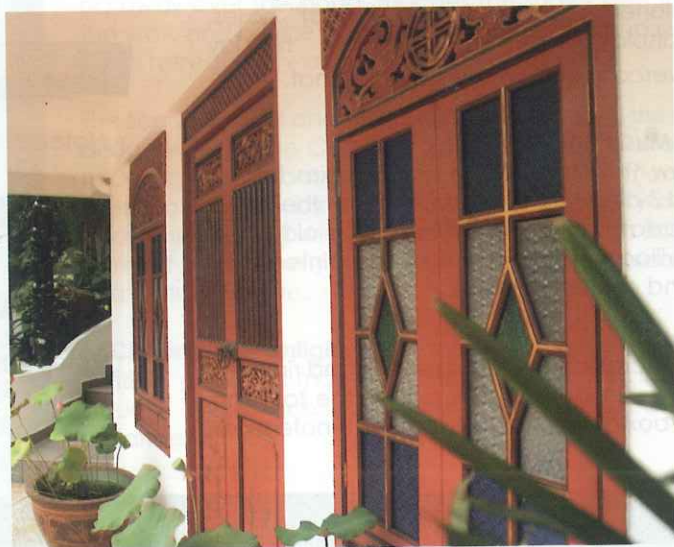




**Clockwise from top** A pair of Iban totem poles stand sentinel at the back entrance • The terrace which is infused with a touch of old English charm is also home to many old regional Malay crafts • A series of antique doors punctuate the façade of the home





