



Working atmosphere

> Elements that make for a great home-office environment

BY ALYSSA J. OON

THE workplace has evolved a lot in the last few years. The advancement of technology and a revolution in workplace culture have come to shape the modern office we know today – one that is completely different from the offices of not too long ago. In Malaysia, we can see this new design trend cultivated in offices such as Google, MindValley and KFit among others.

While part of this transformation is precipitated by today's more flexible working hours and conditions like having the option to work from home and other revolutionary working concepts that make for a happier and more productive workforce – the current state-of-the-art working spaces itself is said to benefit employee as well as employer in unconventional ways and means.

With that, we focus on home, a present-day work space and how one can get the most out of work time in this environment. For starters, it is advisable to designate a space or room in your home as your “office zone”. The area should not only reflect your personal style but also be decorated and designed to keep you focused and ultimately boost productivity. Here are a few tips:

CONTROL THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

It is important that the interior climate of your office space keep you focused while you are working. Ensure temperature controls of fans or air-conditioning are kept at a comfortable level, neither too high or low for interiors that are not too stuffy or chilly. Proper ventilation and natural sunlight is known to help keep one energised throughout the day. Therefore, consider getting

skylights or clerestory windows (series of windows on the upper levels of high walls), which both help elevate the height of the room for adequate ventilation while ensuring sufficient natural lighting. Where possible, avoid fluorescent lights as they cause drowsiness. Instead, have an adjustable lamp at your desk, to use when it gets dark.

USE COLOUR PSYCHOLOGY

Colour has a psychological effect on our emotions. Hence, the reason it is important that your home office bear the right hues to generate the right “qi” or energy force. It is not surprising that white is said to be the default colour to dress any office interior as it is associated with an



PHOTO: HOUSE OF JADE



PHOTO: KATE COLLINS

open, airy feeling, especially when paired with natural lighting. Colours such as green and blue are calming and refreshing and reported to improve focus and efficiency. Try pairing both these colours for the ultimate creative dream team. Think light blue walls paired with green plants or a bright green rug for a room that is calming and refreshing for the soul. You can also consider yellow for the office as it is the colour of optimism. Use it as accents in your office setting, as in hanging art pieces, throw pillows or extra seating.

PERSONAL TOUCHES FOR COMFORT

According to experts, it is easier for you to get into the productive frame of mind if you are comfortable in your surrounding environment. Therefore, create an art gallery of family photos above your desk or have these displayed in your line of sight. Bring your personal interests into the office decor. If you love to read, then line your walls with shelves of your favourite books. If you have collected arty handicraft, souvenirs or memorabilia (that bring back good memories) from your travels, create a small display area for them. A home in Stockholm



PHOTO: THE CONTAINER STORE



PHOTO: BONNVILLE

above them. As for office stationery, clear plastic containers are a current favourite as it not only keeps stationery organised but makes it easier to locate needed items while adding bursts of colour in your office confines.

THE SPACE FACTOR

It is still possible to create a home office when you are short of space. Look for a small corner in any room of your home that can be used as a tiny office area. Invest in a sturdy table that can fit into the nook of your home, such as a wall-mounted table or even a vintage school desk, as long as it can hold your laptop or PC. Another alternative – make like designer Kate Collins and have your nightstand work double duty as your office table. To pull this off, Collins placed a clean, modern mini desk with a single drawer for storage and a simple wooden chair next to her bed. If crawling into bed is your number one weakness and you prefer to do work outside your bedroom, then consider a place that is mostly under-furnished and overlooked, eg. the hallway. Swedish property realtor *Entrance*, made use of a home's wide hallway and turned it into a work space using a simple vintage desk paired with a modern black chair. A large mirror is placed above the desk to reflect light for brightness, illuminating the space to help keep one energised while working. Do not forget to spruce up these small corners with modest-sized decorative items (for a more spacious perception). Build vertical shelves for extra storage to keep folders, books or as a display of knickknacks if required.

