

1 THE KNOLLS SENTOSA ISLAND

A Timeless Luxe Affair



Owner:
Millenia Hotel Private Limited

Architect:
DP Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:
WEB Structures (Singapore)

Contractor:
Tiong Seng Contractors Pte Ltd

Once used to accommodate British officers of the Royal Artillery and their families, the four classical colonial military buildings built in the 1880s have been sensitively revived, repurposed and integrated into a modern six-star resort hotel, Capella Singapore, within a lush undulating and beautifully landscaped historic setting.

Grand and Gracious Welcome

The project team took advantage of the undulating terrain of the main Blocks 48 and 49 to create a grand and gracious sense of arrival for the entire property. In addition to lending the prominence and grandeur of the conserved buildings to the resort, this was a clever way to enchant visitors with a unique sweeping perspective of the historic grounds as they approach the hotel lobby at Block 48 from the winding driveway.

Romance Rekindled

The interiors of Blocks 48 and 49 were well restored. Employing the “Top-down” approach, the project team carefully inspected the unsound steel roof structures of both buildings, removing and replacing only those that could not be salvaged before carrying out the rest of the restoration works. Existing timber doors and timber-louvered windows were repaired where possible or otherwise replaced. To create a greater sense of space and grandeur at the lobby, reminiscent of the grand style of old colonial buildings,



Former military buildings restored as six-star hotel

openings on the inner walls facing the corridor were reinstated.

The new *porte cochere* replacing the stair core which was a later addition at Block 49, was well thought through and implemented. Great sensitivity was demonstrated in integrating old and new with deliberate design distinctions, such as the horizontal shading on the new porch which echoes the timber louvres of the internal façade of the original building. The creation of a continuous walkway in the open-air verandahs was well conceived and executed.

New Chic On The Block

Blocks 50 and 51, which were in a much better structural condition, were also sensitively repaired, restored and brought back to life for their modern use as exquisite upscale manors with six-star amenities. They are also purposefully integrated into the natural topography with the rear portion graduating into the slope – all part of the grand scale of things that allows the buildings to blend naturally and to appear “lost” within a rich landscape.

By taking an approach faithful to the fundamentals of restoration, the project demonstrated an unassuming treatment of the exteriors and a dramatic creation of an interior space for a beautiful six-star hotel site sitting on 30 acres of lush landscapes. All in all, the resplendently restored colonial buildings now lend an air of romance and grandeur of the bygone days within a new lavish resort development.



Upscale manor with six-star amenities



Panoramic view of the resort hotel



Interior of restored manor



Second storey restored and adapted into a library



Open verandah as alfresco dining



Lush landscaped garden between old and new development

1 HISTORY OF BUILDINGS



Fig 1.1 block 48

Blocks 48-51 located along Ironside Road, Sentosa, were gazetted as conservation buildings on 7 August 2000 under the Conservation of Built Heritage.



Fig 1.2 Block 48,49 used as the Officers' Mess

Built in the 1880s, blocks 48-51 accommodated the British Officers of the Royal Artillery, Coastal Defence Command based on Blakang Mati Island. Blocks 48 and 49 were used to house the Officer's Mess and barracks for unmarried officers. Blocks 50 and 51 were used for the married officers whose families stay with them during their service on the island. The Officers' Mess was where the officers and families had their meals and recreational activities such as dining, wining, dancing and tennis. The Officer's Mess was used exclusively by the officers and out of bounds to the other ranks with the sergeants and gunners having their own mess rooms at their own barracks.



Fig 1.3 Parties held at Block 48,49 Officers' Mess

Parties for Christmas and New Year were celebrated at the Officers' Mess with formal table settings extended out to the wide corridors of the block and band performances were held in the room at the entrance. From the Officer's Mess there was a good view of Singapore harbour and it was a practice for the officers and families to welcome in the new year with the loud honking from the ships in the harbour. The Officers' Mess was also used as a ground for welcome and farewell parties when an officer's tour of duty on the island was up.

There was an interesting legend of buried treasures remembered by all the officers who served on the island after the 2nd World War. It was said that in the last days before the British surrendered to the Japanese on 15 February 1942, the British officers quickly buried their regimental silver on the lawn in front of the Officer's Mess, to prevent its capture by the Japanese. Part of the silvers was recovered in Port Dickson in Malaysia in 1950 but whereabouts of the remaining is still unknown and possibly still lying under the lawn.

After the war, the 1st Singapore Royal Regiment Artillery (1st SRRA) was set up in 1948 and the British command continued to use these blocks as living quarters and mess. In 1956 the British Government authorised the disbandment of all their overseas coast artillery and by 1 Nov 1958 the 1st SRRA at Blakang Mati was disbanded. On 18 March 1958, the batteries of the 1st SRRA gathered on the island for their farewell parade and a party at the Officers' Mess.

2 BUILDING TYPOLOGY

Blocks 48-51 were built in the style of the classical colonial bungalows with considerations of the tropical setting. Wide verandahs were designed around the perimeter creating an 'in-between' space for the relief from the tropical heat. All 4 blocks presented the same architectural style with block 49 detailed with more architectural treatment to the columns and arches.

Intricate moldings were introduced to block 49 around the arches, which were not visible in other blocks. Based on past records, it can be seen that windows on the upper storey of block 48 were added subsequently, possibly to create more internal spaces.



Fig 2.1 Block 48 in colonial style distinguished by the white colonnade and fenestrations.



Fig 2.2 Block 48 with the additional windows and staircase added.

Architectural and structural principles

Block 48 presumably the arrival hall used in the 1880s, comprised of a front extended entrance porch flanked on either side with a open colonnade on the front. It is observed that the block may have underwent several renovation to suit the users as additional windows can be used in the front porch and staircases added as seen in fig 3.2. The renovation is suspected to be carried out at various times from photo records of various window and door types used within each block.

The two storey high building was linked to block 49 through a linkway separated by an airwell. Block 49 is observed to be more intricately decorated with the additional moldings around the arches to the colonnade. Block 49, used as the barrack for the unmarried officer's with the brick partition walls at regular intervals aligned to the colonnade, had a outhouse which served as the toilets. Several narrow staircases were found along the corridor with a more formal external staircase in the front of block 49.

The hierarchy of the spaces are distinguished by the wider corridor to the front and narrow corridor with the toilets and service areas tucked to the rear of the building.

2 BUILDING TYPOLOGY



Fig 2.3 Block 50 colonial bungalow in a smaller scale as compared to block 48,49. photo taken in 2002.



Fig 2.4 front view of entrance foyer

Blocks 50-51 appeared to be less intricate in terms of the detailing and construction. Where similar moldings were integrated into the building form, it was found only on the front of the columns, terminating into a blank column or wall on the side. Both blocks were well integrated into the natural topography of the area with the rear portion 'disappearing' into the slope.

Minor variations in the window treatment was observed in both blocks.

A combination of brickwall and concrete construction is observed in all 4 blocks. Where block 48,49 comprised of a steel roof truss, block 50,51 had a timber roof with similar clay roof tiles used in all blocks.