

ISSUE 14 · 2021

# Skyline

Insights into planning  
spaces around us

## Charting our future

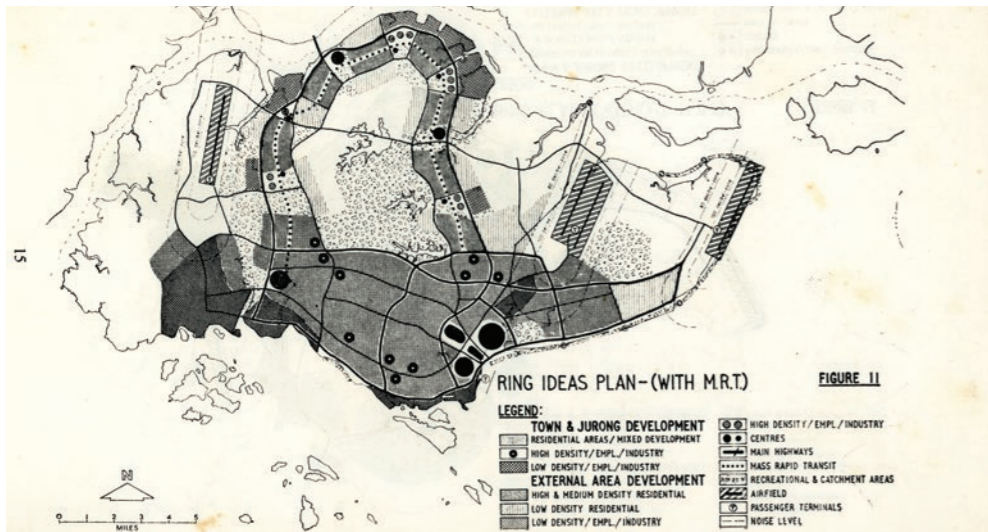
How long-term planning  
enables us to dream big  
and stay resilient

With scarcer  
resources, how are  
we sharing spaces?

Experts, citizens on  
the future: more  
magic, more love

Looking at age-friendly  
neighbourhoods  
with fresh eyes

# Skyline



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Cover | Residents strolling along Pelton Canal—this is one of the spots that photographer Chee Boon Pin loves about his neighbourhood. He is living in the nearby Bendemeer area. See more photos of his neighbourhood on page 46.

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# How can we prepare for the future?

This year, 2021, marks 50 years since the Concept Plan, Singapore's first long-term plan was developed.

50 years on, and what the planners envisioned and charted out in the first long-term plan can still be experienced today, from our expressways and MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) networks to the location of our international airport in Changi.

Imagine planning 20 to 30 years ahead for our own lives and families. How can we predict the future and make decisions today that will ensure we are well prepared for tomorrow?

That was what our pioneer planners, architects and others did. Given our unique conditions as a city-state, we have to allocate many land uses and infrastructure to support the needs of our country and yet cater for diverse and changing needs. Continuous and regular planning is key to ensure we use our land and resources optimally and have the flexibility to embrace new options and possibilities as contexts and challenges evolve.

Because of choices made by our pioneer planners 50 years ago and over time, we can explore and pursue many possibilities. Now, it is our turn to continue to make good choices and decisions that will not only shape our current cityscape but preserve options for future generations, as we embark on a review of our long-term plan in 2021.

In our current times, as we live in an age of greater uncertainties and rapid changes, long-term planning and adjusting our plans along the way, will continue to remain fundamental in enabling us to remain resilient and nimble. Close partnerships across sectors and communities and individual actions will become increasingly important as we confront urban challenges together.

In this issue, we speak to a range of experts and citizens, reflecting on shifting lifestyle trends and landscapes and dream of a future that is filled with even more magic, care and love. In the process, we rediscover ourselves again and fall more in love with this city we call home.

# Shaping our future together

In the face of more complex urban challenges and changing needs, how can we continue to shape an even better city for tomorrow?

This has been a particularly challenging time for all of us.

Beyond new struggles that we have been dealing with on personal and collective fronts, one thing that has stood out is how integral our built environment is in our everyday lives, whether we are spending more time at home, accessing more of our neighbourhood spaces or being more purposeful in going to our work spaces.

In the course of changing some of our daily habits or rediscovering parts of our neighbourhoods, some of us may find new found appreciation for our city, in being able to get groceries and access essential services nearby, moving around the island easily or immersing ourselves in nature and green spaces, for example.