Sometimes a work area can be as simple as lounging on the couch with your laptop, depending on the kind of work you are involved in. However, a permanent place to sit down with other occupational elements do help improve focus and will yield better results work-wise.

uses a bright yellow open-shelf cupboard to display knickknacks while giving the small office a pop of colour. Place a daybed or chaise lounge in your work space to create a small nook where you can take short breaks or power naps. Then again, as every personal touch is “personal” according to the character of the individual, go with what motivates or inspires you and redecorate occasionally if and when you please.

ORGANISATION MADE PRETTY

Bulky metal cabinets are for corporate offices, or so they say ... Although they could portray that zen-effect or reflect your “preferred style”, in this case, we are looking at creative ways to make office organisation part of a pretty place. Start by implementing a command centre in your office where letters and magazines, calendars, to-do lists and cork boards jive. Some suggestions: get a fancy photo frame and use the glass to jot down daily tasks in whiteboard markers or go wild by creating an accent wall using chalkboard paint so that each day it can serve a different function (inspirational quote today – comprehensive to-do list tomorrow – like that). Pegboards are also a favourite, as *Bonville* blogger Steph Bond-Hutkin can attest to. A pegboard sits atop her daughter's room, with movable mint shelves that hold her books and stationery, while a to-do list and calendar hang

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Laws and legal boundaries

PHOTO: SIMEDARBY.COM

> The need for legislative intervention and support

THIS week, we feature an article by lawyer Datuk Pretam Singh Darshan Singh referring to the action taken by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) on improprieties relating to waiver of bumiputra allotment of houses in Johor.

OF STATE COUNCILS AND HOUSE PRICES

There has been practice to impose a condition on housing developers, that they should set aside certain portion of the houses they build, to be sold to bumiputras and in the event they are unable to sell these lots, the developer has to pay a penalty. This raises the issue of whether the state, i.e. the local planning authority, has the power to impose such an award (no matter how noble the intention may be).

This issue is not new and has been discussed previously in the courts of law. One such case is the landmark lawsuit between Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang vs Syarikat Berkerjasama Serbaguna Sungai Gelugor [1999] 3 CLJ 65.

In this case, the dispute was whether Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang (Penang City Council) had the power to impose the disputed condition whereby 30% of low-cost houses have to be built and sold at a cost not exceeding RM25,000 per unit in accordance with "garispanduan-garispanduan mengenai rumah pangsa murah Majlis" (Council guidelines on low-cost housing).

The people (society) agreed at its AGM, that the selling price of a two-bedroom flat, measuring an average of 500sq ft, shall not exceed RM32,000 and a three-bedroom flat, measuring an average of 650sq ft, shall not exceed RM45,000.

Being in a dilemma due to the ceiling price stipulated in the guidelines on low-cost housing, the developer sought the intervention of the courts as it

was of the understanding that the council had no such power to impose conditions relating to prices of houses.

THE VERDICT

The case, described as a "veritable legal porcupine bristling with interesting and complex points of Law" went on appeal to the Federal Court. It was a landmark case in the field of "Planning Law and Judicial Review" in this country and prominent counsel on both sides put up very convincing arguments that ran across six days.

At the end, Edgar Joseph Jr (Federal Court judge) made no apologies for the "acres of paper and streams of ink" that were devoted to the preparation of the unanimous judgment by the Federal Court.

Joseph held that it is axiomatic that local authorities are creatures of statute and their qualities and powers can only be derived by reference to what is expressed or implicit in the statutes under which they function.

The statutory scheme of the Local Government Act confers upon local authorities a distinct political function, to which the courts, by application of ordinary principles of statutory construction, should give effect.

"Taken at its full face value, the above provisions would appear to confer unlimited power on the planning authority to impose any condition it wishes (for example), because it considers the condition to be in the interest of the housing



policy of the state government. But, the matter must be probed further."

On probing further, the Federal Court concluded that the entire decision of Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang was wholly null, void and of no effect and stated that the council had no power to fix the prices of houses.

SIMILAR CASE

In the case of Cayman Development (Kedah) Sdn Bhd vs Mohd Saad Bin Long [1999] MLJU 290, Cayman was a housing developer that wanted to develop a piece of land in the Mukim of Alor Merah, Alor Star, constructing a low-cost housing project. The state authority of Kedah imposed a condition that the developer had to:

"Menjual rumah-rumah yang dibina dengan harga kurang 5% daripada RM25,000.00 (RM23,750.00)."

