

Well appointed

Eric Parry in
Kuala Lumpur



A classical tradition

Why Britain's new rich are in love with old buildings

Time's up

After 20 years of service Rod Hackney quits council

Light box

A Dorset retreat by Dean Hawkes

Practice made perfect

Expanded and improved practice section

Stay cool

Eric Parry Architects/C'Arch's new apartments in one of Kuala Lumpur's most prestigious residential districts is an oasis of calm in a city whose hectic pace is reflected in the architecture, most notably the nearby Petronas towers. by Pilar Gonzalez Herraiz

HELENE BINET









THE FATE OF LIVING IN A MODERN CITY IS A constant dilemma. It is even more so in Asian cities, where spaces often compel the citizen to 'move' constantly from one point to another, restricting the opportunity of urban pauses.

As these societies strive to transform themselves into the official image of 'development', a surreal urban fabric and behaviour emerges, invading and in most instances erasing the pre-existing collective memory. Kuala Lumpur is an example of this struggle to achieve the status of 'modern' urban centre. Where there was a race course there are now the tallest towers in the world. Shopping centres advertise foreign luxury goods; reflections of palm trees on the glass windows of Gucci or Hermes present a clear picture of two contrasting worlds.

View from garden to entrance (left) showing clubhouse on the right and apartment block on the left.

View from street level to entrance (above), showing car ramp leading down to basement parking, with pedestrian bridge link to apartments on each side.

Working and living in Kuala Lumpur is often a state of virtuality. The context is under constant transformation. An architect has to imagine the future surroundings his building will inhabit: research on existing regulations as a measure of future change is not always reliable, and as new development plans try to cope with this multiplicity of change, an environment emerges almost by itself.

Malaysians often refer to a building or a site as a 'lot'. This has a connotation of detachment from the urban fabric. A 'lot' is fenced as a 'compound', clearly demarcated from spaces beyond it. If, for a moment, we look into the urban tradition of this country, we note that urban centres developed as a mixture of Malay *kampong* (village) agglomerations, British colonialism and Chinese urban influences. In



View of rear apartment building from garden (above).

a *kampung*, the houses are independently built in the middle of their land, lightly fenced by greenery and trees. The Chinese community is influenced by the Hu-Tongs or family and clan houses of China, with their heavy high walls around a series of courtyards, again isolating the private from the public with a clear demarcation of boundaries.

The British influence introduced the shophouses of Malaysia and Singapore and the denser urban fabric of the older part of these cities – but overall the idea of a city as a series of isolated ‘compounds’ is what appears to have shaped the modern structure of Kuala Lumpur. Buildings fill their lots without acknowledging each other; ‘context’ as we understand it in Europe is simply not an issue.

Eric Parry Architects must have seen this dilemma clearly when first designing Damai Suria. The site is a corner plot along a rather noisy but tree-lined street, located in what is one of the most prestigious residential locations, a street away from the Royal Selangor Golf Club and a few streets further from the Petronas Twin Towers, clearly visible from Damai Suria.

The finished development has 30 units with 19 different types, ranging in size from 2,000ft² (186m²) to 5,000ft² (465m²). The surrounding plots are now occupied by low-rise residential developments or by private houses.

The client is a first-time developer for whom this

was a flagship project. He was looking for a different approach, to break into a market where quantity and profit were the overriding concerns. He was prepared to be flexible, take a risk and buck the trend for characterless, multiple dwellings, by offering a lifestyle previously out of reach – even to the well-off.