In a way, the physical environments around us have come to influence how we live, work and play, shape who we are and how we interact with each other.

### Preparing for unknowns

How can we plan and design our environments in a way that can anticipate and meet our needs now and in future? Can we continue to enjoy our quality living environments and shape something even better for tomorrow?

“No one can give an answer with absolute certainty,” said Dr Cheong Koon Hean, Chairman, Centre for Liveable Cities and the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design, in the foreword for the book, *Seeking a Better Urban Future*, as part of the 2017/2018 Institute of Policy Studies-Nathan Lecture Series.

“We live in a complex and uncertain world. There will be many unknowns that we cannot anticipate. What we can do is to prepare for these unknowns. Thinking through issues

that we need to address would help us watch for and deal with different scenarios, shifting gears as necessary in the process<sup>1</sup>,” she added.

Indeed, for the past 50 years, we have been preparing for the unknowns, catering for new possibilities and remaining nimble and flexible, as we continuously protect and shape this city.

We delve into the invisible hand that has influenced our cityscape and reflect on fundamentals that will enable us to address our urban challenges together for the future.

### Long-term planning

As one of the few city-states in the world, our conditions are unique. Like all cities, we must cater for housing, business, social, and recreational needs.

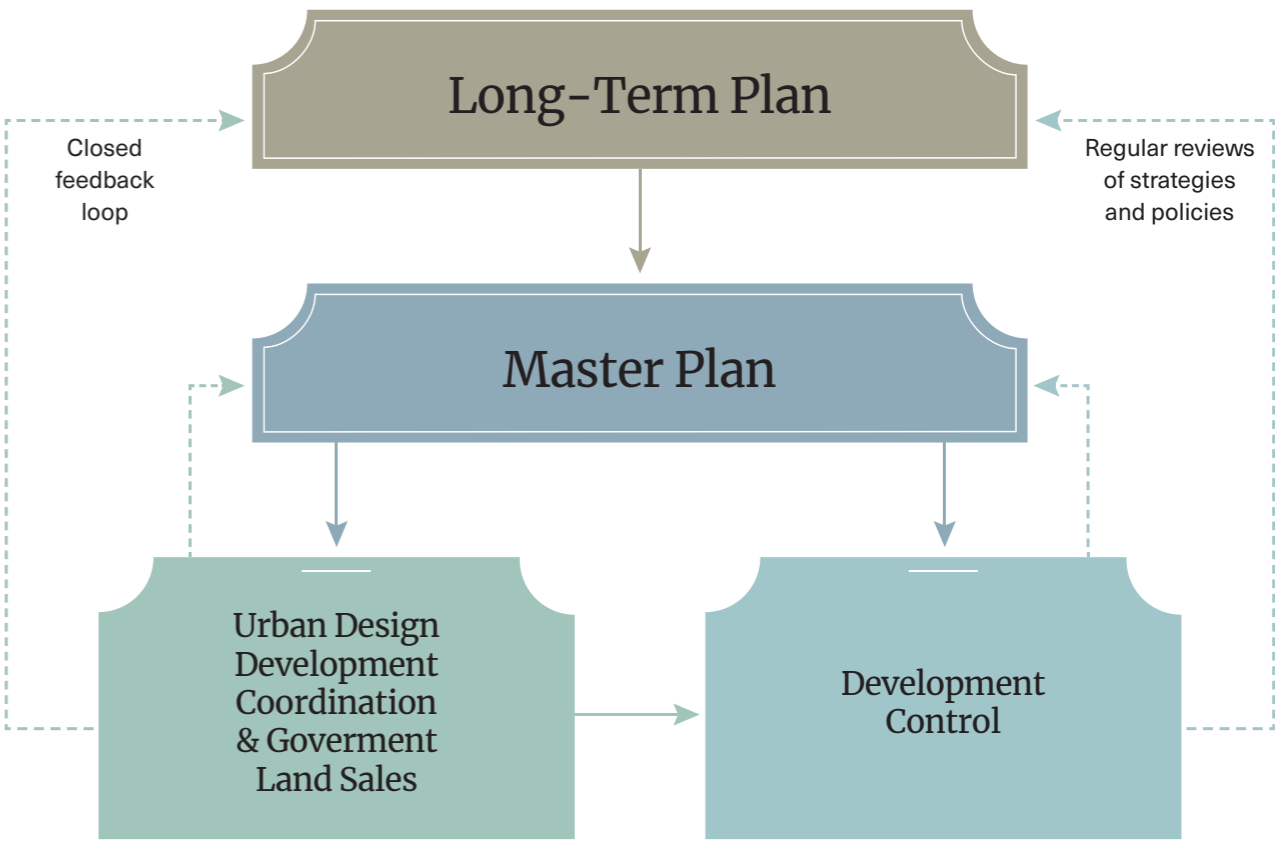
But as Singapore is not just a city but also a sovereign state, we must accommodate activities that are typically located outside a city like seaports and airports, water catchment areas, utilities such as waste treatment plants and power stations, as well as military training areas and bases.

