

# WEAVING GREEN



LAUD ARCHITECTS CAPITALISES ON THE THERAPEUTIC QUALITY OF GREENERY FOR THE AGAPE VILLAGE TRAINING CENTRE, MAKING VEGETATION AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE ARCHITECTURE.

TEXT • FELICIA TOH  
PHOTOGRAPHY • MELVIN H J TAN (COURTESY OF LAUD ARCHITECTS)



THE CALMING EFFECT OF GREENERY has been the subject of many medical studies over the years, resulting in its purposeful integration into 'therapeutic gardens' for people seeking restoration from illness, fatigue or the plain bustle of daily life. Agape Village is a building designed by LAUD Architects for Caritas Singapore – the social and community arm of the Catholic Church in Singapore, which oversees 24 charities. There, lush greenery forms an integral part of the architecture. Stepping onto the long site in Toa Payoh, one's eyes are immediately drawn upward to the soft lilted curtain of hanging creepers gracing the facade.

Caritas Singapore supports a wide range of causes and assists those facing financial hardship, broken families, migrant workers, children, the elderly, and those with disabilities. LAUD Architects won a design competition that called for a building to accommodate two main types of programmatic spaces: workshop rooms, and a multi-purpose space that could host events, seminars and lectures.

In response to the brief, LAUD Architects found themselves with a building typology resembling a school, with corridors branching off into numerous training rooms. This raised many intriguing questions. What does it mean to build a school in the tropics? As a one-stop help centre dealing with many different user groups, how could the design create pockets of spaces that encourage these diverse groups to interact and linger? Director Ho Tzu Yin of LAUD Architects shares that the studio was inspired in part by Fumihiko Maki's research into Group Forms, which posits that there is value in the interstitial spaces between defined clusters – in terms of enriching community life and generating collective identity.

LAUD's exploration led to their proposal for a series of gardens that glue together myriad programmes within the building. In total, there are eight gardens of different scales and quietude: some are meditative and conducive to solitary walks, while others are communal (for example,



Left: Pocket gardens between training rooms and the perforated exterior walls create flexible, directly accessible in-between spaces and facilitate air flow

Right: The creepers and other greenery planted on the building create a soft-edged appearance and create a calming atmosphere within



Glass louvers enclose the training rooms, allowing air to flow through the rooms, and tie and from the central stair atrium.

gardens adjoining a playground, or open-to-sky terraces for community farming). "Every room in this building has a view of the outside and of some form of greenery," Ho reveals, gesturing toward the lush hanging 'Lee Kuan Yew creepers' (Bridal Veil Climbers) that have grown long enough to cloak the glazed facade. These gardens are enjoyed not only by people within the building, but also by the neighbours across the street, who complimented the architects for providing them with a pleasant, verdant view.

Lushly planted, the facade is a dynamic undulating wrapper that envelops the programmatic modules and garden pockets, softly deforming in response to key nodes such as entrance drop-offs and large branching trees along the main road. The sense of greenery informs and transforms the experience of the architecture as one moves through the spaces, seamlessly blending the interior and exterior through gradual transitions while allowing diagonal views within the building.

"The budget was quite generous for the plants, but it paid off as it really softens the feel of the building. Plants have a very soothing and calming effect, which works well with the programmes housed here," says Ho. LAUD Architects first encountered the possibility of enjoying the therapeutic effects of incorporating greenery into their architecture when designing the Good Shepherd Centre next door – a shelter for abused



THIS IS A BUILDING THAT APPEARS TO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY TAKEN ITS CUES FROM NATURE – ORGANISED YET ORGANIC, AND ULTIMATELY, UPLIFTING.

Top: In-between spaces such as the indoor-outdoor pocket gardens were thought of as the glue that would bind the users of the village together

Bottom: A controlled colour palette clearly defines each element in the building, as shown in this training room



women and children from broken families. Their design for Agape Village is an extension of that idea, executed to great effect. A quiet hush falls within the building as we thread through the light-filled atriums and sun-dappled gardens. Shaded and cooled by the greenery, the porous shell is transformed into a stunning living facade.

The colour palette is a neutral canvas: swathes of white geometric facade screens are accented by the black tones of a sleek metal staircase and signage. Against this backdrop, the green of the plants really pops – while simultaneously softening the building, much like the feathery effect of Photoshop's 'blur' brush. Copings for the planters, parapets and benches are composed of glass-fibre reinforced stone – a terrazzo-like material similarly composed in white.

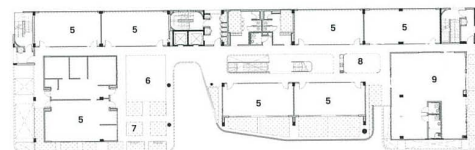
Initially, LAUD intended to employ ventilated blocks for the facade, like those used in 1960s schools, but found they were too heavy and would require large steel support structures – especially when applied to taller parts of the building. They subsequently found a viable alternative in EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finishing System) – a type of densified polystyrene clad with mesh and rendered in plaster and paint. This material offered the benefits of being lightweight with the potential for milling into any desired shape.

