

Navigating the future blueprint

By JOSEPH WONG
josephwong@thestar.com.my

The Malaysian architectural sector is currently navigating a period of intense transformation, driven by ambitious national mandates for sustainability, the necessity of urban renewal and a relentless pace of technological change. The year 2026 is poised to be a pivotal point where strategic vision meets practical implementation, requiring the industry to evolve rapidly to remain competitive and relevant.

In an interview with StarProperty, Malaysian Association of Architects (PAM) president Adianta Aziz addresses the most pressing issues facing practitioners, developers and policymakers. His responses underscore that the challenges ahead—from rising project costs due to stricter environmental compliance to the ethical complexities of accelerated urban regeneration—are ultimately necessary steps toward a high-value, resilient and globally competitive architectural profession.

StarProperty: Given the government's commitment to achieving net-zero goals, what specific, measurable new green building codes or mandatory certifications does PAM anticipate being implemented in 2026 and how will this regulatory pressure affect project costs and timelines?

Adianta: Given the government's commitment to its net-zero pathway, PAM anticipates that the 2026 (Green Codes) updates to Malaysia's building regulations will place stronger emphasis on measurable, performance-based standards. These are likely to include mandatory operational energy modelling, embodied carbon disclosure for major developments, enhanced water efficiency benchmarks and minimum passive design requirements such as improved façade performance and natural ventilation standards. While such regulatory shifts will increase the need for early-stage coordination and specialised consultancy—thus raising initial project costs and extending pre-construction timelines—they will ultimately reduce long-term operational costs and improve building resilience. PAM views these updates as necessary steps to ensure Malaysia remains competitive in a global market where ESG compliance is now a baseline expectation rather than an optional feature.

StarProperty: Assuming the Urban Renewal Act is finalised, how will the expected

Adianta Aziz
President
Malaysian Association of Architects (PAM)

mechanism for lower consensus requirements fundamentally change the opportunities and ethical challenges surrounding the redevelopment of older, key brownfield sites within city centres like Kuala Lumpur?

Adianta: If the Urban Renewal Act adopts a lower consensus mechanism—for example, an 80% agreement threshold—it will fundamentally reshape redevelopment potential in older strata-based areas, especially high-value but fragmented brownfield sites in Kuala Lumpur. Such a mechanism will enable long-delayed regeneration projects to finally proceed, encouraging higher-density, transit-oriented developments and unlocking land that is currently underutilised. However, this acceleration brings heightened ethical responsibilities. PAM emphasises the need for transparent valuation models, independent mediation, clear relocation frameworks, and social safeguards to protect elderly and low-income owners who may feel pressured by market forces. Renewal must not only facilitate development but also uphold equity, community heritage and the dignity of long-standing residents.

StarProperty: Beyond basic BIM (Building Information Modelling), what emerging technologies will be mandatory for architectural practice within the next three years and how is PAM preparing its members to bridge this skill gap?

Adianta: Over the next three years, the architectural profession is expected to integrate tools that move far beyond

traditional BIM workflows. These include AI-driven generative design, which optimises layouts and environmental performance; digital twins, which support lifecycle asset management; automated compliance-checking platforms; and advanced modular/off-site construction systems that reduce labour dependency and increase quality control. To support this transition, PAM has intensified its digital transformation agenda through expanded CPD programmes, partnerships with technology providers, structured competency frameworks, and knowledge-sharing platforms tailored for both emerging architects and established practitioners. The goal is to ensure that firms of all sizes can adopt these technologies without widening disparities in capacity or competitiveness.

StarProperty: What specific, innovative design templates or construction methodologies can architects propose to meet the escalating demand for genuinely affordable, quality housing, rather than simply reducing unit size?

Adianta: Addressing Malaysia's urgent need for affordable yet dignified housing requires more than reducing floor areas. PAM encourages architects to promote standardised modular components, which shorten construction time and lower costs; high-density, low-rise typologies, which balance community scale with efficient land use; reconfigurable unit layouts that adapt to occupants' changing needs; and climate-responsive templates that reduce reliance on mechanical cooling. Additionally, optimised

structural grids, integrated community spaces and improved material efficiencies can elevate liveability while keeping overall delivery costs within reach. PAM believes that good design—not smaller spaces—is the key to sustainable affordability.

StarProperty: As construction costs continue to rise, how is PAM addressing the pressure on architectural fees to ensure firms can maintain quality and profitability while undertaking complex, sustainable projects, especially in the context of increased competition?

Adianta: With construction costs rising due to inflation, supply chain volatility and higher sustainability requirements, architectural fees are under increasing pressure. PAM continues to advocate for fair remuneration structures that reflect the expanding responsibilities architects shoulder, particularly in sustainability compliance, digital coordination and quality assurance. Through ongoing dialogue with government bodies and industry stakeholders, PAM is promoting procurement models that prioritise quality, safety and lifecycle performance rather than lowest-fee selection. At the same time, PAM is strengthening tools and guidance to help firms establish clearer scopes of work, manage risk more effectively and maintain financial resilience while still delivering high-quality, sustainable projects.

StarProperty: Beyond building design, what are the primary design priorities for Malaysian public spaces and urban planning in 2026?

Adianta: Malaysia's urban design priorities in 2026 must respond decisively to climate challenges and declining urban liveability. PAM highlights the need for flood-resilient public spaces, including multifunctional retention parks, restored river corridors and permeable street systems. Addressing the urban heat island effect requires expanded tree canopies, continuous shading, and materials that minimise heat absorption. As cities grow denser, prioritising pedestrian-centric, transit-oriented environments will be essential to improving quality of life, health and economic vibrancy. PAM is encouraging local authorities to adopt planning frameworks that value human comfort, safety and environmental performance over car-dependent models that no longer serve Malaysia's long-term needs.

StarProperty: What steps is PAM taking to address the brain drain of experienced architects leaving Malaysia and what reforms are necessary within Malaysian architectural schools to ensure graduates possess the advanced, future-proof skills required by the evolving demands of the global market?

Adianta: Malaysia continues to face the outflow of experienced architects seeking better remuneration and stronger career progression abroad. To address this, PAM is working to strengthen local career pathways through enhanced professional development, international collaborations, and advocacy for fairer industry-wide remuneration practices. In parallel, PAM believes that architectural education must undergo significant reform to ensure graduates possess future-proof skills. This includes deeper integration of digital design technologies, AI literacy, sustainability and performance-based design, interdisciplinary teamwork, and industry-linked studio experiences. By aligning education with global professional demands, Malaysia can retain talent and position its future architects as competitive contributors in the international arena.