Underpinning this reality and in preparing for unknowns today and tomorrow is our far-sighted and integrated planning approach. It focuses on both planning long-term, envisioning 40 to 50 years ahead, and remaining flexible in the immediate and medium terms. Visions and plans are realised over the years, working closely in partnership amongst government agencies, industry professionals and with communities.

“Planning is a very all-embracing subject. If you have a small family, husband, wife and let’s say one child, how do you plan for the child 20 years ahead? Now imagine that you are doing this for the future of an entire city and country, all with different needs, different capacities, different skills. What determines the best option for each of us?

While we cannot accurately predict the future, you do the best you can. You make decisions and projections based on past experiences, surveys and other insights and based on what you know today,” said Chua Peng Chye, in an interview with the Centre for Liveable Cities<sup>2</sup> for a 2017 Chinese book on the planning and development of Singapore that has recently been translated into English, *Singapore, Unlimited*.

## Singapore’s integrated planning process



He was one of Singapore's pioneer urban planners, who contributed to the first long-term plan, the 1971 Concept Plan.

### Singapore's first long-term plan

Prior to the 1971 Concept Plan, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Master Plan was used as the basis of planning and development control for the entire island. However, the 1958 Master Plan was viewed as insufficient in being able to keep pace with the rapid changes then and in planning ahead effectively.

Thus, a state and city planning project team was formed with staff from various government agencies and the help of

the United Nations Development Programme was sought to explore and develop a more comprehensive and long-range plan for Singapore.

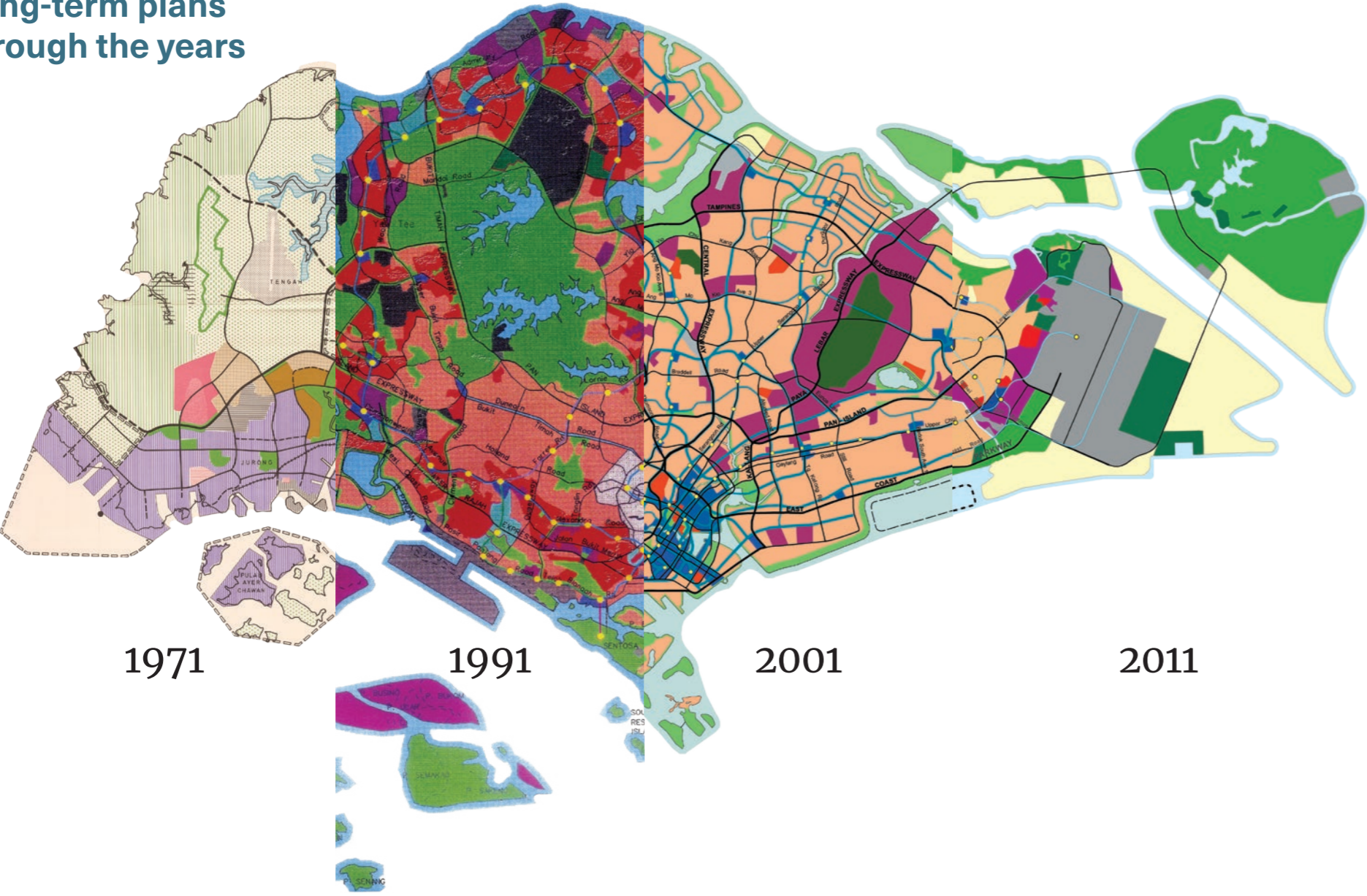
For four years, from 1968 to 1971, close to 100 experts, professionals and government officers carried out a range of surveys and studies and walked the ground in exploring possibilities and ideas for how land use and activities could be organised that best utilised land and yet offered flexibility for growth for the future.

