

The house that Rudin built



By RUDINARA – WINNER OF THE PRESTIGIOUS AGA KHAN AWARD IN 1998 – IS UP FOR SALE. THIS HOUSE IS NOT ONLY AN ARCHITECTURAL ACHIEVEMENT, IT IS A HOME FULL OF MEMORIES FOR EVERYONE WHO KNEW IT and SAYS DZIREENA MAHADZIR.
LIFESTYLE Premium

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WHEN I was younger, I spent many happy hours playing at the home of Datuk Dr Professor Haji Rudin Salinger. His wife, Datin Munira used to teach my cousins and I to bake the best cakes and cookies, and afterwards, we spent hours trying to figure out how to solve the marvellous puzzles handmade by Dr Rudin.

All that was before they moved into the beautiful Rudinara in Sungai Merab Luar, Bangi, Selangor.



When they decided to build their own house, all I remember of that time was everyone saying how “Uncle Rudin was in the jungle somewhere taking ages to build his house”. And indeed he took six-and-a-half years to finish it, and by that time, I was grown up, working and just got married. In fact, I had my first social event as a newlywed at their magnificent new home.

Rudinara – coined from the couple's names – proved to be special in more ways than we imagined. To close family and friends, it was a beautiful, special place with lots of memories of a lovely home with the best hosts.

The living room. Note the spaced slats above that allow their to circulate.

Then in 1998, Dr Rudin’s home won the prestigious Aga Khan Award for “significant contribution to Islamic architecture” – a very special honour for a residential property. (Other Malaysian buildings that have won the award are the Tanjung Jara Resort in Terengganu, Menara Mesiniaga in Subang Jaya, Selangor, and The Datai resort in Langkawi.)

Dr Rudin has always loved wooden houses, and that’s why Rudinara was entirely built of Chengal wood.

“I’ve always lived in houses with wooden floors, so I wanted a house entirely built of wood. It total open concept and there are absolutely no air conditioners as the wind blows through th

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In fact, the idea of modern day mod-cons pretty much horrifies him – he won't hear of having a microwave in the kitchen!

Dr Rudin is very much ecologically minded, and his house reflects this. Set amongst fruit and rubber trees, Rudinara looks like a traditional Malay house, except that it's elevated by 4.5m-6m high stilts.

The house is an architectural feat in more ways than one and was crafted by master craftsman Ibrahim Adam, who was blind in one eye and had no right hand.

When he received the letter of the nomination for the award, Dr Rudin drove all the way to Ibrahim's house to tell him the news: "I drove all the way (to tell him of the nomination) and when I returned, I got the letter saying we had won the award, so I had to drive all the way back!" laughs Dr Rudin, who took the craftsman along to Grenada, Spain, to receive the award.

The house is also built with no nails in the main structure, and almost every doorway has a woodcarving crafted by Haji Wan Su Othman and his son Wan Mustafa, Malaysia's foremost wooden carvers.

"None of the people involved in building this house are alive anymore," he says.

The house looks like it consists of two triangles joined to each other – one part makes up the house and the other, the veranda. The veranda is my favourite as it is a huge open space, and there is a bench running all around it so you could sit in just about any angle to enjoy being so high up amongst the trees.



Some of Dr Rudin's traditional artefacts in the house.

Most of the owner's parties were held on this veranda, and the couple would set up tables and everyone would enjoy dining alfresco and being at one with nature.

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Munira says that she especially likes sitting in the covered part of the veranda, also known as the Anjung, on a rainy day: “It was like being under a large umbrella, surrounded by the rain.”

The main house is equally breathtaking. When you enter the main door, you climb a winding staircase that has a hexagonal stone and granite centre. The lower floor includes the living room, dining area, kitchen and a guest room with bathroom. What makes these spaces interesting is that there are no walls separating them; instead, strategically placed furniture act as partitions.

On the upper floor are the private quarters of Dr Rudin and Munira. There is a sitting room, a prayer room, an office and bedroom with bathroom. Interesting details include handmade windows of patterned translucent glass called “*sisir angin*” and roof tiles with the names of the couple embossed in Arabic.

Dr Rudin often jokes that he lives in a two bedroom house as there are no internal walls on the first or second floor: “You can walk all the way around the house from the dining and living to the kitchen.”



From the living room, you can walk to the veranda outside and round the corner is the kitchen.

The lower floor was where everyone spent most of their time, as the living area held all their treasures – traditional artefacts, a collection of books and all those puzzles that we used to play with.

The house has a very relaxing atmosphere and a visitor will feel so at home that he can spend hours just lazing about enjoying the feel of the house. You’ll be able to hear the wind blowing (beneath the roof of the first level are spaced slats which allow air to circulate) and the birds singing. Even if you hadn’t had much use for nature before, you would have gained a whole new appreciation for it, courtesy of Rudinara.

My family and I weren’t the only ones privileged to spend time at Rudinara – the couple believed in sharing their home with as many people as possible. Rudinara was very much like a tourist spot just with foreigners but also locals.

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teaching visitors how to cook Malaysian dishes using his collection of traditional cooking implements. The meals are, of course, eaten Malaysian style, on the floor and with hands.

Unfortunately, Dr Rudin, who is now 75, and Munira are hoping to sell their dream house as they find it hard to maintain. The thought of Rudinara falling into a stranger's hands is a painful one, but the couple hopes that the buyer will love the house for being unique and quintessentially Malaysian.

I think Munira sums it best when she laughs and says: "This is the house that Rudin built". And what a house it is.

For more information, contact K.K. Yap, manager, prestige homes division, Rahim & Co, which is handling the sale of the property, at 03-2691 9922 or 012-229 2779 or log on to www.rahim-co.com

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