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# NATURALLY GREAT

*When Koo Yoon Kin and her husband built their home they decided to seek out the best that nature could offer*

Words by *Melissa Anne Mohan* Photography by *Sun Studio*

**F**or retired veterinarian Koo Yoon Kin, the phrase 'there's no place like home' stems true, one look at the dazzling house perched on a hill in their quiet neighbourhood is enough to convince anyone to want to retire at their abode. The couple live with their two sons, three dogs and a cat at their Bukit Tunku home.

The residence she shares with her beloved husband, chartered accountant Lee Siang Chin, is a sprawling house with four

bedrooms each with en suite bathrooms, a gym, a Soho (small office home office), secretary's room, lanai, powder room, maid's quarters, a sheltered car park and a vast garden. "We wanted a resort style home where we could relax and spend the next stage of our life," Yoon Kin explains. It was also very important for the happy couple that the house was in tune with nature and the environment. "We choose to suit nature because nature is not going to suit us," Yoon Kin shares. This explains





The entrance foyer where the Lees greet their guest

"A pair of 17th century yoke back armchairs sit in the foyer area beneath an antique carving of birds made out of camphor wood"



Royal Doulton Chinaware

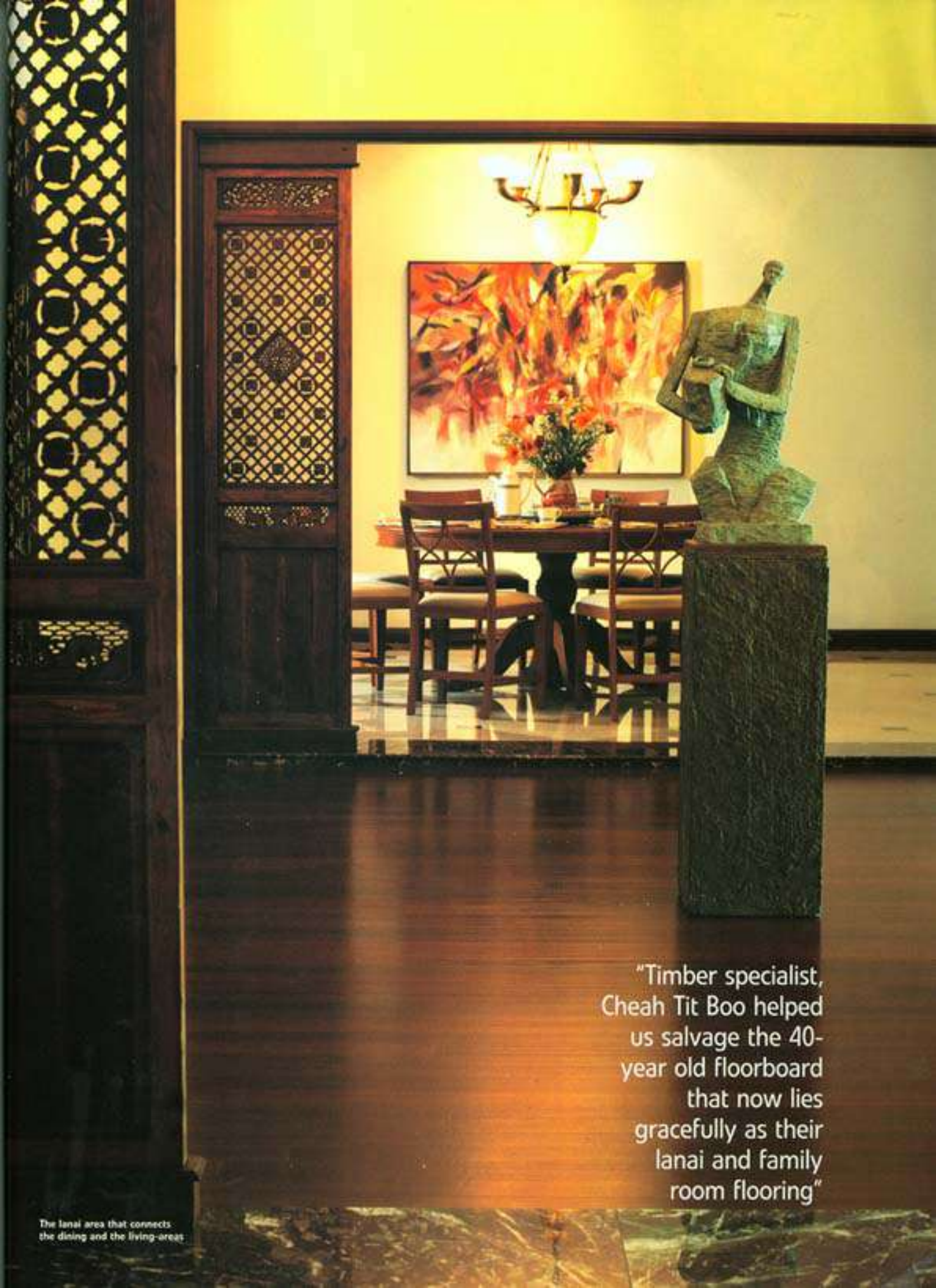
why they chose renowned architect Ar. Almaz Salma Abdul Rahim from Almaz Architect to design their dream home. "We were lucky Almaz found us," Yoon Kin laughs. Having a pretty distinct idea of what they wanted both owner and architect sat down together to build a house that had Malaysian hardwood, plenty of greenery and ventilation. The couple have a keen interest in ecology as evident in the thoughtful and analytical manner in which they built their dream home. "Everything is natural in this house, we don't believe in synthetic products," Yoon Kin highlights.

