

ISSUE 06 · 2017

Skyline

Insights into planning
spaces around us

Reimagining Kallang River

New ideas to revitalise Singapore's longest river

Ambassador Chan Heng Chee and her brother on growing up in Joo Chiat

How LISHA Chairman keeps Little India thriving

Skyline



Photographer Philipp Aldrup captures a whimsical scene on his journey in Serangoon Road. Read about the rediscovery of this district on page 37.



Cover | A view of the Kallang River flowing through Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park with housing blocks in Bishan as the backdrop.

Editorial team
Serene Tng
Michelle Lee

Contributing writers
Jennifer Eveland
Justin Zhuang

Photographers
Bernice Wong
Chia Aik Beng
Darren Soh
Donn Tan
Philipp Aldrup
Wilson Pang

Design
Silicon+

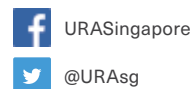
Published by



Address
45 Maxwell Road
The URA Centre
Singapore 069118

Contributions and subscription
hello@ura.gov.sg

Connect with us
URA.sg/skyline



Skyline is published 3 times a year. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or part without the prior consent of URA. All rights reserved.

ISSN 24249971

Craving to belong

At the heart of world renowned architect Jan Gehl's 50 years of work is this: his recognition that we as human beings are social creatures – seeing and hearing other people face to face has always been a great and necessary joy. Indeed, one cannot talk about our physical environment without the human dimension. It is this increasing need to take on a more human-scale approach in designing cities for people that we began writing this issue.

The physical environment has a far greater impact on us than we think.

Growing up in the multiracial neighbourhood of Joo Chiat, racing down the five foot way and hustling mahjong *kakis* for their grandmother, the environment and social interactions in Joo Chiat has significantly influenced ambassador Chan Heng Chee and her brother Heng Wing as they recall their growing up years at 125 Joo Chiat Place.

Beyond their former home holding special meaning is the warmth that one feels in a place that feels human. What does it mean to keep this warmth besides retaining buildings?

Rajakumar Chandra, chairman of the Little India Shopkeepers & Heritage Association let us in on his decade-long place-making efforts for Little India, reminding us that it is about paying close

attention to nurturing communities in historic districts that keeps these thriving, as “once you move away life, you can't bring it back.”

In nurturing communities – good design plays a critical role – we see how local firm WOHA's thoughtful design of an inclusive environment for Enabling Village, the President's Design Award 2016 winner, has brought together communities in the Redhill neighbourhood.

With a dedicated focus on planning for communities, the new ideas envisioning the future possibilities for Kallang River, Singapore's longest river, offer the potential to link up neighbourhoods and communities on a grander scale.

We have discovered that this human-scale approach requires patience, kindness and the deepest respect for human interaction, the need to belong and connect with one another.

Photographer Philipp Aldrup, in mentoring students in a year-long documentation capturing the intimate moments of Serangoon Road, says this when asked about photographing the soul of a place: Be patient. Don't rush. Feel more. Listen. Hang out, chat with people. Make friends. Visit it again – and again.

Perhaps this captures the approach we could take for human-scale designs.

Contents

THINKING ALOUD

03 Craving to belong

SPOTLIGHT

04 In short

05 More reasons to linger

New public space guidelines released

08 Jan Gehl on designing cities for people

World renowned architect on why human scale design is important

NEIGHBOURHOODS

13 Revitalising Kallang River

Planners dream up new possibilities for greater connectivity and community bonding

18 Handle with care

How LISHA Chairman protects Little India's authenticity

23 Memories to treasure

Ambassador Chan Heng Chee and her brother recall growing up at 125 Joo Chiat Place

INSIGHT

26 Design by not designing

President's Design Award 2016 winner WOHA on designing Enabling Village

29 Green over gray

We step into the world of green building visionary Emilio Ambasz

32 Designs in progress

4 teams from CUBE 2016 share their inspiration and challenges in designing for people

IN PICTURES

37 New lens on Serangoon Road

4 photographers unveil fresh insights on this colourful district

42 At a glance

6 things to check out this weekend

“...the diversity in Serangoon Road far exceeds the stereotype of it being an “Indian” enclave – is there really such a thing anyway?”

Local photographer Darren Soh learns more about this colourful enclave in the year-long photography project on Serangoon Road, mentoring 30 student photographers together with three other photographers.

800,000

The current number of residents living within 2 km of Kallang River, who will enjoy enhancements along Singapore's longest river with new ideas unveiled by the planners.

150,000^{SQ FT}

The size of Tanjong Pagar Centre's new Urban Park, an exciting public space and green lung coming up in the city.

300

The number of members of the Little India Shopkeeper & Heritage Association. Its chairman, Rajakumar Chandra has grown its membership from 50 when he took on the role since 2006, making a major impact on Little India with his proactive place-making efforts.

“The critique sessions were nerve-wrecking...so fun and impactful. We wonder if the life of an urban planner is this exciting!”

Nanyang Polytechnic students reflect about their planning workshop experience with URA in 2016, designing spaces for the Buona Vista stretch of the Rail Corridor. 145 tertiary students took part.

Architecture

Is an act of myth-making imagination. It is not hunger, but love and fear – and sometimes wonder – which makes us create.”

Emilio Ambasz recently exhibited in Singapore on his ideas and works. He is an American architect, designer, curator and writer who has been designing and building radical green projects for 40 years.

More reasons to linger

URA releases new design guidelines for public spaces.



Need another reason to linger longer at shopping malls and office buildings? Some of these buildings may offer more delightful and inviting public spaces in future with URA's new design guidelines for privately-owned public space released on 24 January 2017.

Along with parks and other open spaces in neighbourhoods, public spaces in private developments are increasingly important as Singapore's urban landscape grows denser – allowing us to take shelter from the rain, enjoy a quiet moment in our busy schedules, catch up with friends, or just savour the beautiful environment around us. These spaces also promote street life and vibrancy, serving as “living rooms” of our city.

The new guidelines aim to raise the bar on the design of quality and meaningful public spaces. Under this, owners and developers of buildings in selected new and redevelopment sites in areas that meet certain criteria like being located close to major transport nodes and pedestrian paths will need to provide public spaces with effect from 24 April 2017. Others not in the selected sites may also voluntarily provide public spaces if their developments meet the criteria. Developers providing such public spaces can qualify for a gross floor area exemption that may result in significant savings.

We catch up with Cheng Hsing Yao, Group Managing Director of GuocoLand Singapore and

Low Chee Wah, Head of Retail and Commercial Division of Fraser Centrepont Singapore to check out two new public spaces coming up in the city – Tanjong Pagar Centre’s Urban Park and Frasers Tower’s The Park and The Oasis.

What kinds of activities can we look forward to in the new public spaces?

Hsing Yao: On a regular day, workers, residents, hotel guests and visitors of Tanjong Pagar Centre and the nearby neighbourhoods can unwind in the urban park, surrounded by cafes and outlets with alfresco dining. On the weekends, people can take the MRT or cycle with their kids or pets to the park and play in safe area. People can expect curated events in the city room. Starting with one of our tenants, Virgin Active Gym’s regular public mass exercises in the city room. Another one of our tenants, Japan Rail Café, will be collaborating with the Japan Tourism Board to hold Japanese cultural events here. We are now in talks with community bodies and event organisers to bring performances, artisan or farmers’ markets etc. to the urban park. Our aim is for the city room and urban park to become a community hub for the Tanjong Pagar district with a year-long calendar of events.

Chee Wah: Frasers Tower will have end-of-ride facilities to support tenants who choose to

cycle to work. Visitors will also enjoy access to public amenities with lush landscaping, public art displays, ample seating and well-designed shelters at the ground floor park space. The Oasis, the three-storey retail podium linked to Frasers Tower will add more food and beverage offerings to the already vibrant Telok Ayer and Cecil Street precinct. It also houses a roof garden where tenants and their guests can recharge amidst their busy day, surrounded by flora and water features.

Why did you decide to create the 150,000 square feet urban park?

Hsing Yao: The area directly above the MRT was preloaded to take a new six storey building when the MRT station was built in the 1980s. However, after we studied the site and the district, we decided not to build over the MRT station and expanded upon the land sales requirement for a public space into an urban park over the entire MRT station box. This is because the Tanjong Pagar district is rapidly developing and will become more densely built up, and a large green lung in the heart of the district will provide the much needed green relief and focal point. Now, one of the most attractive features of our development is the urban park, with its food and beverage pavilions amidst a variety of thematic gardens, and a large solar-panelled glass canopy over a climatically



Previous and above | Tanjong Pagar Centre’s 150,000 square feet Urban Park will be completed in phases by July 2017. Within the Urban Park is the city room, a public plaza with direct access to Tanjong Pagar MRT station that can accommodate 2,000 people. Photo Credit: GuocoLand Singapore



comfortable public square or ‘city room’.

Tell us more about how your spaces connect to the surrounding neighbourhood.

Chee Wah: The ground floor park space of Frasers Tower directly links to Telok Ayer Park, connecting Frasers Tower to the green network extending through Tanjong Pagar Park and Duxton Plain Park to Pearl’s Hill Park. We designed Frasers Tower to enhance networking opportunities by integrating several common areas into the environment. We welcome the new URA guidelines for public spaces because we see the value of creating charming environments where communities can be inspired at work and socialise without any spatial restrictions.

What other kinds of public spaces would you like to see in future?

Hsing Yao: I would certainly like to see more public spaces in the city that are integrated with public transportation, and the recent policies and incentives introduced by URA will help with that.

Besides large and vibrant urban spaces, I think there is a lot of potential in small and intimate public spaces. Not all public spaces need to be vibrant and busy, the city should also have some beautiful quiet places, maybe even ‘secret gardens’. These spaces add a layer of richness and serendipity to the city. Barcelona city, for example, has since the 90s made a concerted effort to convert little remnant lands, traffic islands into very beautiful and well appreciated urban spaces.



What makes a good public space?

