

Nos. 15 TO 23 CLUB STREET



Owner:

Haruta Investment Pte Ltd

Architect:

KNG Architects & Urbanists

Engineer:

S B Ng & Associates C E

Contractor:

ALL-TRADE Construction Pte Ltd

This project comprises 5 units of two-storey shophouses with an internal courtyard and a large two-storey building at the rear. The first storey is for commercial use and the upper floors for residential purposes. The buildings are of the Early Shophouse Style and are located within the Historic District of Chinatown.



Early shophouses restored to their historic character

Prior to restoration, the buildings were in a fairly poor condition. Some parts of the buildings were shored up to prevent collapse and vegetation had to be cleared from the existing structures. Before commencement of restoration works, a thorough survey of the buildings was carried out.

The existing buildings were adapted for the new use without sacrificing their historic character. Externally, the original character of the shophouses was retained and restored.

All internal timber members were replaced and masonry walls restored. A decision was taken to use the courtyard, a feature unique to the site, as the focal point for the first storey commercial areas. A fountain was introduced in the

courtyard to enhance the ambience of the place. The upper floors were converted into 15 residential units - 5 units in the shophouses fronting Club Street and 10 units in the rear wings facing the courtyard. Skylights were added to provide light into these units. A timber balcony rings the courtyard to provide circulation for the upper floors. Entry to these residential units are taken from the two access corridors created at House Nos 15 and 23.

The completed project retains the original humble character of the Early shophouse.



Restored rear facade of rear building



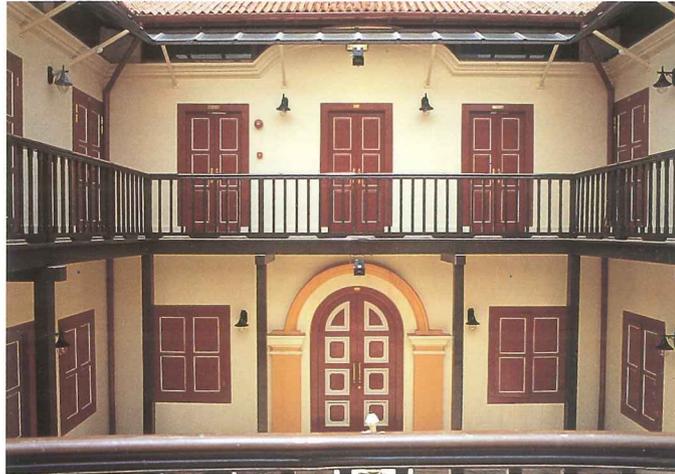
Arched window shutter with fixed and openable louvres matching the original



New skylight introduces natural light into the interior



Restored moulded plaster cornice and beam



Restored main courtyard facade of the rear building



Arched window matching the original in every detail



Continuous five-footway restored for uninterrupted thoroughfare



Columns with simple moulded capitals supporting the new curved balcony complement those flanking the main doors



Panelled door with secondary glazed layer



Club Street is a narrow road within the Telok Ayer Conservation Area which winds up from Cross Street to the top of Ann Siang Hill and is bounded on each side for the most part by restored shophouses. Historically, this area was occupied by clubs and associations within the so-called "big gate" area.

No.s 15 -23 Club Street are the subject of a URA land parcel, which was put on sale in 1995 with conditions attached to ensure the conservation of all buildings on the site within a three year period. It is one of the few sites in Singapore, which integrates a collection of historic buildings. Located in the Telok Ayer Conservation Area, it consists of a row of five two-storey shophouses fronting Club Street and a large two-storey building at the rear. This 'rear building' wraps around three sides of a courtyard, the rear boundary wall of the shophouses.

The five shophouses are of early shophouse design and form part of a continuous row of seven, the other two falling under a separate site. The characteristic of this humble style includes a narrow shop frontage of 5m, a low floor to ceiling heights of 2.76m and very simple ornamentation. The rear building which, is larger in proportion is also simple in style. Featuring a shallow arch under the overhanging eaves and a semi circular arch and pilasters outlining the main entrance, the main courtyard facade has a special charm of its own.

CONDITION OF THE BUILDINGS PRIOR TO CONSERVATION

Prior to restoration, the buildings were all in fairly poor condition. Although the roofs had been patched up, there had still been extensive water damage to the buildings over time. The gutters had all rusted through. The service blocks at the rear of the shophouses including the rear boundary wall were unstable, and the upper timber floors were unsafe. The existing concrete beam at the walkway to no.21 had cracked exposing the reinforcement. The second floor in the rear building was in a state of collapse, its walls were damp and the courtyard was completely overgrown by vegetation.