Prior to building the house the couple did countless hours of research on various Malaysian hardwoods. "I think if you live in Malaysia it's logical to use Malaysian hardwood," Yoong Kin says. Adding to their thoughtful demeanour, Yoon Kin and Siang Chin went on further to recycle and salvage the 40-year floorboard that now lies gracefully as their lanai and family room flooring. "This beautiful floorboard was part of the old house that used to stand on this site," Yoon Kin points to the dark flooring. "The house that was here had very nice timber floors. Timber specialist, Cheah Tit Boo helped us save the flooring," Yoon Kin proudly exclaims. The site on which the house now sits on was formerly a colonial double storey unit belonging to ICI. "It was

dilapidated and was in such bad shape that we had to demolish the house to build the new one, even so we were careful not to remove the existing trees that have been here for years," they both explain in unison. The lush foliage provides a soothing vista for the Lees. "If you look closely, nearly every corner of the house has a splendid view of the garden," Yoon Kin shares. Their garden, an artwork itself, is yet another splendid example of the Lees attentive and down-to-earth approach to living. "We choose tropical plants that are suitable for our climate and condition," Yoon Kin describes. "Plus we have three big dogs that roam freely in the garden, that's why the plants have to be resistant, both to the climate and our dogs," Yoon Kin jokes. Old big trees, ferns, bamboo, *damu keladi gajah*, heliconias and a frangipani tree are just part of the foliage that surrounds the Lee residence.

Inside, the family room is spacious and airy. "We hardly ever use air cons in this house," Siang Chin says. A sculpture piece by Loh Ek San stands in the lanai connecting the living room and the dining room. On their coffee table, is a stunning vase of red heliconias juxtaposed against an Andy Warhol bowl and a beautiful Indian table runner the couple picked up on their various travel abroad. "The heliconias are from the garden, aren't they





"Timber specialist, Cheah Tit Boo helped us salvage the 40-year old floorboard that now lies gracefully as their lanai and family room flooring"