In terms of site planning, the architects organised the café and services along one side of the building, so the car park could be converted to a contiguous space for occasional temporary events. All the rooms were designed to be naturally ventilated through sliding glass doors, louvred glass and fans, although air-conditioning is provided as an option. In consideration of the client's status as a charity organisation, finishes were kept simple but presentable – with cement-screed flooring underfoot and exposed services neatly organised beneath the ceiling.

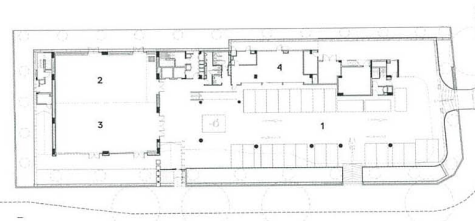
"One concern we had was that the long corridors serving the classrooms might be dim, so we designed the atrium to be naturally lit from above by skylights, which are also ventilated at the sky-terrace level," Ho shares. The central atrium reads as a series of smooth curves illuminated by a central skylight. Thought was put into the design of three-dimensional signage that sits perpendicular to the walls to ease wayfinding along the corridors.

Top: The common pantry on the second storey enjoys natural light and a garden aspect. Colourful furniture disrupts the otherwise reductive colour palette

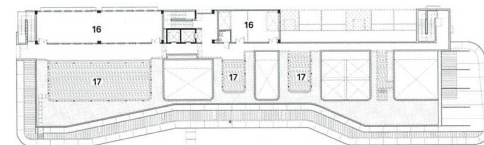
Bottom: Training rooms enjoy views of greenery, with the plants and perforated EIFS walls creating an environmental filter and reducing glare



2ND STOREY PLAN



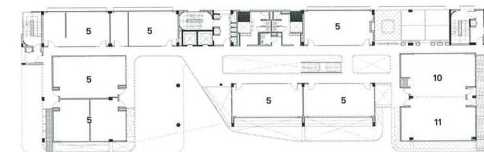
1ST STOREY PLAN



ROOF PLAN



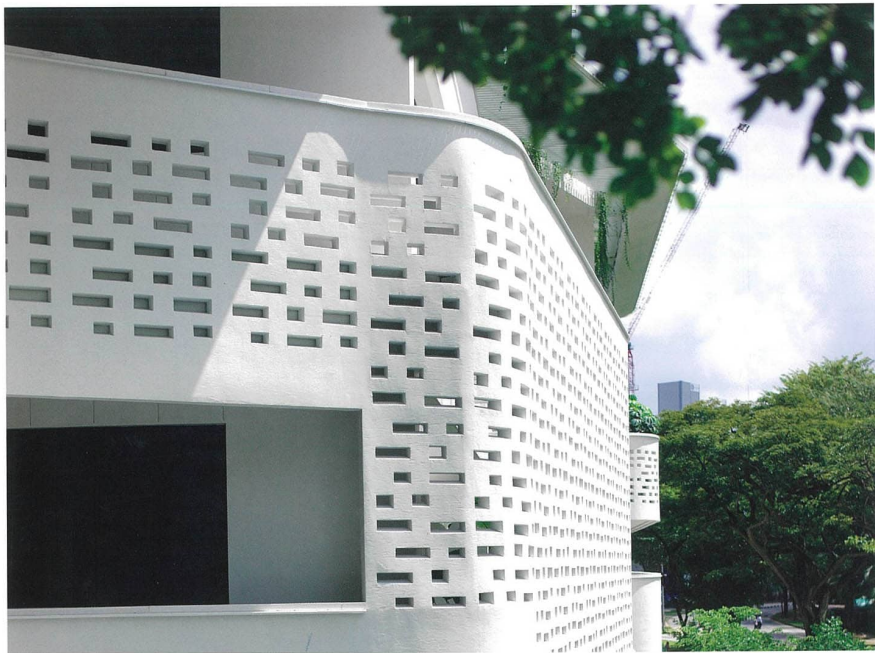
4TH STOREY PLAN



3RD STOREY PLAN

## LEGEND

1 Car Park | 2 Multipurpose Hall 1 | 3 Multipurpose Hall 2 | 4 Café | 5 Training Room | 6 Children's Playground | 7 Garden | 8 Common Pantry | 9 Respite Centre | 10 Multipurpose Room 1 | 11 Multipurpose Room 2 | 12 Office | 13 Interview Rooms | 14 Quiet Room | 15 Dance Studio | 16 M&E | 17 Roof Terrace



SECTION

Ironically, this is a building one might want to get lost in. A sense of the organic can be read in the curvature of the skin and circulation paths, which were planned as offshoots from the corridors. One is tempted to meander and emerge into pleasant pockets of greenery. The classrooms do not butt against the external skin – an intervening depth was created and lushly planted, allowing a tranquil walk in the garden between the two layers. Despite the modularity of the programmes, the experience is anything but linear. The wavy porous facade does not stick to the classroom boundaries but purposefully detaches itself to create open-to-sky gardens along the perimeter, providing each classroom with a view and a degree of sensory richness.

