

9 & 11 Empress Place (Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall)

A Timeless Encore

2015 Award Category A

Owner:	National Arts Council & Singapore Symphonia Company Limited
Architect:	W Architects Pte Ltd
Engineer:	T.Y. Lin International Pte Ltd
Contractor:	Sato Kogyo (Singapore) Pte Ltd

Two monuments built at different times for distinct purposes, Victoria Theatre (1862) and Victoria Concert Hall (1905) have been elegantly rejuvenated with great skill and conceptual finesse. Taken together, restoration and improvements to the buildings have made these major cultural and architectural landmarks newly relevant and resplendent, adding to their aura of Neo-Classical grace and grandeur.

Striking a Respectful Balance

The team did well to balance the goals of restoring the past and meeting the demands of two modern art venues. Good effort is evident in retracing their history and evolution. As a result, hidden and lost gems from an unsympathetic 1950s renovation were reclaimed from obscurity. These include the original central courtyard and adjacent passageway, the internal façade flanking Victoria Theatre, and the ground floor space of Victoria Concert Hall which has been returned to its monumental glory with the removal of intrusive structural pillars from the previous renovation.

Throughout the restoration, the venerable structures were well protected with extensive shoring. The team commendably engaged conservation specialists for consultation on materials usage, and skilled craftsmen from India for the intricate plaster works. This further secures the quality and authenticity of the restoration.

Ushering In the New

In bringing history forward to embrace the buildings' new ambitions, the team introduced many sensitive interventions to dramatic effect. The recovery of the old open courtyard made way for a voluminous covered atrium with an ingenious skylight that visually connects the clock tower to the buildings. The lost internal façade was reinterpreted with such elegant restraint that the new wall stands with great confidence in contrast with the old.

While the new Victoria Theatre has a modernised interior, the past remains everywhere and in delightfully unexpected ways. Timber seat backings have been repurposed as sculptural pieces, and metal chair components redirected to serve as a support for the timber wall claddings.

Noteworthy interventions at the Victoria Concert Hall include the refurbished balcony and mezzanine. Rebuilding them smarter and lighter allowed for the removal of intrusive support beams that had distorted the grand staircases below. Elegant new glazing for both porticos have given the facades a much lighter appearance. The extra effort to reinterpret the dome's missing crown,

restore the clock mechanism, and reinstate the original 'City Crest' is laudable.

Pride of Place

This ambitious and inspired revival has produced a cohesive outcome for the old and new. Through good research, careful planning and innovative design, a pair of important cultural landmarks has regained its civic presence as the visual focal point and pride of Empress Place.

1 St Andrew's Road (National Gallery Singapore)

Artful Administration

2015 Award Category A

Owner: National Gallery Singapore
Architect: CPG Consultants Pte Ltd &
Studio Milou Singapore Pte.Ltd.
Engineer: CPG Consultants Pte Ltd
Contractor: Takenaka Singapore Piling Joint Venture

Two important historical monuments have been respectfully rejuvenated, and united physically and in purpose to flourish anew as the National Gallery of Singapore. A historic endeavour in itself, this impressive revival has successfully transformed buildings formerly restricted to government and civic activities into a singularly eminent cultural asset which hallowed halls the world can soon wander through and enjoy.

A Judicious Revival

A complex restoration, involving a diversity of historic elements, the project has set new standards with its sensitive and scientific approach. Great effort has been placed in understanding the history and memory of the buildings, evident in pivotal spaces such as the Main Lobby and the Rotunda Library of the Former Supreme Court and the City Hall Chambers.

Extensive research and consultation with conservation specialists informed the entire process -- from the robust structural shoring that secured the buildings during work, to the extensive retention of original materials such as the Shanghai plaster, copper domes, teak ceilings, terrazzo finishes and the historic floor patterns on the second floor of the Supreme Court, as well as the marble flooring on the grand staircase of City Hall. A high quality outcome is also evident on the majestic facades, fenestrations and roofs. The two historical lobbies and four main courtrooms were entirely retained, as was the original profile of the memorable courtyards of City Hall. The team was judicious in observing the 3R principals to ensure the accuracy and longevity of the final product.

Summoning a New Order

While the restoration has been masterful, it is many inspired interventions of the new that are equal stars of the show. From above, the new roofline is a subtle yet powerful touch that instantly defines the envelope of the new development. As it connects old spaces, it creates exciting new possibilities such as the monumental new central atrium with its pair of link-bridges, and an extensive roof garden with views of the skyline and main dome. The well-thought-through design complements the monuments, celebrating the memorable courtyards of City Hall and opening up hidden spaces like its roof deck and the internal courtyards of Supreme Court for public enjoyment. The decision to convert the old Rotunda Library into an Art Reference Library cleverly preserves its usage history. The project team is also lauded for their care in discretely introducing mechanical and electrical services required to meet the stringent standards of a modern-day Gallery.

