participants.

“We are searching for local projects that can be a reference point for landscape architects around the world,” said Dr Suhardi.

Citing the New York Central Park as an example, he said that landscape architects have been using the park design as a benchmark for their projects.



Likewise, he is challenging landscape consultants to bring in new ideas.

Dr Suhardi believes that such a lofty goal may not be achievable without the support of developers and government agencies.

He highlights the development of Putrajaya which utilised a massive wetland system to cleanse the water supply before channelling it into the lake. “In the United States at that time, only small developments were implementing the wetlands system,” said Dr Suhardi, adding that few people believed Malaysia was capable of achieving such a feat.



The Putrajaya Lake Cruise was established to tap into the recreational potential of the 650 hectare man-made lake and wetlands that spans across Putrajaya.

ILAM is looking forward to seeing the new government play a more robust role in cultivating landscape policies.

“We have 70% or 80% of our population living in urbanised areas; this is an issue that the government will have to tackle.

“As a rule of thumb, every development should have 10% of the land apportioned as open spaces and play areas.

But the situation will be complicated if there is a capacity of 2,000 to 3,000 people in an area with a plot ratio of 1:6 or higher. Will a 10% land area for open space be enough?”

According to Dr Suhardi, a condo or high-rise should have green spaces at the bottom of the building and that these open spaces would be limited if developers decided to provide rooftop gardens only. “Open spaces are not commodities but something that the public can use together as a community,” he added.

He said the government should not only focus on buildings and infrastructure because people usually want to spend their time in green open areas. “It is not necessary to have a lavish open space; all that’s needed is a green space with grass, shady trees, and places for walking, playing and sitting.”



People spending time with family at the Kepong Metropolitan Park in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Suhardi said it is crucial for the government to enact a Landscape Architect Act. “When something happens to a building, it is the responsibility of the architects. But who will be responsible for the safety of the jogging tracks, playground or open spaces?”

He said that the Act will ensure that landscape architects are more careful when executing their work which directly benefits members of the public who use the open spaces.

ILAM believes that landscape architects can play an important role if given the chance to work with planners during the early development stage to ensure landscape requirements are met for the betterment of the people and the environment.

“Unlike 20 years ago, we now have millennials with different mindsets and needs, and they want a better quality of life,” said Dr Suhardi, adding that one way to meet their demands is by introducing more greenery, open spaces and parks.