

THE VIEW FROM TOP

Colombo's skyline is a blink away from the top of the cubist tower designed by **Architect Arosha Perera**

Narrates Deepali Mody

The drive out of Colombo, on parliament road forces you to notice a building that is iconic in its setting. It is one of the few tall buildings in a low lying sub-urban scape. The Fairway on the Waterfront is now 90% complete, having started construction in early 2006. The

design has attempted not to fall prey to the developer driven concept of maximum usage of site Vs optimum usage of site, with the former always taking precedence in many other projects.

The developer of the property had only recently moved into his custom built designer house completed just a few years ago. Next door, was another piece of land owned by him where he considered building some apartment units which he

thought he would sell. This was around the time when the new golf course at Waters Edge came into being. This caused the property values in the area to boom.

The developer says "I couldn't justify keeping a large extent of land without developing it. The idea of apartments came from a close friend who believes in me" He approached his architect, Milroy Perera and his son Arosha, to design an apartment for this site. As plans

were being drawn up, it became obvious that it was not possible to build without amalgamating the two blocks of lands. The decision was made to demolish the brand new house and build a tall apartment block instead, the Fairway.

Initially the clients brief was to build 24 units. The architect tried working on a layout of 6 units to a floor. This resulted in inefficient circulation and a complicated plan-form with a central courtyard. Convinced the client

to build only 4 units per floor the architect was able to achieve an efficient central circulation core. The loss of area on each floor was compensated by building higher. Initially planned for only 12 floors the building now stands at 19 floors with multi level penthouses at the top.

The form of the building was driven by the regulations and the shape of the site. Arosha states "I got lucky the regulations also worked for me in terms of orienting the building to obtain views."

The building is a simple rectangular plan extruded vertically with a pleasing surface texture of windows, setbacks and balconies that give an ordered rhythm to the facade. Two vertical glass reveals on the sides of the building, when lit up at night give a strong definition to the massing of the form. These slits also bring natural light into the core of the building and provide glimpses of the views around.

All of the apartments are three bedrooms. Identical units are stacked on top of each other. There was such a small difference in the size of a two and three bedroom units – just the area of one bedroom – that it was felt that no real price difference would be possible and it was just as well to build all of them as three bedroom units.

The apartments are organized in a typical format, with all the spaces that require views and light on the periphery of the building and service spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms towards the center core.

The entry into the apartment from the main door is walled on both sides and opens out suddenly to reveal the large main space with its breathtaking

