



TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW OF AR. ANTHONY LEE TEE OF ARCHITECT CENTRE, MALAYSIA ON 15 MAY 2009 ON BFM 89.9 THE BUSINESS STATION

BFM: Why an inspection needs to be done?

Anthony: Currently most properties that are transacted are done purely on what purchasers think they want to buy. They really don't have a professional whom they can refer to or get an advisory from. So an inspection really helps purchasers to make informed decisions before they embark on probably the single biggest investment in their whole life.

BFM: What is the state of buildings here in Malaysia?

Anthony: If you look at the buildings in Malaysia, many of the stratified high rise buildings have been around for about 15- 20years. So in this span of time many of them are now quite dilapidated. As you know our weather also is humid and this condition also promotes a lot of cracks and leaks in our current buildings. In the landed properties also you can see that many of the properties lack proper maintenance.

BFM: Sometimes the best solution is to get to the root cause of the problems and more often we know of residential buildings having a multitude structural deficiencies. I wonder how these buildings get their CFs in the first place? I'm not stepping on anybody's toes but I want your educated answer to that.

Anthony: Yes, but I think that's a really valid question. A lot of people are concerned about the structural deficiencies but I would like to debunk that. In fact I would like to say that in Malaysia most of our buildings do not suffer from structural problems. Most of the problems are visual and these problems are often related to architectural finishing - to do with roofing, plumbing issues and also settlement. But rest assured that most of our buildings are structurally sound.

BFM: Okay, I'm talking to Anthony Lee from Architect Centre Sdn Bhd and we are talking about Forensics Building Inspection, so it's a combination of CSI and FBI....so how is an inspection carried out?

Anthony: What we do is that we have a systematic approach. The first thing we do is that when we look at a building, we would analyze the cause of that particular defect. It is not just looking at the defect and say, look, there's a crack there or there's a leak here and there. We have to find out the cause of the problem and then we will provide a remedy to this problem. Now why is this so important? It is because it is no use of just picking up a mistake and then when somebody comes and fixes it up and they would just repair it in a way....you know we say "*cincai cincai*" when the work shoddily done, the problem comes back all over again. So it is important to get to the root cause of the problem. Often we get advice from the contractor. For example, the contractor says "Look you

know we can *kau tim* everything for you”,...that he would fix things up and the problems would go away. But in fact maybe most of the time the problem would recur so this does not resolve the root cause of the problem and it wastes your time and money.

BFM: **I think you are supposed to carry a red flag but some say no problem and then there will be a problem in future. What kind of methods do you use for your inspection? Are they like very technical or using high-end equipments or using sniffing dogs?**

Anthony: Well, largely our inspection is largely based on visual. We use all our five senses. Most of the time we use our eyes, our hands and our nose. In fact, when we go into a building and if it is leaking, we can smell the dampness. This can lead to serious health problems. We also have several tools which we use to detect dampness. In Malaysia, many bathrooms are not waterproofed properly.

BFM: **It's supposed to be. But from what I understand waterproofing can cost quite a bit so sometimes there may be incomplete work done...so if we have problems with our tiles, once you start ripping it off and there's no waterproofing there...**

Anthony: Yes that's it, especially people who live in high rise apartments can vouch for this. For example, whenever a guy above takes a shower you take one as well...

BFM: **What are the other problems that you see?**

Anthony: Well, you mean the *Kisah Benar* stories? There are many, many stories...but I think in this segment we can't cover all. But there is one in particular that I would like to talk about. It's a very simple problem really. It's about somebody who lives in a high-rise building who faced this problem with the air conditioning pipe. Most people who fix air conditioning would face the problem a few years after that - when the pipe that drains the water out is leaking onto the little balcony below. What happens is the water seeps back in again and damages all of the parquat flooring below and because of the simple little thing, it has resulted in thousands of ringgit in damage.

BFM: **What are the solutions do you provide actually?**

Anthony: In Malaysia now, we tend to serve many of the Joint Management Bodies in apartments. Many of these apartments now are having issues to do with maintenance and also repairs. So one of the biggest solutions that we are providing to the industry is what we called by MRR which is Maintenance, Repair and Replacement program. Now this is really a smart and efficient use of their Sinking Fund. It is not just going out there and getting a contractor's quotation but it's really conducting a very detailed investigation and report or of condition of the building.

Take for example, if you are living in a condominium that is 10 years old and you want to repaint this condominium. It is not just only getting a quotation from a painter, it's really investigating to see whether there are any cracks or any other issues that that would result in the deterioration of the paint and also any other leaks that are normally found in the building.