From URA's Good Practice Guide, a good public space should be:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. a pedestrian priority zone | 6. well lit and safe |
| 2. of a meaningful size | 7. well landscaped |
| 3. easily accessible | 8. offering good seating options for everyone |
| 4. highly visible | 9. enjoyable and delightful serving various public needs |
| 5. well shaded and comfortable | |

Above | The 38-storey Frasers Tower will be completed in the second quarter of 2018. The public can expect two major public spaces – The Park, a 17,000 square feet park space on the ground floor and The Oasis, a three-storey integration of retail and garden podium space directly connected to Frasers Tower. Photo Credit: Frasers Centrepont Singapore

Jan Gehl on designing cities for people

World renowned architect and urban designer talks about the joys and challenges of creating people-friendly cities.

Writer **Serene Tng**

“A good city is like a good party – you stay for longer than you plan,” says Danish architect Jan Gehl. In a recently published autobiography *“People Cities The Life and Legacy of Jan Gehl”* (Island Press, Washington, 2016), the authors Peter Newman and Annie Matan explain how Jan Gehl believes good architecture is not about form, but about the interaction between form and life. Over the last 50 years, Jan Gehl has changed the way that we think about architecture and city planning – moving from the modernist separation of uses to a human-scale approach inviting people to use their cities.

At a time when growing numbers are populating cities, planning urban spaces to be humane, safe, and open to all is ever-more critical. His work has influenced public space improvements in over 50 global cities, from New York, London, to Moscow, Copenhagen and Melbourne, including Singapore. Whether it is drawing up future possibilities for Kallang River, managing conservation districts like Little India, designing more inclusive spaces like those in Enabling Village or engaging youths in reimagining parts of the Rail Corridor, Jan Gehl reminds us on the continued need for human-scale design and creating great public spaces in sustaining the soul and life of cities.



A good city is like a good party – you stay for longer than you plan.

Tell us about the genesis of people-focused cities.

In 1961, the New York journalist, Jane Jacobs published her famous book *“The Death and Life of Great American Cities”*. This was the starting point for the renewed interest on how people used cities and how the built environment influenced the quality of life.

In the traditional cities were embedded a lot of knowledge and experience on how to make

cities inviting for people. All this knowledge was thrown out by the architecture ideology of the modernists from 1930 onwards. They claimed that everything traditional in architecture and planning had to make room for a completely new modern architecture and city planning for a new creature, the modern man, different from any previous generations.

By 1960, these new modernistic ideas started to be used in a big way seriously affecting the quality

for people in cities all over the world. At about the same time, the automobile invasion started in earnest further eroding qualities for people. This was the background of the work of Jane Jacobs, and also the background for my research which started in 1965. Both in New York and in Copenhagen, we realised that we would have to start from the very beginning to find out what created a good city for people, because all previous, mostly informal knowledge had been thrown out.

How has this concept evolved since you started this 50 years ago?

This urban renaissance started in the 1960s and it has gradually gained momentum in the 50 years to follow, as more knowledge about people in cities were gathered and made available. Especially after the year 2000, this new people oriented



urbanism has become widespread, and in many cities such as Copenhagen, Melbourne, New York and Moscow, one can now see the results of these new people-oriented principles.

What is one memorable project that you have worked on?

The results achieved in Copenhagen in Denmark stands out as one of the most satisfying in my professional life. Copenhagen has undergone a remarkable transformation taking more and more care of the life in the public spaces continuously, not only in the city centre but throughout the city, as expressed in the 2009 City Council strategy: *“We will be the best city for people in the world”*. I have had the pleasure to live and work in Copenhagen through all these years, and to see that generally the city has been a better place for people day by day – for 50 years. A unique experience and actually the city is by now, quite unique.



Above | In the 1950s, all of the 18 squares in central Copenhagen were parking lots. In the years following the closing of the main street Strøget, all 18 have been turned into people squares. Photo Credit: City of Copenhagen

As for my own participation in this development, it was for many years quite indirectly. We at the School of Architecture continuously studied and documented how people used the city and this increasingly influenced city policies. Copenhagen became the first city in the world where the life of the city was studied in the same way in which all other cities documented their traffic developments. The fact that Copenhagen became one of the world’s centres for studying people in the city has had a major influence on this city as expressed by the Mayor of the City Planning Bente Frost (2013): *“Without the public life studies by the School of Architecture, we politicians would never have had the courage to implement the many projects to increase the attractiveness of the city”*.

What do you look for when you travel and what is your one favourite place?

Wherever I travel, my main interest are the daily places, the ordinary life and city fabric that make up the soul of each place. One of my favorite places is Campo San Margherita in the Dorsoduro district of Venice. A lovely place well away from the hordes of tourists near San Marks Square and the Rialto Bridge, this square has diverse street life and is dominated by the local people including many students from the nearby university. My grandchildren especially love Campo San Margherita because it has everything any child or adult can wish for.

What are the key criteria for designing great public spaces?

Through my studies of people activities in spaces in all corners of the world, a list of 14 quality criteria has been developed centred around 3 major considerations outlined in my book, *“Cities for People”*: (1) **Protection** – from various unwanted elements such as traffic, fear and unpleasant climate factors. (2) **Comfort** such as good conditions for basic activities that people can engage in such as walking, standing, sitting, seeing, hearing, talking and unfolding. The last one is (3) **Enjoyment** such as a good human scale, possibilities to enjoy the positive aspects of the local climate and finally positive sense experiences: architecture, design, art, detailing, materials, greenery, water, nature and views.

The list is most useful not only in evaluating existing spaces but also for designing new, great people spaces. Whenever you find a popular public space, you will find that most of these quality criteria have been carefully addressed.

How do we manage change and evolving spaces over time?

All cities are constantly changing. In this way it can be very problematic to programme a public square too rigorously to cater for the present day’s needs and activities. Many of the best squares of the world like Piazza del Campo in Siena do possess some basic qualities that has served many generations well. Other places – often newer ones – have very specialised equipment and most often a short life if there is unwillingness to upgrade and change the physical environment. Public spaces need to be continuously adjusted especially when special uses develop in a way that creates problems for a more universal use. One example could be squares which are gradually being taken over by street vendors, sometimes in such numbers that other people cannot use the square. A recent and rather famous example has been the great popularity of Times Square in New York made partially car free in 2009. Here, street performers started to seek out this square in such numbers that numerous problems were created. In this situation some authorities suggested to bring the traffic back to get rid of the unwanted entertainers. Of course a much better solution was to regulate the activities, and luckily this policy was adopted.

If there are too many pigeons on Saint Marks Square in Venice you can remove the square or you can chase the pigeons away. In all cities, the use of the public squares will constantly have to be monitored, and from time to time regulations will have to be made. Pigeons come and go but life in the public spaces must go on.

Citizens are coming forward to re-purpose spaces on their own. How can we encourage more of this?

Most citizens respond to public spaces with great interest and enthusiasm and this is really valuable. But it is important that education and information about good solutions play key roles in ensuring that conversations about public spaces be constructive and useful. Nobody can ask for solutions they have never seen or heard about. Such information should be systematically made available.

In an age where people demand instant gratification and are glued to their phones, how does this influence the use of public spaces?

For years, it has been predicted that cyberspace would soon make the public space redundant but this has not happened. In the decades where

Reimagining Kallang River

New ideas to revitalise Singapore's longest river.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland** | Photographer **Wilson Pang**



digital technology has blossomed, life in public spaces around the world have also increased and blossomed. One factor may be that many are living longer and have more leisure time on their hands. We are also social creatures – meeting, seeing and hearing other people face to face and using one's own senses has always been and still is a great and necessary joy. Life in public spaces goes on – quite a few now bring their mobile phones along when they move about in cities. The best of several worlds?

What are important shifts happening in cities and pitfalls to avoid?

There has been a gradual shift in planning paradigms towards more people oriented city planning especially after the year 2000. Gone are a number of technocratic planning principles related to modernism, and gone are also – in many places – the total dominance of traffic planning. Many cities today are striving to be liveable, sustainable and encourage healthier lifestyles promoting walking and cycling to overcome the

serious sitting syndrome from too much sitting in homes, offices and automobiles.

This development is definitely a good one, however, in a number of cities that have progressed in this area, we also see problems concerning gentrification and higher housing prices. This challenge should spur us on to make sure that many or all city districts are guided by people friendly policies, ensuring that good quality districts and spaces are available and accessible to everyone in society.

Professor, Dr.hc. Jan Gehl is a Danish architect and urban design consultant based in Copenhagen whose career has focused on improving the quality of urban life by re-orienting city design towards the pedestrian and cyclist. He is a founding partner of Gehl Architects. He is the author of several books, published in all corners of the world.

For more information on his projects and works, go to www.gehlpeople.com.



From Lower Pierce Reservoir in the centre of the island, the Kallang River begins its journey, winding its way past high rise heartland neighbourhoods and low rise industrial estates. It flows dutifully through lush parks and concrete canals alike, under massive bridges and expressways with ubiquitous acronyms like CTE (Central Expressway) and PIE (Pan Island Expressway) and a heritage bridge named for Merdeka, the call for the nation's independence. Singapore's longest river is 10 km long, but if ever a river symbolised the power of nature, the steady flow of time and the ever changing nature of life itself, the Kallang River is it.

We trace the river's beginnings, re-experiencing its life and pathways and peek into future possibilities and ideas unveiled at URA's latest exhibition, "A river runs through it", launched

on 29 March 2017, inviting the public to share their views and feedback to continue to make the river exciting and accessible for all.

Otters and purple heron

An oasis of lush growth amid the cityscape, Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park is more than just an idyllic site for a river to run. It's a testament to the will and the ability of people to reclaim their natural heritage. Where the river once passed through a gaping concrete gash of a canal, it now feeds 62 hectares of parkland frequented by wildlife, thanks to the Active, Beautiful and Clean Waters Programme (ABC Waters) by the Public Utilities Board (PUB) and National Parks Board (NParks).

"The greening of the river along this stretch is very effective in terms of biodiversity and aesthetics," says Dr Ho Hua Chew, vice-chair of

the Conservation Committee at the Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS).

