

# SRI TEMASEK

Heritage on a Hill



**Owner:**  
*Prime Minister's Office*

**Architect:**  
*CPG Consultants Pte Ltd*

**Engineer:**  
*CPG Consultants Pte Ltd*

**Contractor:**  
*Evan Lim & Co Pte Ltd*

**B**uilt in 1869, Sri Temasek, located within the Istana grounds, is a stately 19<sup>th</sup> century country house with an architectural legacy as diverse as Singapore's heritage. Now lovingly restored, its Malay-influence timber fascia roof and a mysterious Chinese moon-gate are just two among the many architectural gems that have been brought back to life.

## Full Of Surprises

Formerly the residence of the Colonial Secretary, Sri Temasek is a unique blend of European and Asian architectural elements. The main bungalow is linked by a covered walkway at the rear to single-storey outhouses which were once used as stores and servants' quarters.

The house, designed by Major J.F.A. McNair, a civil engineer, has a typically colonial, symmetric layout with deep verandahs surrounding the central living spaces. On approach, its striking roof with timber fascia of Malay origin hints at the many more surprises the house has in store. Among them are several arch features at both the first and second storeys hidden under thick plaster, generous verandah spaces overtaken by insensitively added timber partitions for makeshift amenities and, at the outhouses, plastered-over under-floor vents and floors of patterned paver stone embedded in cement. There is also the unusual but intriguing Chinese moon-gate on the second storey lounge.

## On Solid Ground

Today, Sri Temasek sits on its original foundation of granite slabs built almost 140 years ago. While the foundation remains strong, much of its physical structures and finishes had been badly ravaged by time, weather and termites. The project team rose to the challenge taking great care to reinstate most of the house's distinctive elements.



*Aerial view of restored bungalow on a hillock amidst manicured lawn*

First, the original symmetry of the house was restored. A makeshift kitchen and toilets on the second storey verandah were removed to bring back the original layout which allows for free-access all around the building. The grand front entrance of the bungalow was carefully reinstated, right down to the brick pit along the driveway originally used by horse carriages and the stone slabs on the front porch for mounting and dismounting the carriages. Internally, detailing on railings, doors and windows including the Chinese moon-gate and several *pintu pagar*, ceramic

breeze blocks and all manner of original floorings were intricately restored. Evidently, what was irreparable was fastidiously replicated.

On the first storey verandah, the timber structure and the arches framing the verandah were replicated in look-alike steelwork. This controversial choice was thought by the project team to be the practical solution to the incessant termite problem.

## A New Chapter Begins

The project team did a good job integrating the new facilities and creating a new niche that pays homage to the bungalow's heritage. The former servants' quarters were retained and reused as a heritage gallery. The 8 types of bricks uncovered during the restoration process are displayed here among many other artifacts. A new kitchen and bathrooms were carefully integrated without changing the symmetric façade of the building and its original layout.

Sitting serenely on a verdant hillock upon the immaculately manicured Istana grounds, it is not difficult at all to imagine that this restored bungalow was once a breezy country home filled with life.



*Roof timber fascia of Malay-influence*



*First storey verandah with delicate decorative fretwork above*



*Timber staircase with elaborate balustrade motif fully retained and restored*



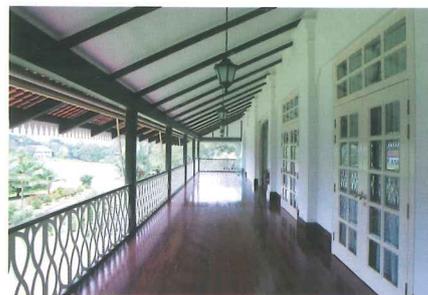
*19<sup>th</sup> century bungalow restored to original design*



*Old water tower at rear garden kept*



*Grand front entrance reinstated complete with brick pit and stone slabs*



*Two-metre wide wrap-around verandahs at second storey with ornate railing*



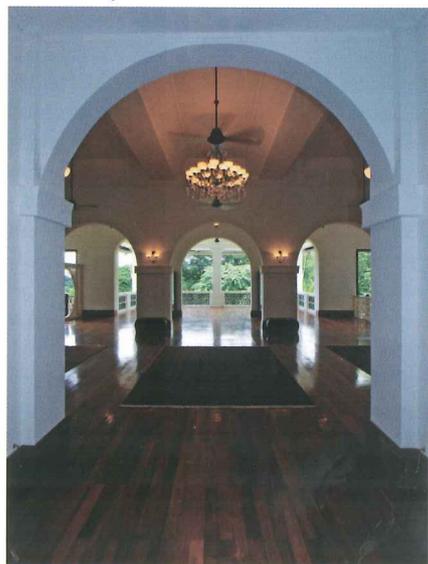
*Pintu pagar retained*



*Chinese moon-gate*



*Original layout of second storey interior retained*



*Arched central corridor at second storey*

Sri Temasek, a two-storey building with floor area of 1,558sqm, was built in 1869 by the colonial engineer Major J.F.A. McNair and was used as a residence for the Colonial Secretary. The main building block was linked by covered walkways to single storey outhouses at the rear of the main block. The main building contains the main living quarters. The outhouses were used for stores and servants' quarters.

The main entrance is through a Foyer leading from the Car Porch. For the main building, the ground floor comprises the Lounge, Dining Room, Kitchen, pantry and toilets. The Dining Room and Lounge open out onto a wide verandah on both sides of the building. The verandahs are framed by timber arcades with elaborately carved fretworks. The 2<sup>nd</sup> storey comprises the living quarters. It consists of a Seating Area, 4 Bedrooms, store and toilets. Like the 1<sup>st</sup> storey, all the rooms open onto wide verandahs with timber railings.