



**Left** The distinctive entry way hints at the home's stylish adherence to an earlier period  
**Right** The owner has fashioned many alcoves and nooks within the property to exhibit his collectibles



TEXT. ANITA KANDHADEL PHOTOGRAPHY. HARIS HASSAN

# Eating, drinking and living **heritage**

IT LOOKS AND FEELS LIKE A PRICELESS MUSEUM  
BUT SAYANG PUSAKA IS HOME TO HENRY BONG

REVISITING A PLACE brings with it the pleasure of not only reacquainting yourself with old favourites, but also discovering new things. This was certainly the case when haven stopped by Sayang Pusaka in Kuala Lumpur — home to the effervescent Henry Bong, founder and face of The Pucuk Rebung Royal Gallery-Museum.

As the name Sayang Pusaka (love for heirlooms) suggests, the home showcases a heritage lifestyle and was launched as a heritage concept home by the Sultan and Raja Perempuan of Kelantan in March 2006. Filled with an astounding assortment







**Clockwise from top** Penang nyonya doors and windows punctuate the front façade of the distinctive drawing room • Antique period furniture and detailed furnishings complete the décor of this space • One of the country's foremost cultural craft experts – Henry Bong, JP • A close-up of the ornate gilt *pintu gerbang* • Visitors are welcomed into the drawing room through a traditional *pintu pagar* entrance







of rare artefacts and objets d'art, Sayang Pusaka is bursting at the seams with old Nusantara treasures. A tour of the house offers visitors a historical narration of the influences and cultures that helped shape modern Malaysia, an experience which is only enhanced by Bong's witty and informative commentary.

Intricate antique regional craftwork (including metal, glass, wood, textiles, porcelain and pottery) as well as old treasures, such as manuscripts and jewellery, representing Anglo-Malay, Anglo-Chinese, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and old Malay influences inform the décor of this home. However, despite boasting items that any museum would be proud to call its own, Sayang Pusaka is not just a depository for these objects of





**Clockwise from top** The family lounge with a sampling of Bong's collection of icons in the background • Steps leading up to a Kelantanese inspired terrace are accentuated by indigenous East Malaysian tribal carvings • Rare photographs march along a wall in the kitchen





historical value. Peppered around the home are myriad examples of the owner's unique and almost nonchalant use of rare antiques and valuable items. "We come from a melting pot of rich and colourful cultures that have generated an incredible offering of quality hand crafted articles. Instead of exploiting a few select items as décor accents or conversation pieces, why not breathe new life into these old treasures by employing them in a functional manner in our day-to-day living?" asks Bong. "After all, what better way is there to truly appreciate such pieces?"

"Sayang Pusaka is a labour of love that remains a work in progress. I'm constantly adding to my collection so spaces need to evolve to make room for both new acquisitions and the rotation of old favourites. My house was designed by the architect Dr Ken Yeang and favours a modern slant and so, for the home's exterior to resonate with the interior, I am slowly reconfiguring some parts of the house to embody a Peranakan home [rumah abu] with one distinct variant. Where a typical *rumah abu* would stretch inwards along a horizontal line, my *rumah abu* climbs up vertically. In short, I have given my home a new personality — one that reflects my passion and Malaysian identity," he says.

Visitors enter the property through a traditional wakaf-style entrance and are ushered along a newly built walkway that is flanked by colonnades. The processional walkway leads into another recently created space — the secondary Peranakan drawing







Regional gongs and Melanau jars decorate this niche

room — where acquaintances are usually received and entertained. Like the other areas of his home, Bong has spared no effort in the decorative detailing of this space. The room is resplendent with its richly furnished period-style finishes, from *pintu pagar* and intricately carved door and window frames, to ornate gilt cornices and colonial-inspired locally crafted antique furnishings.

From this space, a stairway directs guests up to the next floor which houses the public areas such as the opulent formal lounge, stately dining room, quaint kitchen and delightful terraces. A few new additions caught our attention, most notably the intricately carved *pintu gerbang* spanning 22 feet which traverses the lounge.

Meanwhile, the second floor accommodates the home's private areas such as the family lounge and bedrooms. Taking pride of place on the walls of the family lounge — which also doubles as a library — is one of the country's largest private collections of icons (images of sanctified Christian personages).

Even the garden serves as a setting for the owner's

collectibles, and an exploration of the luxuriant landscape reveals many hidden delights. Sculptures, reliefs and carvings are selectively integrated against a verdant backdrop to create and accent charming nooks and corners. For example, one section of the garden is filled with indigenous East Malaysian tribal carvings, and in another part of the garden, a series of regional gongs hold station. Cast from melted bronze Chinese coins, these percussion instruments previously symbolised power and wealth.

As we walked in and around the array of historical pieces featured in *Sayang Pusaka*, it was easy to let the mind wander into a world of folk tales featuring wonderful oil lamps, magical caves and, who knows, maybe even a benevolent genie. Unlike Aladdin however, Henry Bong's prolific accumulation of treasures was earned by years of dedication and perseverance. The result is an unrivalled showcase of art and history that provides a telling account of one man's passion for the history and cultures that have shaped his beloved Malaysia. ■