

Headline	When the bells and whistles turn ugly		
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Lovely but costly!

Landscapes are great for the soul – if they don't go over the top and burn a hole in your pocket.

Can landscapes be planned and built for sustainability and still look good?

Turn to **Pages 5 to 9** to find out.

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When the bells and whistles *turn ugly*

●Text **Natalie Khoo**

You don't need the experts to tell you this: parks, open spaces, flora and fauna are this season's darlings of property investors and tenants – all due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

And we are not just talking about landed homes that usually come with enough plots of soil for some DIY planting, besides a mandatory recreational park.

Vertical developments too, are recognising the green feature as a major factor in attracting potential buyers.

But before you jump at the offers that promise oxygen-loaded environments, remember there is no free lunch. All the alluring greens and open spaces – take a closer look and you will notice the attached price tags.

The cost is not limited to the one-off sale and purchase price. It is what you need to pay in the long run – every month in fact – for as long as you own the property.

Why? Because without regular upkeep (read – money), landscaped features and amenities become eye-sores. Have you visited (or are living in) a project boasting water features, which now needs to be hidden from view, because they have become green – not the kind of the desirable shade in this case, but from mould? Or barren hedges alongside sorry-looking plants that will never see brighter days?

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“

The real cost of maintenance starts when the project is completed”
— **Yap**

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOW YEN YEING | EdgeProp.my

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“The real cost of maintenance starts when the project is completed,” points out Praxcis Design director and landscape architect Yap Nga Tuan. Ill-managed amenities do not only challenge value protection but could be expensive to rectify.

Not all property buyers are aware that a project’s sustainability extends beyond the brick and mortar. Often, it is not until the plants start wilting very quickly and a lot of replanting and maintenance work is demanded, that the high and recurrent maintenance cost hits.

The same goes for public and community parks. The bells and whistles in any project do not come free. And the buck stops at the developer. (*See story on page 8*)

Learning from mistakes

Time will tell if the landscape of a project is sustainable. Often, the lesson comes with expensive “tutoring fees”.

It goes without saying, a landscape design minus the bells and whistles from the start is easier on the pocket.

Consider the 26-year-old Sri Penaga in Kuala Lumpur’s Bangsar. Sri Penaga was the Silver winner of EdgeProp-ILAM Malaysia’s Sustainable Landscape Award 2019, which was part of EdgeProp Malaysia’s Best Managed & Sustainable Property Awards 2019. In 2018, the 304-unit condominium was a Gold winner in the 10-years-and-above multiple-owned strata residential category of the anchor awards. The project is managed by Henry Butcher (Mont Kiara) Malaysia Sdn Bhd.

Sri Penaga Management Corporation landscape sub-committee member Yuen Cheong Swing stresses that proper maintenance for plants and machinery is crucial to ensure a pristine condition of the landscape.

“Here at Sri Penaga, we are well-known as a garden resort living condominium. We believe that a well-managed, beautiful and lush garden will enable residents to enjoy a vacation right in our garden resort,” Yuen tells **EdgeProp.my**.

However, the success of Sri Penaga’s beautiful landscape has not come overnight. Expensive mistakes were made and learnt from along the way.

For instance, upon consultation with a certified arborist, some old trees planted on a sloppy area along Jalan Medang Serai were cut down to avoid potential hazard to both residents and the public.

Yuen also recalls the time the committee bought expensive plants that were difficult to maintain.

“We always learn. I wanted to plant a flowering plant once and our techni-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOW YEN YENG | **EdgeProp.my**

The 26-year-old Sri Penaga in Kuala Lumpur’s Bangsar. Sri Penaga was the Silver winner of EdgeProp-ILAM Malaysia’s Sustainable Landscape Award 2019.

“

We always learn. I wanted to plant a flowering plant once and our technician told us that it would be very messy [when it grows]. You have to respect his opinion because it could be too much work for him to clean later.”
— Yuen

cian told us that it would be very messy [when it grows]. You have to respect his opinion because it could be too much work for him to clean later,” she says.

Yuen and her team have a clear vision – to balance the protection of the natural environment while fulfilling the residents’ needs.

“Upon entering Sri Penaga, you would be greeted by a row of coconut trees along the driveway as well as our royal palm trees at the pool area. Royal palms and coconut trees are self-cleaning, meaning the old fronds can be monitored by the gardeners. This has saved cost and time. On top of that, they also provide shade at the swimming pool area,” Yuen explains.

The trade off is that the coconut trees need to be regularly trimmed and cut shorter, to prevent them from collapsing onto passing vehicles and pedestrians.



Curtain creepers called the Lee Kuan Yew creepers caress some 200m of the concrete wall at the edge of the condominium building on Jalan Maarof.

“We chose this plant because it does not grow its roots into the wall. This was a major concern for the management team as we needed to conduct periodic safety inspection on the wall and slope. This creeper beautifies the place yet allows the wall to be accessible for inspections,” Yuen shares.

Sustainable landscaping does not come in a one-size-fits-all model. Neither is it a one-off initiative.

