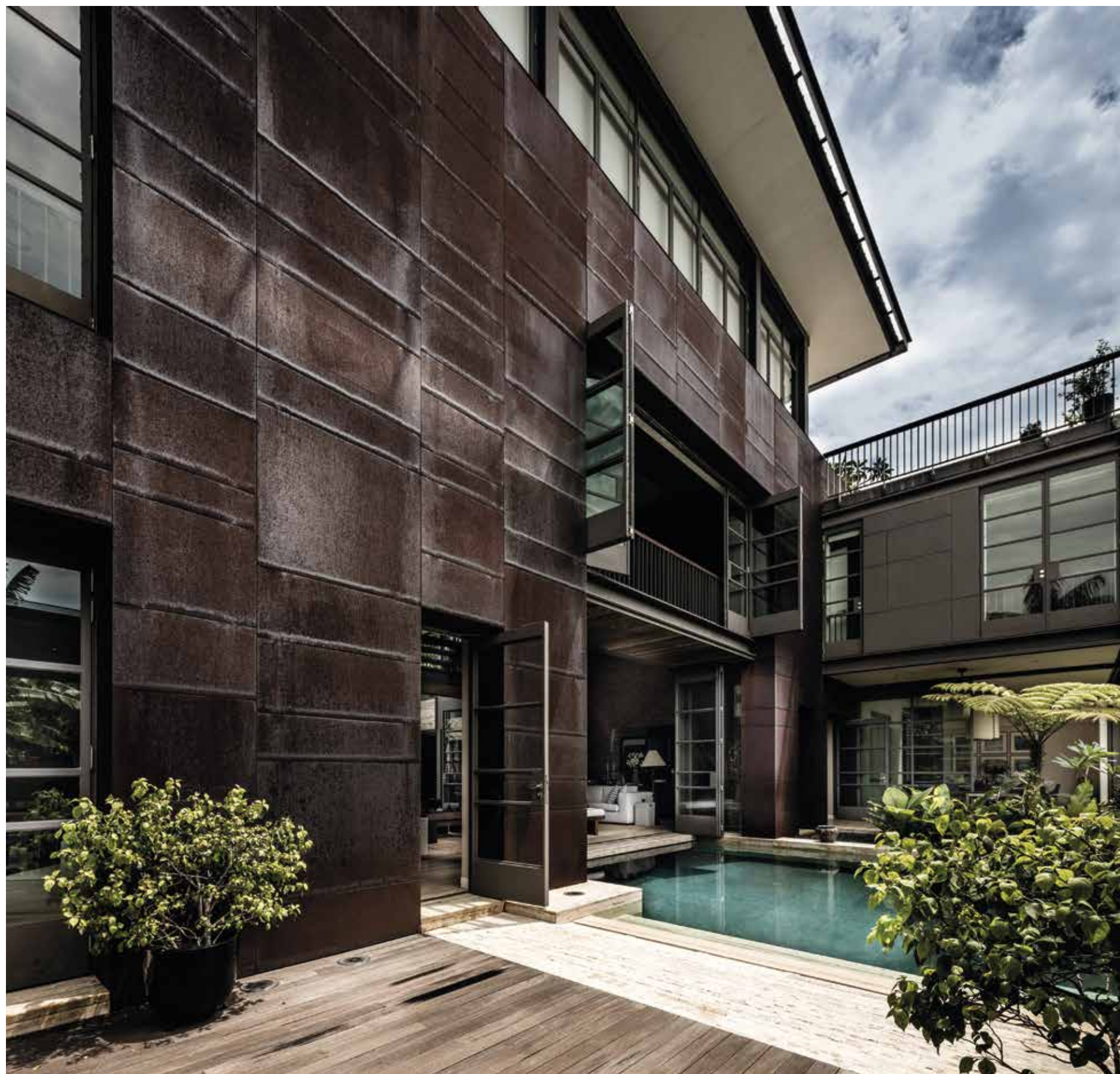


Making a Show of it

Text / Payal Uttam Images / Edmon Leong





At a glance, the staircase slicing across the interior of Lim Hong Lian's Singapore home looks like something out of an MC Escher print — the slender teak planks precarious-looking and never-ending. 'A lot of guests don't dare walk down it but I like the excitement,' says the 68-year-old designer gleefully. Instead of an ordinary chandelier for the space — Lim isn't a big fan — he added the stairs flanked by two bridges that run above either side of the living room.

The founder of LTW Designworks, the firm behind the stylish revamp of the Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong and the interior design of several notable hotels across Asia, Lim spent three years building his hilltop home — a property that is full of surprises.

'When you arrive you don't see much from the road,' says Lim of the partially sunken 650-square-metre bungalow. 'We want people to take their time with it and really enjoy it.' Through the gates, the sleek three-storey structure sheathed in rusted Corten steel gradually comes into view. Visitors cross a bridge with lush planting on the left and a century-old Pandanus tree that rises from a water feature below. The water almost reaches the edge of the living room floor, where the glass doors are usually pushed open. 'The design is inspired by living in the tropics in the British colonial times when we didn't have air conditioning and houses were built with natural ventilation. It's a living house — we have bats and birds flying through — it's great!' he says with a smile.

Inside the airy living room, one's eyes quickly gravitate to the sculptural wall installation

climbing two storeys in height. The rippled surface is composed of countless tiny wooden cubes, explains Lim, which have been sliced and rotated. 'I said go ahead and drink a bottle of whisky and play with it to the installers,' he jokes.