Speaking from his own experience, he's noticed more marshland birdlife feeding along the river and the marshy banks.

"Very significant is the appearance of a family of smooth otters, and recently the nesting of a purple heron on an angšana tree by the riverside," says Hua Chew. "Frequent and regular otter sightings indicate that they have made their home here and not just visiting or exploring. The nesting of the purple heron is a first for Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park and is very important, as nesting sites of this species are rare in Singapore. It's a good sign of the health and viability of the wetland at this stretch."

Hua Chew believes we can dig further into our natural heritage by literally digging deeper under the river itself. In the NSS 2007 feedback on Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park ABC Waters Programme, in which Hua Chew was involved, the society advocated for the removal of concrete from the entire river bed and not just the banks.

"The uncovering of the mud-bed of the former canal, even to some extent, would attract wildlife that haunts the softer mud-beds at the shallow waters as well as the river-bottom," he says. "This will make the river more alive and interesting as well as ecologically beneficial."

Living along the river's edge

More than 800 000 residents live within 2 km from the river. Gently down the stream in Geylang Bahru, residents can be seen fishing every day and, on rare occasions, kayaking. When the Ng family moved here in 2007 they had no idea how much they would enjoy the river. They chose their block, which is nestled in a fork where a canal branches off towards Whampoa, in part for the unobstructed view that follows the path of the river where it runs to the sea. On a clear day you can spy tiny cargo ships on the horizon. This wouldn't be possible if not for the river, says Bernard Ng. He spends time with his family by the river jogging, scooting and fishing.

"In Singapore, there is so much water around us, but there is comparatively very little interaction with the water," he says. "Basically you just look at the water because there's a railing that will stop you from engaging in the water."

"There's a lot of safety concerns about getting into the water," he says, "but that issue can be explored progressively." There's no need for planned water activities, either, he adds. "Just go in and dip your feet in and that's enough."

Rich with landmarks

To see Kallang Basin now, it's hard to imagine the swamplands where early Javanese settlers, the *orang kallang*, lived on boats over 200 years ago. They were resettled long before decades of land reclamation began in the 1930s, permanently changing the river's course. The 1960s saw kampong houses making way for Housing Development Board flats and industrial blocks. By the late 1970s the water had turned to filth, prompting a cleanup that would spark Singapore's water story.

Over time the area grew rich with landmarks. Still today, the circa-1888 Sri Manmatha Karuneshvarar Temple welcomes Hindu devotees, and the Merdeka Bridge, built in 1956, connects the riverbanks via Nicoll Highway.

The former Kallang Airport that hasn't seen a plane since 1955 is now used for sports, recreation, working or other forms of community uses in the interim. The terminal building has been gazetted for conservation in 2008. The airport was Singapore's first purpose-built civil airport built by the British Colonial government in the 1930s. When it first opened, it was touted as one of the most modern airport of its time with revolutionary facilities. Its runway is now Old Airport Road; its control tower vacant. Over the years, it has housed the Singapore Youth Sports Council and Peoples' Association offices, and even the Singapore Biennale 2011.

Remembering the old Kallang Gasworks, Lim Leong Seng, the sculptor created *The Spirit*



Above | A view of the Kallang River flowing between Kallang Trivista and Kallang Industrial Estate, a sign of how life along the river can be multi-faceted serving various needs of the community.



of Kallang, using pipes and other fittings from the gaswork itself. Kallang Gasworks was built in 1862 by the Singapore Gas Company to supply piped gas for street lighting. Many locals would avoid the Kallang area due to the strong stench of gas and fears of the Gasworks exploding, giving it the name "fire city", or *huay sia* in Hokkien. After over 130 years of service supplying the nation's first piped gas to fuel streetlights and employing generations, it was phased out in 1998.

"Preserving memories of these public places is important since it highlights the social obligation of the citizenry and gives them a sense of belonging despite a relative short historical heritage," says Leong Seng. "Public art imparts values and ideas for society while challenging citizens to reflect more, to connect to our history, and to cherish this little red dot," he says. "It is that sense of responsibility that shapes the identity of a community."

The kallang wave

As the river nears the sea, its banks widen to form the Kallang Basin, a large body of water made fresh after the construction of the Marina Barrage in 2008. It's hard to miss the Singapore Sports Hub, the massive complex built to house virtually every sport Singaporeans can imagine.

Kallang has been synonymous with sports since the 1973 opening of the original National Stadium. The new mega sporting complex which replaced it in 2014 was built on that legacy.

"It's unlike other stadiums which are built for the sole purpose of hosting major games," says Chin Sau Ho, Singapore Sports Club senior director of corporate communications and stakeholder management. "We have a long-term vision of serving as a catalyst for the emergence of sport in Singapore."

Around the shores of the basin, joggers run through shady parks and kayakers launch their boats from palm-lined beaches, and not a day passes without spotting a dragon boat plying the calm waters.

"Kallang is the main venue for our events," says Jason Chen, founder of Dragon Boat Innovate, organising corporate dragon boating activities. For over 20 years Jason has been a competitive paddler, coach and dragon boat advocate. "I live for dragon boating," he says.

He launches his events from a few of the parks surrounding Kallang Basin, which he says are very impressive to his clients, who are mainly international meetings, incentives, conferencing, exhibitions (MICE) travellers. "They also get to see the Central Business District from the middle of the Kallang Basin, and the natural side of Singapore they don't get to see from the inside of a hotel room," he says.

Jason remembers when paddlers had the freedom to travel upriver all the way to Bishan, exploring the network of canals that carved through distinct neighbourhoods from the water's vantage point. It is an unforgettable experience for him.

Above | Against the backdrop of the Central Business District, the Kallang Basin has been home to many sporting activities and events in Singapore over the years.

A look at future possibilities for Kallang River

The river offers fresh possibilities for more to enjoy its meandering streams, strolling, cycling and mingling through neighbourhoods and communities and living and working close to the water's edge. And for more to come out to play, with a wider range of sporting activities and community spaces, celebrating its spirit and beauty.

Along the riverbanks, greenery can be further enhanced with more green lungs and community spaces. Upcoming developments along the river can be designed sensitively where greenery within developments can be developed to extend the riverside landscaping, adding to the overall lushness around the river.

URA planners together with other agencies dream up new ideas and possibilities for the river. Here are the top 10 ideas presented at the exhibition, "A river runs through it" from 29 March to 2 May 2017 at The URA Centre.

For more information and to give your feedback, go to <http://ura.sg/kallangriver>.

Green, thriving corridor

- 1 Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park to Gardens by the Bay – greenery along the river can be enhanced to turn the river into a thriving corridor, tapping on the rich biodiversity within these two parks.
- 2 Underpass below the Central Expressway (CTE) – this space could be turned into a vibrant community space with better headroom, lighting and seating.

Bridging neighbourhoods

- 3 Across the Pan Island Expressway (PIE) – What if you can cycle or jog across the PIE? As part of URA's Bishan-City planning study along the Kallang park connector network, a conceptual design of a possible cyclist-friendly crossing over PIE was drawn up, featuring spiral ramps over Kallang River, a link bridge across PIE and an underpass beneath the Central Expressway slip roads to link to Serangoon Road.
- 4 Across Kallang Bahru and Upper Boon Keng Roads – possible underpasses could be developed across these roads for seamless and barrier-free access for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 5 Below Sims Avenue – a possible underpass link can be developed for greater connectivity along the riverfront all the way towards the Sports Hub.

Building new homes & communities

- 6 Kallang Distripark – conveniently located close to the upcoming Geylang Bahru MRT, this private industrial estate has the potential to be transformed into a quality residential precinct in future, with park and recreational spaces, contributing to the larger network of green spaces along the river.
- 7 Kallang Industrial Estate – this 73 ha estate can be turned into a vibrant mixed-use precinct with high-rise facilities to meet modern industrial needs, as well as potential co-working spaces for the working community. The estate will also be closely integrated with future residential developments along the waterfront and parks, bringing jobs closer to home.
- 8 Kampong Bugis – a stone's throw away from the Lavender and Kallang MRT stations, the area is planned to be developed into an attractive precinct that supports active mobility and environmental sustainability, and a place that fosters community interactions.

Enlivening the river

- 9 Kallang Riverside – this area is envisioned to be a vibrant mixed use district in the longer term. In the interim, the conserved Kallang airport terminal can be put to adaptive re-use for community sports and recreational uses, making the place more accessible for everyone.
- 10 Waterfront along Jalan Benaan Kapal – a possible 8 ha play zone with recreational and sporting facilities for all ages from a football hub, BMX cycling facility to a therapeutic herbal community garden is being studied by Sport Singapore.

LEGEND

- Existing park connectors
- Future park connectors

Green House Design + Communications



Handle with care

Protective of Little India's authenticity, home-grown LISHA Chairman relishes the challenge of cutting through the chaos to keep this historic district thriving.

Writer **Justin Zhuang** | Photographer **Wilson Pang**

The recent hot-button question of whether Little India needs a makeover is not new to Rajakumar Chandra. The chairman of the Little India Shopkeepers & Heritage Association (LISHA) has been grappling with this issue in his decade-long place making efforts for this district along Serangoon Road.

While some see Little India today as crowded and disorganised, he sees vitality and authenticity. Over the years of working with the URA and other government agencies to manage and sustain this conserved precinct's vibrancy – a dedication that has led to him being conferred a Special Recognition prize from the Singapore Tourism Board and a Place Champion Award from the Place Management Coordinating Forum¹ in 2016 – Rajakumar's approach of place-making in Little India is based on a simple philosophy: "Once you move away life, you can't bring it back."

Take it from the affable 58-year-old who declares that "Little India is my life." Born in the neighbourhood's Kandang Kerbau Hospital, now known as the KK Women's and Children's Hospital, and having grew up in the nearby Selegie House estate, the only son amongst four children still recalls vividly the bustling crowds at the old Tekka market and the adjacent Campbell Lane where his father started Jothi Store and Flower Shop in 1960. This desire to sustain and grow the life in Little India is what led him to set aside plans to further his computer science degree and take on the challenge of running the family business and



¹ The Place Management Coordinating Forum is an inter-agency group comprising the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Singapore Tourism Board, National Arts Council, National Heritage Board, NParks and SportsSG which oversees the development of the place management sector in Singapore.



join LISHA in its efforts to promote Little India's heritage, culture and commerce.

