

Values of commercial bungalows rising

2



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6

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Going platinum

Berinda Properties' Molek Pine 4 in JB achieved the highest GBI rating in July, raising the bar for green residential projects in the country. CEO and managing director Frank Goon says such developments do not have to be expensive, just well thought out. See Page 4.

PATRICK GOH/THE EDGE



Johor developer scales the heights of sustainability

BY LAM JIAN WYN

In July, a luxury condominium in Johor Baru became only the second residential project in the country to achieve the highest Green Building Index (GBI) rating.

The 37-storey Molek Pine 4 is coming up on a 6.24-acre freehold site in the blue-riband neighbourhood of Taman Molek in Tebrau, which some say is Johor's answer to Damansara Heights in the Klang Valley. The township is about a 20-minute drive from the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex.

The 1,441 to 5,579 sq ft units in Molek Pine 4, which has a gross development value (GDV) of RM272 million, are priced from RM944,000 to RM4.77 million and come with a raft of green features.

Berinda Properties Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Kuok Brothers Sdn Bhd, is the developer of both Taman Molek and Molek Pine 4.

Up until Aug 15, only seven buildings in the country had been certified platinum. Of these, only the S11 House in Petaling Jaya — designed and owned by architect Tan Loke Mun — and Molek Pine 4 are residential.

In fact, Molek Pine 4 may be significant as the first large-scale residential development to acquire platinum rating. But why bother with such a high green standard for a condominium?

"GBI was very surprised when we submitted an application for platinum rating. 'What, you want platinum?' Well, why not? And sure enough, they were surprised when we managed it," laughs Berinda Properties CEO and managing director Frank Goon.

"It's very, very difficult to get platinum for residential projects and that is why it is so important to remember that the fundamentals of the building, how you build them, is the beginning of whether you get the classification you aim for — whether it is silver, gold or platinum," he tells *City & Country* in an exclusive interview.

Molek Pine 4 is not the only green building in the township. Its predecessor Molek Pine 3 achieved GBI gold rating, which prompted Berinda to try for the apex of GBI rating.

Molek Pine 3 made the headlines when Japanese investors bought about half its units. Global Assets Asia (M) Sdn Bhd, a company that helps Japanese retirees invest in real estate abroad and resettle them, is planning a RM500 million "Little Japan" in Taman Molek.

The condominium also has a multipurpose hall that currently houses the show units and will be converted into retail space that will house mostly F&B outlets.

Designing Molek Pine 3 and 4 was an exercise in lateral thinking, says Goon. Molek Pine 3 scored 77 points — to qualify for gold, the score is 76 to 85 points out of 100 — while Molek Pine 4 scored 89, thanks to their design, the use of alternative materials, landscaping and other green features.

The condominiums' green credentials are notable for not relying on a lot of high-tech and expen-

Right: An artist's impression of the Molek Pine series

Below: A Molek Pine 4 condo show unit

PICTURES BY PATRICK GOH/THE EDGE



If you think through your problems and solutions from day one, going green is inexpensive — Goon



sive equipment. In fact, they were designed to lower the cost arising from building materials, energy and water.

"If you think through your problems and solutions from day one, going green is inexpensive," remarks Goon, who is also a director of Kuok Brothers.

Key features

At the heart of Molek Pine 3 and 4, figuratively and literally, is a cross-stack ventilation system. Goon had sketched some designs on a flight in 1982 and architects working with Berinda Properties have since refined his doodles into something viable.

"I was inspired to draw this when I thought of the environment and I must have felt the breeze and remembered that hot air rises and so this came about.

"The sketches kept evolving until Molek Pine 3, which was completed this year, and we started to push the envelope and this [cross-stack ventilation system] is what we have today," Goon explains.

Thanks to the system, the corridors and units, when the windows are opened, are breezy throughout the day. "We have suggested that some of the smaller units just rely on fans instead of air conditioning because the environment is already so cool."

The yards and the space for the air-conditioning compressors have also been designed to face the air well so that the heat from them can dry the laundry. Thus, residents save energy from not using dryers.

On the roof are solar panels that generate more than enough power for the residents and the com-

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cheaper to import from them. We turned out to be their biggest customer ever!" Goon chuckles.

While the fittings and materials cost more initially, residents save on maintenance in the long run, he says.

Berinda Properties' Johor footprint

Berinda Properties owns a substantial amount of undeveloped land in Taman Molek as well as Taman Ponderosa, which it is also developing. "We don't develop the townships fully to leave room for commercial components. That's where the value lies," Goon explains.

Taman Molek has 28.5 acres of undeveloped land with an estimated GDV of RM840 million while Taman Ponderosa has 447 acres with an estimated GDV of RM4 billion.

Besides the Molek Pine series, Berinda Properties is working on Molek Pulau, a freehold 1.38-acre mixed-use development. At 26 storeys, this building contains 150 serviced apartments and nine SoHos atop eight 2-storey shops. It has a GDV of RM110 million and is open for registration.

In terms of affordable properties, the developer was tasked by the Johor government to build about 600 apartments housed in three 20-storey blocks in Taman Molek. The units will have built-ups of 700 to 1,000 sq ft and cost RM50,000 to RM150,000.

