

## Theater Of Ipoh Cuisine: Regeneration in Ipoh Town

<sup>2</sup>Low Zhi Ling, <sup>1</sup>Sumarni Ismail, <sup>1</sup>Sarizal Yusman Yusoff, <sup>1</sup>Nangkula Utaberta, <sup>1</sup>Mohd Yazid Mohd Yunos, <sup>1</sup>Nor Atiah Ismail

<sup>1</sup>Architecture Department, Faculty of Design and Built Environment, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup>B. Arch Student, Architecture Department, Faculty of Design and Built Environment, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

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### ABSTRACT

Food is considered as a primary aspect in our daily life whereby its preparation and consumption as an important element of cultural heritage and a platform for cultural exchange. The unique and exquisite identity of Malaysian's food is being used as a cultural regeneration strategy to boost the tourism industry while preserving the essence of the local regional cuisine among our local community. Integrating food with architecture is creating a new experience-related space in a city that will promote cultural and social interactions. Ipoh is considered as a hidden gem that house a number of delicacies in our country other than its architecture and natural settings. In fact, Ipoh has its own potential to be promoted as a regional cuisine and culinary centre in Malaysia due to its natural settings surrounded by limestone hills and rivers rich with natural resources. Sadly to say, Ipoh started lost its vibrancy due to the inconsistent urban sprawling with its local cultural context, the local cuisine is not being well-promoted and it's in danger of being forgotten. There is lacking of architecture platform to showcase the local cultures, history and cuisines that represent Ipoh. Hence, this paper is to explore and develop the idea of merging local food and architecture into a regional cuisine theater as the catalyst of cultural-led regeneration in the intersection point of Ipoh Old Town and New Town. Implication concept of in-between urban space will help to enhance the process of Ipoh Town regeneration to showcase the local cultures while serving as a connecting link for the community, tourists and cultures.

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## INTRODUCTION

Food is the basic need for human survival, a satisfaction factor for hunger [2]. Likewise it also can reflect the identity and living lifestyle of a community through the way of food preparation and consumption. Food is also becoming one of the tourist attraction and act as an enhancing element to the travelling experience [6]. Indeed, it turns up to be the catalyst for cultural regeneration which currently Ipoh is lacking of.

Ipoh, the town that Tin Built, is one of Malaysia's quiet and cozy mid-sized cities rich with colonial architecture buildings, friendly folks and some of the country's best delicacies. One of the strong elements to represent the identity of Ipoh town is via its local cuisine beside than its heritage value. There are numerous of local cuisines eateries scattered around Ipoh town which showcase the local cultural cuisines of the local community. Local cuisine is a key part of all cultures, a major element of global intangible heritage and an increasingly important attraction for tourists. The linkages between cuisines and tourism also provide a platform for local economic development, and cuisine experiences help to brand and market destinations, as well as supporting the local culture that is attractive to tourists [7].

At present, Ipoh's pre-war enclave which is known as Ipoh Old Town to the locals, has been turned out to be a dying town for decades as the mining business deteriorated and businesses activities spread outwards to newer parts of town. Ipoh started lost its vibrancy due to the inconsistent urban sprawling to its local context. This phenomenon is getting worse when the school leavers migrate out from the city for further studies or in searching for better job opportunities due to process of urbanization. Unlike Penang and Malacca, Ipoh does not have the benefit of Unesco World Heritage status, a sure tourist attraction draw [9]. However, the street stalls and restaurants scattered in Ipoh town that serve up ample mouth watering local cuisine can actually turn up to

**Corresponding Author:** Sumarni Ismail, Architecture Department, Faculty of Design and Built Environment, Universiti Putra Malaysia.  
E-mail: [sumarni.upm@gmail.com](mailto:sumarni.upm@gmail.com)

be one of the attraction force that make people travel to Ipoh. Most of the people just pass by here for one simple reason - its authentic and delicious food [3]. However, the heritage value of the authentic and healthy local cuisine is not being well appreciated and celebrated by the community. It was facing a problem of depletion in our community.

Indeed, the regional cuisine culture can actually be seen as one of the driven force to uplift tourism in Ipoh which will bring Ipoh back to its glorious past while foster economic development with a touch of modernization by tying food and architecture together. Food is actually serving more than nourishment, it offers pleasure and entertainment which served as a social interaction purpose [5]. Food can be utilized as a means to promote cultural offers and probably can results a growing interest within experience economy to regenerate sectors of urban economy [4]. But how can food related to architecture in terms of space design as a catalyst of cultural-led regeneration? And how can the space design influence the culture of culinary art which bridging the gap between the community?