People make places

To attract more visitors to Little India, LISHA introduced new events on top of the traditional Deepavali light-up every year. In 2001, the district began celebrating Pongal, an annual harvest festival that brought back cows and calves to an area known for its historic cattle trade. In 2010, LISHA started what became known as the Indian Cultural Fiesta, which showcases the traditions of the community's various ethnic groups. Together with Deepavali, these three events bring in millions to Little India annually.

Even as it welcomed more into Little India, LISHA also worked hard to grow the association's stakeholders from the initial 50 members. Rajakumar recalls the skepticism faced early on, "When you go to these merchants, they always ask, what does LISHA do for me?" Over time, the association's track record of attracting footfall through its events benefitted sales and convinced many to sign on. But just as important was the pitch delivered by the mild-mannered Rajakumar who became LISHA's chairman in 2006. "A bigger membership means we have a bigger voice to talk to the government and get what we want," he says. "This would really convince the different agencies that what LISHA asks for is being supported by Little India's stakeholders."

Today, the association has some 300 members, from the precinct's restaurants and eateries to retail shops and even its temples. This gives LISHA a unique insight into the needs of the precinct's community, which proved vital in the aftermath of the 2013 Little India riots. This first such riot case of public unrest in Singapore in over four decades arose following a fatal accident involving a migrant worker along Race Course Road. While the riot was quickly quelled, businesses in Little India suffered for months as crowds stopped coming and stricter alcohol control was imposed. LISHA swung into action to sustain community life. The association worked with the government to open up shops at migrant workers' recreation centres in Penjuru and Jalan Terusan so that Little India's shopkeepers had a means of selling their wares to their regular clientele of Indian and Bangladeshi workers who were staying away. At the same time, Rajakumar began working to persuade his father and neighbouring shops to consider URA's proposal to pedestrianise Campbell Lane.

Like them, he initially feared that closing off traffic meant losing regular customers who drove by to pick up flowers and religious items. "My shop being situated here, my father was very upset," he says. "A lot of customers were also unhappy, they said 'already we have parking problems, how we're going to come to your shop?'" What convinced Rajakumar was seeing the Indian Heritage Centre coming up a few doors down from his shop.

He thought this four-storey museum to showcase the Indian community's histories in Singapore would turn Campbell Lane into a focal point for its businesses and the community. "I convinced other shops that the crowd would be coming in again and their business will be better," says Rajakumar. "I believed that after pedestrianisation, this would be a nice place for the community to gather and move around."

Drawing artful changes

The crowds returned after pedestrianisation and the opening of the heritage centre in May 2015. But so did a perennial problem for Little India's residents. For years, LISHA has had to deal with complaints about huge crowds gathering and obstructing traffic, especially on Sundays which are off days for the migrant workers. As early as 2006, the association worked with the government's inter-agency Little India Task Force led by URA to upgrade the district's infrastructure to handle pedestrian flow. Walkways on Buffalo Road and Veerasamy Road were widened, while along Serangoon Road, the paths were finished with non-slip terracotta tiles and topped with new lamp poles inspired by the lotus flower to make walking Little India more pleasant.

Unlike other historic districts, such as Chinatown and Kampong Glam which were designated as areas for the Chinese and Malay/Arab communities respectively when the

British founded modern Singapore, today's Little India started as a home for Europeans and grew organically to become one of the home for the country's Indian community. It is this ground-up and freewheeling character that Rajakumar has sought to preserve in his place-making efforts, the one thing that many heritage experts, tourists and locals love about Little India too.

To balance residents' concerns with preserving Little India's identity, LISHA worked last year to create more attractive public spaces for the district's visitors and rolled out several initiatives as part of URA's Our Favourite Place programme, a national initiative to encourage public space activation. One example is Project Oasis in Little India, supported by the Singapore Tourism Board. It was launched to open up two plots of unused state land that were previously fenced up. Also at Clive Street, visitors are now greeted by colourful cows that pay homage to the area's history, while at Hindoo Road, superlative trees growing with umbrellas join the precinct's shady trees to provide respite from the tropical heat. These installations are based on designs by Marthalia Budiman, a participant in URA's My Ideas for Public Spaces: Forgotten Spaces competition held in 2015. Besides offering a place to gather and relax, these spaces are also platforms for monthly performances and activities that showcase arts and culture from Singapore's Indian community. "This is useful because there



are not many resting places in Little India and we didn't have places for events to make the district vibrant," explains Rajakumar.

LISHA has also turned to the arts and culture to enhance Little India's image as more than just another shopping space. Since 2015, the association has supported Artwalk in Little India, an annual multidisciplinary art event organised by the tourism board and LASALLE College of the Arts, which borders the district. LISHA has provided the logistic support to host performances in the district and convinced shopkeepers to open up shophouses as canvases for wall murals. One such work that still greets visitors walking by Belilios Lane today is artist Psyfool's two-storey depiction of various traditional trades in Little India. Most of the trades depicted on this mural – *dhobies*, *kachang puteh* sellers and fortune tellers – no longer exist show how much life in the district has changed over the decades.

This is why Rajakumar recognises a need to embrace the future even as he has tried to preserve Little India as how he remembers it to be. Seeing how his son does not hang out in the district like he used to, Rajakumar has been dreaming up ways of making Little India relevant to the next generation. Last year, LISHA launched Dei.com.sg to connect the district's merchants to the trend of online shopping. Now, Rajakumar is exploring how he can support young entrepreneurs in setting up their own cafés and offering new retail experiences to begin making their own Little India.

After all, place-making is all about ensuring a continuity of life. And a place thrives only when it is relevant to its community, says Rajakumar. This is what LISHA has strived for Little India under his leadership: making the place popular with tourists and locals, increasing the sense of ownership amongst stakeholders, and ensuring spaces for change. A proven formula that has made Little India a distinctive place in Singapore.

Beyond URA's conservation efforts and improvements made in historic districts like Little India, URA planners are increasingly encouraging stakeholders to come forward, collaborating with them to proactively manage such important districts, where sustaining its life and vibrancy is critical to ensuring its relevance in the long term. As part of these efforts, the Place Champion Award was started in 2014 to recognise private sector individuals who have made significant place management contributions to their respective precincts, such as rejuvenating a precinct and encouraging other stakeholders to be more proactive in place management. Rajakumar Chandra is the third recipient to receive the award in 2016. The other two are May Sng, previous Chairman of the Orchard Road Business Association (2014) and Wilson Tan, Chairman of the Singapore River One (2015).

For more information about Little India, go to URA's conservation portal at ura.sg/consportal.

To volunteer in LISHA's place-making efforts, write to secretariat@lisha.org.sg.



Memories to treasure

Ambassador-at-large professor Chan Heng Chee and her brother Chan Heng Wing recall what life was like growing up at No. 125 Joo Chiat Place.

Writer **Justin Zhuang** | Photographer **Donn Tan**

Its washed out facade, tinged in a patina of ochre and powder blue, and the fading "Lucky Book Store" signage stenciled just outside the entrance hints at the past lives of No. 125 Joo Chiat Place.

A modern family home today, this 1920s Transitional-Style shophouse is part of a row of conserved residences bounded by Everitt Road, Joo Chiat Terrace and Mangis Road. In 2013, it was lovingly restored by CHANG Architects and owners Low Junri and Denise Wong. The result is an award-winning design that reflects the almost century-old building's history as a bookshop and home of families, an effort that garnered URA's Architectural Heritage Award in 2013 and a jury commendation at the 2014 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards.

Two former residents were the Chans who lived in this double-storey building in post-war Singapore. Professor Chan Heng Chee, the ambassador-at-large with the Ministry of Foreign Ministry (MFA) and her younger brother, Chan Heng Wing, senior advisor at MFA, still recall fondly the fun times growing up in the neighbourhood with their two other siblings, parents and grandmother. Racing down the five foot way that connected the row of shophouses, going around the neighbourhood hustling mahjong *kakis* for grandmother, and cooling down in the tropical heat with ice balls from the coffeeshop down the block, Joo Chiat Place was a playground for the siblings born four years apart.

A melting pot

"My memory of Joo Chiat Place is that it was a very quiet area," says Heng Chee, who was nearly



Above | No. 125 Joo Chiat Place, a Transitional-Style shophouse which has been restored as a modern family home. A spectacular double volume dining area is created by the removal of the second storey side passageway slab. Photo Credit: CHANG Architects

You can do physical conservation but if people don't cherish old memories, then there is no meaning. It's a synergy between two things. If you have it, treasure it, says Chan Heng Wing.

three years old when the family first returned to No. 125 from Malacca after the Japanese Occupation. "It was a multiracial neighbourhood, very mixed use, and you had shops, families, mixed races and a school."

The Chan's home sat in the middle of it all. While Peranakan-Chinese families surrounded them on their right and across the street, the Chans also remember the many Indian residents and the *mamak* shop right next door. In fact, just a unit away from this sundries store was a Punjabi family, whose daughters and son became the Chans' childhood playmates. Such a diverse neighbourhood was on display especially during festivities when the street was transformed by the decorations of the different households. Chinese New Year saw red buntings go up the doors of Chinese homes, the Christians trotted out their trees during Christmas, and the Tamil-Hindu families drew *kolams* outside their homes during Deepavali.

"There was a lot of respect for the cultural differences. People also showed their differences in the colours they used, the things in their houses, and the ways they observed festivities," says Heng Chee, then already a social scientist in the making. "I would say Joo Chiat Place made me very aware of multiracialism and being very comfortable with it."

The neighbourhood was vibrant in another way for her brother Heng Wing. At different times of the day, the tik-tok sounds of utensils would come in from the streets signaling to him the arrival of itinerant food sellers to Joo Chiat Place. Not only did they bring about their own sounds and rhythms, these hawkers served up a variety of dishes ranging from *char kway tiao* to *mee goreng*. One hawker, the self-confessed foodie still recalls was an old lady who sold *wanton mee*. "In my memory, it was the worst! The things were so over-cooked."

