

TELOK AYER CHINESE METHODIST CHURCH



Client:

Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church

Architect:

Design Architects

Engineer:

Ove Arup & Partners Singapore

Contractor:

Array Engineering & Construction Pte Ltd

1996 AWARD

The Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church was the first Chinese Methodist Church to be established in Singapore in 1889. The church building was built in 1924, and gazetted as a national monument on 23 March 1989.

Its design is an example of Singapore Eclecticism drawn from Chinese and European influences. This is evident from the distinct Chinese pavilion on the roof top with upturned roof eaves and the column/

beam sounce details reflecting the prevailing Art Deco of the 1920's. The building's external verandah of alternating columns and piers is an adaptation of the five-footway streetscape.

During the restoration process, it was found that the windows



Front elevation of restored church with "pagoda" styled pavilion and up-turned roof

at one end of the sanctuary on the second floor were sealed up, and a timber backdrop with arches added. These were removed to reveal the original timber windows with four Chinese characters, which were then carefully restored. The double loaded corridors on the third storey were removed, and the space restored to its original spatial quality.

The fourth storey was found to be a later addition as its construction details were different from those of

the other storeys. This addition was re-constructed to harmonise with the original building. Ironmongery, fans and lightings were sourced and added to recapture the old charm of the monument.



New extension designed to harmonise with the old by replication of architectural elements



Restored original bell tower used as a prayer pavilion



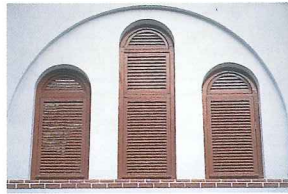
Moulded panels and four Chinese characters discovered and restored to original at front sanctuary



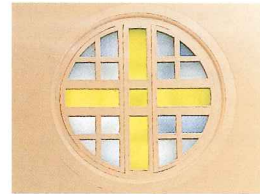
Restored scion details



Restored up-turned roof eaves



Original window module retained and restored



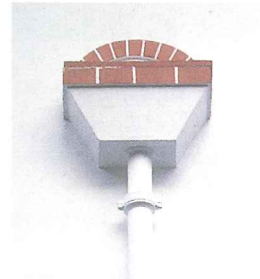
Restored stained glass window



Retention of external verandah with its alternating circular and square columns to articulate the corridor space



Retention of staircase core in its original alignment and design



Rainwater receptor retained and restored to fine details

A. **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TELOK AYER CHINESE
METHODIST CHURCH**

In 1889, Dr. Benjamin F. West, an American medical doctor and missionary under the auspices of the South India Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, started missionary work in Upper Nanking Street offering medical help. He conducted 2 church services on Sunday to a congregation of 30 persons. Many Hokkien speaking migrants living in the vicinity heard his messages which were translated into Hokkien from Malay.

As membership grew, a piece of land at the junction of Telok Ayer Street and Cecil Street was purchased for \$3,600. On this land, a tent was erected, known as The Methodist Mission Centre. This novel idea of worshipping God in a tent like the people of old had done, was not practical as the heat of the tropical sun was simply too hot during the worship hour.

In its place, a chapel measuring 20ft by 30ft in floor area was constructed of wood and corrugated iron. It was shaped like the godowns that could be seen at the wharves and was nicknamed "the Tin Match-Box Church". Even though the congregation baked away every Sunday morning, membership continued to grow steadily.

Between 1918 - 1924, more land was acquired and a 3 - storeyed building was built by a French firm, Bross and Mogin. The architect was Swan and Maclaren. On 9 January 1924, the foundation stone was laid by Bishop Bickley. The new building was completed and dedicated on 11 January 1925. It was in this building that the well-known Chinese evangelist, John Sung conducted his revival meetings in 1935. Even up till today, many older church members still remember the Spirit-filled ministry of the late Dr. John Sung.

World War II broke out in 1941 and Singapore fell into Japanese hands on 15 February 1941. During the Japanese Occupation, the Church became a refuge for 300 persons. Countless members continued to worship and be encouraged at the secret worship services held on Sundays. The Women's Society of Christian Services of the Church helped widows, orphans and decrepit in the area during the war.

Because of the history and the uniqueness of the Church building, the government preserved the building as a national monument on 23 March 1989. That year also marked the Church's 100th Anniversary. The Church has amazingly not undergone

B. EXISTING BUILDING CHARACTERISTICS

The Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church is a typical example of Singapore Eclecticism, an Architectural Pot-Purri with features reflecting the thoughts and aspirations of its original founders and the times that they lived in. Some of the more prominent features include:

- A Chinese pavilion on the roof top with its upturned eaves reflecting its Chinese origins.
- The column / beam sounce details reflecting the prevailing Art Deco of the 1920's.
- External Verandah with its colonnade of alternating columns and piers as an adaptation of the '5' foot way streetscape connecting the church with the existing 5-foot way of the Telok Ayer shophouses.

The Building shape and features generally do not conform to the usual elements of generic church architecture e.g. cruciform plan, etc. Especially a Pagoda roof to top it all. The plan is trapezoidal reflecting the shape of the site and its constraints with 4 "cores" located at each of the corners, visually akin to watch-towers.

