



HOUSES

A New Tropical Dimension

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Preface

In 1997, Architects 49 Ltd. published its first book on houses called 'House Design Architects 49' which was sold worldwide. Its success lead to numerous books on Residential architecture by Architects 49 Ltd., including 'The Master Architect Series: Architects 49' published in 2000, '250 Record Houses: Architects 49' published in 2009 and 'House by A49'

Once again in 2010, Architects 49 has released a new book under the name of 'House A49: A New Tropical Dimension'. This book is a record of the completed works of Architects 49 from the past three years. The featured nine houses, contain various architectural forms and locations, built for inner city residents, suburban areas and country side vacation homes. Each design architect thoroughly describes their house concept and has selected the best photographic images to communicate to the reader. Each house is a result of the architects' creativity and imagination combined with the clients' needs. It is the vision of Architects 49 to produce houses that respond to every requirement while integrating functionality and context. We also believe a great understanding of each location's climate and geography is important, allowing the architecture to harmonize with nature and surroundings.

Every architect at Architects 49 wishes to see clients enjoy the designed spaces and feel pleasure in occupying their houses. This satisfaction should be lasting. Home maintenance and household management must be effortless. Every, house selected for this book has satisfied these requirements.

Designing residential houses is a highly applied art requiring careful articulation and years of development. It is the intention of Architects 49 to keep going forward, creating innovative houses to match peoples' ever changing lifestyles. More importantly, we want to record the journey of house creation through the publishing of books and other forms of media. It is also our intention that students and other interested people learn and apply this knowledge to improve the architecture profession.

On behalf of all architects at Architects 49 Ltd. I would like to thank each of the owners of the houses featured in this book for their support and allowing us to publish their houses. The owners' dedication in working with the architects is greatly appreciated. Without their trust and confidence in our architects these houses would not be as beautiful as they appear here. I must thank every architect who has assisted us in completing this book, as well as the staff at Li-Zenn publications who have designed and published this book.

Nithi Sthapitanonda

President

Architect / National Artist

Hon. FJIA (Japan), Hon. FAIA (USA)



Houses by A49 | A New Tropical Dimension

Extreme Functionalism

Looking at residential design of recent decades, it is evident that some houses bear the stylistic signature of their designers. Others answer strictly to local climate and place, here Glenn Murcutt's steel vernacular comes to mind. More recently, many architects have gravitated toward a new avant-garde, which poses valid questions concerning the act of building and dwelling itself. This is seen in the work of UN Studio, Sou Fujimoto or Anupama Kundoo, to name but a few. Their creative and sometimes critical solutions represent a new generation of residential architecture with new materials, tectonics, and formal and spatial languages. Many designs, however, merely fit in the ebb and flow of architectural trends.

Such a vast variety in residential design may be a symptom of the socio cultural milieu of contemporary society. In an age of information overflow, conceptual and stylistic diversity in architectural design gains full momentum. Architecture based simply on functional requirements, a Modern tenet, becomes too mundane. To be true, architecture must now contribute to a meaningful environment. It must communicate effectively and poetically. From simple and familiar referents to which people can easily relate, the architectonic forms constantly evolve into highly sophisticated, fascinating and even high-brow art objects. Occasionally, the architectural language becomes so complex one wonders if such a language is meant only for the architect themselves.

It is evident from the nine houses in this volume that Architects 49's residential design philosophy is not avant-garde, neither is form used as a super-concept. These houses represent the firm's core belief in an architecture which serves its purpose. They answer creatively to the specific demands of the inhabitants and specific geographical and climatic concerns. There are no external ideas or concepts lending the houses their form and spatial organization. But rather the architecture stems from the climate, the strong tropical sun and rain, the site's terrain and surroundings, and the way of life, aesthetic tastes, beliefs and dreams of the inhabitants.

But is that it? Isn't there any other special "ingredient" which sets these Architects 49 houses apart from the rest? To say these houses are designed to "follow function"¹ or to "taam jai phu yuu"² may sound cliché. Yet, a closer analysis of these houses reveals that such an aphorism might not be too far from the truth. In fact, one might say that Architects 49 has taken this idea to the extreme. In each house, not only have the designers provided for the client's spatial requirements, they have also paid considerable attention to the details of

each and every specific activity. How these daily activities are carried out in the lives of the inhabitants becomes crucial information that informs space, form and architectonic design as a whole. What results is not merely an architectural object, but a dwelling place in which the daily lives of the inhabitants can take place meaningfully, where aesthetic pleasure is not limited to outward form only but extends into the experience of daily living.

