

DICKSON ROAD

Wander-ful Renewal

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Owner:
K.M.C. Holdings Pte Ltd

Architect:
DP Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:
S B Ng & Associates C E

Contractor:
Shanghai Chong Kee Furniture
& Construction Pte Ltd

This four-storey 1920s Art Deco style building in the Little India Conservation Area was once the Hong Wen School. Today, repurposed as the hip and playful Wanderlust Hotel, its resurrection effort is an illustration of creativity and good adaptive reuse of a rare and unorthodox beauty.

Accentuating The Past

The triumph of this project lies in the way the project team had given the revitalised old building a new sense of place within the eclectic urban montage of Little India. Most of the architectural elements on the external envelope, such as the intricately painted ceramic tiles on its front façade and the classic stained glass windows at the upper storeys, have been restored with the precision of professionals who genuinely care about the face that this historical building presents to the world. This restraint is further demonstrated by the simple use of subtle colours and strategic lightings that direct attention to the unique inherited features of the property.

From Old To New

Keeping the property's original structural grid intact, the project team reworked the old school layout by creating various room types and sizes on each floor. Each floor was designed by different interior decorators, each with contrasting themes, furnishings and colours. No two rooms are the same.

In all, 29 hotel rooms, a new roof deck garden with a jacuzzi and restaurant were incorporated. Internally, the timber railings on the staircases as well as



Front façade with intricate ceramic tiles and stained glass windows at upper storeys

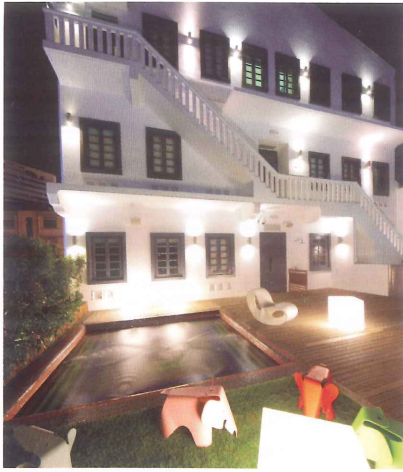
extensive green marble flooring were brought back to life with great care and attention to detail. Several charming pieces of history, such as the recovered colourful ceramic tiles on the first storey, were not cast away but feted as a framed decorative wall art.

Elements of Surprise

The functional elements of a modern-day hotel have also been smartly subsumed into the final development. One of these is the new lift core which was added to the original and revitalised airwell to provide easy accessibility to the rooms above. To create a statement, the brickwork of one of the walls around the airwell was exposed and landscaping introduced within it.

Extensive micro piling was required to reinforce the structure for its new purpose – a complex task obviously executed with great care and dexterity. The retention of the airwell preserves an important element of the building's past while serving the original purpose of bringing natural daylight into the heart of the hotel. Another unexpected joy is the new roof deck. With the clearing away of the unsightly air-conditioning units at the rear of the building, a new uber chic rooftop sundeck has been created, tucked behind the authentic envelope of the building.

All in all, this is a clever transformation of an old urban school building to a new and more viable hotel use.



Roof deck garden and jacuzzi at rear court



Guest room designed as a typewriter room



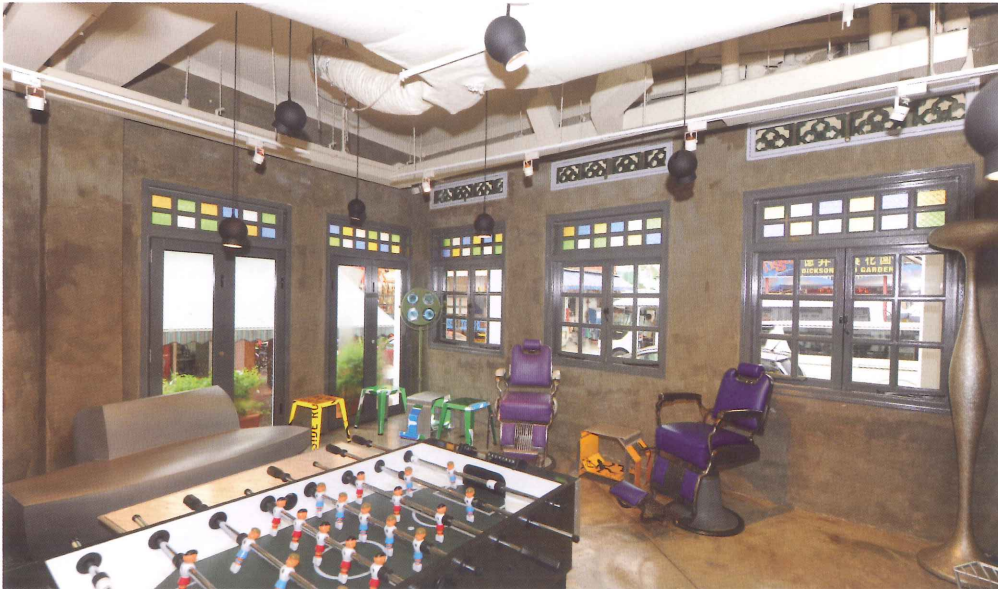
Guest room with Spaceship theme



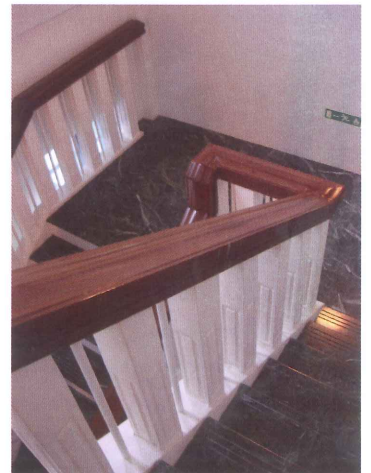
Guest room with Pop Art concept



Existing airwell landscaped and used as a lift core



First storey interior in natural raw state



Staircase's timber railing and marble flooring



No. 2 Dickson Road, taken in 2008



Singapore Buddhist Welfare Services signage

This four-storey building, conserved from the 1920s, used to be the former Hong Wen School and Hin Ann Huay Kuan (a clan association). These institutions were established by members of the Hing Hua dialect group from Fujian Province in China.

