

28, 30 & 32 MADRAS STREET

Charming Revival



Owner:
Mini Environment Service Pte Ltd

Architect:
FARM Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:
SMS Consulting Engineers Pte Ltd

Contractor:
Dreambuild Construction Pte Ltd

This three-storey Art Deco-style former Singapore Improvement Trust apartment building built in the 1940s has undergone a second transformation into a charming boutique hotel. A new landmark has been established with renewed verve and purpose, bringing the romance of travel into a historic neighbourhood.



Former Singapore Improvement Trust flats in the Little India Historic District

Peeling Back the Years

The success of the revival is anchored on understanding and leveraging on the inherent qualities of the building, as well as on capturing the spirit of the times through today's lenses. Much of the original structure was retained with natural ventilation and light reintroduced to the interiors.

For the original 1940s facade, all external finishes were cleaned and repaired, such as the often overlooked fair-faced brickwork of the balconies and the Shanghai-plaster column bases. To restore the many signature but corroded slender mild-steel framed windows, a specialist contractor was engaged to repair them on site. A pastel period paint scheme was also chosen for the facade, and collectively, this has kept the overall Art Deco look intact.

A Breath of Fresh Air

An oasis was cleverly inserted within the rear courtyard, by creatively cutting out a circular opening in the party-wall to create a link

between the new pool and the sun-deck. The sense of the tropics has been enhanced by reinstating the naturally lit and ventilated common corridors leading to the guest rooms. The judicious decision to retain the original rear spiral staircase has created a spatial and visual link between the floors, bringing air and light into the rear of the lobby.

Where previously the lobby was separated from the street, the new design has boldly done away with this spatial division. Doors that can be fully pulled aside, a barber shop and café that are open to the public have created a seamless intermingling between hotel and street.

Extending the Charms

Clever branding has also been incorporated as part of the overall renovations. Customised wallpaper showing selected aspects of Singapore history and daily life, quirky slogans and decorations throughout the interiors add to the unique ambience.

A true and gentle labour of love, the project has revealed the character and added charm to this property, revitalising the site to extend its longevity. The Great Madras is where both the traveller and the local can now encounter the culture and history of the historic Serangoon neighbourhood, and take away new memories for the future.



Barber in the lobby



Restored facade with new Art Deco colour scheme



Neon lights accentuate the Art Deco branding



Swimming pool creatively inserted



New mild steel windows along airy corridors



Open concept on first storey lobby has added life to the street

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2018 Award For Restoration

This project illustrates well how a budget hotel, housed in a pre-war Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) apartment building has been cleverly revamped into a 34-room boutique hotel for guests to relive the charms of travel reminiscent of the Art Deco age of the 1930s.

Good effort was made to reinstate the original layout of the building, which has naturally ventilated and well lit linear corridors, in keeping with the spirit of the shophouse typology. At the first storey, the open lobby concept that allows appreciation of the full length and character of the space is a clever reinterpretation of the typology. Other key elements such as spiral staircases and mild steel windows were retained. A swimming pool was also added at the roof over rear court while retaining the party wall with an artful circular opening.

Embracing a consistent Art Deco-inspired design and branding, customised wallpaper featuring interesting aspects of Singapore's history and daily life, and neon light installations throughout the common spaces add to the unique character of the hotel. The nostalgic creation of a narrative that connects the building to its past has attracted a younger crowd to enliven the historic area. The intermingling of the hotel's activities into the street has been transformative, setting a positive example for other projects.

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