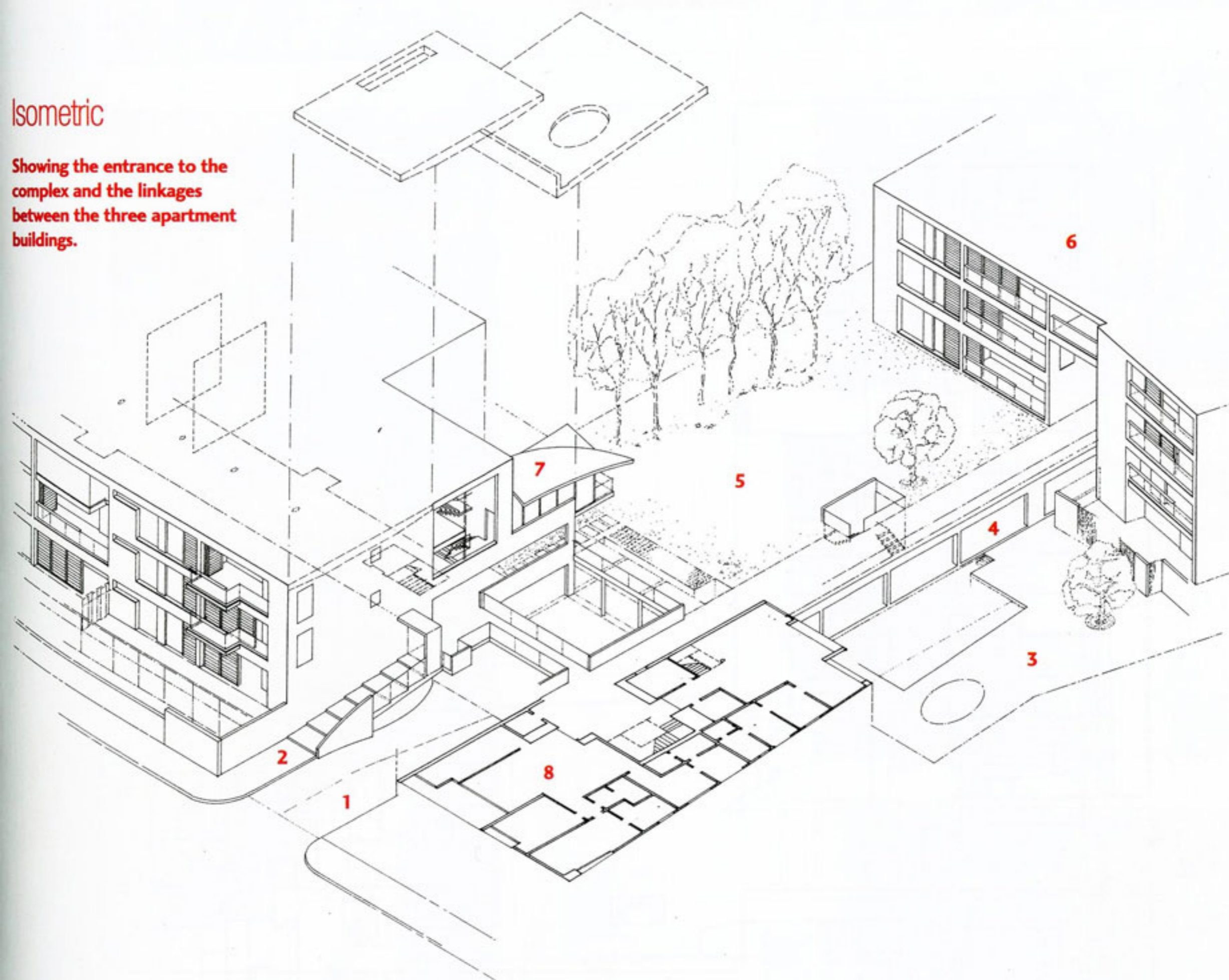
Eric Parry described this process – including project architect and local practice, C’Arch – as a joint learning effort by everyone involved. There were no initial targets in profit margins, number, shape or size of the units, but the architect had to address the tough tropical weather of 90 per cent humidity, heavy seasonal rains and temperatures constantly around 30degC, which demand clever manipulation of roof eaves, covered walkways, cross-ventilation and cooling devices as well as the glaring, reflected light of this city.

In the first analysis on plot ratio and density, the scheme developed as clusters of units around a series of courtyards, the reverse effect to the open courts at Pembroke College, on which the office was working at the time. But the site demanded a further urban agenda and the two sides facing busy streets were to be walls shielding the calm of the interior world from the hectic city outside, and at the same time providing the necessary scale to address the street, the urban space.

The final layout brings to the building a series of

Isometric

Showing the entrance to the complex and the linkages between the three apartment buildings.



