

Applied Art and Design

Application and Appreciation
of Islamic Heritage in
Contemporary Context

Mandana Barkeshli



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APPLICATION AND APPRECIATION OF
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CONTEXT

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CHAPTER THREE

THE USE OF DYNAMIC GEOMETRIES IN THE DESIGN OF CONTEMPORARY MALAY HOUSE

Hazman Hazumi

1. Introduction

The Malay traditional house is essentially a timber frame structure constructed by connecting a number of separate pieces of timber to form a skeletal frame that, as opposed to brick or masonry buildings, does not rely on gravity or dead weight to hold it together. It employs the post and beam construction joined using traditional mortise and tenon techniques thereby forming structural frames which are free standing as the weight of the roof is spread through the frames towards the wall plate level to the posts or columns' pedestals on the ground. This structural arrangement allows for greater design flexibility as it leaves the walls to be non-load bearing thereby allowing for employment of different kinds of materials for aesthetical or economical purposes. Traditionally; timber lattice, woven bamboos, vertical, horizontal and diagonal panels as well as various carving designs were known to be employed in the Malay houses.

The skeletal frames which divide the house structure into bays provide design grids from which functional spaces of the house could be arranged efficiently. In many instances, the internal wall divisions fall within these bays while at the same time the structural arrangements have allowed for greater open plan design to be employed in the areas allocated for semi-private uses like the *anjung* (porch) and *serambi* (veranda) where guests are entertained. The width of the bays and their span are determined largely by the size of wood available, as such the bay sizes usually fall within certain limits. Due to the uniqueness of each design requirement, the finished craftsmanship is largely determined by the expertise, skills and wisdom of the craftsman in designing the house based on individual design requirements; available wood and technology employed.

The visual survey and analysis done on the surviving traditional Malay timber houses in Peninsula Malaysia demonstrated that the Malays displayed a level of sophistication in handling wood both as an art and constructional material. As the history of timber building goes unrecorded in the Malay history, the evidence is acquired both from the naval as well as domestic architecture of the people. The traditional Malay house is generally classified based on the shapes of the roof. In general there are four types of house form which the variations of the traditional Malay house are identified:

- a. *Bumbung Panjang* – Long gable roof
- b. *Bumbung Lima* – Hipped roof