

# No. 33 Erskine Road

Journey to Splendour



**Owner:**  
*The Scarlet Hotel Pte Ltd*

**Architect:**  
*HK Hia & Associates*

**Engineer:**  
*DE Consultants (S) Pte Ltd*

**Contractor:**  
*Wee Hur Construction Pte Ltd*

*Comprising 13 two-storey shophouses built in 1868, a four-storey shophouse at Unit 37 built later in 1924 and an infill site, The Scarlet was originally the shared living quarters of immigrant Chinese women servants. It also served as a boutique hotel from 1988 until the mid-1990s. The new owners wanted it to be upgraded to a top grade boutique hotel. Now, the streetblock is a quaint old space given a sensuous new grace.*

## **Passion to Revive**

When one has the passion, much can be done - as witnessed by what the architect did for the Early Style shophouses with unique one-storey service blocks and the Art Deco shophouse with a distinctive roof pavilion.

The team relied on write-ups and old photographs from available publications to provide the initial source of research on the buildings.

Hoarding and protection measures were then carried out for all units. Existing doors were retained, front window shutters were carefully repaired, and layers of paint over main beam corbels were brushed off to reveal the original granite.



*Restored Art Deco shophouse with distinctive roof pavilion*

## **A New Look**

A cosy welcoming space was created at the lobby to greet guests. Great lengths were also taken to preserve the spatial quality of the shophouse including the hotel rooms.

The infill development at Unit 15 was capitalised upon as an opportune place for a basement to provide the much needed space for the hotel's administrative offices. Ground floor shops were kept along the rest of the two-storey shophouses to retain the traditional five-foot way ambience. Lighting and carefully chosen floor finishes enhanced the nostalgic feel of the past.

Over at the four-storey shophouse, the rear court was decked over at the second storey floor level to incorporate an open-air jacuzzi.

A previously undiscovered basement was also maximised to enhance the linkages between the units and to facilitate the addition of a lift.

## **A Blushing Beauty**

Luxurious boutique hotel interiors and glass shopfronts now form an environment of charm along Erskine Road. The development is an enchanting and sultry adaptation of the living quarters of a bygone era of Singapore.



*Barrel vault roof of new infill development at Unit 15 adds interest to the traditional roofscape of the area*



*Open-air roof terrace serves as entertainment area*



*Second storey open-air jacuzzi at rear court*



*Open corridor at Unit 37 retained*



*Original down-hanging steel struts transformed to a lighting feature*



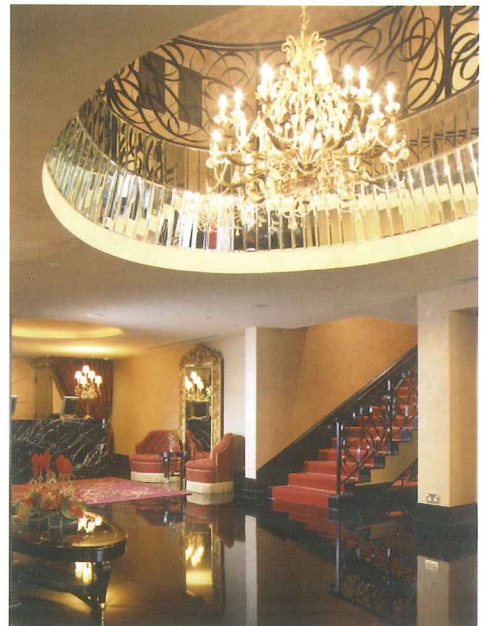
*A typical spacious hotel room*



*Cosy ambience of the restaurant space*



*View of restored shophouses along Erskine Road*



*Double volume main lobby*



Erskine Road derives its name from the Honourable J.J. Erskine, a member of Council in Penang and a government officer in Singapore in 1824.

The fourteen 2-Storey shophouses No. 9 to 35 along Erskine Road were built in 1868, and the 4-Storey concrete building at No. 37 was built later in 1924.

The 2-Storey shophouses were originally the shared living quarters for immigrant Chinese 'black-and-white amah' women servants. Later, the 1<sup>st</sup> Storey frontage was used as shops. Up to the 1980's, the old women would still be seen staying at the premises.

The shophouses are of relatively squat proportion and have a very basic façade design. The lack of ornamentation on the front elevation is typical of this 'Early Shophouse' style. The outstanding feature of the elevation at 2<sup>nd</sup> Storey is the repetitive pattern of full-height timber louvred windows, with typical timber balustrades. Plain columns line the five-foot way at 1<sup>st</sup> Storey, with simple capitals and cornices terminating at 1<sup>st</sup> Storey and continuing upwards as pilasters on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Storey façade.

In 1988, the fourteen shophouses were acquired by a Taiwanese developer who retrofitted the development into a 44-room boutique hotel – The Inn of Sixth Happiness - a Chinese-Inn style. The 4-Storey building at the junction with Kadayanallur Street was acquired in 1992 and provided additional suites to the hotel.

While hotel rooms occupied the upper storey and the rear single-storey portion of the 2-Storey shophouses, the 1<sup>st</sup> Storey units fronting the five-foot way were used for shops and restaurants. The striking red colour of the columns portrayed its Chinese theme.

No. 15 was rebuilt together with the Inn of Sixth Happiness as an infill development under URA guidelines. Its modern glass-and-aluminium frame façade was set back from the old shophouse façades, and starkly expressed its reconstruction concept, while the odd shape of the plot resulted in a very narrow plot frontage.

The Inn of Sixth Happiness shut down its operations in the mid 1990's and was acquired by the present owners Grace International in 1997. A thorough redesign and redevelopment of the project was required by the new Owners for the development to be operated as a top grade boutique hotel.