The fact that there are no unnecessary extras in the landscape of Sri Penaga, a coveted condominium with above-average capital appreciation, says it all.

Yuen (middle) with Sri Penaga MC representatives who manage the landscape matters. (File picture taken before MCO)

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What is sustainable landscaping?

Sustainable landscaping is not all about greenery and trees.

Praxcis Design director Yap Nga Tuan, who specialises in landscape architecture, says landscape design and planning must be looked at in a holistic manner. Sustainable landscape needs to integrate ecology, impact development character, protect the environment, facilitate ambience temperature, operate on low carbon consumption, increase oxygen yield and create potential recreational opportunities.

In recent times, it seems that developers are taking heed of the fact that sustainable landscaping must be thought of from the onset and consider the natural composition of the site in their project planning, Yap observes.

“A developer invited me to give a talk to their homebuyers to encourage and build budding caregivers of the environment – to think about the conservation of the natural landscape that is already present there,” she adds.

Yap also observes there is an increasing demand for designs to complement the existing site instead of altering it to something new totally.

“As a landscape architect, it is also our responsibility to educate and guide the stakeholders on what it means to build sustainable landscaping and the benefits we can harvest from it. In fact, our role is also to be an environmentalist. It is beyond just creating a landscape scene,” she emphasises.

Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia vice-president Dr Assoc Prof LAr Dr Nor Atiah Ismail notices that landscape is still one of the last priorities in the project planning phase, often being considered as unimportant and given less attention to.

“Ideally, all the project stakeholders (owners, architects, engineers, contractors, etc) should be brought together

before the design process begins, and the design process can be completely collaborative, with all parties providing valuable input based on their respective expertise. The reality, however, is that this collaboration rarely happens, especially on smaller-scale projects,” she says.

Nor Atiah is a judge for EdgeProp-ILAM Malaysia’s Sustainable Landscape Awards 2021. This award is a feature of the EdgeProp Malaysia’s Best Managed & Sustainable Property Awards, which was conceptualised in 2017 to recognise real estate that is sustainable and managed with excellence.

The objective of the Awards is to raise the bar on Malaysian property management practices, benchmarking it against the best in class globally. The chief judge of the Awards is EdgeProp Malaysia editor-in-chief and managing director Au Foong Yee.

Nor Atiah says sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

“The concept of needs goes beyond simply material needs, but includes values, relationships, freedom to think, act and participate, all amounting to sustainable living, morally,

and spiritually,” says Nor Atiah, adding that significant concern has been given by some property developers to adopt a sustainable landscape planning in their developments.

Praxcis’ Yap says sustainable landscaping is to address all the needs of the development and end-users, balancing between beauty, function, ambience and survivability of the plants and upkeep.

She says sustainable landscaping is no longer overlooked in project designing. Some projects have landscape as one of the key generators of a project because a building or space is not an isolated object and perception.

“Property developers are getting more conscious of ensuring that sustainable landscaping is adhered to when a project is being planned. The awareness has grown and taken root and more importantly, it is a pragmatic need, and developers are responding enthusiastically to this,” Yap tells **EdgeProp.my**, adding that it is an accumulation of the internal and external environment and ambience as well that underpins the success of a project.

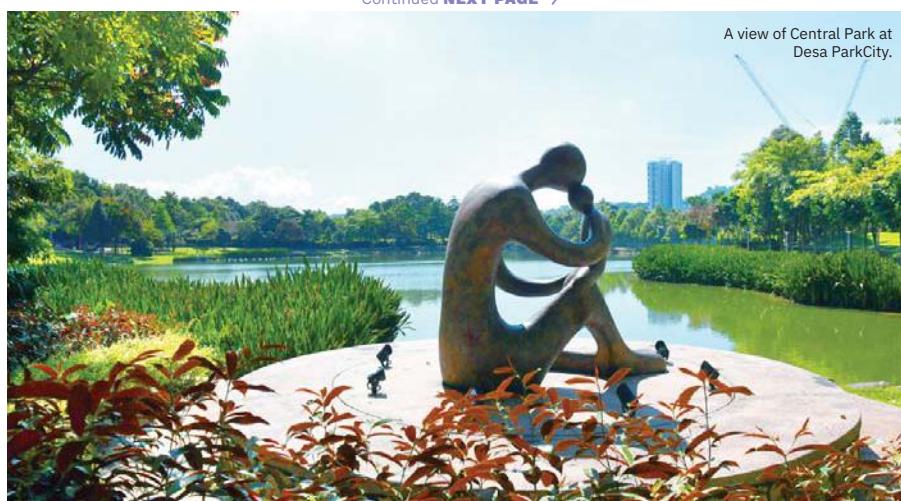
Furthermore, she explains that sustainable landscaping is bringing both social and economic benefits to the built and natural environment.

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— **Nor Atiah**



A view of Central Park at Desa ParkCity.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOW YEN YING | **EdgeProp.my**

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The inward-facing spaces of Desa ParkCity are designed to flow and correspond with one another, to provide good aesthetics, functionality, and comfort.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOW YEN TEONG | EdgeProp.my

The buck stops at the property developer

While a landscape architect can provide advice on the concept and approach of a project, ultimately, the decision rests with a property developer.