[Translation: "To sell the built houses with 5% discount off RM25,000.00 (RM23,750.00)."]

When the developer sold the houses without the stipulated discount, the purchasers sued the developer to enforce the discount as imposed by the state authority of Kedah.

At the High Court, Hishamuddin J held that the state authority has no power to fix the requirements regarding the price of each of the units to be sold to the public, as well as the discount

of 5% (to be given), as these are not the kind of requirements envisaged by the National Land Code.

Hishamuddin J: "I have no doubt whatsoever of the good intention of the state authority, and that in prescribing the price and the discount, it certainly had in mind the interest of the low-income group of the general public, who



would constitute the potential buyers of the low-cost units. Yet, with the greatest respect, I do not think that Parliament, in enacting Subsection 125 (5)(c) of the National Land Code, had in mind to confer on the state authority such huge power, so as to empower it to even fix the price of the low-cost units for the purpose of sale to potential buyers, let alone to prescribe any discount.

"Such requirements, as imposed, are commercial in nature. The state authority, being a regulatory body on matters pertaining to land, in determining the nature of the requirements to impose (if any) when approving a conversion, should avoid entering into the commercial arena. Instead, it should only confine itself to matters directly pertaining to the usage of land and the imposition of rent and premium (consequential to the conversion)."

LAWS AND LIMITATIONS

Both these cases illustrate the point that both the state authority and "majlis" (state council) have no power to impose any condition relating to prices of houses and discounts, as these are considered commercial aspects that both should avoid entering into. Being mere regulatory bodies, they should only confine themselves to regulatory matters such as prescribing the usage of land and the imposition of rent and premium consequential to the conversion (of usage to the land).

Both cases remain unchallenged



and continue to be good precedents as there have not been any legislative amendments to overturn these decisions. It is therefore timely to look into the fixing of the quota and subsequent penalty being imposed, as it may not have the proper legislative support.

A proper legal framework may be the step forward, as such quota and penalty imposition is also prevalent in other states.

Datuk Pretam Singh Darshan Singh, a lawyer by profession, has previously worked as senior federal counsel, deputy public prosecutor with the Attorney General's Chambers and legal adviser to several government departments and agencies. He is currently partner at a legal firm while simultaneously serving as president of the Tribunal for Home Buyers' Claims. Leveraging his vast knowledge and decades of experience, he contributes articles to local and international journals, besides delivering lectures and talks at relevant forums.



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Property in a digital era

PART 1

> Introducing bitcoin and its attributes

BY BRIAN CHUNG

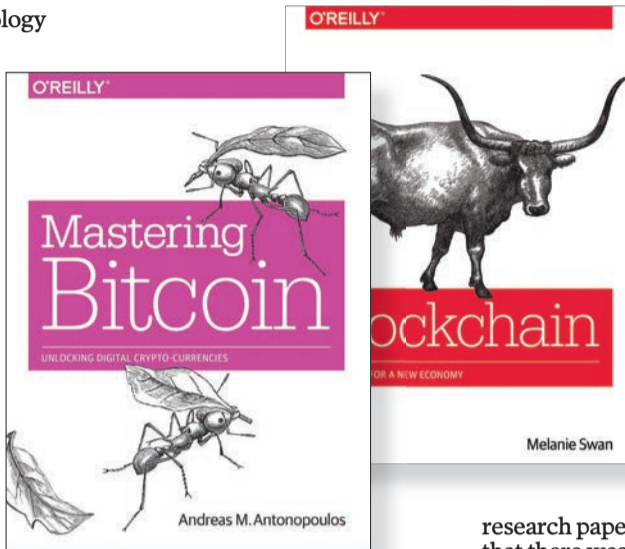
WITH digital technology all the rage and taking the world by storm, we look at how science and automation has managed to change and revolutionise the way we do things, in this section, property. While the internet has changed the way we receive information and connect with others and the smart phone transformed the whole concept of a phone, we now look at the evolution of finance and how purchasing items, including a house, is going through reform with the introduction of bitcoin.