Ready-built villas in housing developments are like ready-to-wear clothes-quick and convenient, but the quality may vary and the shape and size will not fit every body type. Custom design houses, on the other hand, are more like tailor-made clothes designed and made by those with creativity and expertise, promising a better fit and workmanship. The quality of tailor-made pieces is, nevertheless, dependent largely upon the artistic and technical skills and experience of those involved. With that analogy in mind, the house in this volume are as if fine couture, exceptionally beautiful and meticulously created from select materials by experienced designers to fit every move perfectly while lending great comfort to the wearer. Craftsmanship and attention to detail are key criteria in the design of these houses, evident in the way electrical, mechanical and other supporting systems are efficiently integrated into the design while allowing easy maintenance.

Stylistically speaking, the formal language of each house is indeed affected by both the designers' predilection and current trends. Such preference is seldom predetermined, but rather an outcome of a collaborative effort and constant communication between designer and client. This contributes to the subtle and reserved tone of the houses in this volume, with perhaps a few exceptions. One of these is the VR Residence, whose distinctive formal language derives from a different tectonic, as it is the first house by Architects 49 to use steel structure exclusively. The other two houses-Baan Bang Sarae and Cho Residence - find their inspiration through the owners' preference. Baan Bang Sarae combines Western comfort and Eastern tectonic while a fond memory of New England was the main influence for Cho Residence. In terms of architectural style, one cannot help but notice a slight shift since the houses featured in House Volume 2. The familiar Architects 49 style-houses with prominent and finely detailed hip roofs, well-proportioned masses and a unique sense of rhythm-has gradually faded. In its place come houses with a more "contemporary" look, those favoring clean lines and pure rectangular "box" volumes with roofs receding from plain view. A few-such as Baan Pracha Uthit and Baan Windmill-have abandoned pitched roofs in favor of reinforced concrete slabs. Such a shift in architectural language, along with other explorations of form and material, will be even more apparent in projects to come.

No matter what the style, these nine houses still share Architects 49's tropical design principles, which become manifest through the design of the volumes, floor plans and architectural elements. In these houses, the volumes are relatively narrow, with large functional spaces arranged in a linear fashion and interlaced by pocket gardens and/or pools. Corridors are mostly single-loaded and living spaces endowed with windows on at least two walls so as to allow day light and natural ventilation throughout. Such a linear configuration-with two or more volumes connected by a walkway or a bridge-like path-is so common in Architects 49 residential design that it is virtually a design "formula." Yet, with a creative and poetic touch, such a formulaic organization enriches the spaces with airiness, filling them with daylight, cool breezes and pleasant views of green landscapes.

Another instance of their tropical design principles is evident in the architectural elements, particularly the long projected eaves. This feature is not simply limited to the houses with pitched roofs, but also applies to those with less prominent roofs and those with flat concrete roofs also. In Baan Bang Sarae, for example, the sublime proportions of the Asian vernacular-inspired thatched roofs are designed to mimic the grand silhouette of the house's mountainous backdrop, thus becoming the characteristic feature. Meanwhile, the clean horizontal roof lines of Baan Windmill and Baan Pracha Uthit are projected and the exterior walls pushed back, forming efficient shading devices for both sun and rain. As such, the Modernist "boxes" are adapted to fit beautifully and efficiently in a tropical context.

In the end, to label these houses "functionalist" may not be too inaccurate. It must be noted, however, that here "function" is to be defined in a broader sense-meaning not simply in the familiar utilitarian denotation. Rather, as the renown semiologist Umberto Eco points out, architecture, like other "functional" objects, conveys not one but two kinds of function-utilitarian or "primary" function and symbolic or "secondary" function, with the latter enhancing and/or clarifying the former.³ A house, for example, has "sheltering" as its main utilitarian function, and perhaps "tropical," "modern," "austere," or "contemporary Asian" as the symbolic function clarifying the specific manner in which that sheltering act takes shape. As such, something along the line of "extreme functionalism" encapsulates the ideas and principles behind the design. This is especially so when considering another connotation of the term function-i.e., "the result of the action of one quantity upon another."⁴ With that in mind, these nine houses are conceivably poetic functions of the sun, the wind, the land and the lives that go on in and around them-nothing more, nothing less.