The home is a mix of clean, angular lines and textured surfaces, such as unfilled travertine from Italy. 'They use it in old Roman cathedrals. It's nice that it's not flat — it's a very undulating surface and you see the open pores.' The speckled stone runs throughout the home, enveloping part of its facade and acting as flooring, including a pathway leading to the swimming pool and outdoor pavilion: 'I like having something outside that looks back in. You can have drinks in the living room then adjourn to this area with banana trees surrounding you. It's very tropical.' Lim's bedroom with a palatial en-suite bathroom also opens out.

Lim says the idea of layering is key to the property, which has 'a certain amount of complexity so you'll never be bored of looking at the house or being within it'. This idea trickles down to the accessories his family has been collecting since 1980, when he got married. One standout item includes the coffee table made of raw, salvaged century-old railway sleepers from Malaysia. 'They used very strong hardwood from the tropics to make them. It's lasted so long and it's been weathered, which I love,' he says.

And overall, the design is 'like marriage,' concludes Lim. 'It's like your mother says: "You have to have something new and something old." In the house it's the same: you've got to have a bit of history, the present and the future to keep it interesting.'

Previous page: Singaporean designer Lim Hong Lian swapped his previous home, a single-storey colonial bungalow, for this sleek, three-storey structure sheathed in rusted Corten steel

Facing page: 'I like to live on the edge of the internal and external,' explains Lim of the design of his open-plan living area. At the centre of the space are two rustic coffee tables made from century-old railway sleepers from Malaysia, though it is dominated by MC Escher-esque staircases

Built with natural ventilation in mind, the house opens up to its surrounding tropical gardens and integrated water feature





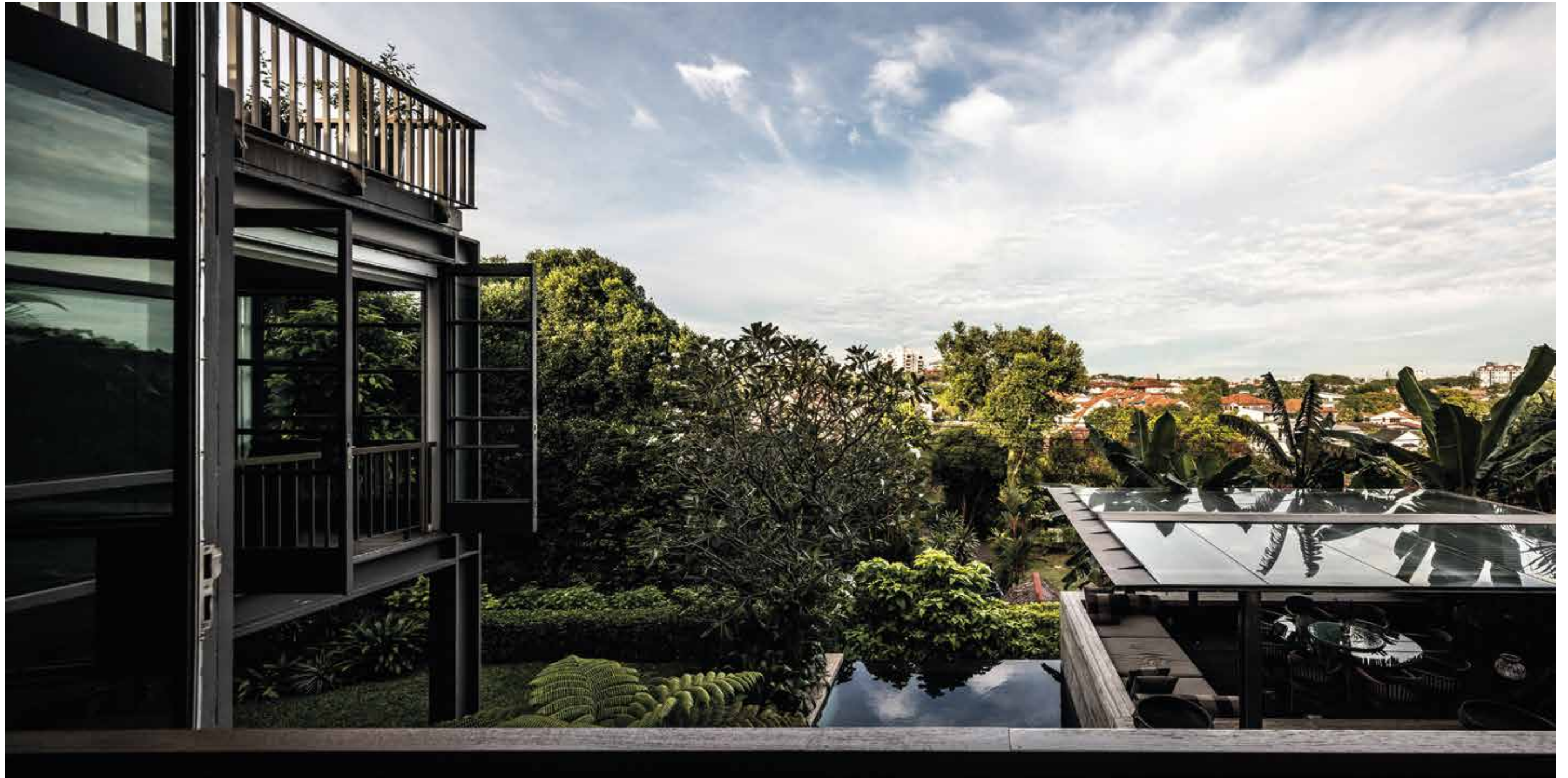
The home is a mix of clean, angular lines and textured surfaces



This page: The staircase leading to the top level of the house is a central feature of the property

Facing page: An outdoor water feature comes right to the edge of the main living area. At its heart is a century-old Pandanus tree with a serene Buddha sculpture resting at its feet





The outdoor swimming pool and *sala* are surrounded by lush foliage

The master bedroom opens up to the outdoor pavilion perched beside the pool

