

No. 153 NEIL ROAD

Two Homes In One



Owner:
Conservation Homes Pte Ltd

Architect:
SCDA Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:
HS Consultants

Contractor:
CHH Construction System Pte Ltd

Located at what used to be a residential neighbourhood where rich Chinese businessmen or 'towkays' lived, 153 Neil Road has been restored from decades of uninspired renovation work to a newfound glory that accentuates its past.

Run-down Conditions

At the start of the project, the house had been modified beyond recognition of most of its original architectural features and heritage. Its façade was plain and sombre while its interior had been severely altered to suit its modern-day use as an office.

Initial visual inspections revealed plastered cracks on many walls. Large portions of the timbered floor joists, floor boards, rafters and purlins suffered from severe termite infestation. The roof tiles were in need of major repair.

The forecourt had been transformed into a concrete vehicular ramp that led to a double-leafed timber front door, one of the few physical remnants of the house's venerable past.

The shophouse was two storeys high and about 22 meters long with a central courtyard still intact.

Two Dwellings

The owner had two requests - to create two distinct dwelling units where two families



Restored shophouse adapted to house two families

could reside separately, and to ensure that the 'new look' would be true to the property's original Chinese roots.

To meet the requirement of having two distinct living spaces in one, more space was created with a three-storey rear extension and a double-storey mezzanine that connected directly from the back of the main conserved shophouse.

Now one family enjoyed the whole first storey of the original house as well as the new double-storey extension along with the modified central courtyard and pool. The second family used the upper levels of the house.

Marrying The Old And The New

A tasteful balance was maintained between the heritage of the shophouse and its present-day purpose.

Among the outstanding efforts were a refreshing central courtyard concept with an elongated reflecting pool, a glazed natural coloured clay-tiled roof that seamlessly extended from the original, and an ingenious interlocking interior structural design that brought the old and new parts of the house together harmoniously.

An Inspired Interior

The interior works had also been exemplary in blending the old and the new. Notably, the original common party wall was retained as a ceiling-high exposed brick wall feature in the new formal living area.

The original airwell was modified into a magnificent skylight that filtered light into the heart of the house, while acoustic ceiling boards, pitched to the original incline of the roof, recaptured the authentic high-ceiling effect.

Today, 153 Neil Road stands proudly in harmony with its neighbours. It adds an antiquated charm to its immediate environment and sets an inspiring precedent in putting two dwelling units in one conserved shophouse.



Original façade carefully reinstated



Decorative plasterworks



Restored corbel



Entrance forecourt leading to cleverly-planned dwelling units



Living area at the second storey



Natural light filtering through the airwell



Central courtyard with elongated reflecting pool



Living area at the first storey

Ambience

153 Neil Road is located in the Blair Plain Historic Conservation District, to the west of the Downtown core. Back in the old days, rich Chinese businessmen, the *towkays*, occupied the shophouses with their many wives each occupying a separate residence in this affluent area. The level of Neil Road then was much lower. Thus, to reach the forecourt of the shophouses, one must climb steep flights of stairs which made the shophouses appear grand and imposing.

Site

153 Neil Road sits an intermediate plot that was particularly long, approximately 47m in length with an average width of 7m. The platform level of the site was roughly 1.5m above the level of Neil Road with a service lane running along the rear of the site.

Existing building

The shophouse itself was 2-storey high, fronted by an 8.5m long forecourt, and measured about 22m long with a courtyard in the middle. It was utilized as offices with single storey storage cum service area to the rear. The front façade timber casement windows had timber lattice glass windows internally while the front timber casement door had fixed glass panels internally. The front boundary wall did not have metal grilles as in the original.

From records and visual inspections carried out on site, it was obvious that some alterations had been made as the existing design differed from the original one. The original façade of the shophouse was quite ornate, with Chinese characters above the 2nd storey windows and polychromatic embossed wall tiles below it. There was supposed to be decorative plaster mouldings as well. The entrance forecourt had decorative metal grilles and was supposed to be accessed by a series of steps. However the present façade had been stripped bare of its ornamentation and decoration, resulting in a plain and stark aesthetic. A driveway ramp was created at the original entrance forecourt for motorcars.