Key

- 1 Car ramp
- 2 Pedestrian entrance
- 3 Pool and lower garden
- 4 Covered passage
- 5 Garden
- 6 Rear building
- 7 Communal club room
- 8 Plan of end building

shared spaces, as a sequence of stairwells connected by covered passages, leading from the public into the semi-public and the private.

The entrance to the building creates a triple-height void, through which a 3D matrix of linking passages crosses. This spatial progression from a proscenium into the garden divides the main street elevation into two blocks and allows a view of the garden beyond, behind which the third block completes the composition. The main block to the left of the entrance is arranged as a linear 'street' illuminated by light shafts and stair voids.

These bring this 'street' closer to a continuous progression of intimate public spaces, intermittently opening up to and providing glimpses of the garden spaces in between units. The other two blocks, although clearly of the same family, provide an entirely different feeling in which the linearity of the first gives way to a vertical arrangement and a more complex composition of flats and maisonettes.

Addressing its tropical environment, the volume composition and variations are designed to maximise cross-ventilation, sun shading and filtering of the strong glare of tropical light. It succeeds at much of this, although one wonders if the eaves should not be longer or more continuous. The large balconies and public spaces are often inspired by the notion of open verandas. To increase privacy,

large sliding/folding shutters shield the balconies from direct view of other units and the street. The largely logical rectilinear compositions are cleverly broken by small incidents of a lightwell, or an irregular opening in a wall.

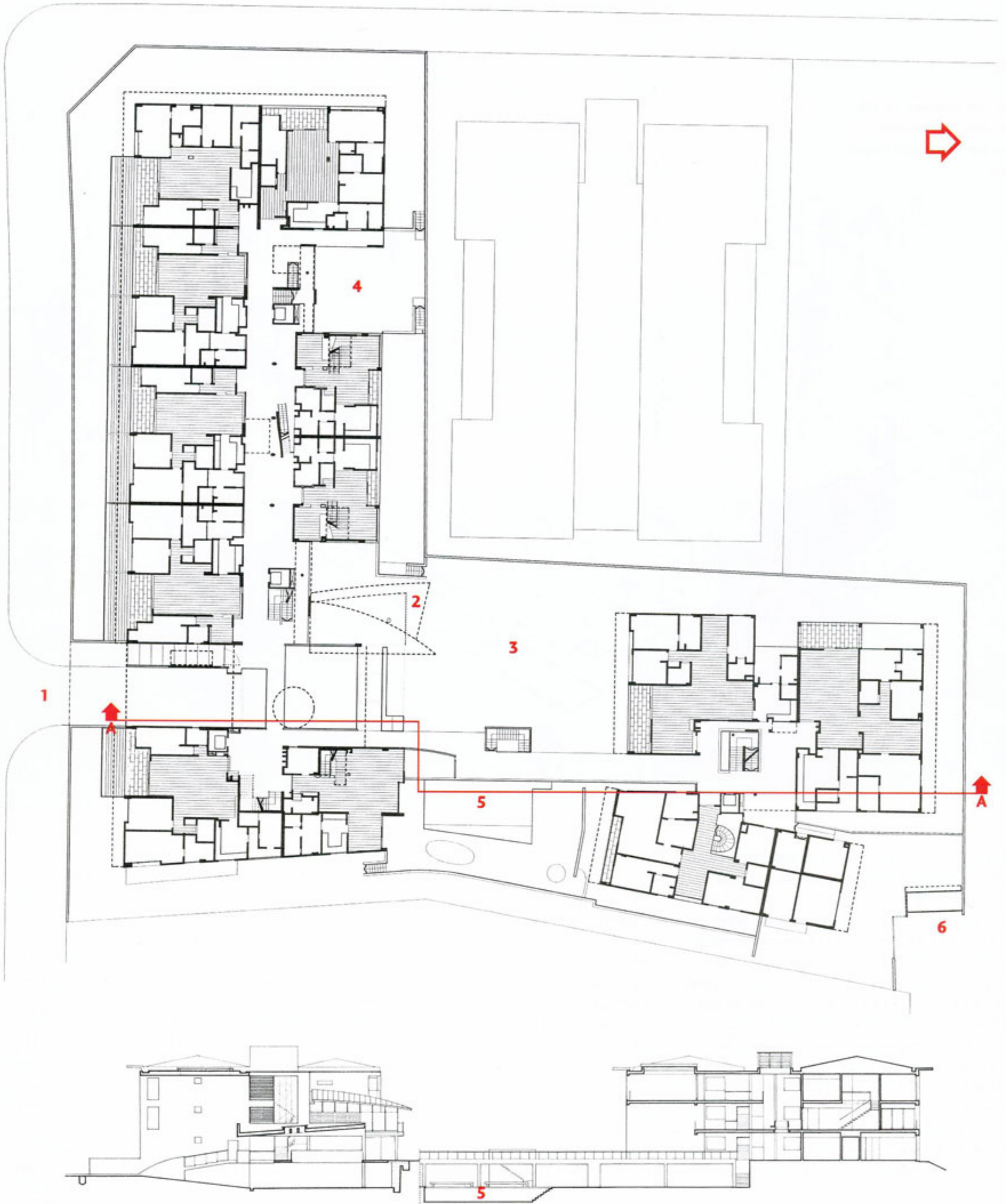
There are two issues the architect considers a compromise. The first are the balconies along the two street elevations. The idea had initially been that this wall should act as a shield, masking the private activity of 'the unit as a cave' behind it. The other was the pitched roof, which should have been flat. Both issues were impositions by the planning authority, which thought the building too austere for residential use.