Hence, this paper will be outlined the idea of cultural-led regeneration to evoke the sleeping town image of Ipoh Town through its unique cultural cuisine heritage [8] originated in Ipoh by developing a regional cuisine theater at this intersection point of Ipoh Old Town and New Town in order to emphasize the role of local cuisine representing Ipoh local identity as a new emerging food heaven. Idea of having a theatrical space on site is to create a public interactive space whereby process of local cuisine and culinary experience will be seen as a performance for the tourists as well as local community to appreciate the essence of cultural cuisines. It will be a merging of architecture and cuisines to showcase the local cultures as well as a connecting link among the community, tourists and cultures.

In order to create a successful cuisine theater that will be able to generate new experience-related space in the future, the creation of social bonds and public relations towards food in a space need to be taken into design consideration. It is vital as the cuisine and culinary should foster relationship among the people through dining experience whereby people get to share their opinions and distress their tension [1]. Concept of in-between urban space integrates with interactive spatial design as the key parameters for new food-architecture experiences which will revitalize Ipoh town while initiating social relations.

Different case studies were carried out to study the parameters for a better interactive cuisine and culinary spatial design which includes the programming, spatial layout, heritage preservation as well as riverfront development. Basque Culinary Centre in Spain was studied as the ideas and design principles of this building showing the example of merging gastronomy and architecture as a whole supporting each other while celebrating the Spanish culinary traditions. This will help to develop a better programming and design ideas which can be applied into Ipoh local context.

Perhaps with this proposal, the Theater of Ipoh Cuisine will be able to tighten up the gap of both the new and old town of Ipoh while act as a catalyst for cultural regeneration in Ipoh town. It will be a project merging of food and architecture as a vibrant interaction space that will reflecting the history, cultures and cuisine of Ipoh.

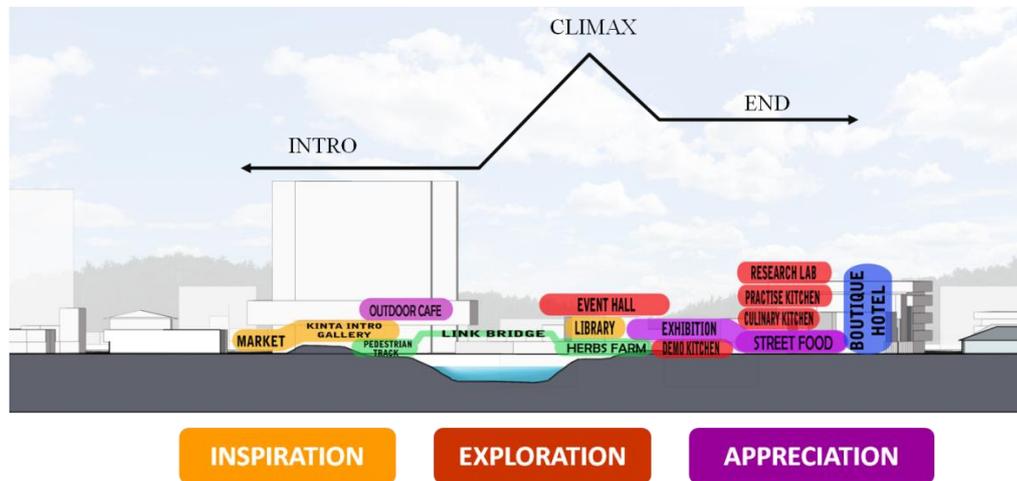
#### *Background Study:*

Ipoh is located at the centre connecting Penang and Kuala Lumpur which is served well as the intersection point of Northern and Southern part of Peninsula Malaysia. It is the forth largest city in Malaysia with population over 710,000 people. In one of the international survey being done by Kathleen 2014, Ipoh is being listed as one of the nine most affordable places to retire in the world. This is because Ipoh itself is like a town with fresh air, clean water and relaxing lifestyle which will not only improves the quality of life but also promoted longevity. Other than that, it is very accessible as well which can be access either by plane at Sultan Azlan Shah Airport from Kuala Lumpur, Penang International Airport and Changi Airport Budget Terminal, by train using ETS from Kuala Lumpur to Ipoh Railway Station which takes up only 2 hours journey, by bus as well as by car.