Similarly, the interior of the shophouse was functional and modernized. For example, the casement windows were timber framed with glass infill. Some old parts of the shophouse, such as the timber beam corbels supporting the second storey timber floor joists and the timber floor itself, were still intact. The height of the pitched roof was concealed by a false ceiling. The rest of the house was nondescript but the length was apparent.

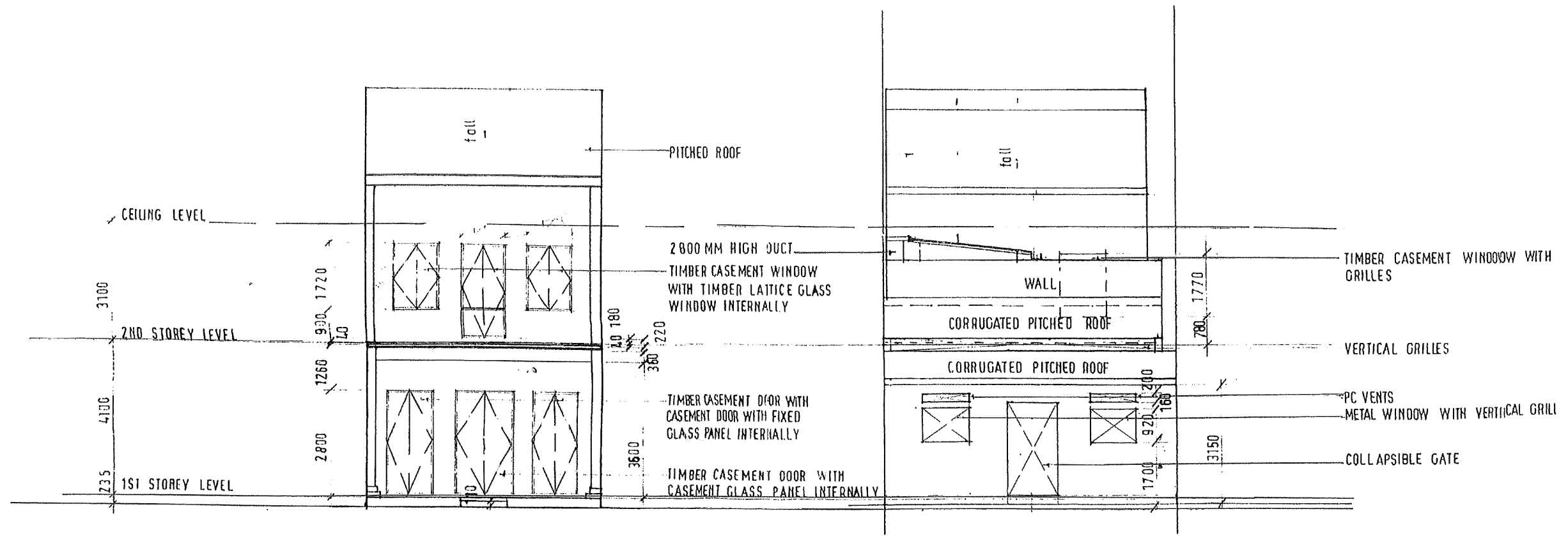
Structure

The main structure of the shophouse was the common party walls which demarcated the boundary from its neighbouring plots. These principal load-bearing brick walls protruded approximately 0.3m beyond the pitched roof of the existing shophouse and were thickened on the ground floor for added structural stability.

Apart from the party walls, the structure of the shophouse consisted entirely of timber. The ground floor structure consisted of a reinforced concrete floor slab. This deviation from the structure of a traditional shophouse was due to renovations that had been carried out previously. The chengal timber floor joists spanned between the two party walls, resting on timber corbels and supported the tongue and groove chengal timber floorboards for the second storey. The roof structure consisted of timber rafters resting on timber purlins which were in turn supported by timber coppings on the party walls.

HISTORY OF BUILDING





FRONT ELEVATION

REAR ELEVATION



ARCHIVE DRAWINGS [ELEVATIONS]