This is a building that feels more like a walk in the park than an institution. With edges softened by greenery and a facade that accommodates, it is a building replete with breathing space and one that appears to have successfully taken its cues from nature – organised yet organic, and ultimately, uplifting.

Above: A close-up view of the facade shows the undulating surfaces that correspond with entry points and the reach of street-tree branches

## AGAPE VILLAGE

**CLIENT** Caritas Singapore  
**ARCHITECTURE FIRM** LAUD Architects Pte Ltd  
**PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS** Joseph Lau, Ho Tzu Yin (GP), Melvin H J Tan, Jason Bok, Wong Siew Wei, Davamoni Rathika Florence, Yeo Lye Niah  
**BUILDER** Hong Shin Builders Pte Ltd  
**C&S ENGINEER** Chodai & Buro Engineering Pte Ltd  
**M&E ENGINEER** HPX Consulting Engineers  
**QUANTITY SURVEYOR** Choy & Associates (1992)  
**LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR** Nyee Phoe Flower Garden Pte Ltd

**TIME TO COMPLETE** 21 months  
**TOTAL FLOOR AREA** 4,200 sqm

**LAUD ARCHITECTS PTE LTD**  
 (65) 6259 2122 laudarchitects.com

### FINISHES

On facade, parapet walls, staircase atrium and feature skylights, Dryvit EIFS (exterior insulation and finishing system) perforated panels supplied by Metro Projects. On benches, parapet wall copings and central staircase treads, FormCal® glass-fibre reinforced stone (GFRS) supplied by Pioneer Process. On external wall, Kansai 'Cera Stucco White' textured paint supplied by Kansai Paint (Singapore). In multi-purpose hall and dance studio, 'Golden Teak' timber flooring supplied by Creative Doroz. On lift lobby feature wall and toilet mirror, timber lookalike aluminium screen is Timbercoat aluminium extrusion in wood grain finish supplied by PBG Aluminium & Glazing Works. Generally throughout, homogeneous tiles supplied by Malford Ceramics. In interview rooms and quiet room, Formica vinyl strip flooring supplied by Formica. On external wall of multipurpose hall, Cerai lightweight laminated decorative board supplied by Admira. On internal wall of multipurpose hall, CR perforated board acoustic panel supplied by Creative Noise Control.

### FIXED & FITTED

Generally throughout, assorted Daikin AC systems supplied by Sensor One. Generally throughout, assorted Rigel sanitary ware and fittings supplied by Rigel Technology. On second-storey children's playground, Kompan play equipment supplied by Playpoint. Signage supplied by Ultimate Display System and Stylistique Ads. In office and training rooms, assorted system furniture supplied by C&R Interiors.

### LIGHTING

In office and training rooms, Philips suspended lights with LED baton and 'Coreview' recessed LED lights supplied by Philips Electronics. In office, multipurpose hall and corridors, Philips 'Greenspace' recessed LED downlights supplied by Philips Electronics.

**Admira Pte Ltd** (65) 6368 0123 admira.sg **C&R Interiors Pte Ltd** (65) 6488 0577 crinteriors.com.sg **Creative Doroz Pte Ltd** (65) 6650 2797 creativenoisecontrol.com.sg **Formica (Singapore) Pte Ltd** (65) 6514 1313 formica.com.sg **Kansai Paint (Singapore) Pte Ltd** (65) 6261 8621 kansaipaint.sg **Malford Ceramics Pte Ltd** (65) 67425756 malford.com.sg **Metro Projects Pte Ltd** (65) 6438 3998 metroprojects.com.sg **PBG Aluminium & Glazing Works Pte Ltd** (65) 6358 2985 **Philips Electronics (S) Pte Ltd** (65) 6882 4861 lighting.philips.com **Pioneer Process Sdn Bhd** (603) 7859 1395 pioneerprocess.com **Playpoint (Singapore) Pte Ltd** (65) 6398 1558 playpoint.asia **Rigel Technology (S) Pte Ltd** (65) 6812 6288 rigel.com.sg **Sensor One Pte Ltd** (65) 6257 7767 sensor.com.sg **Stylistique Ads (S) Pte Ltd** (65) 6285 6166 ultimateadsystem.com **Ultimate Design** (65) 6741 2828 ultimatedesign.com

Top: On the fourth floor, a minimal and meditative garden can be viewed from the adjacent quiet room. The cross formation references the Catholic heritage of the client

Bottom: A green fringe of plants and creepers forms a delicate natural screen across the glazed enclosure of the multipurpose rooms on the third floor



LUSHLY PLANTED, THE FACADE IS A DYNAMIC UNDULATING WRAPPER THAT ENVELOPS THE PROGRAMMATIC MODULES AND GARDEN POCKETS, SOFTLY DEFORMING IN RESPONSE TO KEY NODES.