The evolution of Ipoh history showed that the town was expanded from the West side of the riverbank towards the East side of the riverbank which is spreading from Ipoh Old Town to Ipoh New Town and Greentown. Ipoh Old town and Newtown area were always being overshadowing by new admin and commercial centre of Greentown. Recently, there is a new upcoming township development : Meru Jaya Township which poised to become the State's admin centre located along the North-South highway. Massive sprawl northwards, meanwhile the "Old and New Towns" rot had eventually becoming the norm of progress which leads to the issue of Aging Town to be happened in Old Town and New Town.



The sensory expedition will be divided into three different parts which are Inspiration, Exploration and Appreciation which the visitors will be able experience different sensory experience throughout the cuisine and culinary process. It is a stage of satisfaction where all the senses will be experiencing the quality of space through the interactions between the body, food and environment. All stages listed in the sensory expedition will be designed and integrated into the site in a spatial design layout planning.

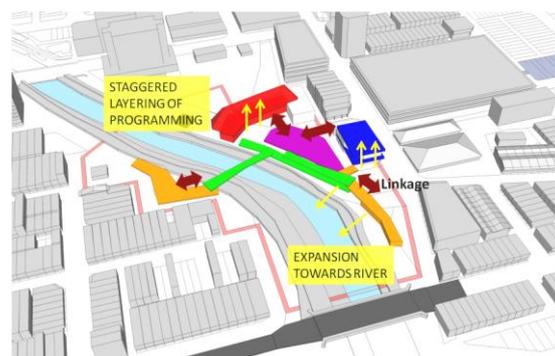


**Fig. 3:** Diagram showing concept of sensory expedition through different programming planning on site section  
Source : Author

#### *Site Planning and Programming:*

The initial site planning and programming is being designed responding to the site context to regenerate the decaying part of Ipoh town while injecting new urban life and street activities to the site through concept of in-between urban space. The design of site will take upon different design strategies that responding to the site while resolve how the spaces should be integrated in the design scheme. The initial idea sketches starts with considerations of site boundary and axis to allocate the building blocks and design layout formation respecting to the surrounding existing building as well as the riverfront promenade.

The massing idea is designed and planned according to the concept of sensory expedition and urban in-between space to create a theatrical cuisine space within the urban void. The overall planning layout will be a journey of sensory exploration that will showcase the local cuisines to the visitors when they walked pass all the zones on site.

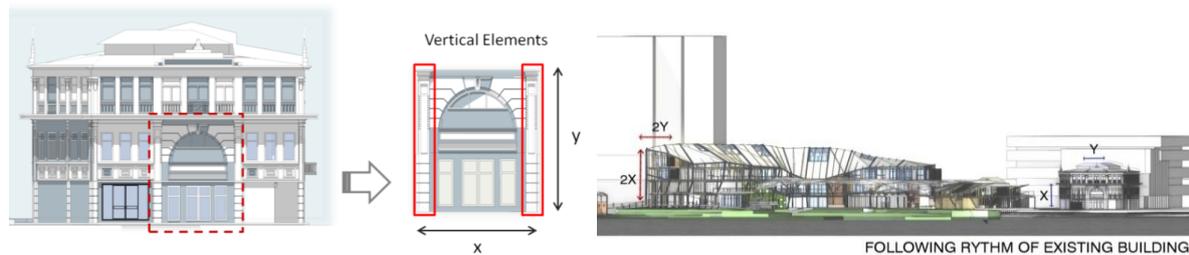


**Fig. 5:** Diagrams showing process of massing planning development on site  
Source : Author

#### *Design Strategies and Implication:*

The design will be enhanced with different design strategies respecting to the site context. Since the site itself is a challenging site whereby it is split by a river running across it as well as surrounded by some heritage buildings, different design strategies such as the scale, materials, connectivity and juxtaposition approach are implemented into the spatial design and planning of site.