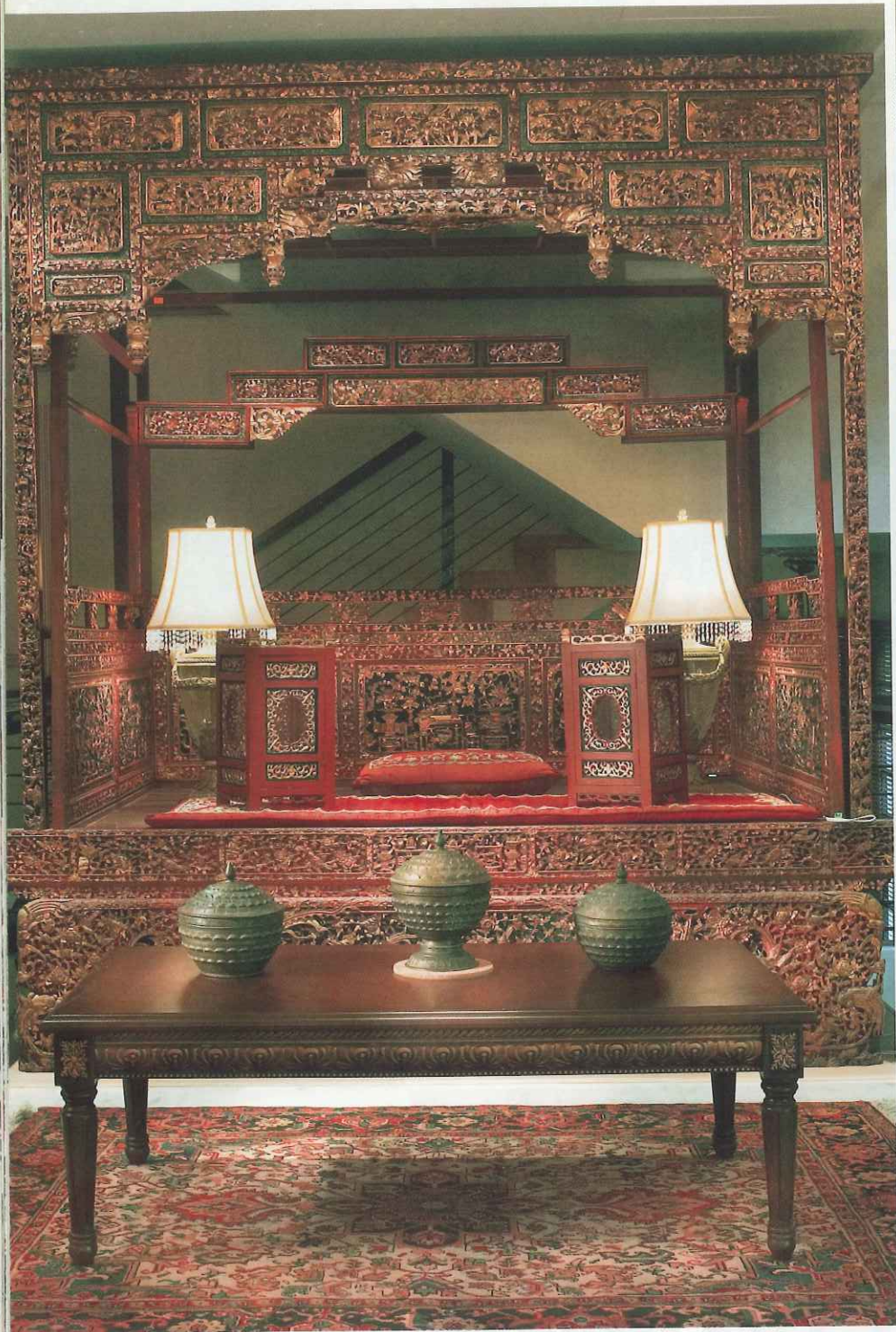


# An Asian **HERITAGE** house

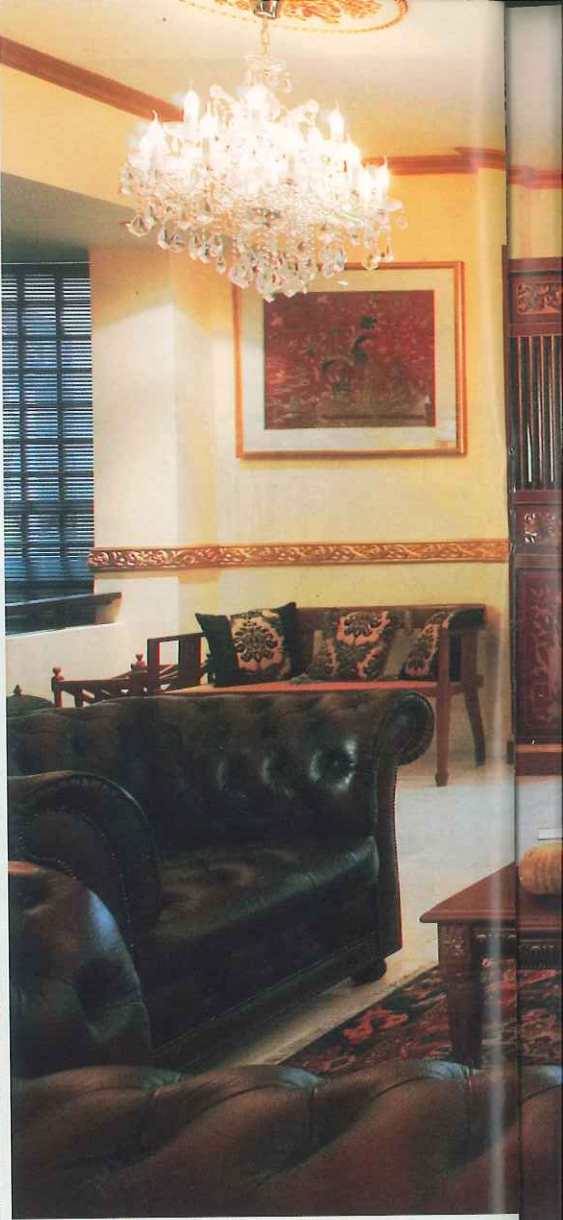
For Henry Bong, Sayang Pusaka is both home and a wondrous cauldron of cultures old and new

TEXT. ANITA KANDHAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY. SC SHEKAR, REDS STUDIOS





**Clockwise from top** The magnificent tri-layered elm wood Nyonya wedding bed commands notice • The décor of the formal lounge is a seamless blend of old artefacts and new furnishings • Black and white self-portrait of Henri Matisse







HENRY BONG IS a colourful personality born with a predilection for collecting a wide and eclectic range of old treasures. In fact, he confides that his extensive collection is the culmination of two generations of family heirlooms and 40 years of his own compiling. Simply put, it's in his blood.