At nearby Taman Ponderosa, the developer will launch its Lake Side 2 and 3 luxury condominiums with an estimated GDV of RM430 million and RM500 million respectively by year-end.

Perhaps Berinda Properties' most ambitious launch next year is Ponderosa Waterfront, a 381-acre mixed-use development along Sungai Tebrau. It comprises 4,000 bungalows and high-rise apartments apart from commercial properties and a big-box retail building.

Kuok Brothers has, via a 70:30 venture with government investment arm Khazanah Nasional Bhd, acquired 12.5 acres of land in Nusajaya for RM182 million to be transformed into a RM1 billion mixed-use development with high-rise homes and retail and commercial units.

While Goon and his team have a lot on their plate, one of their more exciting and immediate projects now is Molek Pine 5, the last in the Molek Pine series.

The RM340 million project will comprise 260 condos with built-ups of 1,200 to 1,500 sq ft and penthouses with built-ups starting at 4,500 sq ft. It will be launched some time next year.

"We hope it gets a platinum rating too, but if GBI comes up with an even higher rating — a diamond, perhaps — we will go for that," Goon jokes.

Not difficult to achieve high ratings, says GBI

The Green Building Index accreditation panel disagrees with the notion that it is more difficult for residential projects to attain platinum and gold ratings than commercial projects.

"As at Aug 15, some 64 projects were certified under Residential New Construction (RNC) Buildings. Of these, 15 were rated gold while two were rated platinum. In combination, both gold and platinum-rated projects comprised 27% of total certified projects under RNC," the panel tells *City & Country* in an email.

"Therefore, it is NOT true that it is more difficult for residential projects to achieve gold and platinum ratings."

The panel says Berinda Properties' Molek Pine 3 and 4 scored high due to the following green features:

- 1) Minimised thermal heat gain through façade;
- 2) Good thermal insulation at roof;
- 3) Incorporated renewable energy (photovoltaic panels);
- 4) Good air quality in units and common areas;
- 5) Harnessed sunlight;
- 6) Use low-LOC and non-formaldehyde products;
- 7) Site's proximity to public transport and community connectivity;
- 8) Provision of landscape >25%;
- 9) Practised stormwater management;
- 10) Incorporated recycling bins during construction and during occupancy;
- 11) Use of re-used materials (metal formwork);
- 12) Practised construction waste management;
- 13) Use of regional materials;
- 14) Rainwater harvesting saves >50% portable water;
- 15) Use of water-efficient sanitary ware and fittings save >50% of potable water;
- 16) Use of energy efficient lighting, that is, LED;
- 17) Incorporated vertical greenery within façade; and
- 18) Provision of herb gardens >10% of the total landscaped area.

Molek Pine 4 achieved platinum rating due to these additional features:

- 1) Extra shading devices to further minimise thermal heat gain through façade;
- 2) Further usage of re-used materials;
- 3) Further reduced waste from practising construction waste management;
- 4) Use of recycled content materials;
- 5) Use of sustainable timber;
- 6) Practised greywater recycling;
- 7) Use of regenerative lifts;
- 8) Provides real-time display board in the education corner to educate residents on energy savings from the minimisation of thermal heat gain through the façade, good thermal insulation at roof and usage of PV panels; and
- 9) Extensive use of green labelled products.

mon areas. The rest of the power is sold to Tenaga Nasional Bhd. "Based on the feed-in tariffs, they get to sell power back to the government at 35 sen per kilowatt hour. Tariffs are currently at 15 sen kWh. That means they get back money," he smiles.

The solar panels also deflect heat from the building. That, combined with the ventilation system and the greenery around the perimeter, lowers the ambient temperature of the building by around 5°C.

Taproot-type trees that are around 3m to 5m tall are planted around the perimeter to green the space. The trees were chosen because their roots grow straight down and will not crack the concrete flooring. The clubhouse roof is topped with a cover of vegetation to mitigate the heat island effect.

A rainwater harvesting system is used to water the plants and clean the common areas. Molek Pine 3 and 4 took this a step further with a greywater treatment system on site.

In Molek Pine 4, Berinda devised a clever way to minimise materials by placing the water tank in the middle of the tower. This not only means running a shorter cable length from the ground floor, but also savings through 40% less concrete used during piling.

The basement car park is also elevated by half a floor to eliminate the need for mechanical cooling and reduce artificial lighting.

Meanwhile, the condos are outfitted with alternative recyclable materials such as compacted bamboo laminate strips that resemble timber. Bamboo is a sustainable alternative to wood because it grows quickly and is lighter and cheaper.

The units also have water-saving fittings, including toilets made of finer porcelain that require less water and chemicals to clean.

Porcelain is basically ground into finer particles before it is baked so that the toilet bowl surface is smoother. As it is harder for dirt to stick to the bowl, all it takes to clean it is a swish of bleach. No scrubbing required, Goon claims.

"The technology is Japanese, but we found that they were also making these in Thailand. So we decided to buy them from a factory there because it is

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