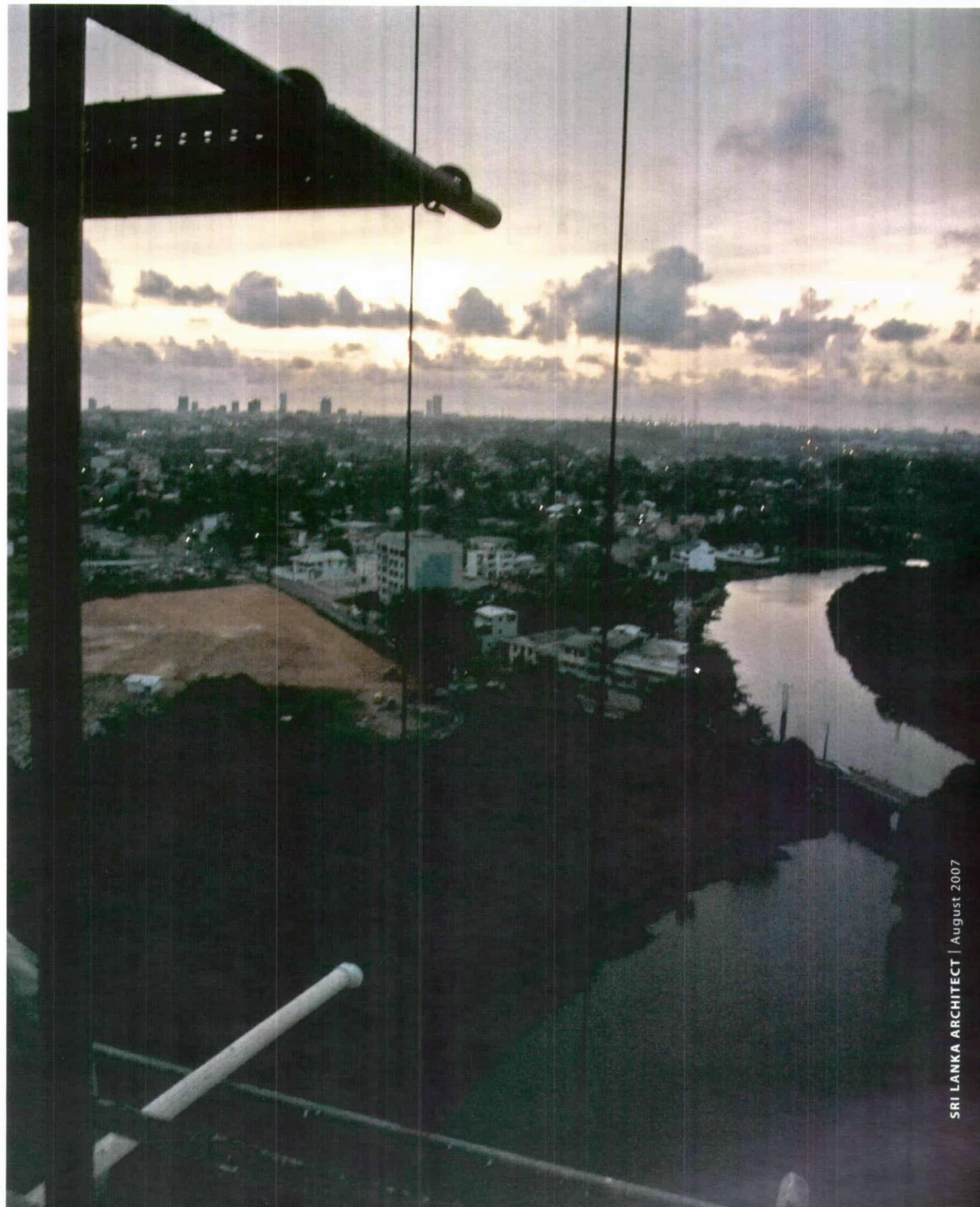
views. The Main living area combines living, dining and an open pantry. A room bathed in light with warm timber floors gives this space a welcoming homely feel. It speaks of a different lifestyle free of the hierarchy and traditions of a conventional house in Sri Lanka. The owners of these apartments will have to accommodate this open plan living style. The kitchen leads into a utility area and drying balcony that has a secondary service access entrance.

The bedrooms are spacious clean rectangles with clearly organized

wardrobe space and large windows that light up the room with sunshine. The bathrooms too exhibit this clarity of planning and are ventilated through simple vertical ducts. The piping in these ducts is meticulously organized and is a simple joy to look at according to the architect. The bathrooms are orderly spaces where every inch of tiling has been planned to fit the space and all fittings are laid out with an awe inspiring precision. Large and spacious, these bathrooms are an oasis of calm in which to lock out the world.

The simple and organized

planning of the spaces is a welcome relief from the commonly cluttered apartment plans available in the market. Windows in the living room run floor to ceiling, and lead onto cantilevered balconies. The minimalist railings in the balconies disappear from ones perception and allow the space to flow uninterrupted from inside to outside. One can rest assured that the views will not be blocked by future development. The buildable land around the site is too small in extent to allow for anything more than two stories by regulation, and other façades overlooks the vast golf



Course All of the apartments are located from the second floor onwards. The Aluminum extrusions used for the windows are specially imported as the shop front sections available locally are not designed to seal the wind and the rain. This is essential in a tall building where horizontal winds would lash rain across the glazing facade. The imported sections used are deeper and designed for these conditions.