It was inevitable, therefore, that despite a successful career in banking spanning 20 years, Henry would eventually devote his life to the art of collecting and making a living out of it too. He is the founder and face behind The Pucuk Rebung Royal Gallery-Museum, a cultural art-house that enjoys the patronage of the Sultan and Raja Perempuan of Kelantan. The gallery itself is a treasure trove of contemporary art and historically significant antiques with an emphasis on Old Malay World heritage pieces.

An extensive knowledge of his chosen field, coupled with a ready wit and infectious *joie de vivre*, all serve to ensure that time spent with this informed and cultured collector is a unique experience from beginning to end. His status as one

of Malaysia's foremost cultural craft experts has been recognised on many occasions. For example, Henry was specially commissioned by the government to craft a gift for the UN. His design of an intricate Malaysian *tepak sireh*, symbolising the nation, its history and people, was fashioned employing ancient techniques and incorporated gold, silver, and precious stones. More recently, he was engaged as an interior consultant in the elaborate design of the new state banquet hall for the Kelantan palace.

*haven* was offered the privilege of visiting Sayang Pusaka, The Pucuk Rebung company house that Henry calls home. Launched as a heritage concept home by the Sultan and Raja Perempuan of Kelantan in March 2006, this residence stands out amongst its more contemporarily designed neighbours for its stylish adherence to an earlier period. Guests are formally greeted by the unmistakable Penang nyonya doors, traditional Malay wooden carvings and a large cannon perched majestically at the entrance.



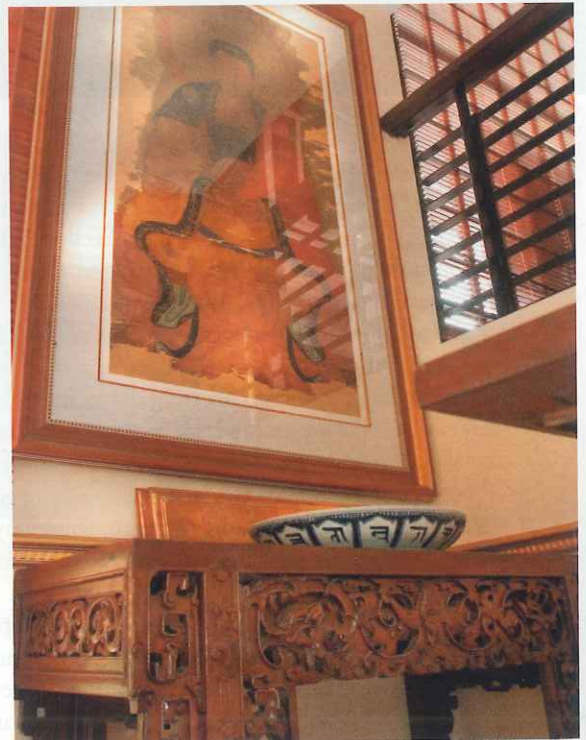


**Top** A dining room fit for a Sultan (literally), for Henry played host to the Sultan and Raja Perempuan of Kelantan over dinner  
**Bottom** A peek at the rare, rice paper Buddha print

That Henry also has a great love for animals becomes obvious as we come across his numerous pets — dogs (nine of them), tortoises, birds, fish and a musang to boot! By this time, we almost expect to chance upon the proverbial partridge in a pear tree.

As soon as we step into Sayang Pusaka, it is as though we have been given a ticket to explore the mythical cave of Aladdin. The house is filled with a plethora of artefacts and *objets d'art* that transport visitors to a different era. At every turn, there is a piece that catches the eye and almost all of them seem to whisper tales of mysterious pasts. However, by some unfathomable sleight of hand, there is nothing stuffy about this home which has an order that invites quiet exploration. And explore we did — from the Anglo-Malay to Anglo-Chinese to Islamic, Buddhist, Christian and Old Malay works of art incorporating wood, fabric, metalwork, jewellery, porcelain, pottery, glass, crystal, manuscripts, photography and paintings.

