



Above Finishing materials like indoor roofing, windows, and doors were salvaged from demolished homes.

on a narrow lane in the center of the old city, lined with old and new multistory buildings in the typical Vietnamese urban row house or “tube style,” long and narrow with retail space on the ground floor, and offices and dwellings on the few levels above.

The client needed to accommodate her seven-member family spanning three generations, including two grandparents and five grandchildren, aged between three and twelve. She wanted it to be a place where her whole family, including her brothers and sisters with their families, could gather every weekend as they had done growing up together under the same roof in Saigon. Her brief was not to design a Western-style house, like those that had become popular in the city, but rather one that somehow represented Saigon as she once knew it. She wished to uphold this family tradition in her new home and to pass on her fond childhood memories to her children. Ultimately the house should be a gift to the children. Thus, a21 focused strongly on the children in their design. “When we presented the concept, we showed it to the kids in the family first, because if the kids like it, then the parents will follow,” say the architects.

When they were approached by a new client to build her home, a21 decided to do something that Vuong Hong Sen had tried, but failed to do with his own house: impart the building with the character and characteristics of Saigon, so that its spirit can live on for generations to come.

The client had approached the project with very few requirements and was open to the architects’ vision. “The client came to us and said, ‘we have a site that is 3 × 15 m (10 × 50 ft), but we don’t know what to do with it. We want to build a house where the whole family can live.’” The small site is located

Looking to create a house that was distinctively “Saigonese,” a21 drew on their “love for Saigon’s lanes, which are romantic in the rain and sunshine.” Taking a novel approach, the architects envisioned the house as a vertical, archetypical Saigon alleyway. Each of the rooms is like a miniature house, with a sloping tiled roof, shuttered windows with flowering balconies, and facades in a variety of colors and textures. Instead of being organized as a detached building, the small dwellings are independently suspended between the supporting walls. A lively connection of stairs, walkways, and vantage points

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fosters communication throughout the four levels of the house. “Bedrooms today are so big that kids end up spending much of their time there. Here, the bedrooms are kept relatively small, encouraging the kids to leave their rooms to experience the

sights and sounds in the house, and to interact with others,” say the architects.

At the heart of the house is a central courtyard where the family gathers for meals and other activities. A large play net stretched above the space is visible from almost everywhere in the building. “The adults can sit in the courtyard and the kids can run around, so people can be very interactive. It’s like being outside—that is what we wanted to bring into the Saigon House.”



Above The open space above the courtyard extends up to the transparent roof. Over time the house will be covered with greenery both inside and out.