Instead, Heng Wing recalls more fondly what his Peranakan-Chinese neighbours shared with them. The Cantonese family were introduced to flavours like *assam*, and they loved it so much so that their mother even catered Peranakan-Chinese food from Joo Chiat's famous Guan Hoe Soon Restaurant when Heng Wing got

married years later. "When my grandmother was alive, all the exchanges between my mother and her neighbours were done in great secrecy and it was quite a naughty treat to eat... it was not what a Cantonese family would cook," he says.

As the young Chans grew up, their view of the neighbourhood expanded beyond Joo Chiat Place too. On her *beh chia* (trishaw) rides to CHIJ Katong Convent, Heng Chee began noticing the different types of families living in this mixed suburbia. Unlike No. 125 and its row of middle-class homes, those along the nearby Still Road were raised in stilts and had gardens for their wealthier families. There were also small narrow houses occupied by the lower middle class. Heng Wing, who went to Telok Kurau English School at Lorong J, discovered *nasi lemak* in the canteen and the friends from Malay kampong that bordered Joo Chiat.

What got the young Chans even more acquainted with Joo Chiat was walking around the neighbourhood with their father. Whether it was to watch a movie at the open-air Lily Cinema along Joo Chiat Road towards Geylang Serai or to shop at Roxy, the entertainment hub in Katong, the elder Chan made his young children go with him on foot. "One got really familiar with the neighbourhood by walking around a lot," says Heng Chee, whose slender figure attests to that. Her brother adds, "We hated it at that time, but actually I thank my father for it now." It may also explain why the two in their seventies look younger than their age.

Treasuring the city

Around the mid-1950s, the Chans moved out of No. 125 when they bought new modern apartments at a development their uncle had built on Onan Road. Not far from their old home, they still returned to hang out with their neighbours though this diminished as they became teenagers. From what they recall, another family moved in after them, and by the time it became Lucky Book Store, the Chans had long stopped coming by the neighbourhood.

On recent visits back to Joo Chiat Place, both of them were glad to see No. 125 but also struck by how much life in the neighbourhood has evolved from their memories. Singapore sculptor



Ng Eng Teng's house on stilts across from theirs was now a contemporary terrace house, while further down from it, a Chinese school that operated out of two shophouses was no longer around. At the corner of Joo Chiat Place and Everitt Road, the shophouse that was a coffeeshop has been conserved and become part of the residential compound Lotus at Joo Chiat. Further down Joo Chiat Place towards Tembeling Road, the shophouses remain but eateries have replaced residences, a noodle factory and a *za huo pu* (provision shop) that the siblings often had to go pick up rice and other supplies from.

"The feeling I had was I grew up here, it's a nice neighbourhood now," says Heng Chee. "I am just glad that my old home is not violated by somebody who decided to paint it shocking pink!" While activities and uses of buildings have evolved over the years, new uses and memories are created to continue to offer us a sense of place and identity.

Having lived for over a decade overseas as Singapore's permanent representative to the United Nations, and later, ambassador to the United States, Heng Chee says it is important that citizens have places in the city that are meaningful for them to return to. For her, No. 125 stands as a reminder of growing up, but for others it could be a park or somewhere that one has many strong memories of. This is how heritage and conservation can make a city lovable.

"If you go to cities with older features, you feel the warmth towards you and you imagine the history behind it. It's human," says the professor

who also chairs the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovation Cities at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. "Because life is so fast-paced, you want that contrast in your life for balance."

Heng Wing is also glad to have No. 125 remain a physical "reference point" in his life, and has made it a point to drive by when visiting the neighbourhood. During his decade long period of working in Hong Kong, Bangkok and Shanghai for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he has seen how people living in these developing cities retain strong memories of places even after they have been physically changed. This is just as important as conserving buildings and places.

"You can do physical conservation but if people don't cherish old memories, then there is no meaning. It's a synergy between two things," he says. "If you have it, treasure it."

The Joo Chiat area is not only a treasure trove for delectable local food but is also known for its decorative and ornate shophouses and residential terraces, which lends a special charm to this secondary settlement. It was designated as a conservation area in 1993 and further expanded in 2003, with over 700 buildings and landmarks gazetted for conservation. The restoration of 125 Joo Chiat Road shophouse has not only left intact elements of its past but also reinvented the space as a modern family home, earning it URA's Architectural Heritage Award in 2013 for its quality restoration efforts.

For more heritage stories, go to URA's conservation portal at ura.sg/consportal.

Design by not designing

How President's Design Award 2016's Enabling Village people-centric design draws communities together.

Writer **Justin Zhuang**

Where Timothy Ang used to work in Jurong Point, there were times when he couldn't get to the office because the lift broke down. He also recalls only seeing "buildings and walls". Today, the studio manager, who is a wheelchair user works out of a ground level office next to the housing estate of Lengkok Bahru. Not only is he surrounded by greenery, he can connect with others like himself and the larger community at this one-stop hub.

Welcome to Enabling Village – an inclusive space combining education, work, training, retail and lifestyle that connects people with disabilities to society.

Located in the mature Redhill neighbourhood, the project is a successful demonstration of rejuvenation and community building within a housing estate. An adaptive reuse of the previous Bukit Merah Vocational Institute built in the 1970s, the property was taken over by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, repurposed and opened in December 2015 as the Enabling Village. It is now the home of SG Enable, an agency dedicated to enable people with disabilities to connect with like-minded partners and stakeholders.

Breaking down barriers

"Not just a place for people with disabilities, we wanted the village to also be a new heart and hub for the community, breaking down barriers," says the lead architect Phua Hong Wei from architectural firm WOHA who led the 22-month project to transform this sprawling compound consisting of six blocks. This meant removing major segregations and ensuring the site is well



Above (top and bottom) | Steps have been replaced by ramps, with the gradient gentle enough for both manual wheelchairs and motorised scooters at the Enabling Village. The open space between the Village Green and the Hive at The Enabling Village is reactivated as a garden yard with re-purposed sea containers as bridges, follies and meeting rooms loosely scattered with recycled oil drum planters. Photo Credit: Patrick Bingham-Hall



integrated with its surroundings. A tall green fence came down. Multiple entry points were created. Drivers can come in through a safer spot along Lengkok Bahru, visitors can walk in from Redhill MRT fully covered by sheltered linkways, while residents from the adjacent Redhill Close can enter through a new entrance that features a garden shaded by majestic saga trees that have stood there for decades. "People can also take a short cut through the village from one end to the (neighbouring) school and precincts. It's not just a destination but has become part of people's daily commute," adds Hong Wei.

Within the compound itself, a kampong feel with more wild-looking landscape seeks to draw people closer to nature and to each other. It is designed together with landscape studio Salad Dressing. "We wanted the village's environment to be more accessible with Singapore's indigenous flora and fauna," says Hong Wei. The village's ponds surrounded by edible plants such as pandan, lemongrass and banana have attracted dragonflies, frogs and even rare hornbills. And while residents have released fishes into the ponds others slow down to enjoy the surroundings when they go around the village. "I overheard a

mother sharing a special moment with her little boy, pointing out the fishes and unique plants," says Hong Wei. "That was a great moment for us."

Reimagining everyday spaces

In addition to ensuring smoother and more seamless movements around the site for those with disabilities, WOHA also injected more public spaces to encourage greater interactions amongst visitors and users. From seating booths to play spaces for preschoolers and an outdoor amphitheatre for events, the spaces cater for both buzz and quiet moments. "One of the main things we look at is how everyday spaces and linkages can be reimagined to be useful, meaningful, accessible and inclusive. The more meeting points you create, the more opportunities there is for people to meet and interact. That sort of interaction is what creates a village and really opens it up to connect people with disabilities with the rest of society," says Hong Wei.

He adds: "The place is not about how it looks, but how it works. A lot of people have come to the village to use it differently... and in doing so, they share and bond with common memories." Children have been seen doing their homework

Above | Natural ponds and native tropical trees and shrubs attract and support a wide spectrum of biodiversity, welcoming visitors into the community space. Photo Credit: Patrick Bingham-Hall



at the amphitheatre, and a set of repurposed sewage pipe used as seating booths underneath the amphitheatre have become popular with visitors who contort themselves to fit in or imagine being sucked into them. The Enabling Village's ecosystem of businesses and services geared towards people with disabilities has also enabled users like Timothy to expand his network and make new friends. His colleague Jessie Ong likes the village for its convenience, and has participated in events and parties organised by others like the Stroke Support Station located in a neighbouring block.

In their citation for this project, the jury of the President's Design Award wrote that the "Enabling Village is a first of its kind and represents a natural evolution of place-making, where the redesign of the space is driven by the needs of the users.

It is a demonstration of how designers can build a better world through design, by not designing." For its thoughtful creation of a social space that breaks down many barriers and brings together communities, the Enabling Village was awarded the President's Design Award 2016.

The President's Design Award is the highest design accolade in Singapore recognising designers and designs from all design disciplines for their design excellence and creative innovation. Three designers and 10 design projects were honoured with the award in 2016 which is in its 11th edition.

The award is administered by URA and the DesignSingapore Council. For more information about the award and roving exhibition on the winners, go to www.designsingapore.org/pda.

Green over gray

We step into the world of Emilio Ambasz, the green building visionary, who views architecture as a stage for human majesty, thought and sensation.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland** | Photo credit **Emilio Ambasz**



"I have always believed that architecture is an act of myth-making imagination. I believe that the real task of architecture begins once functional and behavioral needs have been satisfied. It is not hunger, but love and fear – and sometimes wonder – which makes us create. The architect's cultural and social context changes constantly, but his task, I believe, remains always the same: to give poetic form to the pragmatic," says Emilio Ambasz (EA).