Framed and strategically positioned are rare antique Malay fabrics and textiles. Near the front entrance is an aged prayer mat from Kuala Kangsar that intriguingly has Sanskrit, Syrian and Chinese nuances assimilated into it. Elsewhere, other spectacular textiles abound, such as the finely woven, antique *kain limar* songket, which once belonged to Terengganu royalty, and a royal valance embroidered with gold thread and solid gold sequins that has its origins in the Borneo sultanate.







Henry also has an impressive array of old and contemporary art pieces. Many of these paintings adorn the walls of the stairwell, framing the staircase with vibrant colours and nostalgic charm. However, this avid collector ruefully acknowledges that a lack of hanging space has preordained that a number of canvasses are stacked against each other. "On the flip side, this style of storage does facilitate rotation of the artwork," he remarks cheekily.

In the corner of the first-storey landing sits a lovely handcrafted teak console table that supports a rare rice paper print of Buddha. Over time, the original rice paper of this 18th century Formosan (Taiwanese) print was damaged but the print of the Buddha was successfully lifted and transferred onto a new sheet of rice paper.

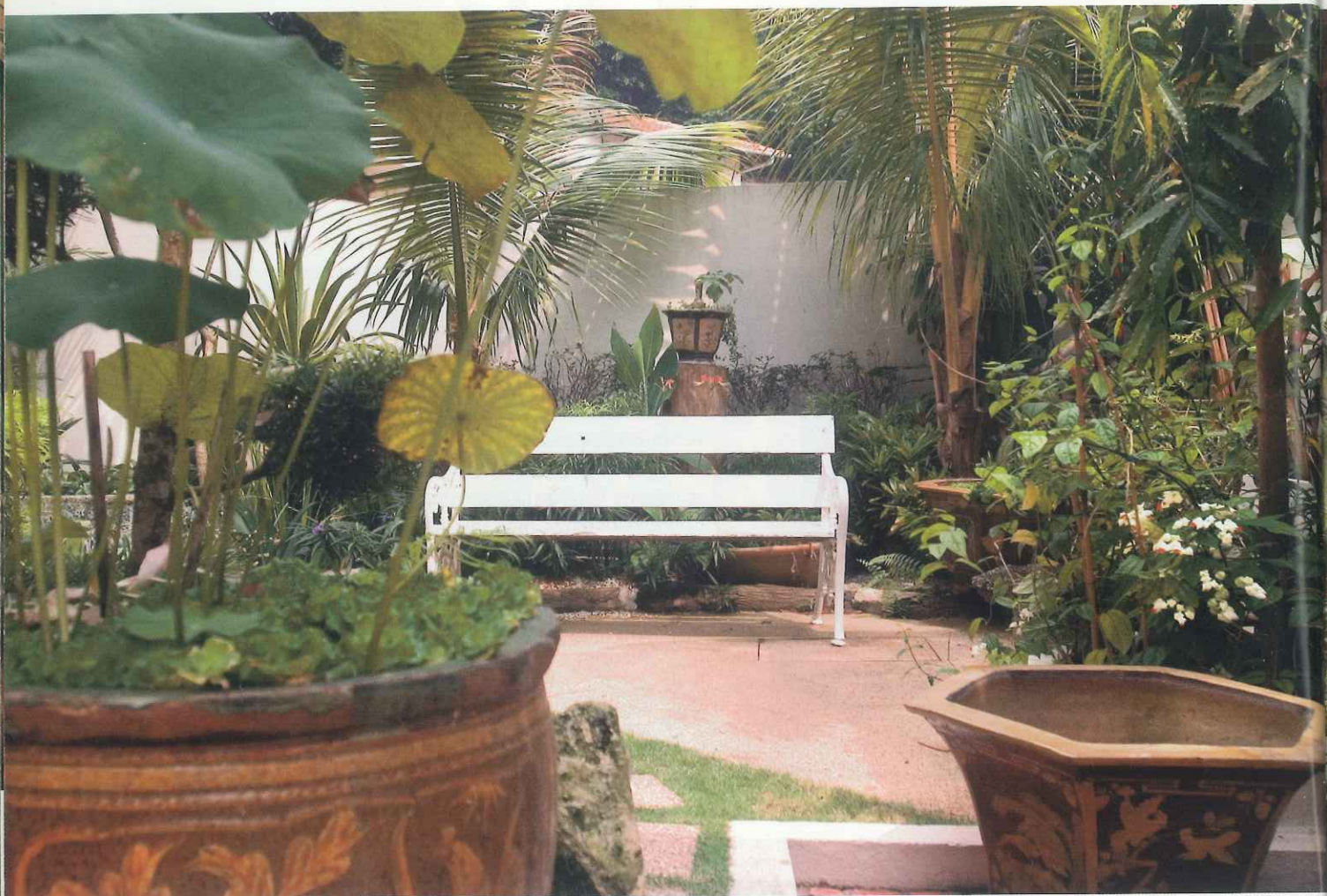
Whilst the formal lounge is abundant with old treasures, this space pays homage to a breathtaking Penang nyonya wedding bed. Commissioned in China, this intricately carved tri-layered elm wood masterpiece is simply a sight to behold. "What is unique about this piece is that despite being made in China, there are no depictions of dragons. Instead, amongst the motifs and designs, you will find carvings of the phoenix and sang kancil," explains Henry.