When I visited the now-occupied building, with the balconies and shutters open to the street, I felt a different doubt – the lack of building along the side flanking the next development, which might have enclosed the courtyard garden, unifying the composition, albeit depriving its neighbour of a view of the garden and pool.

None of these concerns detract from the main achievement of Damai Suria – to have questioned and addressed the lack of urban relationships in the fast-changing structure of South East Asian cities, and having provided its inhabitants not only with a calm and carefully planned environment, but above all with the opportunity to feel part of the urban fabric.

Persiaran Ampang Hilir

Jalan U Thant



Plan and section

Section AA (above) showing the entry sequence from the street to the garden and the rear building, and plan (top) showing apartments, covered passages and stairwells.

Key

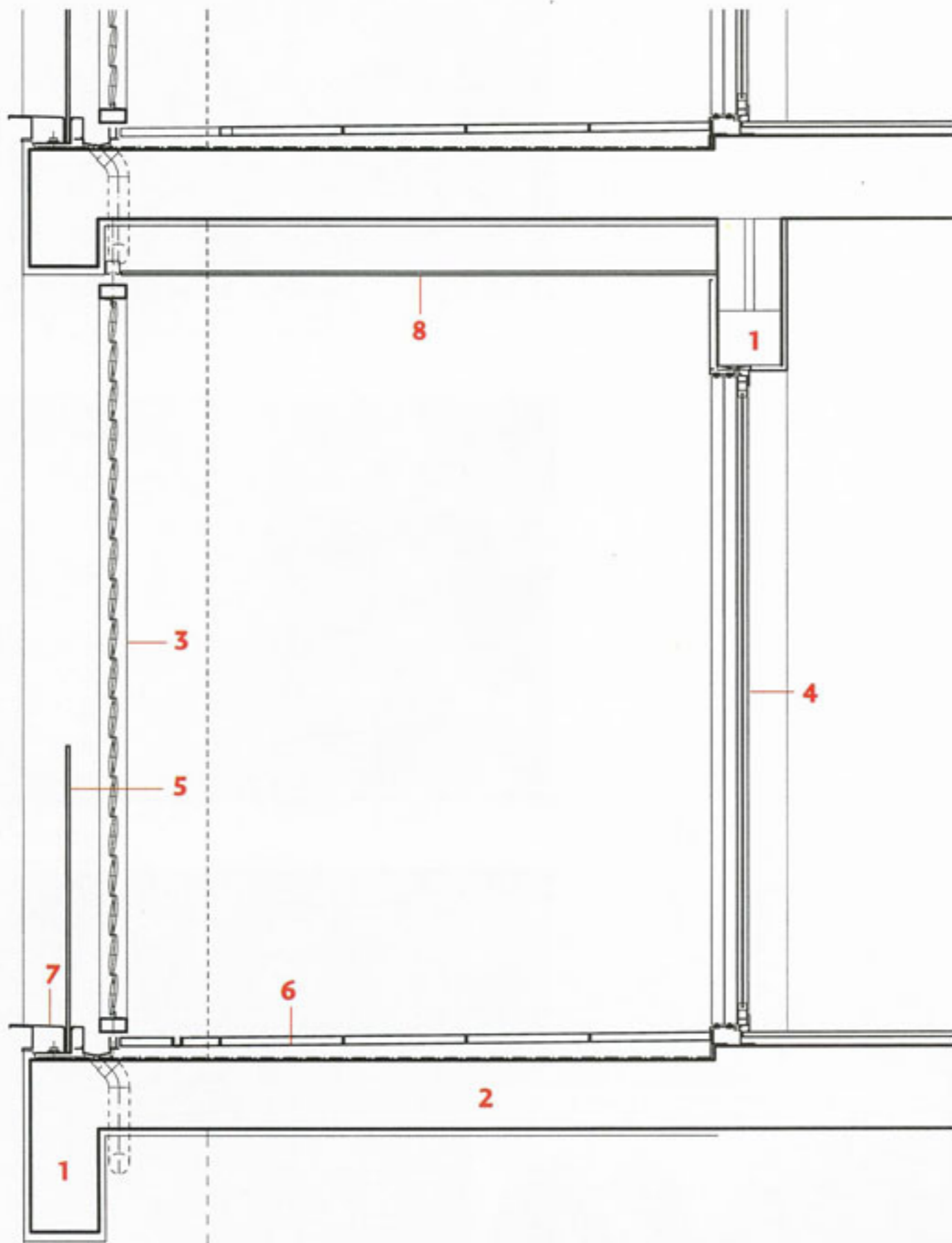
- 1 Entrance
- 2 Pavilion
- 3 Garden
- 4 Garden court
- 5 Swimming pool
- 6 Service entrance