INTRODUCING BITCOIN

When people hear terms like “bitcoin” and “blockchain”, many are vague while some may not even be familiar with these words. But for the technology industry adept, bitcoin and blockchain are common as these new-age technology concepts and modus operandi have been around, perhaps less widely known in Southeast Asia as it is in the West and China.

For the uninformed and in the dark, bitcoin is a technology that has established a new electronic payment method using “digitised money” made with digital cryptography, otherwise known as cryptocurrency. This system of payment is carried out when a user uses “bitcoin currency” (or cryptocurrency) to pay for goods by transferring the currency to another user (seller) within the bitcoin community.

Each transaction is recorded in a public data ledger known as “blockchain” and it is here where all the transactions that have taken place within the bitcoin community are



everyone or with selected users”. As a result, the “participants” are in control of their transactions, making everyone equal within the bitcoin community, which is also transparent.

It is said that bitcoin technology was first created in 2008 by a person or a group of persons under the pseudonym “Satoshi Nakamoto” in a

research paper. The research stated that there was need for a new electronic payment method, one using digitised money. The analysis also included the future of bitcoin, its benefits, capabilities and potential.

The system was implemented on Jan 3, 2009. And after just a few years, bitcoin grew to become a whopping US\$12 billion globalised economy.

stored. The amazing thing about this system is that anyone in the bitcoin community is able to validate transactions that take place without the need of an intermediary.

Sound too good to be true and a little risky? Well, the reason there is no intermediate party necessary is due to the network bitcoin technology is regulated on.

MODUS OPERANDI AND MORE

The bitcoin network is founded on a “peer-to-peer network system (P2P network)” which is explained as “a network of computers/ mobile configured to allow certain files and folders to be shared with

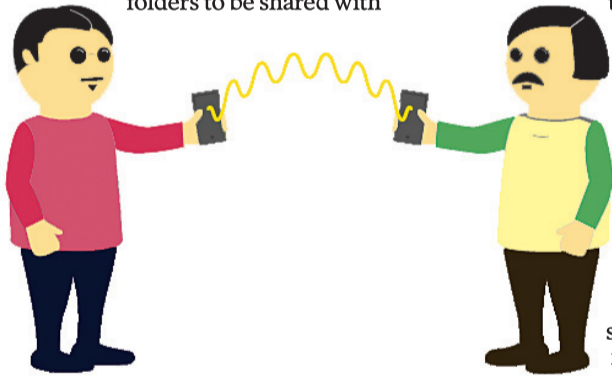
BITCOIN ATTRIBUTES

While not much has been said about bitcoin in this part of the region, the system has been around, slowly developing and growing. Like many things that are cloudy and not often talked about, people are weary hence, there will be sceptics who dissuade others about the system

they themselves are unclear about.

With that, *theSun's* Brian Chung shares what he learnt of this new method of transaction and currency when he attended a talk by renowned entrepreneur, author and expert on bitcoin Andreas M. Antonopoulos.

Below, Antonopoulos shares important information on bitcoin.



- 1) Bitcoin is an **open system of payment**: It is a system that anyone can access, participate and innovate, and does not require permission. Bitcoin allows anyone to join in and use the system, validate the transaction and create different kinds of cryptocurrency.
- 2) Bitcoin is **borderless**: Like the internet, bitcoin is not restricted to a country's rules and regulations as it has its own protocol with no distinction across countries.
- 3) Bitcoin is **neutral**: Bitcoin does not take the identity of the participant into any consideration. It only validates the transaction that takes place between participants. This attribute also allows participants to remain anonymous.

makes bitcoin a singular global currency with no exchange rate between countries.

7) Every bitcoin transaction is **permanent and immutable**: The transaction of everyone in the community is verified by everyone in the system. Once it is verified, the transaction will be permanently recorded in the blockchain.

8) Bitcoin is a **constantly innovative** technology: The open source nature of the bitcoin technology allows other people to further improve on it. There are many other cryptocurrencies based on the bitcoin technology. Moreover, the bitcoin technology is dependent on the internet, which makes improvement and innovation necessary.