Each apartment is approximately 1700 square feet, while the new project by the same developer, Fairmont apartments will be built at 1570 square feet. This reason

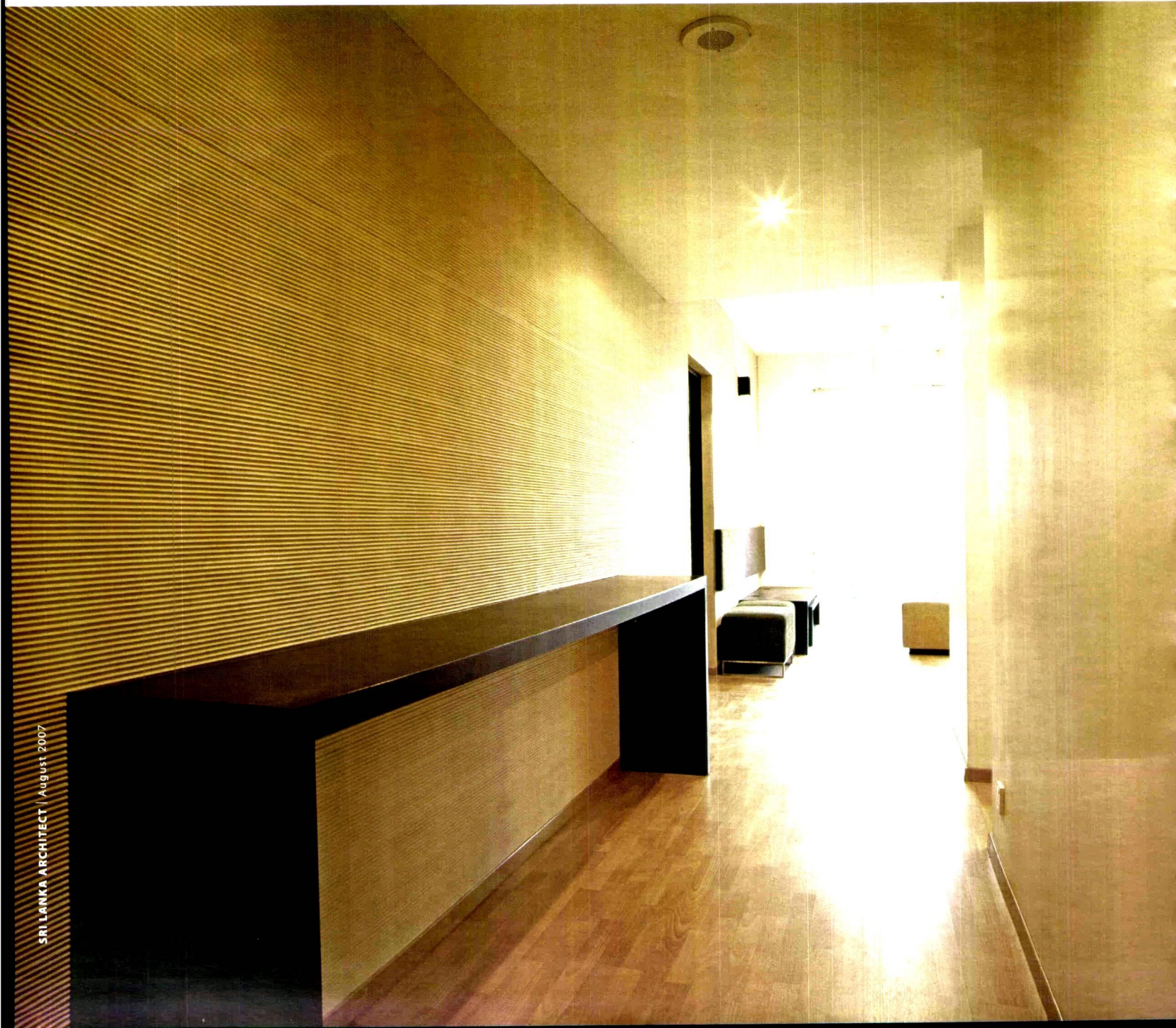
efficiency in the new project, with no loss of spaciousness, is achieved by narrowing the rooms. Narrower rectangular spaces, the architect has learned by designing Fairway, allows for better utilization of the space than broader squar-ish spaces.

