

36 & 38 ARMENIAN STREET

SOHO Charmers



Owner:
Hong How Investments Pte Ltd

Architect:
DCA Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:
C P Lim & Partners

Contractor:
Nakano Singapore (Pte) Ltd

Once dilapidated and overwrought with insensitive additions and alterations, these two clusters of 1930s to 1950s Art Deco four-storey shophouses have been transformed into commercially attractive properties that still support the live-and-work functionalities of their original intent.

A Breath of Fresh Heritage

With a refurbished façade of carefully restored ornamentations, the voluntarily conserved properties now stand with renewed charm and confidence in a neighbourhood replete with heritage icons. Elaborate mouldings, chipped off motifs and ornately carved capitals have been meticulously repaired and brought back to their former glory. Algae infested walls and weathered plastering have been removed and the walls given a new coat of life.

Window panels and original glass which could not be salvaged were painstakingly measured for reference in making exact replicas. The project team managed to rescue and preserve an original mild steel window which is now on display at the new lobby. No. 36 Armenian Street now houses SOHO style offices on the upper floors with shops and eateries on the first and second levels. No. 38 Armenian Street has been converted into chic, interlinked spaces for private art gallery and office use.

Crossroads of Old and New

With the historical aesthetics back in place, the project team took on the tall task of transforming the properties into commercially-viable spaces



Art Deco shophouses transformed into commercially attractive live-and-work properties

and magnets for stylish tenants. Dramatically transformed into column-free, seamless spaces for work and living, the refurbished shophouse interiors showcase a new sheen to the age-old concept of home-and-workplace symbiosis. The airwells of old are reinterpreted into a green vista of tiered courtyards that bring natural light into the interior spaces.

Bridging Past and Present

Placed between the conserved property and the extension block, these connective courtyard spaces provide a physical link between the old and new. A landscaped deck built on the second storey is a brilliant reinterpretation of the communal back lanes which are common characteristic of shophouses of old, now made relevant for contemporary usage.

A commanding new and rear extension rises gracefully on independent support with its sixth and highest storey cantilevered over one of the conserved buildings. Purposefully designed in subtle and modern style, the new extension does not compete with the old but rather complements and accentuates its presence.

This project has set high standards in innovation and design for commercial development projects that call for integration of old and new.



Restored façade of 36 Armenian Street



Detailed elevation of 38 Armenian Street



Original pitched roofs with firewall



New extension complements the old



Landscaped deck at second storey



Original mild steel window on display at new lobby



SOHO-style office at upper floor

36 & 38 Armenian Street is centrally located in the heart of Singapore's Arts and Heritage precinct, at the highly visible junction of Armenian and Loke Yew Street, surrounded by the National Museum of Singapore, Singapore Arts Museum, Singapore Philatelic Museum and the future National Art Gallery. It is opposite the restored Peranakan Museum, The Substation and walking distance to three MRT stations - Dhoby Gaut, City Hall and the newly opened Bras Basah.

Comprising 7 stacks of 4-storey Art Deco shophouses, these shophouses were built between 1930s and late 1940s. Along Armenian Street and immediately next to Wilmer Place was the former 27-room Mayfair City Hotel which was thriving in the 1950s and 1960s. At the hotel's 1st storey was a bar that was popular with lawyers and even judges from the nearby law courts. Next to the bar was a restaurant renowned for its Shanghainese cuisine. At the Armenian Street corner was the legendary "Char Kway Teow" stall ran by Mr S K Tan and his father. Foodies would have fond memories of this famous hawker.

The shophouses were given conservation status on **13 October 2001** under URA's voluntary conservation scheme.



Figure 1: Armenian Street in 1950

The Art Deco style is distinctively defined by the strong lines and ornamental patterns embellished on the façade of the shop houses. Like many famous Art Deco buildings, the 2 clusters have a flag pole each in the middle and the geometrically shaped decorative elements are concentrated at the top of the buildings. The ornately carved capital and vertical lines on the pilasters may be classical inspired, but the streamlined rectangular windows at the junction of Armenian and Loke Yew Street displays the inclination towards a modern architectural style of its time.

The low-rise terrace buildings portray the distinctive characteristics of a typical Singapore shop house built in the 1930s. The rhythmic pattern on the façade, colonnaded five-foot way on the ground floor, party walls, rear court, air wells, timber roof members and the unglazed roof tiles are the inherent features of the existing building form.

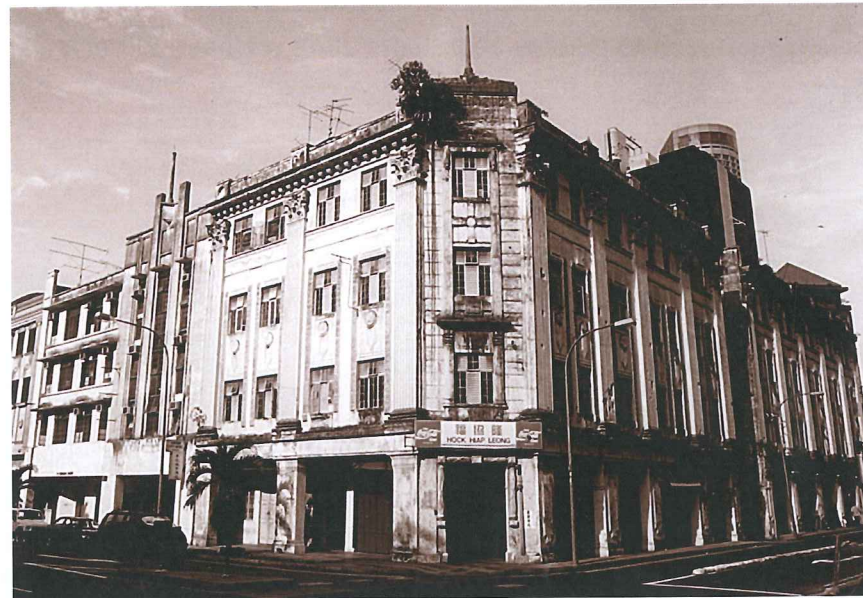


Figure 2: Junction of Armenian Street and Loke Yew Street

The existing buildings were in a dilapidated state. Large awnings hung outside the five-foot way damage the appearance of the shop house. The façade and the gable end walls were stained black, paint were peeling off the wall surfaces, cracks lines were also visible due to prolonged weathering. Ornaments on the façade were also visibly damaged. Pipes were seen running on the façade, cables and wires hung haphazardly across the backlane that seperated the two clusters, above the five-foot way and out from the windows. Air-conditioner condensing units were hung outside the windows, timber panels were mounted outside the louvers and the glass panels were seen with various shades of green. Tenants of the ground floor units installed zinc roof over the rear court with debris scattered over the top.



Figure 3: Condition of the existing conservation façade



Figure 4: Existing Backlane



Figure 5: Existing rear of shophouse

Inside, the premises above were used as lodging for foreign workers. The lack of maintenance, air circulation and poor hygiene cause foul smell to linger inside the buildings. The common areas were dark and stuffy. Partition walls and ceiling boards were in a state of deterioration.

After the removal of ceiling and plaster, detailed visual inspection disclosed minor cracks at the columns. Spalling concrete to the beams and slabs were also observed. Defective columns, corroded reinforcement and spalling concrete had to be repaired to ensure long term durability and stability. Apart from these, the building structures were generally in good condition. (Refer to Appendix 1 – Existing Building Survey Drawings)



Figure 6: Internal corridor