



Urban Refuge: Lessons From Laman Standard Chartered Pocket Park

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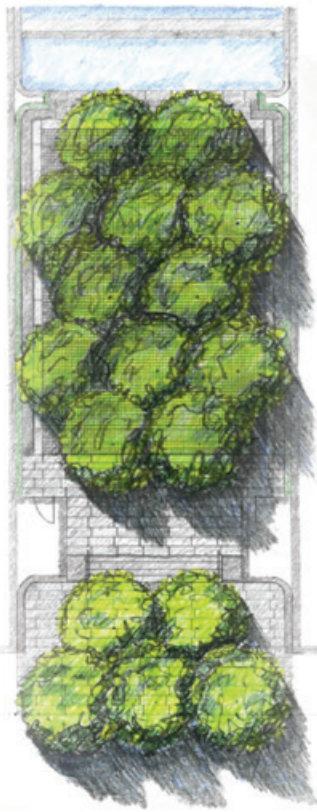


Turning Kuala Lumpur into a green city has been an important vision since the British era. In year 1888, Sir Alfred Venning successfully materialised this vision at the Perdana Botanical Garden (Formerly known as *Taman Tasik Perdana*). Since then, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has been initiating agendas and programmes that involve creating new parks or refurbishing existing parks. Nevertheless, the Post-Independent Era in Malaysia witnessed the rise of 'big-box shopping malls' and massive urban solid configurations which lead to a high dependability on indoor activities and a decline in the significance of urban public spaces. Moreover, due to the high demand of land in urbanised areas, creating new parks is not a feasible option. Thus, creating pocket parks as urban public spaces should be highly prioritised

in current Urban Planning practises. While urban pocket parks provide both environmental and social benefits, poor design and the lack of maintenance have always been a primary setback for most local authorities.

Looking at any successful urban pocket park projects, one might ask, "What constitutes the success of these pocket parks?" To answer this question, it is worth reviewing The Paley Park, New York as an example of one of the finest pocket parks. Measuring at 390m², this quiet mini urban oasis was established by landscape architectural firm-Zion & Breen in 1967. Good design and management practices are the key successes to this park. Paley Park embraces the concept of 'bringing nature into cities', where users, including the disabled, can enjoy the sounds of running water, fresh air and greenery in a simple layout which is equipped with lightweight furniture. This privately owned public space was financed by William S. Paley.





The cosy and intimate design of Paley Park

A major issue faced by the local authorities in Malaysia is the limited budget to maintain parks. Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) as an example is struggling to maintain and upgrade large public parks and pocket parks. Adding to this problem is vandalism which is a continuous struggle faced by DBKL. Amenities and facilities at the parks require constant attention due to the damage caused by vandals and the homeless. In addition, these public spaces seem to suffer from a lack of "Social Surveillance" due to the non presence of users during peak and non-peak hours. Hence, to accomplish the "Greener KL" programme, more allocation is needed to maintain and upgrade both large public parks and pocket parks in Kuala Lumpur.

Due to the shortage of budget and social support, DBKL has come up with an alternative method through a mutual partnership with the corporate sector in carrying out Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes. Through this endeavour DBKL hereby urges the corporate sector to adopt a park in order to promote a greener KL and to evoke corporate responsibility among the corporate sector. Hence, the responsibility of maintaining these parks is shared.