- a) Scale of Buildings to site context

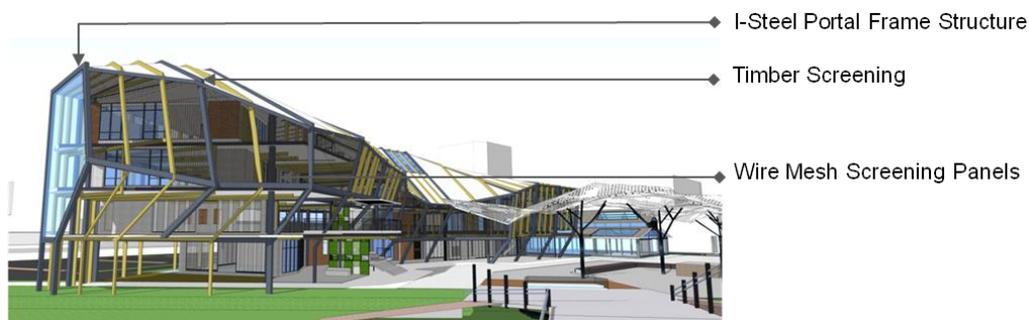


**Fig. 6:** Diagram showing study scale of building to harmonize rhythm of overall buildings to site

Source : Author

The columns' proportion of Foong Seong Villa was being taken as the proportion study elements. The height and width of the columns were designated as ratio  $x:y$  whereby the proposed design will follow to the ratio  $x:y$  to harmonize the rhythm of the building scale to the site context. Hence, it will create a continuation of horizontal elements between the proposed buildings with the existing buildings.

#### b) Materials used



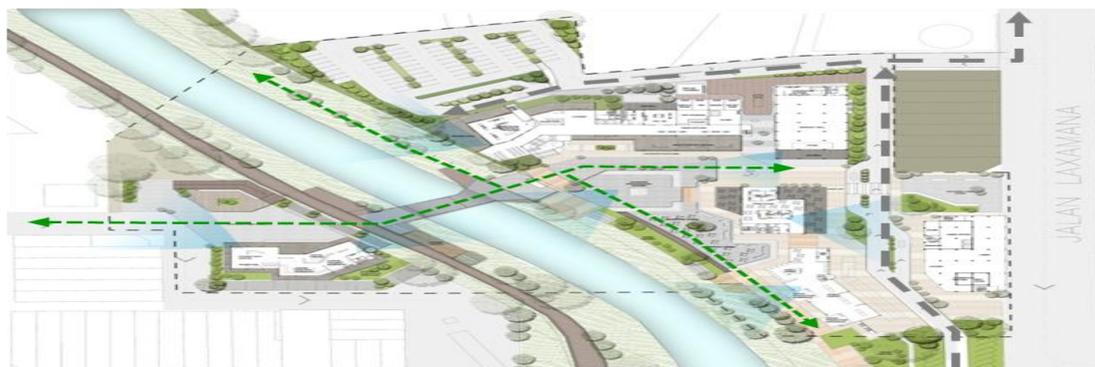
**Fig. 7:** Diagram showing materials study of proposed building

Source : Author

Combination of Steel Frame Structure with timber screen as the main supporting structure whereas the envelope will be a double wall treatment with wire mesh panels. Permeability of the spaces inside-outside is the main concern of the usage of materials. Hence, the materials used must be able to provide a space that connects the people in the building to the outdoor environment and vice versa.

#### Connectivity to site:

In terms of physical connectivity, the missing joint between Old Town and New Town will be connected through a linked bridge for public access. The indoor spaces are connected to the outdoor through landscape and decking and different façade of the building blocks will be open up to be connected visually to the surrounded buildings. People, space and environment are all connected visually and physically that create an urban spot which capture the happening scenery of local cuisine experience.