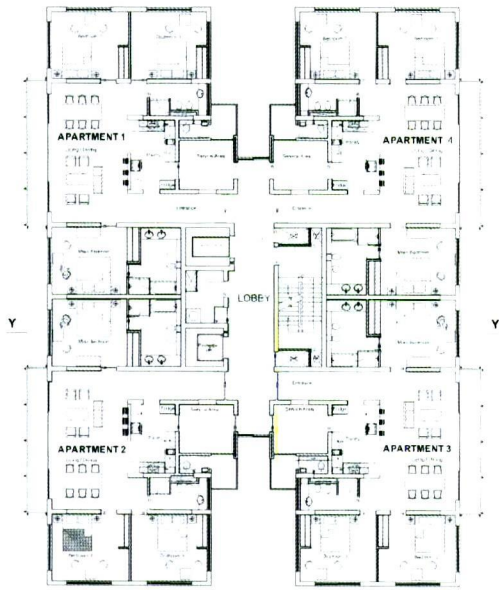
Another technical feature of the building is that the structure is seismically designed. Having been planned just after the Tsunami of 2004, the concern uppermost in everyone's mind was the possibility of future earthquakes. This led to a building with about 20% more steel reinforcement for its seismic design.

The structure of the building, like everything else here is very simple and cost effective. The central core that runs vertically is reinforced with two other smaller shear cores. All beams are hidden over walls and once in the apartment there are no visible beams. The load of the column grid in the apartment is supported on large transfer beams at mezzanine level, where the grid is modified to suit the parking requirements for cars on this tight site.

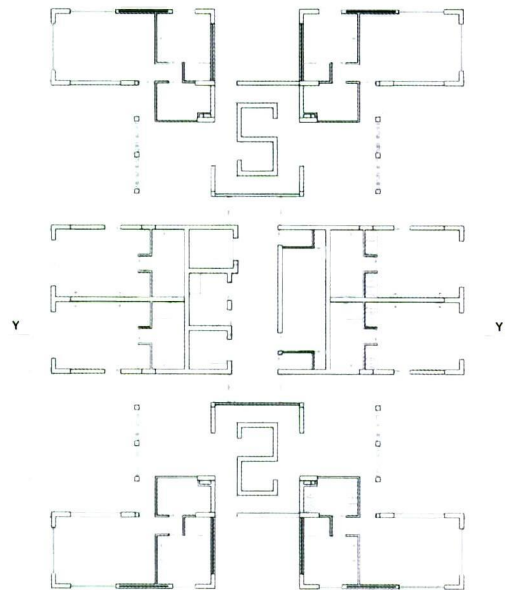
On the top two floors of the building are the penthouses.

These were a flamboyant afterthought by the developer as the project progressed. The architect was unconvinced that buyers would pay a premium to own a penthouse in the suburbs. In an attempt to make the penthouses something different and special, Arosha came up with a novel concept. This was to flip the floors of the three level unit to get 180 degree views. Each penthouse has its own internal elevator and a large pergola covered terrace. Though it was decided to have these terraces open to sky, regulations did not permit private terraces to be open on the top most floor.