View of communal pool from upper-level garden (right).



Screen detail

The environmental screen for the control of light, weathering and ventilation has shutters that can be 'parked' or opened to create a continuity with the living room.



Key

- 1 Insitu reinforced concrete beam
- 2 Insitu reinforced concrete slab
- 3 Aluminium sunscreen with adjustable blades on proprietary sliding system
- 4 Aluminium sliding window system
- 5 12mm tempered glass balustrade
- 6 Indian sandstone on screed
- 7 Pressed aluminium cill and channel
- 8 Painted cemboard ceiling



Typical apartment verandah designed as an extension of the living room space (above). Mobile shutters and adjustable louvres give shade and act as a rainscreen.

Credits

- Client**
Dawntree Properties
- Architect**
Eric Parry Architects
(Eric Parry, Nick Jackson, Henry Teo, Robert Kennett, Nello Gregori) and
C'Arch Architecture & Design
(Chris Wong, Wilson Sng, I Wen Foo, Flora Foo, Chris Lee)
- Quantity surveyor**
David Langdon & Seah
Malaysia
- Structural engineer**
Arup Jururunding Sdn Bhd
(in association with Ove Arup & Partners)

Cost specifications

Total cost	£6.2 million
Internal area	11,682m ²
Cost per m ²	£529
Costs	
Preliminaries, demolition and preparation	£716,940
Substructure	£574,788
Frame	£203,957
Upper floors	£234,860
Roof	£500,622
Stairs	£135,971
External walls	£24,722
Windows and external doors	£432,636
Internal walls and doors	£339,928
Floor, wall and ceiling finishes	£1,075,409
Mechanical	£624,232
Electrical	£346,109
Fittings, fixtures and furniture	£210,137
Plumbing and sanitary ware	£401,733
External works and services	£358,470

Specifications

Structure and external envelope
Frame: insitu reinforced concrete. Walls: single-skin brickwork with render to both faces. Roof: titanium zinc. Windows: aluminium system with laminated glass.

Floors and doors

External doors: sliding aluminum system. External floor finishes: Chinese granite, Indian sandstone. Internal doors and joinery: agathis veneer and solids. Internal floors: hardwood strip flooring, travertine.

Fittings

Sunscreens: powder coated aluminium extrusion for blades and frame. Balustrade on balconies: 12mm cantilevered tempered glass in stainless steel angle support. Balustrade on stair: painted mild steel.