After the site was procured by the Client , the first priority was to stabilise the existing buildings and the beam at no. 21 was shored up accordingly. A doorway was then formed through the rear boundary wall of no. 19 to provide access to the courtyard and the rear building which were otherwise inaccessible. This allowed the clearance of the vegetation to prevent any undermining of the existing structures. Once this had been done, a proper measured survey was conducted.

INITIAL SURVEY AND HISTORIC RESEARCH

Before the design work commenced a thorough survey of buildings was carried out. This consisted of topographical and measured building surveys as well as the collection of detailed information on all building elements and features. Although access to the second storey of the rear building was impossible for safety reasons, the information was collected by means of ladders propped up at the external walls so that the size and profile of timber members and ornamental details could be faithfully recorded.

Preliminary investigations with the URA Sales Office and National Archives revealed no existing records of any of the buildings and it is not known how the rear building came to be sited so close to the back of the shophouses. Interestingly, no evidence of an existing staircase was found inside the rear building and it can only be assumed that the original building was constructed for entirely different uses on the upper and lower floors and with two separate entrances.

Our investigations led us to interview a sculptor who was actually born in no. 19 Club Street and lived in the area for some forty years. He recalls that the upper level of the rear building was indeed entered from either of two doorways at second storey level. One had steps leading down into a garden and the other was approached via a timber staircase leading down from the Yeung Cheng School grounds. This upper floor was occupied by four families and the lower floor was used as a warehouse and as the residence for another family. No. 21 Club Street was occupied by the Chinese Kung Fu School.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING BUILDINGS

Shophouses

The row of shophouses presents a humble plastered masonry façade along Club Street. The only concrete used was for the first storey floor slab and the beams over the walkway. A simple horizontal plaster moulding at second storey level and the strong line of the overhanging eaves pulls the front façade together, whilst the columns along the walkway, carried up as pilasters above, set the rhythm. The roof ridge is punctuated by a series of low jackroofs. With the exception of no. 23, which has been altered at some stage, the shopfronts were all of the residential style, some with an additional door onto a timber staircase leading to the upper floors. At second storey, each shophouse has a pair of timber shuttered french window openings protected by simple timber balustrades. Above these, nine small rectangular openings cut through the wall to provide ventilation. Each shophouse had an existing steep timber stair but the position of these varied from unit to unit. These were in a poor state of repair and in no way met with the current safety regulations. The existing brick party walls separating the shophouses were originally only built up to support the timber floor joists for the upper floor. Brick piers extending upwards in turn supported the timber roof structure. In between these piers the walls at the upper level consisted of timber panelling on timber framing. The ramshackle rear additions were inconsistent with the recognized traditional form of rear block extension. Most were roofed with temporary corrugated metal sheets spanning from the rear boundary wall back towards the eaves at the rear of the shophouses. Without exception, these extensions were unstable and in need of rebuilding.

Rear Building

Like the shophouses, the rear building too is of plastered masonry wall construction with a concrete first storey slab. The upper timber floors were supported on a series of joists on massive timber beams spanning between the masonry walls. These beams were in poor condition and one had already collapsed. The roof construction consisted of traditional tiles on timber trusses and purlins. There were no penetrations through the roof. Although the rear building is not visible from Club Street, its most elegant façade and courtyard faces in that direction. The three courtyard elevations have survived more or less intact although it was obvious that two of the doors at first storey had been blocked up to form windows. The rear elevation on the other hand had been altered at second storey over the time. The first storey windows were timber shuttered with iron bars. Those looking into the courtyard were rectangular in shape, whilst those looking out to the rear were arched and set at 2.1m above floor level. Only part of the main courtyard entrance door had survived.

At the second storey there were four pairs of french windows with timber shutters on each wing overlooking the courtyard and three sets of double doors on the main façade giving onto an existing dilapidated timber balcony. The second storey windows on the rear elevation were haphazardly arranged taking no reference from the arched window positions below. Although they were protected by timber shutters, whose style was in keeping with those of the courtyard, it was clear that horizontal concrete vents had been added below at a later stage giving this façade a completely different character.

Most of the original timber louvres housed in the high level rectangular openings above the second storey windows had been replaced with wire mesh and those that had survived were rotten. Behind the rear building, a triangular-shaped yard forms part of the site. At one stage it was accessible from Gemmill Lane but is now hemmed in by a new building. The yard was split into two levels, the lower part giving access to the first storey. A series of steps from the upper level led to a doorway into the upper storey, but this was demolished by the adjoining owner, as it encroached on their land.