What is architecture and what makes a building more than merely a sum of its parts? How does one inhabit a place? Can buildings peacefully coexist with nature? Should architects strive to

create emotionally charged total works of art? These are some of the questions that are central to the work of Emilio Ambasz, who recently exhibited his works in Singapore in an exhibition, "Emilio Ambasz: Architecture Toward Nature", curated by Vladimir Belogolovsky (VB), organised by the New York-based Curatorial Project. The exhibition examined the ideas and buildings of Emilio Ambasz, an American architect, designer and curator, and writer who has been designing and building radical green projects for 40 years. He is a crusader whose work and ideas were, in the words of American architect and artist James Wines, the "forerunner of green architecture".

Above | The Banca dell'Occhio is a 5,000 sqm medical facility which includes a 450-seat auditorium. In the triangular space created by two 12-metre high walls, a series of landscaped terraces make up one side while a series of steps leads to a flat planted roof garden.

VB: You wanted to be an architect at an early age when you were 11. What prompted your initial interest in architecture?

EA: I was interested in architecture since I was nine, I think. I had a toy set with which I could build houses. I am a person of steady ideas. Once I have an idea that's it, I persist. I wanted to become an architect and that led to my applying to Princeton. I sent my application with a wax seal telling them that I went to bed every night with the idea of wanting to be an architect and woke up every morning with this idea...

VB: You once said that you dream of the future where “you can open your door and walk out directly on a garden, regardless of how high your apartment may be. Within a high density

city, reconcile our need for building shelters with our emotional requirement for green spaces.” Does this remain to be a dream or do you think some of the most recent projects in Singapore or your own in Fukuoka [1994] and elsewhere, perhaps made this dream closer to reality.

EA: Well, they are all my children! I did the first vertical garden wall in my ENI Headquarters closed competition project for this Italian petrochemical giant in 1998 in Rome. Jean Nouvel was one of the other two invited competitors, but that competition got suspended... It was about modernising the existing structure, the first curtain wall building in Italy from the 1960s. Water and wind were filtering in, so they had to change the façades, which meant that no one could



Above | The south side of ACROS Fukuoka Prefectural International Hall consists of 14 one-storey densely-planted terraces achieving the result of a thickly planted hill in the midst of an urban environment. The building occupies more than 1 million sqf in the last remaining green space in the city centre.



work there for two years. And that was a huge 20-storey building. My solution was very simple and logical. And in the process, I tried to make the oil industry more sensitive to problems of ecological equilibrium.

VB: Do you by any chance know when and who did the first vertical garden wall as a real project?

EA: I am not interested in that kind of research. Look, I am like a tiger. Once my cubs are born, I don't want to know about them. I want the next project. But by now you can see many projects all over the world influenced by that initial idea. Certainly in Singapore, but there they, at least, acknowledged my role because when the government published a book, Vertical Garden City Singapore (Straits Times Press Pte Ltd, 2014), on Singapore's commitment to green architecture they asked me to write the introduction.

VB: In one of your quotes, you said: “My architecture is a stage set that serves as background for the dramas of human activity. With it, I hope to place the user in a new state of existence, a celebration of human majesty, thought, and sensation. The result is an architecture that seems to stand for eternity”. Is there one particular project that you still would like to do? What ideas would you like to explore?

EA: I don't know until they come to me. Again, I am not an intellectual. I detest writing theories. I prefer writing fables. They are metaphors, they are standards for approximation. That's what

metaphors are philosophically. A metaphor is a model for approximation. I don't work with words. When I design, I try to remove all words from my mind and I work with images. Because if I work with words I will remain in the semantic domain, which is something already understood. But I am interested in images that come to me without being conscious about them until they simply come. And I am not aware of their meanings until I start thinking. Then I start asking questions. This was the case with my Casa de Retiro house. I could come up with a whole theory about that project, but it came to me as a complete image. I think it is a great tragedy when the word arrives before the image.

The above are excerpts from an interview conducted by Vladimir Belogolovsky, first published on ArchDaily. Vladimir is the founder of the New York-based non-profit curatorial project focused on organising and curating architectural exhibitions worldwide. He is the curator of “Emilio Ambasz: Architecture Toward Nature”, the recent exhibition on display in February 2017 at The URA Centre. The exhibition is part of URA's larger continuous efforts to raise awareness and appreciation for architecture and urban design excellence in Singapore.

In the 1970s, before environmentalism was a trend, Emilio Ambasz was one of the first architects to incorporate landscape into the design of buildings. His concept of “the green over the gray” continues to inspire the sustainable architecture movement, and his iconic buildings such as Cordoba House, Spain (1975) and the ACROS Fukuoka Prefecture International Hall, Japan (1994), are revered as compelling works of architecture aside from their eco credibility.

Above (left and right) | Cordoba House is situated over a promontory and overlooks a lake surrounded by olive trees. The walls have been oriented towards the north to shade the balcony and protect the home from northern winds.

Designs in progress

Four student teams from URA's latest annual planning workshop let us in on their designs for the Buona Vista stretch of the Rail Corridor.

Writer **Jennifer Eveland**

Inspiring a future generation of planners, architects and urban designers, the 8th edition of the annual Challenge for the Urban & Built Environment (CUBE) 2016 workshop cum competition welcomed 145 student participants in 16 teams from 11 junior colleges and five polytechnics to step into the shoes of urban planners and try their hand at planning and urban design. The task – to transform Buona Vista node into a vibrant business and lifestyle gateway with dynamic community spaces. Located next to Buona Vista MRT, one-north business park and Holland Drive residential neighbourhood, the site is also a key gateway to the 24-kilometre-long Rail Corridor, a green oasis that connects homes, work places and schools. Nikken Sekkei and local landscape firm Tierra design won URA's Request for Proposal for their thoughtful Concept Master Plan for the Rail Corridor, *Lines of Life*, in November 2015. URA will share a 4 kilometre stretch of the Rail Corridor from Bukit Timah Railway Station to Hillview Road in May 2017.

Four teams from CUBE share their designs, inspirations, challenges and talk about what it takes to design spaces for people.

Winners of CUBE 2016 were announced at the second urban planning festival in March 2017. For the latest on CUBE, check out the students' works in an exhibition at The URA Centre from 14 March 2017 and join its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CUBESStudentWorkshop

Challenge for the Urban Built Environment 2016 (CUBE)

WINNERS

- Millennia Institute
- River Valley High School
- Saint Andrew's Junior College

SPECIAL MENTIONS

- Nanyang Polytechnic
- Singapore Polytechnic
- Temasek Polytechnic
- Victoria Junior College



GREEN CONCERTO | NANYANG POLYTECHNIC

What are we looking at?

Green park-linkages designed as wide pedestrian walkways, bike lanes, ramps and bridges that connect inhabitants to the iconic elevated Buona Vista MRT interchange, Biopolis and Holland Drive.

What's the idea behind it?

We want to retain and convert the existing surrounding greens as parks to honour the historic Rail Corridor. The parks are then elevated as park-linkages between major entrances from Holland Drive and Biopolis, serving inhabitants with direct access to all blocks.

What's your design concept?

We call our design a 'Green Concerto' to illustrate the infusion of history-based resonance in the Rail Corridor, the massive built-up Biopolis, and a pinch of locality spirit in Holland Drive. We drew inspiration from musical scores to reflect the sense of rhythm in the repetitive yet harmonious forms of the proposed buildings.

What was your biggest design challenge?

To translate something abstract and intangible, such as rhythm, into architectural and urban language. We struggled with the details of our masterplan and were debating to the final hour of the competition.

How did you address it?

Sketches helped us visualise the rhythmic form and translate our concept into watercolour drawings.

What are your thoughts about urban planning and design?

The critique sessions were nerve-wrecking, enriching, so fun and impactful. We wonder if the life of an urban planner is this exciting! Understanding how to develop meaningful spaces for people is such a rare opportunity for all of us as we are currently studying spatial design. Both spatial design and urban planning celebrate the human experience, but the urban planner having to consider and balance many competing needs and take on a broader view was a revelation to us.

What are we looking at?

Sky bridges designed to connect commercial and residential buildings. Each design incorporates aspects of greenery and eco-friendliness through the use of solar panels. Plants make the sky bridges aesthetically pleasing, lower the air temperature and provide shade. Shops along the sky bridges provide incentives for people to use the bridge. Community activities like Taiji or Zumba can be held along the bridges to bring the community together.

What's the idea behind it?

Interconnectedness – we connected all aspects of our design through shared spaces within the green sky bridges. Shops are located within the dome-shaped bridges and empty spaces occupy solar-paneled and open-topped bridges, providing opportunities for interaction between Buona Vista residents and workers.

What's your design concept?

A place where people of different social groups such as residents, office workers and commercial

users, can congregate to relax and interact with one another, amidst a natural setting that retains a large proportion of the node's original green space that now includes a river running through.

What was your biggest design challenge?