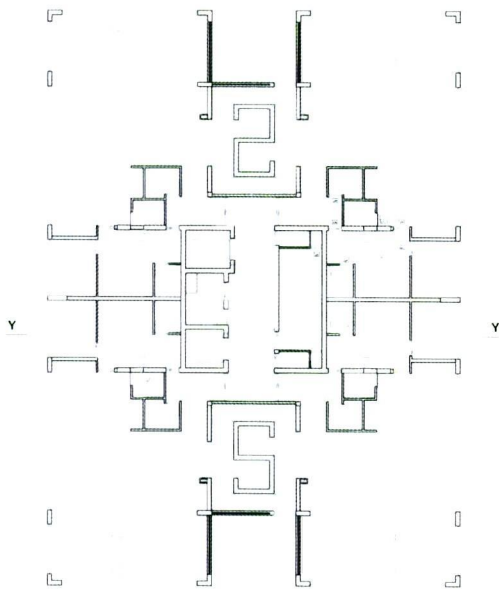




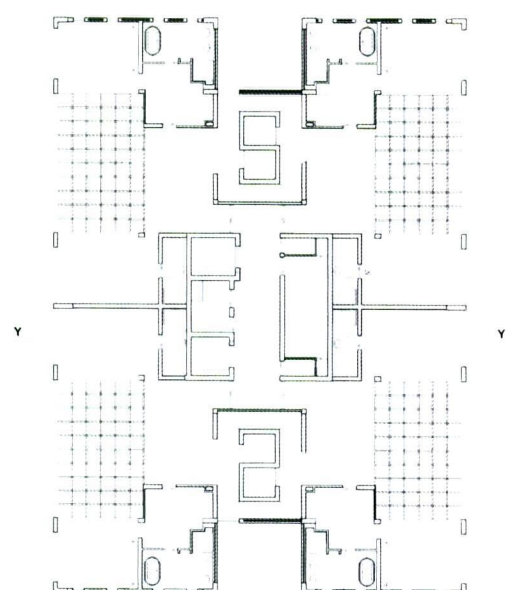
TYPICAL APARTMENT LAYOUT PLAN



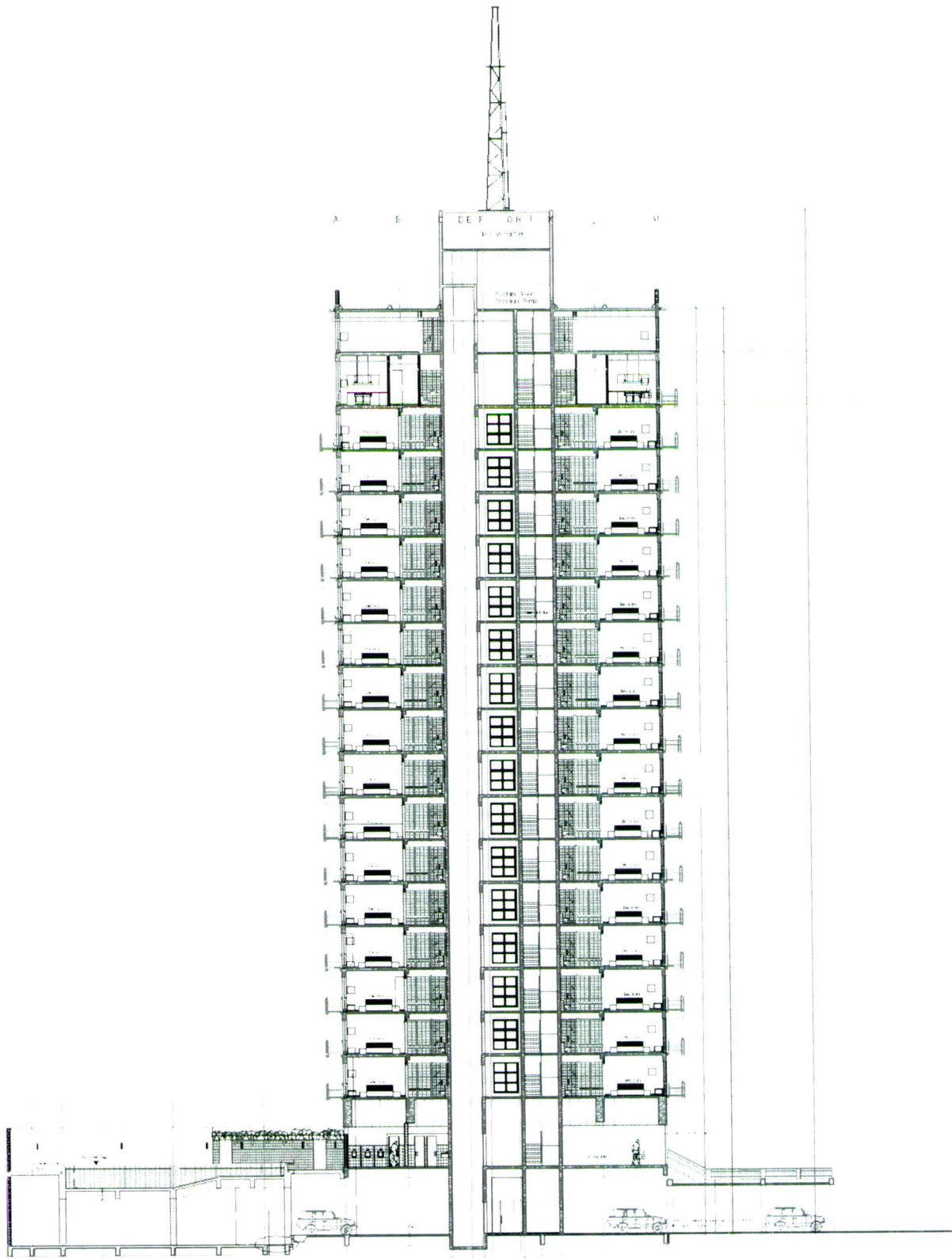
PENTHOUSE LEVEL - 1



PENTHOUSE LEVEL - 2



PENTHOUSE LEVEL - 3



SECTION Y-Y



The reason given by the authorities was that one could land a helicopter on it!!

The building boasts the standard common facilities of a banquet hall, gymnasium and large pool. The architect feels that at this income level, the owners would have other options for recreation and the common areas would be underutilized. However, in the developers own words **“The common areas and the ‘hang-out’ places that are there can compliment any mood. The pool side and the first floor terraces are exhilaratingly beautiful in the evening and hauntingly calm by nightfall.”**

The story of the financing of the building is also of interest. Initially when the developer had approached banks for funding, they had turned him down on the grounds that they did not believe anyone would buy apartments in the suburbs of Rajagiriya. The developer, who had considerable experience in risk management and financing, did not let this deter him. He decided to pre-sell his project to raise funds for the construction. By the time the superstructure was completed all of the apartments had been pre sold and only the minimum shortfall

at any given time was required as financing from the banks. The success of the project can be attributed to the proper management of funds by the developer and good cash flow. This might have prompted the planning of the other building in the same neighbourhood The Fairmont, where the developer has been responsible for upgrading the infrastructure in the area. The price of lands in the vicinity of these developments has soared due to this.

We asked the developer to tell us about the project and why he decided to do it:

“Doing business in Sri Lanka is riskier than doing business in most any other country. But what other choice do we have? Migration is not an option for everyone. Real-estate in that sense, is the safest investment in any economic climate and more so in challenging times such as this”.

Was the risk worth taking?
“Absolutely!. It has been the best time of my life. I have enjoyed every bit of it. Besides, when it sold out early, and with the team we had, it couldn't fail. So, I wouldn't call it risky”.
“I would like to think of

ourselves as a team. Into this triumvirate, Arosha will no doubt agree, comes the contractor with whom, we have an excellent working relationship. Together with Milroy and Arosha, we have an honest, credible and experienced team that is focused on achieving excellence”.

In the current situation in the country with its economic situations, security situations, sky rocketing land values it is a luxury to own landed homes. However small the size may be, owning a land in Colombo or close suburbs is a dream. The buyers initially were those who were looking for a safe place to invest their money. Since the construction many of the owners have decided to move into the building and leave their current homes. This says a lot about the livability of these apartment units.

The writer Deepali is a practicing Architect who is also a lecturer at the Colombo school of Architecture

Photography
 © Waruna Gomis

Architects :
 Milroy Peries Associates (Pvt) Ltd
 Project Architect :
 Arosha Perera AIA (SL)
 Consultants :
 Stems Consultants (Pvt) Ltd
 Client :
 The Fairway Residencies (Pvt) Ltd
 Civil Contractor :
 Maga Engineering (Pvt) Ltd
 Project Period :
 2005 Nov - 2007 Aug
 Total Area :
 16,400 sqm
 No of Units :
 60 + 4 Penthouses
 Area of Each Unit :
 1700, 5100 sqft
 Site Area :
 160 perches

Arosha Perera AIA (SL) is the principal Architect at Milroy Perera Associates which was his father's practice.