4) Bitcoin is **ensorship resistant**: Every transaction in the bitcoin network cannot be frozen, censored or cancelled. Like the internet, the bitcoin system is a global digital economy with one currency.

5) Bitcoin is a **decentralised system**: The bitcoin network has no central institution or centre point of control. This trait ensures that there is no one major target for hackers to concentrate their attacks on. Instead, hackers have to create attacks on every single participant's software with different forms of virus and codes to hack into one computer.

6) Bitcoin is **scarce and limited**: Bitcoin is a system of value like gold but in digital form. This makes it a system that is not based on credit and debit. It also

Bitcoin transactions can be done via smart phones and computers by downloading the application and software. Users do not need to register themselves to be part of the bitcoin network as all “participants” are referred to by codes and “signature of one's device”.

However, iPhone users need to remember their iTunes password to download the application. In addition, the device that one has downloaded the bitcoin software on must remain connected to the internet in order for one to use the bitcoin method of payment.

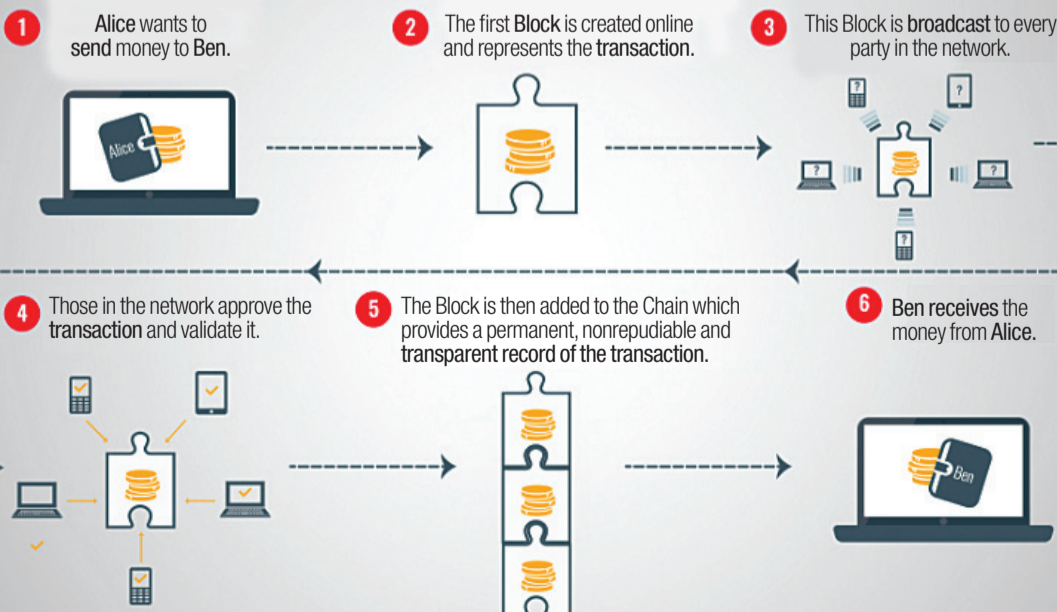
Follow our column next week on the application of bitcoin in property.

[Note: All charts courtesy of Bitcoin Malaysia.]

HOW BLOCKCHAIN WORKS

“ A Blockchain is a cloud-based database shared by every participant in a given system, in the case of this example, it's a currency trade. The Blockchain contains the complete transaction of the cryptocurrency or other record keeping in other applications. Think of it as a cloud-based peer-to-peer ledger. ”

SOURCE: WWW.BULLBEARANALYTICS.COM



Notes: Transactions are not valid until added to the Chain. Tampering is immediately evident.

The Blockchain is regarded as safe as everyone in the network has a copy. The Source of any discrepancies are usually evident immediately.

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DID YOU KNOW?

According to Antonopoulos, there are many cryptocurrencies. Some of these cryptocurrencies include Dash, Monero, Ethereum, Z-Cash and Litecoin, among others. These cryptocurrencies all share the same technology as bitcoin and are based on the blockchain format.