

# FAR EAST SQUARE



**Owner:**  
*Far East Organization*

**Architect:**  
*DP Architects Pte Ltd*

**Engineer:**  
*KTP Consultants Pte Ltd*

**Contractor:**  
*Kim Seng Heng Engineering Construction (Pte) Ltd*

The project involves the restoration of 61 units of conservation buildings and the construction of a new seven-storey car park station and a two-storey cultural pavilion within the China Square Conservation Area. The conservation buildings comprise mainly two- and three-storey shophouses of architectural styles ranging from Early to Art Deco as well as the former Fu Tak Chi temple and Chor Eng Institute (the First Chinese School).

The first storey of the buildings was to be retained for activity-generating uses. The owner chose to have shops and food outlets at the first storey and offices above. Prior to restoration, the National Heritage Board (NHB) was engaged to carry out research on the area to determine elements, structures and events that were historically significant to the site. In addition, an expert in antiques was also commissioned to identify and document historically significant articles such as antique chinaware, furniture and typewriters found on site.

The design approach taken was to create a unique and vibrant commercial centre to showcase the historic nature of the area within the setting of a 21<sup>st</sup> century city complex. This was done through the juxtaposition of the glass and steel



*Old shophouses restored to showcase the historic nature of the area within a modern city complex*

structures of the new architecture against the backdrop of the traditional shophouse, in essence creating an environment where the past and present 'co-exist'. The conserved shophouses were linked together internally to create a larger floor area while their external facades, airwells and party walls were left intact to retain the character and spirit of the shophouses. The traditional method of construction was adhered to. Original materials were retained and restored, where possible. Skilled craftsmen from China restored the Fu Tak Chi temple and the Chor Eng Institute. The temple has been restored and renamed the Fu Tak Chi Museum to house artifacts found on the site or donated by former residents of the area. To minimise M&E equipment on the external facades of the conservation buildings, the aircon system was centralised within the new car park station. Amoy Street and the backlanes were covered to allow the spill over of activities from the shops and eating outlets onto the outdoor areas, making the internal streets alive with activities.

The end result is a bustling and innovative commercial development for the new millennium that celebrates culture and technology.





*Amoy Street bustling with food vendors and push-carts*



*Restored conservation buildings of various architectural styles*



*Plaza along Cross Street*



*View from Pekin Street*



*Restored exterior of the First Chinese School*



*Internal courtyard of the Fu Tak Chi Museum*

Far East Square was one of the Sales of Site parcels in the China Square Development Area that was awarded to China Classic Pte Ltd in 1995. The site includes a 7-storey Car Park Station, 61 units of conserved Shop houses, a 2-storey Cultural Pavilion and a covered Pedestrian Mall.

Far East Square is located in one of the most important historical areas in early Singapore history, the Telok Ayer Area. It is the part of the site where early immigrants first settled. It is bounded by Cross Street, Telok Ayer Street, Pekin Street and China Street. The history of Far East Square is thus part of the history of Telok Ayer Street.

The former Fu Tak Chi temple was designated as the most historically significant structure on the site and the decision was made to preserve as much of the temple as possible. Only the plaster of the walls, the roof tiles and the floors were extensively replaced since they were to be too dilapidated to be retained. The rest of the temple, like the timber carvings, doors and windows were largely maintained and confined only to repair and reconstruction works to portions that were missing and/or damaged. The granite slab floors in the airwell and at the entrance were retained, as well as the main structural timber members.

The former temple is now the Telok Ayer Street Museum that houses artifacts that were found on the site or donated by previous residents of the area. It also serves as the Main Entrance to the Heritage Trail at Far East Square. Refer to figure 3.

The other structure that was designated for restoration based on the research by NHB was the gateway at Unit 131, which was the former First Chinese School. As with the Fu Tak Chi temple, the roof tiles were replaced due to bad conditions. The rest of the structure was repaired and reconstructed where necessary.

#### Significant and unique features

The NHB study also uncovered a number of historically significant companies and trades that operated in the area. The names on the shop house columns that identified these companies / trades were retained and repaired.

In areas where there was expected heavy pedestrian traffic, effort was made to retain some of the dilapidated conditions that characterized the old Chinatown, so as to project the character of the past within the modern setting. Thus, certain areas of the development were left 'as-it-was'. An example is the 2-storey high 'courtyard' space at the rear of Unit 47. The rough edges of the broken brickwalls and dilapidated window frames were retained, although the freestanding wall was reinforced. The loose plaster on some of the walls has been stripped and the brick walls left exposed. The spiral stairs at the rear of Unit 7, which is fully visible to the pedestrian flow, has been left in the condition that it was prior to the restoration works. All this was done to retain that "old Chinatown" atmosphere in an area that has been commercialized with modern amenities.