Locality

Little India is a culturally rich ethnic neighbourhood which used to be a settlement for Tamil convicts. Its location along the river made it highly attractive for raising cattle, and livestock trading prominent in the area, making it the centre of Indian migration during the end of the 19th century. Due to its close proximity to city, it gradually transformed into a residential and commercial area in the 1930s and has now become a popular location. It exudes a bohemian and eclectic atmosphere while being deeply entrenched in a rich cultural heritage.



Festival lights during Deepavali



A street in Little India

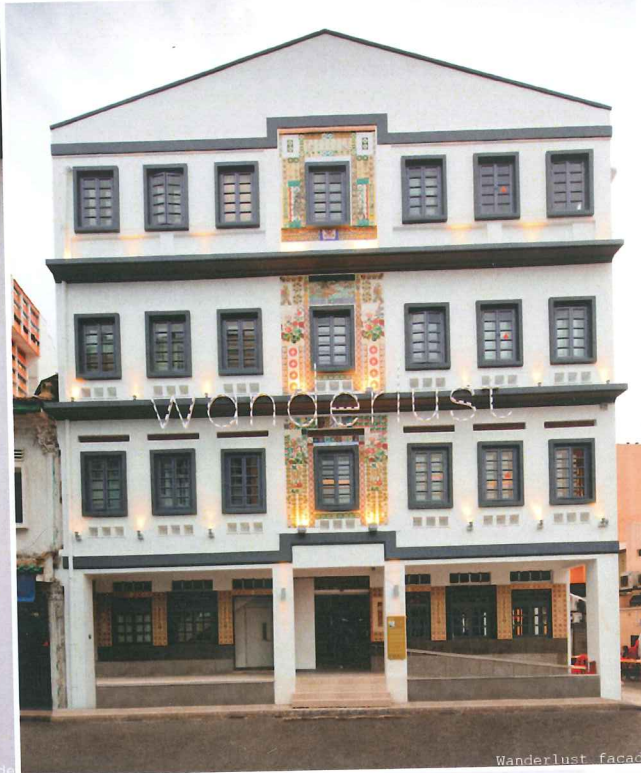
Hence, the main design focus invested in this characteristic of the site and sought to keep the old charm while introducing a new twist into the hotel.



Panoramic view of Little India



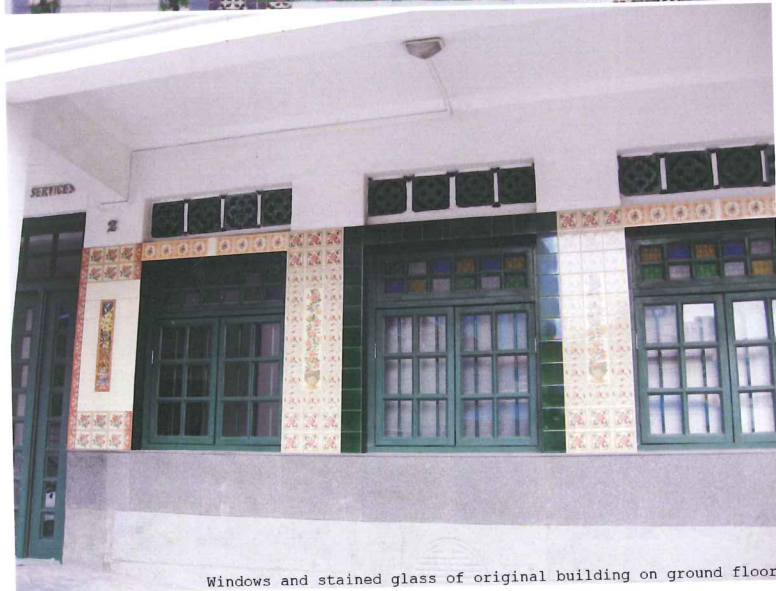
Windows and tiles of original facade



Wanderlust facade

Wanderlust hotel is a four-storey shop house located at the end of a row of two-storey shop houses. Despite standing out from its surroundings due to its height, the alignment of the floor to floor height with adjacent shop houses harmoniously blends the building in with its neighbours.

Uniquely different from the shop houses in the vicinity, it has a symmetrical facade, with the front elevation richly decorated with beautiful and intricately painted ceramic tiles, an architectural expression not found in other shop houses. Another distinguishing aspect is the use of large carved slabs of granite as part of the external wall treatment at the first-storey along the five-foot-way, exhibiting a strong Chinese influence, like a Chinese threshold, with a strong base.



Windows and stained glass of original building on ground floor



Side facade of original building

In spite of its unique facade and atypical storey height, it has an internal air-well that is typical of shop houses, allowing the penetration of daylight into the building through all four storeys.