An example of a sustainable landscape site is the award-winning The Central Park in the popular Desa ParkCity township in Kuala Lumpur. The 13.19-acre Central Park with a 6.34-acre man-made lake was completed in 2008 as Malaysia's first park with pet-friendly features like pet waste dispensers. Anchoring the amenities in the township is a 4.5-acre iconic retail entertainment centre called The Waterfront, wrapped around the Central Park; and the 11.3-acre British colonial-style architecture hybrid mixed-use development Plaza Arkadia — both award-winning projects.

Besides a living showcase of sustainable landscape, the park has successfully played a significant role in drawing investors and tenants to Desa ParkCity.

Pre-Covid-19 days, the park was a scene of bustling activities both on weekdays and weekends. To date, the park boasts a total of 125 tree species, 15 palm species, 54 shrub species and

10 aquatic plant species.

To support this, in 2014, the developer -- Perdana ParkCity -- set up a softscape nursery within the township. Today, the nursery nurtures hundreds of shrubs to be transplanted not only to the park but also the entire township, to replace withered shrubs.

The vibrancy of the public park has not gone unnoticed. Numerous local councils have conducted field studies here.

The Central Park, run by ParkCity's in-house landscape, property management and township maintenance department, bagged Gold in the 10-years-and-above specialised category in EdgeProp Malaysia's Best Managed & Sustainable Property Awards in 2020.

In 2019, the developer bagged the EdgeProp Malaysia's Responsible Developer: Building Sustainable Development. This was in recognition of the developer's vision, commitment and efforts made towards the building of sustainable developments in Malaysia. ParkCity is also inducted into **Malaysia Developers' Hall of Fame**

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File picture of Lau (second from left) representing ParkCity Group to receive the EdgeProp Malaysia's Responsible Developer: Building Sustainable Development Award in 2019.

“Sustainable landscaping should start with a sustainable design. This will ensure the development is well managed and maintained to provide long-term support to the community and ensure a consistent quality of living, long after construction.”

— Lau



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“Malaysia Developers' Hall of Fame”

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where membership is exclusively accorded to winners of EdgeProp Malaysia’s Responsible Developer introduced in 2018.

Other members of the exclusive “**Malaysia Developers’ Hall of Fame**” including S P Setia Bhd, Paramount Property Development Sdn Bhd, AME Development Sdn Bhd, Sunway Property, Gamuda Land, Tanah Sutera Development Sdn Bhd, Eco World Development Group Bhd, Matrix Concepts Holdings Bhd and Sime Darby Property Bhd.

Creating a healthy ecosystem

Explaining the efficacy of the township design, ParkCity Group CEO Datuk Joseph Lau tells EdgeProp.my the inward-facing spaces of Desa ParkCity are designed to flow and correspond with one another, to provide good aesthetics, functionality, and comfort.

“With The Central Park placed in the heart of the master-planned township and connected with wide walkways, it allows the residents and visitors to enjoy walkable distance to get to the parks.

“Choosing the right plant species is important when it comes to a sustainable landscape. The selection at The Central Park consists of rare and exotic species in the Klang Valley such as *Corypha Umbraculifera* (Talipot Palms), *Latania Lontaroides* (Red Latan Palms), *Kigelia Africana* (Sausage Tree), *Bombax Malabaricum* (Red Cotton Silk Tree) and many more,” Lau highlights.

He adds that in order for the plants to be self-maintained, they have installed a new automatic irrigation system which helps to

reduce the manual labour and accurately meets the watering needs.

“Furthermore, planting the aquatic plants helps to naturally balance the ecosystem by slowly absorbing the nitrate and phosphate from the lake water. Some of the aquatic plant species are *Hanguanamalayana* (Common Susum, BakongRimba), *Lepironia Articulata* (Grey Sedge, Blue Rush, RumputPurun), *Phragmites Karka* (Common Reed), *Scirpus Grossus* (Herb Linn) and many more,” Lau elaborates.

In early 2019, a new aquatic plant species called *Cyperus Haspan* or dwarf papyrus was introduced in the Central Park Lake to further help improve the water quality.

Lau stresses that sustainable landscaping should start with a sustainable design. This will ensure the development is well managed and maintained to provide long-term support to the community and ensure a consistent quality of living, long after construction.

“Sustainable landscaping will further protect the environment to combat the changing conditions of the earth. Landscape planning is very important in order to cushion the effects of environmental hazards and risks to preserve the well-being of the community and environment.

“The lack of sustainable development from the start has many possible consequences, such as negative environmental impact including deforestation, pollution, global warming, climate change as well as modification to the ecosystem. These factors will eventually contribute to the decreased value of the development as many homebuyers today opt for having a natural environment within their home surroundings,” he adds. ☎



PHOTOGRAPH BY LOW YEN YENG | EdgeProp.my



The Desa ParkCity township practices sustainable landscaping to cushion the effects of environmental hazards and risks to preserve the well-being of the community and environment. (File picture taken before MCO)

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