Standing Stalwart

Extensive research has resulted in sensitive harmonisation of key spaces and restoration of the original fabric and finishes that retains a patina of history. Thoughtful design has opened up, for the first time, significant historical spaces that allow important narratives of the nation's past to have a place in her present and future.

12, 13 & 17 Rochester Park

Verdant Roots

2015 Award Category A

Owner: BASF South East Asia Pte Ltd
Architect: Forum Architects Pte Ltd
Engineer: Ronnie and Koh Consultants Pte Ltd
Contractor: Towner Construction Pte Ltd

Originally built as residences for British military officers, this set of three colonial black and white beauties, circa 1950s, has been awakened to its new purpose as a modern corporate training retreat. The holistic approach taken has recaptured the nostalgic charm of colonial homestead living, restoring not just the bungalows but also their terrain of landscaped gardens with vistas to discover, and the natural wooded surrounding.

Return to Nature

The success of this comprehensive design approach was founded on careful research to understand the origin of the site, the houses and their construction, as well as their relationship with their historic terrain.

Adhering to the 3R principles, the team did well to retain the original fabric of the building, especially the original roof structure with its concrete beams and timber rafters. Damaged elements were repaired; rafters were reinforced and given anti-termite treatment.

Key period features such as the chimney, cast iron access door of one of the bungalows, ventilation panels and original ceiling designs at the verandahs and eaves were repaired and reinstated. Missing elements such as windows, doors and ventilation screens which could not be salvaged were fastidiously refabricated to their original design.

At Home with the New

New elements such as brass window and door fittings, and period tiles were well selected and strengthen the development's sense of history. The bungalows were sensitively fitted to be functional with natural ventilation. All verandas were kept open, true to their original intent. In the interiors of the bungalows, materials chosen for the surfaces are representative of those used in the same period as the houses' construction.

In form and choice of palette, new additions, pavilions and link-ways have been designed to be unobtrusive, quietly exalting the developments' vintage assets. Great effort has also been placed in reviving the property's tropical landscaping to reinstate and capitalise on views to and from the gardens, which had been blocked due to overgrowth over the years. The team is commended for saving the historic trees that came with the property, even though it was not mandatory to do so. Retaining and reusing the bungalows' outhouses is also an admirable decision.

A New Path Found

The property's transformation has been gentle, rather than radical. Both the fabric of the buildings and their original surrounding landscape have been recovered and set on a new path to its future. The result is a shining example of how buildings and landscapes can be restored as an organic whole, recapturing the history, aesthetics and atmosphere of a bygone era with renewed verve.

66 Pheng Geck Avenue (Alkaff Upper Serangoon Mosque)
A Spirited Revival
2015 Award Category B

Owner: Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura & Alkaff Upper Serangoon Mosque
Architect: Shing Design Atelier Pte Ltd
Engineer: Keon Consult Pte Ltd
Contractor: Tangs Engineering Pte Ltd

A rare and significant specimen of architectural and social history has been preserved and renewed – thanks to the generosity of the community that has always rallied together with pride over the 80-plus year-old building. Working on a modest budget, the restoration has secured a living heritage site for the Mosque's growing congregation and its neighbouring community, for now and for generations to come.

Yours, Faithfully

Sensitive to the layers of change over time, and respectful of the original fabric of the building, the restoration proceeded according to the 3R principles, informed by careful research on the site's history and architecture. Much of the Mosque's original architectural form, its masonry and period detailing have been reinstated. The original roof profile – a one-of-a-kind in Singapore, lost in a previous renovation – has been reintroduced along with the authentic ceiling design. The team is commended for making the concerted effort to bring back these important elements of old that add to sustaining the building's historic aura.

All useable materials, including the original timber doors and the cast iron balustrades, and useable parts of the roof timbers, were retained with great care and effort. Surfaces, columns, capitals, plaster mouldings and the historic flooring, among others, have been thoroughly cleaned and given a new lease on life. Long-missing elements such as the mild steel windows have been reintroduced. The sense of airiness of the building has also been expertly recaptured, while the distinctive minaret remains a beacon for the Mosque community and a landmark for the wider neighbourhood.

Enduring Serenity

Modern materials have been used for the new extensions to avoid visual competition with the historic building. They serve the Mosque in its current need for space without stealing its glory. Many meaningful extra touches add to the appeal of the project, such as the incorporation of the Mosque's name in the patterns of the new carpeting at the prayer hall.

Born Again

Overall, the Mosque is a well restored building that is inspiring despite the constraint of a limited budget. Beyond the physical restoration work, the installation of the wall-mounted historical timeline serves the good intent of tracing the history and importance of the Mosque for the appreciation of its modern-day visitors.