

# No. 140 HILL STREET

A Breath of New Life



**Owner:**  
*Ministry of Information and The Arts (MITA)*

**Architect:**  
*PWD Consultants Pte Ltd*

**Engineer:**  
*PWD Consultants Pte Ltd*

**Contractor:**  
*Evan Lim & Co Pte Ltd*

**2001 AWARD**

This involved the restoration and transformation of the Former Hill Street Police Station, a national monument, into a modern office building with commercial spaces like art galleries and cyber-cafes on the ground floor.

The six-storey Neo-Classical building, now known as MITA HQ, was



*Transformation that combines functionality and a slice of history*

designed by J F MacNair and completed in 1934.

Prior to restoration, there was a complete and thorough documentation of the elements of the building. The "Top-Down" approach was used. The building was treated for rising damp. Detailed study was also carried out on the cast iron newel posts and wrought iron handrail and balustrades that were repaired and reused.

Six of the original eight blocks of the building were retained and restored with their corbelled loggias and balconies, timber louvred windows and pedimented entrances. Even the inscription of the old building's name, prison cell grilles and the two building plaques with

the names of the then Chief of Police, Director of Public Works and Government Architect were kept. The triangular courtyard was landscaped and kept open-to-the-sky. The rectangular courtyard, once a Parade Square for Police Officers, was covered with a glass roof and converted into an

air-conditioned atrium, now appropriately called the ARtrium.

Great care was taken to screen all roof top equipment from public view, especially from Fort Canning Hill. A basement for car parks and M&E equipment was provided under the adjacent plaza with access from River Valley Road.

The brightly-painted, rainbow-coloured timber windows are an apt reflection of MITA's multi-faceted roles as developer of the information hub, protector of heritage and promoter of arts.

The transformation gave the building a breath of new life, combining functionality and a slice of history.



*Moulded entablature*



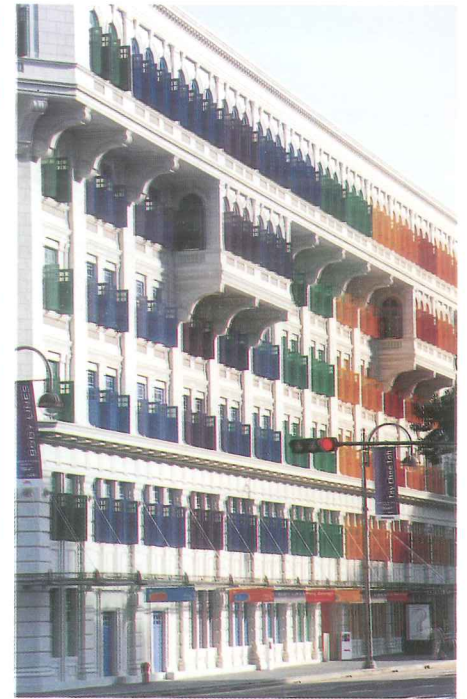
*Brackets with decorative scroll work*



*Restored post and balustrades*



*Rusticated facade with protruding balcony and other features*



*Brightly-painted, rainbow-coloured timber windows*



*Series of circular rusticated columns*



*The ARTrium - the rectangular courtyard covered with new glass roof*



*Pedimented entrance flanked by circular and rectangular columns*



The Old Hill Street Police Station was completed in 1934, as a result of the reorganisation of the Singapore Police Force. It was originally called the Hill Street Police Station and Barracks. It was one of the finest police barracks of its time in the world, and the largest government building in Singapore.

The building is at the junction of Hill Street and River Valley Road, the site of Singapore's first jail. The Public Works Department designed it when F. Dorrington Ward was the Government Architect. Ward was well known for his design of Supreme Court and the terminal building of Kallang Airport. The design architect for this building was J.F. McNair.

The building followed the neo-Classical style, which was still fashionable for public buildings in England in the 1930s. The building was heavily rusticated on the elevations facing Hill Street and River Valley Road. As can be expected from this era, the building is vertically broken down into the three parts of base, middle and top. It was in form and content a bastion of masculinity, with the rustication and Doric Order, the most robust of the 5 classical orders being used on the lower storeys. The use of scrolls on the cantilevered balconies, however, gives it an elegant touch.

The original drawings show that the police station only occupied a small part of the building – where the pediment is, on the first storey, and it was access from the opening under the pediment. Traces of this police station can still be found today, for example, the tiny windows for cells (there were two cells in the station), garages and wrought iron grilles at the windows. The rest of the building was used as barracks, including barracks for single and married policemen on the lower floors, and flats for Inspectors, both European and 'Asiatic' on upper floors. At its peak, it housed some 1,000 police officers.

The 6-storey building has two courtyards, one of them rectangular and the other triangular. Because of the building's height, the proportions of these internal spaces are somewhat overwhelming but, as a solution to the problems of the Singapore climate, this is a sensible idea. The rectangular courtyard was used as the Parade Square for the police officers. A double volume arcade flanking one side of this courtyard served as recreation area and it opened out a view to the foot of the Fort Canning Hill.

Except for a brief period when it was a holding place for prisoners of the Japanese Kempeitai (military police), the building served the Singapore police force until 1980, when the police moved out. After renovations and the renaming of the building to the Hill Street Building, in 1983, it was occupied by the Official Consignee, the Official Trustee Public Receiver, the Archives and Oral History Department, and later the Board of Film Censors.

From the 1980s, renovations of some parts of the buildings had caused walls of some of the barracks to be torn down and some opened terraces to be bricked up and installed with windows. The double volume arcade was filled up when this portion was converted to house the Board of Film Censors. Fortunately, many original details survive. These include some rather special steel casement windows filled with timber louvres, old ironmongery and beautiful cast iron balusters.

National Archives and the Board of Film Censors were the remaining tenants when the building was vacated in December 1997 for redevelopment to the MITA HQ Building. In general, structural members of the building were intact. Common wear and tear problems associated with old buildings, such as termite infestation, rising damp, corroded metal elements, plaster crack, plaster debonding, roof leak, and general deterioration of building materials were found in this building.