The lanai area that connects the dining and the living-area



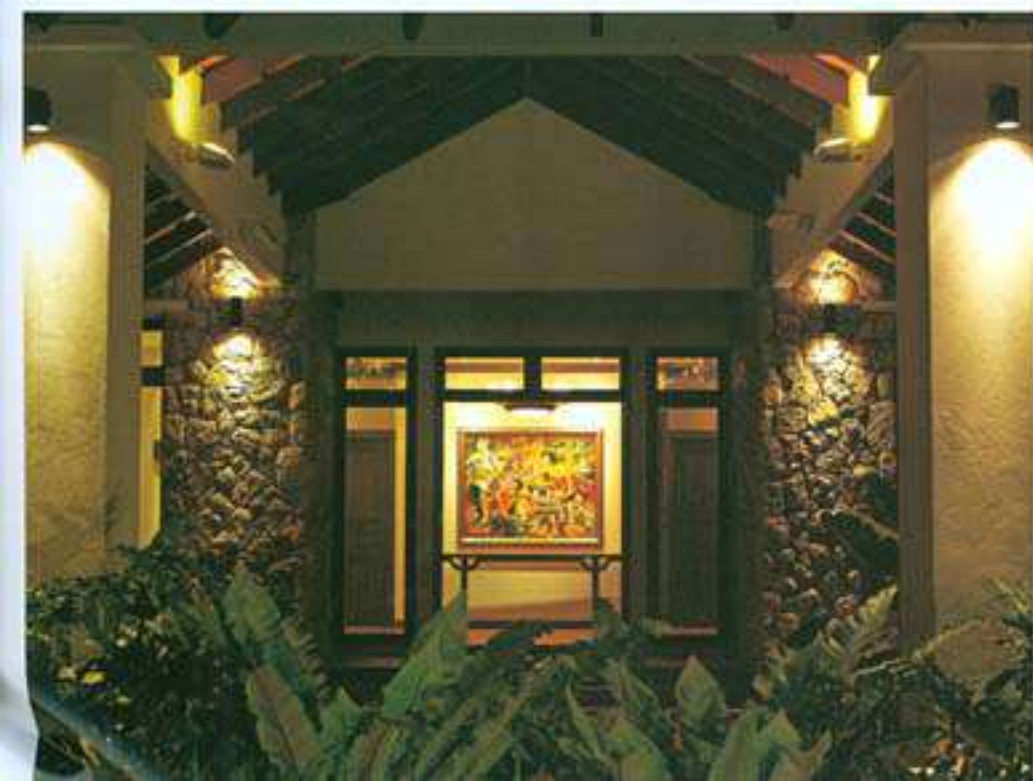


Clockwise from left: Yoon Kin relaxes in the confines of her living room with her hand plucked heliconias from her garden. The master bedroom is simple and austere. The stone rubble wall, fronting the entire house was handcrafted by a highly skilled shifu.

**"We choose to suit nature because nature is not going to suit us"**

beautiful?" Yoon Kin smiles proudly. Moving outside is a suspended pergola deck made out of Malaysian hardwood once again. The focal point in the courtyard in the deck is a bright sunny table top, Yoon Kin and Siang Chin bought on their trip to the Riviera. "We liked it so much because of the amazing colours," they quip. One DHL trip later, the beautiful table top now sits eloquently on their deck. House cat, Mingkee seems to agree with the owners judging by his profound liking for the table.

The couple has an astute appreciation for beautiful things, most of the furniture that lies in the house are exquisite antiques from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). "They're from the Greater Shanxi Region in China," Siang Chin adds. Friends, Dato' Malek Merican and Datin YG Merican travelled with us to Beijing to help us choose the antique furniture. "A pair of 17th century yoke back armchairs sit in the foyer area beneath an antique carving of birds made out of camphor wood. "The chair is made out of elm wood and the two big table in the lobby is an altar table made out of persimmon wood," Siang Chin, the wood lover explains. "Our chairs weren't exactly what the emperor sat on," Yoon Kin self-effacingly jokes. "We didn't want that, we wanted things that we could use and not shelf







Clockwise from left: A sculpture piece by Loh Ek San takes prominence in the lanai. An antique washbasin from the Qing Dynasty. The high ceilings at the Lee's home provide ample ventilation. The master bedroom bathroom.



like a museum piece," Yoon Kin adds.

What is also interesting about the couple is the harmonising manner in which they mix and match mediums, the foyer for example is laid out with terracotta tiles interspaced with hand-painted tiles from Spain, the furniture includes antiques from China while the Peranakan scene painting is obviously from home. All these elements come together perfectly to showcase a truly international house. "We wanted the house to be non-ethnic specific and global," Yoon Kin says.

It is evident that the house is a culmination of both Yoon Kin and Siang Chin's personalities. The construction for the Lee's dream home started in 2000 and was completed after months and months of hard work. The biggest hitch they had, which must have been a nightmare for the architect, was to literally

reposition the home. "We laugh about it now, but I don't think the architect was too pleased at first," Yoon Kin laughs. "While the concept design of the house was being finalised, we had word that a famous Feng Shui master from Hong Kong was in town to look at some property, it must have been our good fortune because a friend introduced us to Mr Chan," Yoon Kin elucidates. Mr Chan evaluated the Lee's home and gave some pointers to the couple. "He told us to reposition our house as it was facing an inauspicious direction for my husband, so we had to 'turn' the house around to face the south as it was facing the west corner," she explains.

Sitting at their pergola deck, the couple look happy with what they have achieved in building the house and are content to kick back and relax to watch the sunset from their home. □