

53 GRANGE ROAD



1998 AWARD

Owner:

*Spring Grove Development Pte Ltd
(a CDL-Marubeni Development Joint Venture)*

Architect:

RSP Architects Planners & Engineers (Pte) Ltd

Engineer:

RSP Architects Planners & Engineers (Pte) Ltd

Contractor:

Sumitomo Construction Co Ltd

Built between 1888 and 1890, this two-storey conservation bungalow of the Neo-Classical Victorian style was once the residence of the former United States Ambassador to Singapore. It was sold together with the land in 1992 for a condominium development and subsequently integrated within the development as a club house with function rooms, gymnasium, billiard room, management office and other communal facilities.

Prior to the restoration works, an in-depth research of the bungalow was carried out. Restoration works commenced in March 1996. Much effort was employed to focus on the technical aspect of restoring the bungalow. Where the existing roof structure was in a good condition, it was retained, treated with anti-termite treatment and restored. The timber floors at the second storey were retained and restored. The white marble flooring at the first storey, which was badly stained, was replaced with similar material of another colour to match the



View of the restored bungalow amidst the condominium development

rustic look of the club house. All existing windows and doors, eg those with the original blow glass panels, were retained and restored. The original ornamental details were also retained and restored. Damaged ornamental details were copied and reproduced for reinstatement at their original positions. All external and internal walls were carefully cleaned and washed with water jet to remove the flaking oil paint before they were repainted.

Contemporary additions to the bungalow which have no historical value were removed eg bullet-proof windows and grilles. Mechanical and electrical

services were duly concealed within the bungalow without affecting the building facade. The air-conditioning condenser units were located behind the building at a position lower than the ground platform level and camouflaged with landscape plantings.

The result is a beautifully restored heritage bungalow with a new lease of life amidst a condominium development.



2nd floor vestibule/lounge with timber doors and flooring retained and restored



Unfluted circular columns framing meeting room entrance



Open verandah with timber elements retained



Restored club house overlooking the swimming pool



Front entrance porch



External features of bungalow restored to original



Eaves supported by timber post raised from the ground



Timber staircase balustrade detail

UR URBAN
REDEVELOPMENT
AUTHORITY
TOWARDS A TROPICAL CITY OF EXCELLENCE



Spring Grove House stands on land bounded by Grange Road, Irwell Bank Road and River Valley Road granted to Hoo Ah Kay (better known as Whampoa) by the East India Company on May 7, 1845. The property was bought by William Wemyss Ker in 1849; John Harvey, (Borneo & Company) was the next owner; Edward Boustead (Boustead & Company) in 1827; Tan Keng Cheow. (Singapore Steam Laundry) in 1880. The property continued to change hands over the years and among the subsequent owners were Herman Muhlinghaus 1894, Wee Kay Poh, and Adolf Laspe, a partner of Behn Meyer & Company, in 1901. From 1904 the house was lived in by various partners of Behn Meyer & Company and it was conveyed to the firm itself in 1906.

William Henry Mcleod Read and his cousin Robert Barclay Read (son of Christopher Ridout Read, (A.L. Johnston & Company) were residents of Spring Grove from 1868 to 1885.

Originally a modest structure of three bays across the front, Spring Grove House was initially a bachelor quarters. The present house was probably erected before 1868 and could have been built by Ker sometime between 1849 and 1857. (However, other records suggested that the residence is believed to have been built between 1888 and 1890). Rebuilding by the Reads was unlikely as they were in continuous occupation and reconstruction of the roof in 1891 indicates that the house was by then old. The roof reconstruction was done in conjunction with the addition of the two side bays. The architects were Crane Brothers who carried out the work for W. E. Hooper, a junior civil servant and possibly part-owner of the house. Hooper lived there with the Read cousins from 1882 to 1885. Another short-term resident was author John Cameron who lived with the Reads in 1875.

After the renovations, the house became a family home for successive directors of Behn Meyer & Co. When war broke out between Germany and Britain in 1914 the house was seized as enemy property. In 1916 it was sold to J. A. Elias, a well-known Jewish millionaire, who in turn sold it to the Straits Trading Company in 1919. Little is known about the house during the Japanese occupation (1942 - 1945) except that, at one time, a Japanese general made his home there. A bomb shelter was built in the garden off the patio. After World War II, the British Military Administration, under Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, requisitioned "Spring Grove" as the residence for the Air Vice-Marshal. The American Consul General successfully regained possession in 1946 and on April 4, 1950, the US Government purchased the property from the Straits Trading Company for US\$83,438.

When Singapore achieved independence and became a sovereign state in 1965, the American Consulate General was elevated to the status of an Embassy and the Consul General, John Lacey, returned to the United States. A year later, Mr Francis J Galbraith came to Singapore as America's first Ambassador.

The Galbraiths possessed a sense of history and immediately recognised a unique dwelling and its potentiality (despite its dilapidated condition). An architect and an interior decorator from the United States were commissioned to make improvements to the house as a suitable Ambassadorial residence. A swimming pool was subsequently added in 1973 at the rear of the building.

Spring Grove House is a 1,240m² 2-storey detached house situated at 53 Grange Road on a land area of 24,481m². The building although residential was planned to operate as an ambassadorial Residence of United State of America. It had, a banquet room, living room, powder room, breakfast room, guest suite (bedroom, bath and sitting room), kitchen, butler's pantry, storage pantry, laundry and large covered terrace at 1st storey level with the 2nd storey providing a further large living area and 4 bedrooms all with en-suite bathrooms. In addition, there are upstairs patios at front and back of the house, public assembly places, conference rooms and place of refuge. Although it is a matter of conjecture as to when exactly this Victorian Colonial Residence was built, it has a historical link with Singapore's early pioneers.