

No. 12 TAI GIN ROAD

A Historical Landmark Remembered



Owner:
Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall Co. Ltd

Architect:
DP Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:
Oscar Faber Consultants Pte Ltd

Contractor:
Wee Hur Construction Pte Ltd

This project involved the restoration of the Sun Yat Sen Villa, a gazetted national monument, the construction of a new annexe block at the rear directly above the North and South MRT tunnels. The building, which opens onto a generous front garden, now houses the vast collection of documents and artifacts associated with Dr Sun Yat Sen's activities.

Built in the 1880s, the 2-storey Victorian Style bungalow was once used by Dr Sun as his centre of operations when he was in Singapore. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the bungalow was sold to a group of Chinese merchants who donated it to the Chinese Nanjing Nationalist Government for preservation as a historical site. The Japanese briefly occupied it during the 2nd World War. The Singapore Branch of the Kuomintang used it as its headquarters till 1951 when it was handed to the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. In 1965, it was converted to a library before it was renamed the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall in 1996 in recognition of the contributions of the Southeast Asian Chinese towards the 1911 Chinese revolution.

Prior to restoration, the bungalow was in a fair condition. The entire bungalow was below the flood level. There was also rising damp in a number of its walls. Its timber components, such as the roof rafters, floors, windows and doors, were deteriorated. To ensure that the



Victorian-style villa restored into a memorial hall

restoration works were properly carried out, a detailed record of the original building condition and studies of its architectural elements were made and used for reference.

During restoration, the 3-R principle of maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair was observed. Temporary cover was used to protect the architectural elements of the building. The timber structure was strengthened to support the additional load needed for the

exhibits. Micropiling was carefully done to avoid the MRT tunnels. Pressure injection of damp proof solution was used to address the problem of rising damp. A water tank with a pump was installed below the garden to take care of the problem of flooding.

All architectural elements, such as the classical columns, timber doors and windows, cornices, filigree fascia and cast iron railings, were retained and carefully restored. The verandahs, complete with bamboo chinks, were also retained. A ramp was introduced between the old and the new buildings to bridge the floor level difference. The garden with the statue of Sun Yat Sen was maintained. Even the 100-year old Angsana tree at the entrance was kept.

The transformation of this residential building into a memorial hall has been a worthwhile challenge. The building is indeed a historical landmark worth remembering.



Fligree fascia and decorative column



Original ambience of open sitting area at balcony retained



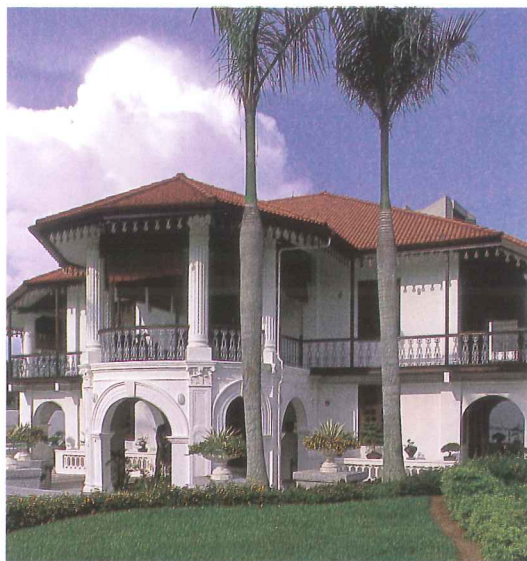
Timber railings with decorative cast iron balustrades



Timber framed windows restored



Open side verandah with timber flooring



View of restored villa with generous front garden



Second storey interior with exhibits



South verandah at 1st storey



Classical arches with moulded architrave and decorative parapet walls restored

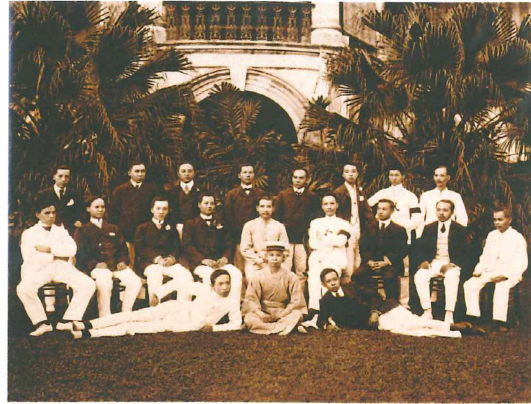


Entrance porch and front balcony retained

The villa is a freestanding bungalow built sometime in the 1880s in the style prevalent during that period according to the aesthetic taste of the wealthy Chinese merchants. It was built for Mr Boey Chuan Poh a wealthy merchant and located in a sugar plantation. It was later sold to Teo Eng Hock the paternal uncle of wealthy businessman Lim Nee Soon who later offered it to Dr Sun Yat Sen. The villa was given a Chinese name, Wan Qing Yuan, by Teo Eng Hock to symbolise peace and happiness in his mother's twilight years.

Sun Yat Sen a western trained doctor embarked on a campaign to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and to establish a republic in China. Sun traveled to Singapore among other places to gather support. This was followed by many subsequent visits and subsequently made it his base for his operation. He managed to garner enough money and support from the Chinese in Malaya and eventually over the whole of South East Asia. In December 1911, the Qing dynasty fell.

After 1911 however Sun Yat Sen villa became dilapidated and was sold to an Indian merchant. In 1937, it was purchased by six Chinese merchants who donated it to the Chinese Nanjing Republican Government for preservation as a historical site (refer to figure 1). It was occupied briefly by the Japanese during the Japanese Occupation (refer to figure 2) and thereafter the Chinese Nationalist Government (Kuomintang) made it the Headquarters of its Singapore Branch (refer to figure 3). When the Kuomintang ceased to operate in 1951 the building was handed back to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. In 1965 it was turned into a library and was opened to the public (refer to figure 4). In 1994, it was gazetted as a national monument. Finally in 1996, the villa was renamed Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall to recognise the contributions of the Nanyang (Southeast Asian) people towards the 1911 Chinese revolution.



During one of Dr Sun Yat Sen's visit to Singapore, He posed with his supporters on the grounds of the villa



Figure 1

In 1937, the six leaders of overseas Chinese jointly bought back the Sun Yat Sen Villa which was known as Wan Qing Yuan



Figure 2
In 1942, Sun Yat Sen Villa was made as a communication hub by Japanese Army



Figure 3
In 1948, Singapore branch of the Kuomintang held its 6th Congress at Wan Qing Yuan.



Figure 4
In 1965, restoration works by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce were completed. A bronze statue of Sun Yat Sen was erected in front of the villa.