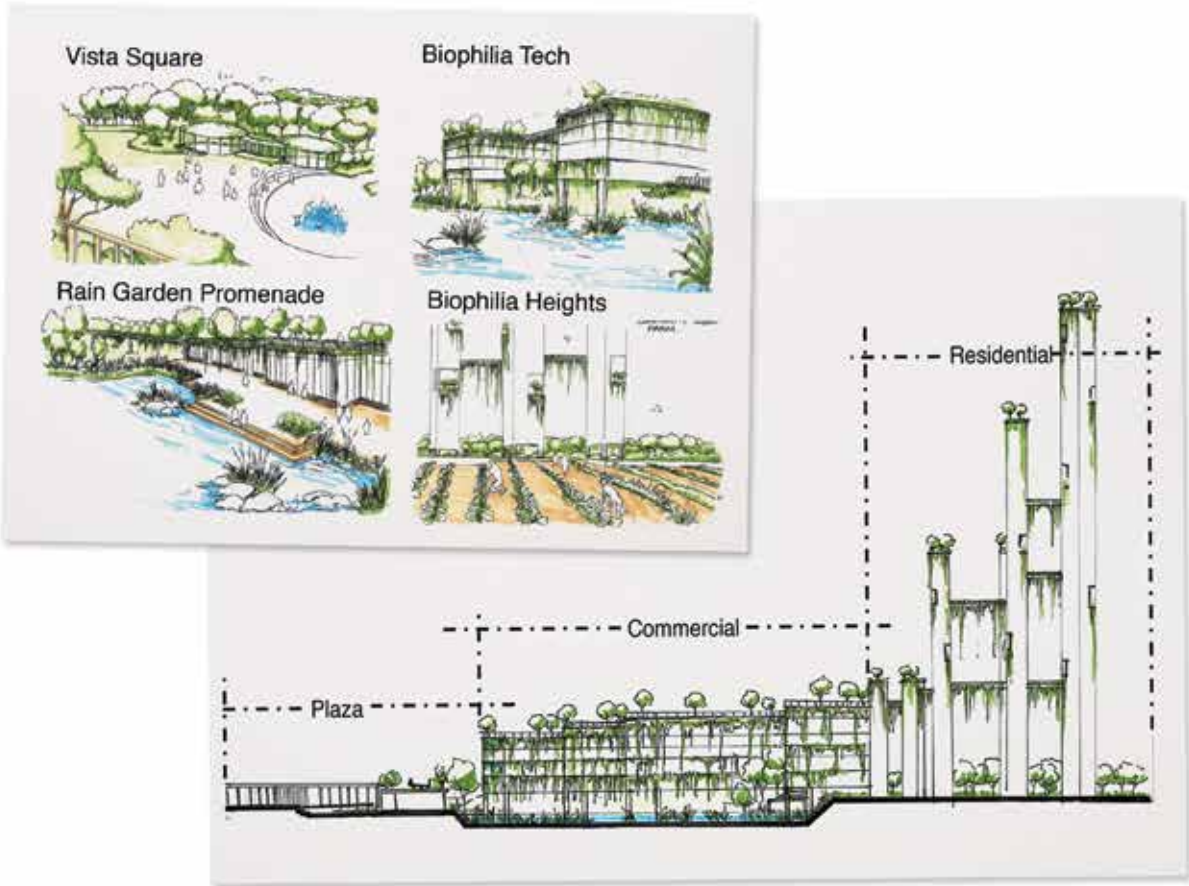
To think of linkages in the Buona Vista Confluence that could function as more than just pathways for people to walk through. We envisioned the sky bridges to be an opportunity for the local community to interact and bond.

How did you address it?

We took inspiration from the sky bridges at Biopolis as well as the concept of 'placemaking' that we learnt – creating places as sustainable destinations for people and the community.

What are your thoughts about urban planning and design?

Urban planning and design requires a good mix of both creativity and practicality. We had to ensure that our ideas met the requirements but at the same time be unique from other projects.



What are we looking at?

Residential spaces are located above public spaces to maintain privacy for residents. The staggering of the building mass relates to the existing profile of the site to maintain visual connectivity and to form a distinct skyline profile. The mass of the built environment is softened by the staggered landscaped spaces.

What's the idea behind it?

'Biophilia' relates to everyday human activities and existence with nature. The introduction of roofscape gardens, vertical greenery, urban farming, waterscape and terrain are all part of the spatial characteristics shown in the sketches.

What's your design concept?

'Biophilia' is the notion of enriching community living through engaging with the growth of the natural environment. Understanding environmental forces and using them to create opportunities to be incorporated into living spaces is critical. Rain, fauna, flora, terrain, wind and sun energy are all vital resources that can be leveraged on to make our city more liveable.

What was your biggest design challenge?

To introduce an overall comprehensive development that sits nicely with the community, existing context and the environment without looking imposing and intrusive, yet is progressive and realistic, responding to people's aspirations.

How did you address it?

Through understanding the site's surrounding context, understanding considerations by various authorities, identifying the peoples' aspirations, plus many discussions, brainstorming and numerous design proposals.

What are your thoughts about urban planning and design?

The work involves understanding the complexities of good planning, including experiential spaces for people to live, work and play, and to inspire progress and a forward-looking nation. Some aspects included conducting surveys and research, understanding national policies and issues related to sustainability.



New lens on Serangoon Road

4 photographers and 30 students re-experience the sights, smells and colours of Serangoon Road through their lens in a year-long documentation project.

Writer **Justin Zhuang** | Photographers **Bernice Wong, Chia Aik Beng, Darren Soh and Philipp Aldrup**



Photo Credit: Darren Soh

BRAIDING URBAN TRADE, THE URGRADE HWA CHONG INSTITUTION

What are we looking at?

Mixed-use buildings and community spaces. Organic forms are used in our buildings, reflecting the nature of braiding and brings out the idea of weaving and connecting places throughout the entire site.

What's the idea behind it?

The idea of mixed-use buildings came as an inspiration after we observed that there appears to be a clear divide between the residential estate and Biopolis across the road. This sectioning of residential and commercial areas is greatly unnecessary as both communities are capable of and will gain from coexisting in the same space.

What's your design concept?

To revitalise the human connection by incorporating a shared sense of community. We propose to introduce the concept of the barter trade that can potentially enhance liveability, where skill sets and experiences are exchanged between individuals to create a diverse yet close-knit communal culture.

What was your biggest design challenge?

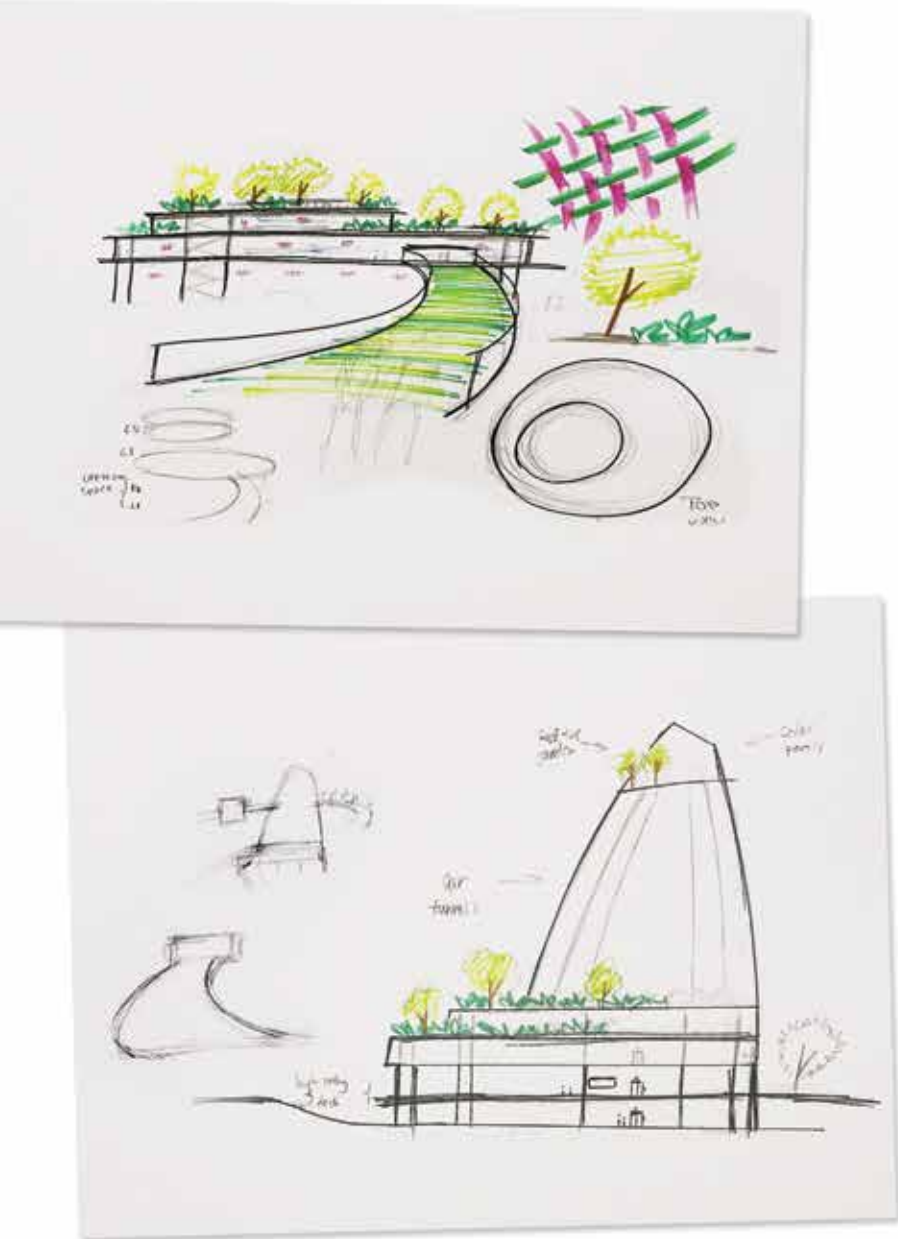
Finding the right focus. Our initial concept lacked a clear focus as there were too many ideas. Another challenge was how to translate our ideas and vision into the actual space design.

How did you address it?

Through many rounds of discussions and carefully studying our site's context and environment.

What are your thoughts about urban planning and design?

The process behind urban planning and design is definitely more complex than it seems. Beyond architecture, aspects like human psychology, sociology, the conditions of the physical and human environment must be considered in order to establish the best-fit design landscape that suits and caters to the needs of inhabitants. In spite of the long hours put in, it is rewarding to have played a part in improving the quality of life for people.





“Serangoon Road is not just ‘Little India’. It’s not just a place where foreign workers and people of Indian heritage go to hang out. This area has a lot of historical architecture, much of which is not Hindu or India,” says Darren Soh, on capturing this historic road as the lead photographer of the project on DOCUMENTING: Serangoon Road, organised by URA in partnership with National Youth Achievement Award Council (NYAA) and the NYAA Young Photographers Network.

The project was initiated by URA to capture and document the more intimate and lesser-known landmarks, spaces and life of one of Singapore’s oldest roads and to open up a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Serangoon Road area, associated with familiar names like Tekka and since 1989 is also known as “Little India” where the historic conservation district is located. A year-long project from March 2016 to February 2017, Darren Soh, together with three

other photographers Bernice Wong, Philipp Aldrup and Chia Aik Beng mentored and guided 30 tertiary students from 16 schools, uncovering new sights and perspectives about this colourful enclave. The four photographers share their thoughts about Little India and the project.