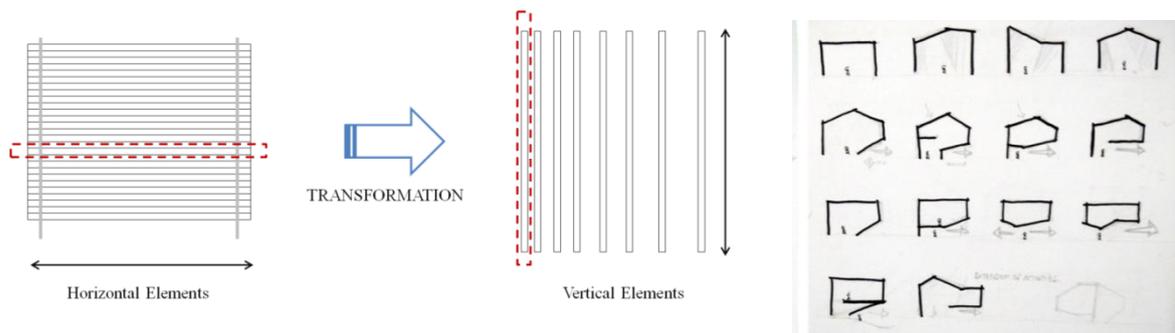


**Fig. 8:** Diagram showing the physical and visual connectivity to the site context

Source : Author

*Juxtaposition of Frame Structure with current pre-war architecture:*

The idea of having the frame structure developed from the local element of bamboo chick which is being used as the sun shading device by the local. The horizontal element of bamboo chick is translated into vertical element of frame structure to create a different spatial experience and views when the visitors walked pass the space. A site context design of architecture is being transformed from the morphing study of frame structure.



**Fig. 9:** Diagrams showing morphing study of frame structure

Source : Author

#### *Design Solution:*

Based on all the idea sketches, spaces analysis and programming studies as discussed earlier, various activities related to local cuisines are designed and planned in accordance. Different spaces will be designed according to the concept of sensory expedition based on the space requirements.

The overall site planning will be divided into three different parts based on the stage of sensory experience as well as the zoning of space.



**Fig. 10:** Diagram showing sensory expedition of different spaces across Section AA

Source : Author

#### *Inspiration zone:*

It's the welcoming zones with tourist info centre, street market, public square located at the entrances of both Old Town and New Town. These spaces are to expose the local cultures of the community to the visitors when they first reach to the site. It will be the first move for them to excite their senses and trigger the mind to explore more.

#### *Exploration zone:*

It will be a zone for exploration where the visitors can get involved in the process of cooking and understand more about local cuisine and culinary process through different spaces provided in this zone. These spaces are the demo kitchen, cuisine exhibition galley, research lab, seminar rooms and public teaching kitchen where the visitors can have a complete sensory experience about local cuisine.

#### *Appreciation Zone:*

Appreciation zone is the place for the public to enjoy the local cuisines in the local setting that will provide another sensory experience. Banquet hall, street food dining plaza and theatrical performance plaza served as the venues excites the taste buds of visitors where the visitors will be able to enjoy the interactive dining experience with the chef. The theatrical performance plaza will be served as the gathering spot filled with evocative scents and experience will attract the public to participate and interact with each other.

The main structure of the proposed building will be I-steel portal frame as the main architecture element that reflecting the past, present and future. It is the proposed solution respecting to the historical context of the site while creating a flexible spatial layout for present use and future extension.

*Conclusion:*

This paper is first started with the vision and goals of promoting local cuisine as the cultural-led regeneration solution for the decaying town of Ipoh. Then the design is further developed and enhanced with the data from site analysis. The design is focuses on the integration of urban in-between space with local cuisine through the concept of sensory expedition. The building program of local cuisine and culinary is developed based on the needs of target users to showcase the identity of Ipoh as the new emerging food paradise in Malaysia. The overall idea of sensory expedition is explained in every stage of design that matched to the site context to create a happening cuisine celebration spot in the urban void of Ipoh.

Although there are many challenges and constraints throughout the design process, these obstacles eventually turned up to be the opportunities for a better design approach. Challenges and obstacles are meant to be faced and solved which the process of solving might comes up with unexpected knowledge inputs. These inputs will be a useful resource for future design or further enhancement for the thesis.

It is such a pleasure and honour to be able to complete this design scheme within the given time with the limited resources. The idea of having this theatrical cuisine space in the urban void will helps to enhance the interactions among people, food and environment that make the project achieve the visions as set earlier. The exploration of architecture by integrating food and architecture is developed and enhanced based on many factors to make it success in hitting the target of revealing the cultures of a community.

This project is giving the opportunities to study on the potential of architecture exploration through merging of food with architecture that gives different learning experiences and knowledge throughout the process. This helps to open up the thinking and mindsets on problem solving that interaction of human can actually be fostered through food as well as its spatial design. Food is not only served for the purpose of nutritional support, indeed it can be a connector for human interactions or even showcasing the identity of a place. "Sometimes food is more than just food." – Jo Beverly

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