BEYOND

STUDIOGOTO CHALLENGES AND DISSOLVES THE CONVENTIONS OF SHOWROOMS, CREATING AN EXPERIENTIAL LABORATORY FOR TILE AND STONE SPECIALIST RICE FIELDS.

Above: On the fourth floor, the hotelLAB offers various hotel suite settings. Mock hotel rooms can be discovered behind concealed doorways.

Right: Just inside the entrance on the ground floor, the reception area gives way to the TRENDLAB, which showcases the latest products.
Prior to visiting Rice Fields – a provider of Italian tiling materials in Singapore – it is advisable to shed any preconceived notions of what a showroom should be. Even from the moment of arrival, before one steps foot into the reception area, the entry point (clad in a material that resembles slightly weathered wood and that is later revealed to be tile) hints at a unique experiential journey. Dubbed riceLAB, the project shatters the boundaries of its own typology and presents an intricate and interactive spatial immersion that is part exhibition and part laboratory.

When Rice Fields Director Terry Tan initially approached architects Kimberly Toh and Chioh-Hui Goh of Studiogoto with a proposal to design a space dedicated to showcasing tile as a featured product, Toh was not entirely convinced about the idea of highlighting a material seemingly inferior to its natural competitors like stone or timber. “Before this job, tiles were seldom our choice selection for interior finishes,” she confesses. “We had to experiment to see the potential in what tile could do in order to be convinced. We realised that with modern-day technology, the aesthetics and capabilities of the tile material have vastly improved. We wanted riceLAB to become an education hub that would show how tiles are now much more than they used to be.”

From the top (fourth) floor to ground floor, riceLAB (Toh is hesitant to call it a ‘showroom’, because it is so much more than that) encompasses a well-designed journey that allows a visitor to experience the featured materials in a multitude of ways. Each floor presents a different experience, designed with different customers in mind – from homeowners to architects and developers. Every element has been customised with a meticulous attention to detail, down to the sizes of tile storage drawers (themselves clad with tiles), and the location and placement of lighting fixtures.

The exploration of the capabilities of tile begins at the fourth floor – the ‘hoteLAB’ – with a comprehensive look into the design possibilities through various design hotel suite settings. Here, the architects’ scrupulous exploration of tile’s capabilities and advantages reveals a vast array of carefully executed details that unveiled the strengths...

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Above: The boardroom, dubbed riceBOLD, caps one end of the second floor and incorporates a custom-made table with a marble top.

Top: The ‘Lounge Suite’ within the riceLAB incorporates vintage furniture from the owner’s personal collection.

Bottom: The ‘Premier Suite’ showcases timber-look tiles within the ‘hoteLAB’ on the fourth floor.
of the material in surprising and eye-opening ways. Beyond the floor, tile has been applied on walls (with a variety of joint treatments), joinery, and even on custom-made basins. By deliberately juxtaposing the tile with the natural counterparts, Studiogoto chooses to reveal how one material can effortlessly be used as a substitute for the other. A fun game of ‘guess that material’ ensues in the process.

"The lab is not about plastering every surface with tile to overwhelm the visitor. It’s about demonstrating the various ways tile can be used, and also selectively inserting natural materials to complement the tile. We have intentionally placed stone and a tile that looks like stone side by side for comparison. The visitor needs to take a closer look to be able to identify what is tile and what is not," explains Toh.

One floor below, the ‘MATERIAL LAB’ takes the visitor a step deeper in their exploration of tile and its properties. Here, a wide range of tile samples is presented. QR codes on the back of each sample offer the instant gratification of seeing the chosen tile in a built environment simulation on one of the monitors. In the user-friendly shopping experience offered in the ‘MATERIAL LAB’, every cabinetry detail and light angle aids in a customer’s tile selection process.

Toh compares the space to an education hub for homeowners and designers. She explains, "Just as we had to experiment with tile to be convinced of its versatility of usage, a customer has to experiment before making a purchase. We paid a lot of attention to the details, from where a customer can put their bag to the provision of a magnetic layer on the back of each tile." Magnetic strips running the length of the countertop storage trays allow the tile samples to be stood vertically for inspection. "We've ensured that the samples can be viewed at different angles and with the flexibility of moveable light sources," explains Toh.

"THE VISITOR NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK TO BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY WHAT IS TILE AND WHAT IS NOT."

+ Kimberly Toh

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**Above:** The third-floor ‘MATERIAL LAB’ is an educational hub targeted at homeowners and designers.
Similarly, in the ‘PROJECT LAB’ on the second floor, Toh and Goh worked closely with Tan to design a space that placed customer experience at its core. This space, which partly functions as a workshop and demonstration area, incorporates a large-format display area, sliding display screens, and custom-made working stations and provisions for different lighting tones. “From day one, we wanted this to be a discussion area—a space where architects and designers could bring in other materials, and experiment with different colours and textures,” explains Toh.

The journey through the labs concludes in the ground-level ‘TREND LAB’—a space showcasing the latest design trends and industry innovations. More than just a showroom, riceLAB re-imagined as a swimming pool, with the roof access ladder imagined as a swimming pool, and the stairway landing as an intricate and interactive space that sparks design thoughts and encourages practitioners to push the boundaries and conventions of design.