Why is Serangoon Road special to you?

Darren: As a sociology student, I spent a fair bit of time talking to foreign migrant workers who frequented the area in the weekends. My studio was also located in Rowell Road, the heart of the more colourful part of the area and I have fond memories of the food, both Muslim and Chinese, plus the late night shopping at Mustafa Centre when I needed supplies for work.

Bernice: I started going down to Rowell Road every week when I was in university after I chanced upon a volunteering opportunity with

a migrant worker non-government organisation, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), which offered a soup kitchen there. The soup kitchen served workers who were having issues with their employers and those that were injured, amongst others. Apart from administering meals to these workers, I’ve had many hours of conversations with a good handful of them. Over time, I picked up basic Bengali from them and eventually went to Bangladesh a couple of times to visit some of their families and to produce a short film.

Aik Beng: Serangoon Road has a colourful past and still remains one of the most vibrant districts. My grandfather, a taxi driver used to bring me there when I was a kid in the mid-1970s. I have fond memories of the many diverse cultures of the district.

What did you learn from the project?

Darren: It is really more colourful and interesting than common knowledge makes it out to be; the diversity in Serangoon Road far exceeds the stereotype of it being an “Indian” enclave – is there really such a thing anyway?

Philipp: Photographing it years back taught me framing seemingly disorderly scenes, making sense of confusion, bringing a certain order to randomness. Reviewing the students’ photographs showed me the many other perspectives one can look at the area and how they as beginners approach the site in often similar ways as I did back then: sometimes distanced and shy, helpless and insecure, sometimes courageous and straight forward, unbiased and fully immersed.

Why is Serangoon Road popular with photographers?

Bernice: There’s so much life and vibrancy. The parallel lanes in Serangoon Road make walking fairly easy and you also get a lot of human traffic, hence more opportunities of dynamism in street photography. Also, it isn’t as gentrified and sanitised as most parts in Singapore, the sights, sounds and smells give the place its unique character.

What are 3 must-see places?

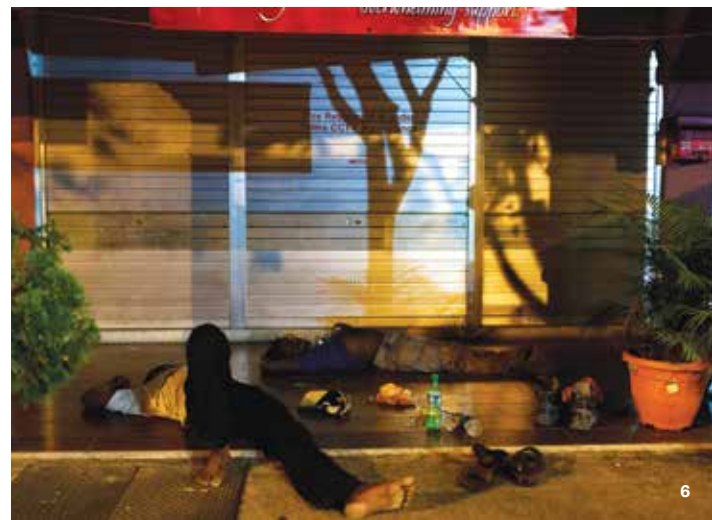
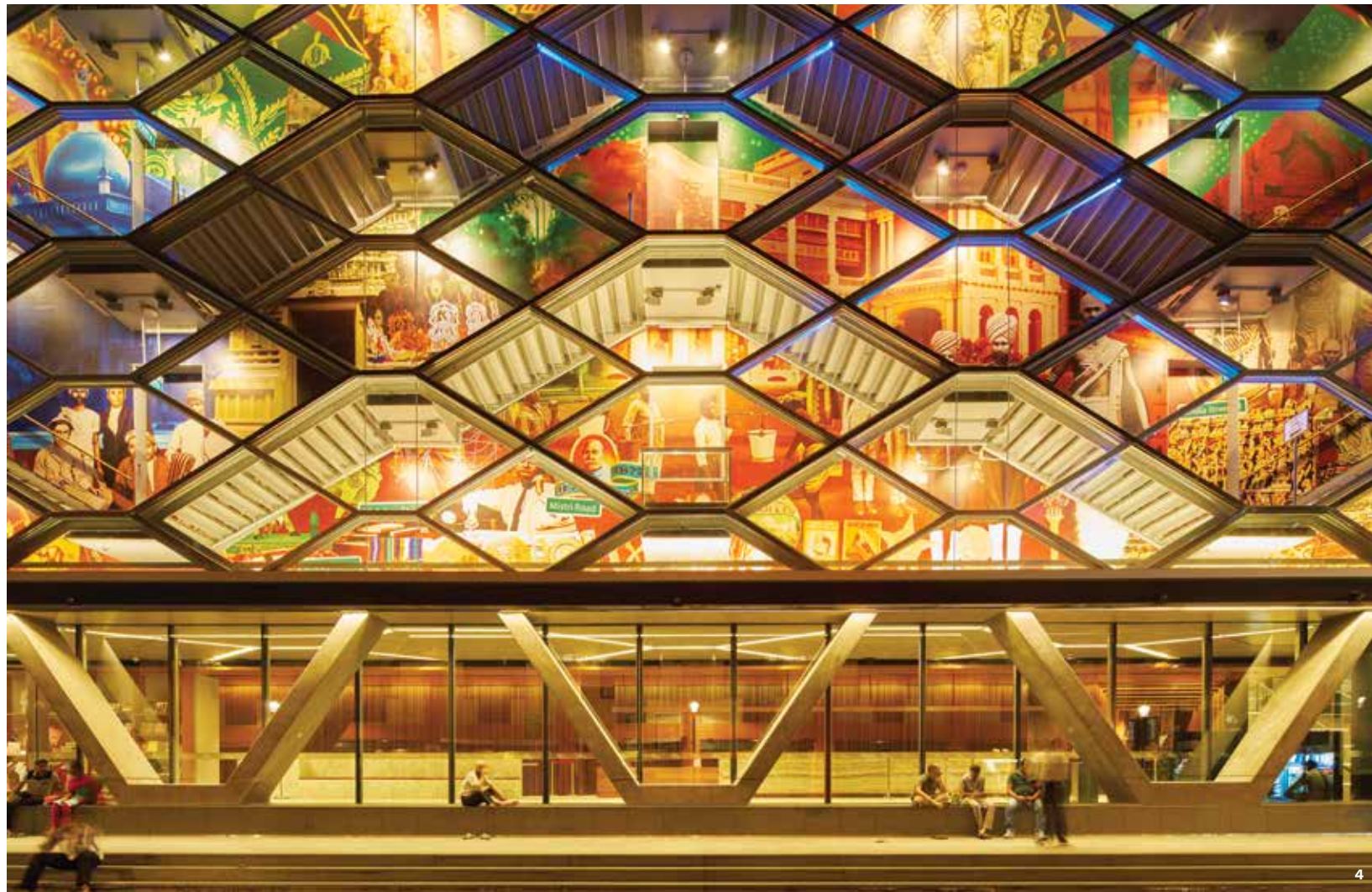
Aik Beng: The area around Jalan Besar and Race Course and Sungei Roads. Time stands still in these pockets of the district.



What are some tips on photographing the soul of a place?

Philipp: Be patient. Don’t rush. Shoot more, feel more. Listen. Stay and look around. Hang out, chat with people, eat and drink. Make friends. Visit it again – and again.

The “DOCUMENTING: Serangoon Road” photography exhibition is now on at The URA Centre from 13 March to 29 April 2017. The exhibition includes old photographs of Serangoon Road and those taken by the 4 mentor photographers and the students.



At a glance

We check out the latest events and happenings shaping the landscapes and neighbourhoods around us.

Pop-up ideas for public spaces

My Ideas for Public Spaces competition is back for its third edition, the focus this year is on pop-ups which can enliven public spaces around Singapore. Visit ourfaveplace.sg for inspiration and submit your entries from now till 12 April 2017.



Lights up at Marina Bay

The annual sustainable light festival is back for its fifth edition! Join the symphony of light and festivities at Marina Bay waterfront from 3 to 26 March 2017. Festival goers can expect to adopt light art installations from local artist Lee Yun Qin or upcycled furniture from eco.me. Visit www.ilightmarinabay.sg for the festival guide.



A view to savour

With the revamp of the outdoor refreshment areas (ORA) along Boat Quay by URA in partnership with Singapore River One, Singaporeans and tourists can now enjoy the view of the Civic District while dining. Together with the pedestrianised Circular Road, this is aimed at drawing the crowd to rediscover Boat Quay.

Urban planners share their trade

Ever wondered what an urban planner's work entails? The Urban Planning Festival from 14-31 March 2017 will reveal the intricacies of urban planning to secondary school and pre-university students through exhibitions, workshops and tours in historic districts. As part of the festival, a photography exhibition "DOCUMENTING: Serangoon Road" will be at The URA Centre. Read about the photographers' journeys on page 37.



A theme for every #CarFreeSunday

In the second run of Car-Free Sunday SG, we have seen tremendous success and participation from community leaders and businesses. With a different theme for each Car-Free Sunday SG, you can look forward to a variety of activities including sports activities, personal mobility devices roadshows and trails along heritage districts. Share with us your thoughts on what you would like to see at the next Car-Free Sunday SG on Facebook (@URASingapore).

Designing for innovation

Good design is an important facet of innovation, business strategy and creative solutions to everyday life. Singapore Design Week 2017 brings together over 100 local and international events and activities. Held from 3-12 March 2017, the ever-popular Singaplural will present how design influences our daily lives and a collective exhibition on how architects overcome space and resource constraints to build a better environment. Read more about the events and activities on Going Places Singapore (goingplacessingapore.sg)





Sharing a special moment at Kallang Riverside Park amidst the lush greenery. They will get to enjoy more of Singapore's longest river with new ideas unveiled for Kallang River. Full story on page 13.