BFM: **When you talk about Joint Management Bodies and Management companies that actually manage a residential building, there's a question to ask: The developer, actually builds it all up. Then there's a transitional period before the management body takes over. For example, the same management company engages your forensics expertise to go and have a look at the building so that they can forward defects issues to them, and rectify all the problems before they take over because they are somewhat responsible for the building once they take over. Are there any situations where the developer will say, "No I'm no more responsible anymore because this is beyond and who are these guys?"**

Anthony: Well, it goes back to the Sales and Purchase contract. Like if you bought a stratified property some two years ago, the defect liability period always say that the guarantee period is 18 months. Count the day when you get your vacant possession. If the

developer is requested to fix up these problems within this time, then yes, he is bound by the contract to fix these problems. But often the problems emerge way after that; in fact even two, three or four years after that. Now at this moment in time if you go back to the developer, I don't think it's fair to go back to him. Therefore, if that's the case you should fund the repair. It must come from your own pocket. So it's important then to try to capture a lot of these problems during the guarantee period if it's still valid. A developer does not mind actually carrying out this repair because they would have paid the contractor already to do this work. So if you brought up this complaint, it will just mean that the developer would just ask his contractor to repair it for you.

BFM: **How do you actually ensure he does all these solutions and rectify all these problems as what you describe?**

Anthony: Well, we'll go back and check it again. In our defect-cause remedy it is very clear we would ensure that the particular defect has to be repaired in this particular way and if it's not done in that way, we would bring this up to the resident.

BFM: **Are Joint Management Bodies that take over building management responsible for the safety and property value depreciation of the building?**

Anthony: This is a very interesting situation in our industry. The government recently introduced a new act called the BCP Act -The Building and Common Property Act. In this Act what it means is that the developer and the purchasers now have to form a joint body corporate. This is done while the strata title is in process so this is actually an interim act. During this time the body corporate actually has a common seal which means that they can sue or be sued. This means that the purchasers now have a responsibility to ensure that people pay up. It is ridiculous now that in a lot of places that you go to, people don't pay their maintenance charges. Now if you don't collect maintenance charges, then you are going to have no money to repair, to maintain and to upkeep the premises. This Act has been put in place so that this can be done. So this is one of the areas of responsibility of the Joint Management Body that has to be looked at.

BFM: **How do you actually rectify and resolve maintenance issues?**

Anthony: Like many other condominiums, they will engage their own technical people look at these problems. Most of the residents themselves are not technical people. So this is where we are trying to reach out to these people to say, ARCHITECT CENTRE is here now, contact us, we can conduct this investigation and reports for you so that problems can accurately be diagnosed and then remedied.

BFM: **Do you cover commercial properties?**

Anthony: Yes, we do.

BFM: **Do you see people coming forward from commercial property seeking your services?**

Anthony: Yes, in fact, commercial property people are excellent opportunities for us because we look at dilapidation reports and properties before things change hands and they would like to budget in renovation costs or upgrading costs.

BFM: **Just wondering because with so many constructions happening especially in the city centre where one 20 or 30-storey building is undergoing construction where there is 20-storey building next to it - what happens to it with all the pounding and piling going on?**

Anthony: Yes, this has in fact been a common industry practice that prior to a construction; we will do a survey to check that the pre-existing problems around the building are probably recorded.

BFM: Since you have been around for 12 months, how's the response been? Are people concerned and they see that it's useful to have your services?

Anthony: Well, I think that generally if people heard about our services and if they were the end purchaser they would say, Ah! Finally I have somebody I whom I can turn to who could actually give me a technical report. You know, we are not anti-developer or anti-contractor or anything like that. What we are, we stand for is anti – defects. We like to look at upgrading the entire industry so that people can make informed choices.

BFM: How do you think that Architect Centre can actually help upgrade the buildings in Malaysia? As you said most of our buildings are about 15 to 20 years old.

Anthony: Well, one of the things that we can do is to conduct an inspection to look at the building condition as it is and we can make recommendations for them to upgrade them or to improve them at the most optimal cost according to the correct specifications and the correct use of materials for them.

BFM: Based on the recommendations of course, you know, some defects may cost more than what they could actually afford, so what do you think would help drive the catalyst for people to arrive at whatever cost needs to be rectified?

Anthony: Take for example, if you live in a place where it is a safety issue. The fire doors to the fire staircase for example. Through time they tend to wear and breakdown. Now these are the things we always recommend that you have to replace or repair them and make sure that they are in functioning order. These include fire pumps, hose reels and things to do that are important for their safety and the safety of the building. Now of course there are things that would be the nice- to- do things, you know those are the things that the management corporation or the residents can decide for themselves but if you were to focus about getting value for money and protecting your investment, those are the areas that you would always prepare in protecting the properties as far as not making it into a rundown stage as it would cost so much more to repair them after it has broken down than to do preventive maintenance.