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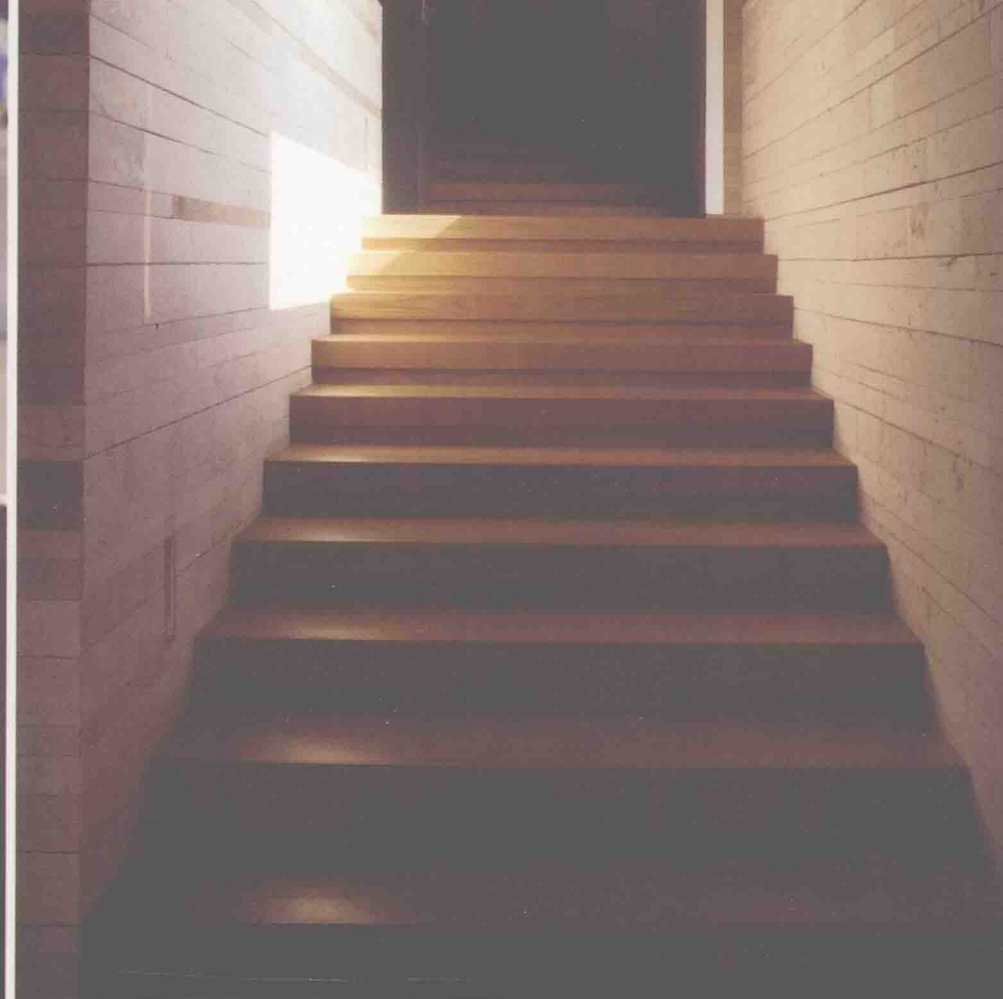
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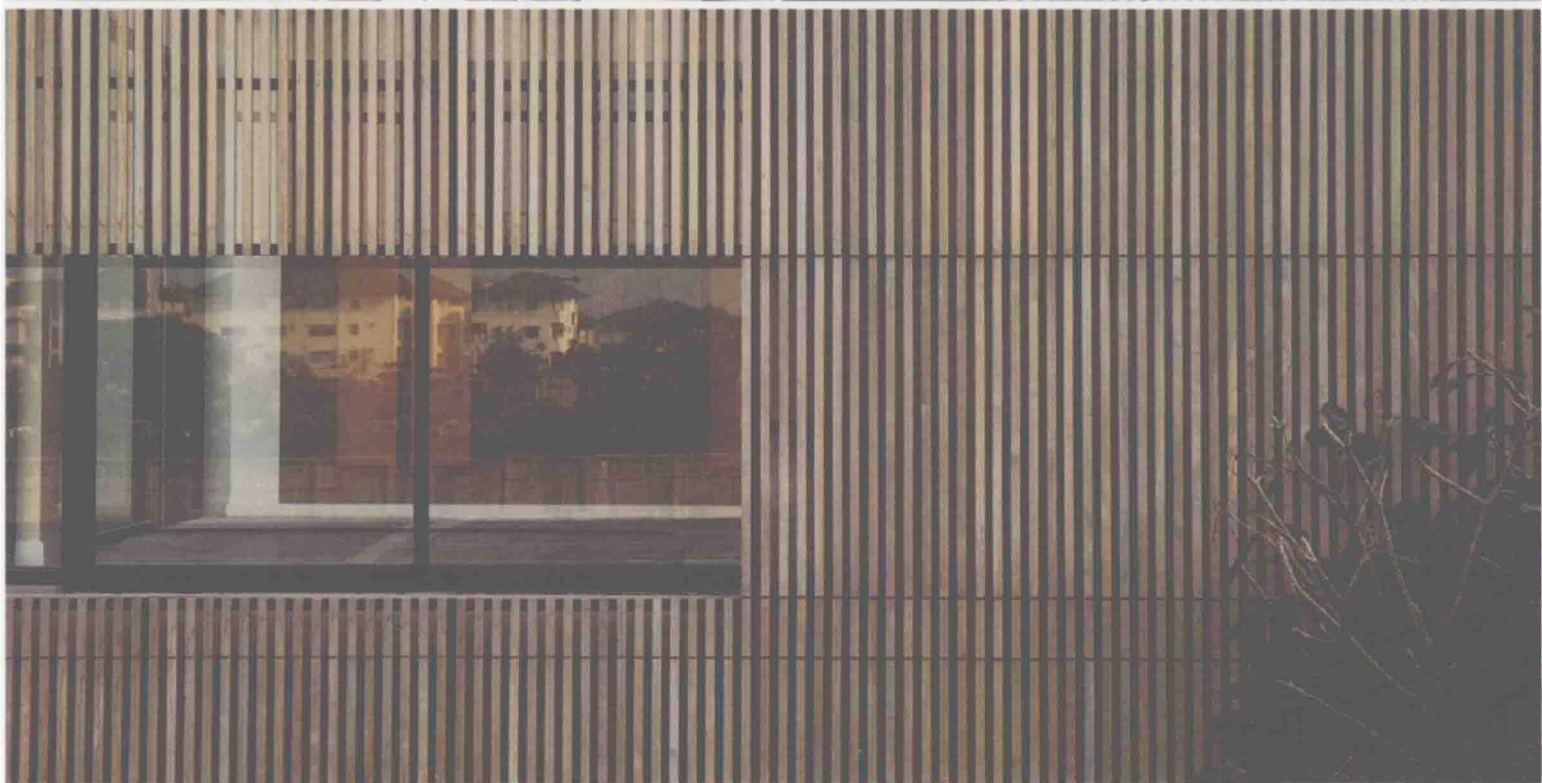
¹ In spite of its many connotations and long history in architectural discourse, the term "function(s)" is used here in a more familiar utilitarian sense, one which is rather common in architectural circle. For further details, see Adrian Forty, "Function" in *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 174-95.

² The old Thai saying Plook Ruan Taam Jai Phu Yuu, Phook Ou Taam Jai Phu Nawn literally means "Build the house according to its dwellers,' desire, Set up the bedding chamber according to (s)he who sleeps in it." This, however, has a more general connotation, that is, to let (s) he who is affected by the action loe the one who decides how to act.

³ Umberto Eco, "Function and Sign: Semiotics in Architecture," in *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. Neil Leach (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 182-202.

⁴ Forty, 174.







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