

## ***Coba House- a Modern House critique in Bali***

By Fransiska Prihadi\*

Originally, the name of 'coba' (in English means: Experiment) derives from a good friend of the architect who often visited the house when it was first finished built. Experiment might be the perfect word to describe the house since it was the first house of the architect who as well is the owner.

Situated in the East Denpasar, people kept forgetting that Bali is not only an exotic island with beachfront or mountain-view. So when one has not enough luck to really own a piece of land from the above option, they might as well need to solve a typical urban house problem. It's the same on whichever city it would be built. The basic problems will be a question of the natural light and good air ventilation system. Especially in a dense populated urban area.

With the total land of approximately 180 meters square, Daniel Sandjaja designed a two-storey house to fulfill the living need of he and his wife, Lily.

Breaking the house with an inner courtyard, he separates the kitchen-dining area and the living space in the ground floor. Later on the second floor are the main bedroom and the guest room. The simple modern lifestyle statement was not only implied on the house program, but also in the range choice of color and material scheme.

All the rooms are open flowing space (without any doors-windows) except for the bedroom that use alluminium glass sliding door panel.

The idea of using these sliding doors in bedrooms is so that in daytime the doors could disappear and leave the bedrooms open, allowing wind flows in as much as you want, and at night one could still enjoy the bright starry sky. Perhaps some of the problems with these alluminium doors in house are the natural squeaking sound they make while it's not soundproof compared to wood doors. Of course water came in from the panel-rails when it rains was another thing to consider when one is giving a thought of having these shade-less kinds of door/windows.

The Coba House appears as two huge white-gray boxes with a square courtyard squeezed in between. The courtyard acts as a natural light and air provider for the whole house, more or less like a heart of the house. Although it's visually connected between these boxes, it's not functionally well linked. The canopy-less courtyard makes one need to use an umbrella to



Façade of the house- (photo by.Fransiska Prihadi)



Looking to the guest bedroom- (photo by.Fransiska Prihadi)

move from the kitchen to the other side of the house (which happened to be a seating-living room). It's hilarious to think that an umbrella is needed inside the house for only 6 meters distance. But it's not amusing anymore when it's raining hard and even the floor inside the house became slippery. Now it becomes a dangerous modern house.

Solving the basic problems of natural light and good air ventilation system with the inner courtyard are not enough to be called a good modern house after all.



Left: view of the inner courtyard from entry, Right: view of the kitchen dining from the second floor-(photo by.Fransiska Prihadi)



Left: stairs to the roof deck from the second floor. Right: the main bedroom from kitchen-dining-(photo by.Fransiska Prihadi)

Despite the trivial inquiry of merely being stylistic and want to look modern, the architect's decision to leave the commonly pitched roof in the name of giving the house a pure boxlike form is a very defying unwise decision. Not only because the amount of rainfall in the rainy season in Bali leads to leaking of most of the corner in the house, but it also impacted the interior furniture of the house.

The architect chooses to fill the interior space with all white custom-built furniture. Trying to blend the furniture with the architecture, a working space is created by simply opening a cabinet in the living room.

Besides successfully merge the interior & exterior, these furniture also have a very sharp shape. Perhaps it's the box theme of the house that was carried all in to the furniture design concept. But sharp edged house furniture unfortunately isn't really a human user-friendly thing. Be careful with the inside furniture of the house (such as tables, sofas) would be very useful when you're walking around, or else you'll leave the house with bumps mark all over your knee or thigh. Of course when one live in the same house every day, they will automatically memorize the danger edge zone in their mind. But aren't houses supposed to support the living gesture of the human living inside and not the other way around?

Regardless how pretty this house looks in the pictures, the important issue to learn is that design need to be sensitive and responsive to a certain climate condition and there should be an ergonomic limit of experiment for the inhabitant's mode of living. There are dangers in this sort of buildings, these schemes tend to be too overdone and abandoned the basic purpose of a house, which is to make a comfortable place to live in.

The Coba House makes me wonder why is this style of architecture sometimes too focused on architect's emotional creative design sense and less on common sense. However, with the fact that there are more publication and television programs about design-architecture in Indonesia, it would be a fascinating challenge for the future clients and designer to carefully investigate which is the best thing to choose. It seems that modern architectural forms in the tropical climate need to go further than merely chic images.

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