**Left** A restored antique apothecary cabinet gets a new lease of life as kitchen storage

**Bottom** Henry's collection of old Buddhist and Javanese moon cake and biscuit moulds and quirky animal shaped coconut scrapers from India







Leaning nonchalantly against one end of the wedding bed is a black-and-white portrait by visionary French artist Henri Matisse. Oddly, the juxtaposition of Western art against an ornate Eastern fabrication works well. This is perhaps due to the seemingly effortless manner in which Henry has chosen to merge the old with the new in the design and décor of this house. "What we are promoting is a heritage lifestyle. This house is not a platform to showcase art and antiques; it is a heritage concept home, the only one of its kind in Malaysia. We don't just live alongside these old valuable pieces but live with and employ them in our daily lives. I believe each and every one of these painstakingly handcrafted artefacts carries a piece of its artisan's soul within it. By making use of these pieces, albeit with care, it's almost as if we are recycling the souls of those artisans," muses Henry.

As we browse around the house, it is evident that Henry practises what he preaches. An ancient gold crown and a pair of arm bracelets (past possessions of the Indonesian Kutai royalty) function as paper weights; refreshments are served on old porcelain and silver crockery while a colossal old Chinese apothecary cabinet provides the bulk of the kitchen storage.

Naturally, the garden is no exception to this way of life. As this 2½-storey bungalow is built on an incline, Henry has

allowed the terrain to dictate the garden landscape. The house is artistically flanked by parallel flights of steps that lead up to the rear garden and terraces and the lush greenery bordering both stairways is punctuated by indigenous East Malaysian tribal carvings. The terraces reflect an eclectic blend of styles. One terrace fuses a traditional Anglo theme, incorporating 19th century English grills with old regional Malay works such as handcrafted silver vessels and 13th century Majapahit clay jugs. The others present a varied tapestry as their décor is persuaded by a mélange of regional influences from such places as Kelantan, Borneo, India, China and Java.

Our visit culminates with the inescapable conclusion that Henry has an eye for traditional and contemporary interior design. "We live in a wondrous cauldron of cultures that has given birth to a distinctive Malaysian culture. In the spirit of Malaysia Boleh, we should be proud to draw design inspiration from our own history and traditions," he says. His conviction to these words manifests itself in the design and furnishings of Sayang Pusaka. However, the true magic of Henry's touch is in the way that different cultures, eras and styles have been cohesively and respectfully woven together to create a home that resonates with the soul and passion of this gifted collector. ■





**From left** A sample of the many inviting nooks instituted in the garden • This appealing terrace communicates a Kelantanese inspired décor • Another glimpse of the back entrance to the property

REFER TO STOCKISTS DIRECTORY FOR DETAILS ON THE PUCUK REBUNG ROYAL GALLERY-MUSEUM