Location Laman Standard Chartered



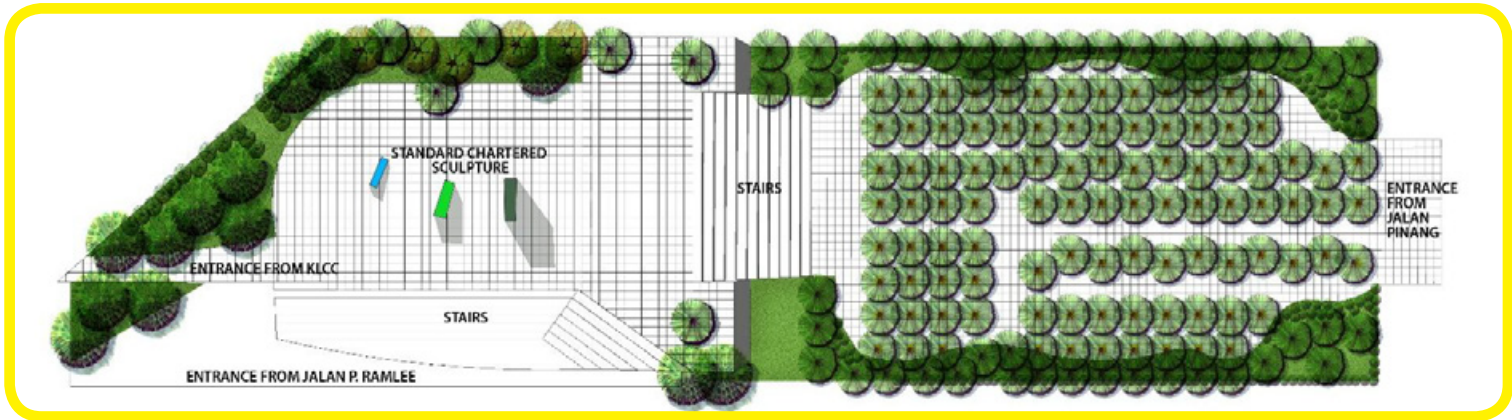


DIAGRAM 1: Sketch of Laman Standard Chartered

“The less is more”, a popular phrase adopted by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is reflected through its planting scheme and its street furniture



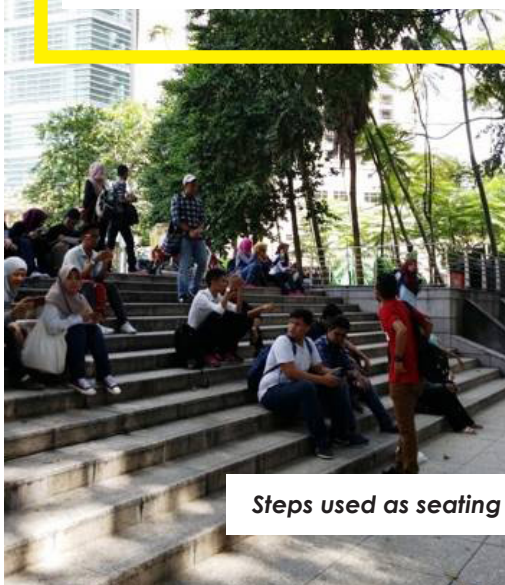
“The less is more”, a popular phrase adopted by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is reflected through its planting scheme and its street furniture. Over 120 matured trees (*Hopea odorata*) were planted by the Standard Chartered Bank (M), providing a natural canopy and giving the experience of a mini oasis. The Merawan Siput Jantan (*Hopea odorata*) (approximately 10m high), creates high volume and imitates a forest canopy, thus giving a forest-like experience to users. Besides that, the six meters alleyway provides easy access to passersby who are crossing the park. The wide steps at the entrance from KLCC to Jalan P. Ramlee function as seats as well as a gathering space for small groups. The Standard Chartered Park has acted as a platform for social events where it unites communities and helps to spread awareness to the masses. The blue and green individual seats

with the Standard Chartered Bank colour code has the right ergonomic for users to sit and rest, especially during lunch hours. Unfortunately, these comfortable seats have also invited the homeless to use this pocket park as their homes.

The high *Hopea Odorata* trees provide a forest-like experience

Laman Standard Chartered has promoted a ‘win-win’ situation between DBKL and the corporate sector, for the benefit of urban dwellers. This has spurred other

corporate and private sectors to become more proactive in their CSR programmes by adopting green spaces in the city. Good designs and a well maintained pocket park are the key ingredients to a successful urban public space that can improve the urban quality of life.



Steps used as seating