

No. 50 EU TONG SEN STREET

A Masterpiece Restored



2000 AWARD

Owner:

Thong Chai Ke-Yip Pte Ltd

Architect:

Design Environment Group, Architects

Engineer:

Hainal-Konyi (S) Pte Ltd

Contractor:

LAEC Construction Pte Ltd

This project involved the restoration of the Old Thong Chai Medical Institution, a national monument, and construction of a new two-storey building next to it. Given its location in a commercial zone along busy Eu Tong Sen Street,



The Old Thong Chai Medical Institution restored to its original glory

the owner has the flexibility to introduce whatever commercial facilities he wishes, to put the building to viable use.

Built in 1892, the Old Thong Chai Medical Institution is a prime example of Southern Chinese Architecture. The original configuration of the interior spaces and courtyards has been kept. Because the building was dilapidated, skilled craftsmen

from China were engaged to restore its detailed features. Protective temporary coverings were used and the 3-R principle of maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair was observed. The “Top-Down” approach was also adopted.

The new annexe respects the historic grain of the streetblock and its design is compatible with that of the monument. As a finishing touch, a beautifully landscaped Chinese garden has been created at the junction of Eu Tong Sen Street and Merchant Road.

Thus has an old masterpiece been restored to its original glory.



Internal courtyard retained and restored



Ornate corbels



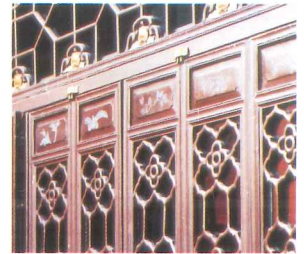
Free-standing column with sculptured granite base



Main roof with concrete ridge frieze, gable walls and ornamental copings



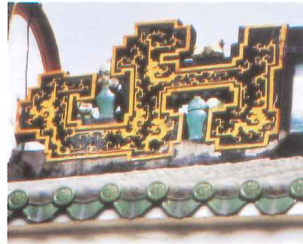
Timber purlins restored



Decorative timber windows with timber screens above



Decorative timber screen



Intricate concrete ridge frieze



Interior of the building with original timber features retained



Interior space retained



Covered linkway

The original name of the Old Thong Chai Building is Thong Chai Medical Building which is located at China Town, 3 Wayang Street. Old Thong Chai Building is one of the preserved buildings under the Preservation of Monuments Board. It was constructed on November 17, 1892 with the donation of philanthropists. It was a charitable institution which offered free treatment to the patients coming from all races and religions. The Building is designed in Southern Chinese Architecture style with elegant design features and special roof structure. It was built with imported Chinese (local) materials by the experienced artisans. It is one of several unique Chinese Architecture left in Singapore.

On both sides of the gate of the perfectly preserved Thong Chai Medical Building there are a couplet with the inscription and above it is a horizontal inscribed board with the inscription Thong Chai Medical Institution. The layout structure and decoration are all in Chinese style. The building is in the form of a typical Chinese ordinary house in southern part of China. The ancestral hall is mainly divided into three parts, the entrance hall in front and the halls in the middle and the rear building in the back. On both sides of these three major components, there are covered links connecting them to form two courtyards. The building is totally enclosed on the outside but is free in the inside. There are not any windows on the exterior wall and the sunlight and ventilation are mainly coming from the courtyards.

Going through the entrance hall and the first courtyard, the high and spacious hall in the middle with the complicated structure and intricate decoration and decorated with the ancient furniture and antiques serve as the place of ceremonies and reception as well as the exhibition hall for arts and crafts. Highly hung on the walls are a lot of couplets and horizontal inscribed boards passed down from the founding of the medical institution. The inscriptions highly praised the philanthropic acts done by the medical institution and recorded how the Chinese in Singapore assisted the weak and oppressed. Also these boards and couplets have enriched the culture contents of this particular building.

The third part is the rear hall for residence. The style of the fourth building at the rear is completely different from the buildings in the front. It was built in the western style and many shops took this architectural style in the past in Singapore. This reflected the changing of the history and this was retained in its present design. The work is restricted to include the repair and decoration to this existing building only.

The three buildings in the front integrate with each other and are parted with the rear building by the second courtyard.

The green glazed Chinese tiles have been used on the roof. As it has not been repaired for a long time it cannot protect the water from penetrating through the roof. The sculpture and the flower pattern on the roof ridge, which depict the natural water and mountains, have been vague in colour and design. The loading of the structure is made of wood frame, and bricks and stones are used in some places. A small part of the timber purlins and rafters have rotted. The wood carving "Happiness, Emolument and Longevity" hung on the hall is gracefully carved but part of it has rotted. The decoration of the rear building is simpler than the halls in the front. This section has been changed from the structure of timber frame into steel stanchion which is possibly repaired at a later time.