13 ideas plans were simulated and tested in determining the fundamentals of where people could live and how people would move around the island. This was a breakthrough for

<sup>1</sup> The quotes are adapted from the book, *IPS-Nathan Lectures, Seeking a Better Future, Vol 5*, by Dr Cheong Koon Hean. Published by World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte Ltd (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Peng Chye, Chua, "Interview with CLC", Centre for Liveable Cities, Ministry of National Development, 12 November 2015, transcript, with permission from CLC. The response has been edited for clarity.

Long-term plans through the years



the team. “Being able to test different ideas and to understand traffic implications for each option was important.

From the testing, you can find the best plan to minimise the number of road proposals, the unnecessary extra distances to travel and to reduce the travel between home and work. We could not have done this earlier as we did not have the resources or the technology to do this,” said Peng Chye<sup>3</sup>, reflecting on the importance of considering options and alternatives.

The 1971 Concept Plan has a far-reaching impact even until today.

The most tangible expression of its approach, the Ring Plan, is still evident in Singapore’s physical environment today. It was a spatial strategy that linked residential, industrial, commercial, environmental and other developments across the island through a comprehensive transport network. New housing estates were envisioned to be located to the north, east and northwest of the city centre.

<sup>3</sup> Peng Chye, Chua, “Interview with CLC”, Centre for Liveable Cities, Ministry of National Development, 12 November 2015, transcript, with permission from CLC. The response has been edited for clarity.

Impact of long-term planning

The 1971 Concept Plan laid the foundation in planning ahead for fundamental key infrastructure such as the provision of expressways, MRT lines and the location of the international airport in Changi. Subsequent reviews of long-term plans built on earlier efforts, further enhancing the qualities of our city and our sense of belonging, introducing bold new possibilities over the years.

**Towns:** The 1971 Concept Plan envisioned where the new high-density satellite towns could be located. Subsequent reviews continued to expand on this; regional and sub-regional centres have also been developed around major towns for more jobs closer to homes.

**Green and blue:** The 1971 Concept Plan helped to retain the Central Catchment and envisioned a system of parks and open spaces; subsequent reviews extended and deepened green and blue spaces, making these more accessible and integrating with natural environments.

**Mobility:** Long-term plans envisioned a variety of mobility options critical to move people and goods across the island optimally and reviews over time continued to expand the mobility options, including walking and cycling.

**Heritage and identity:** The 1971 Concept Plan contributed to the conservation of historic districts and the 2001 Concept Plan Review deepened the focus in further shaping local built and natural identities.

**Industrial and business areas:** Long-term plans over time shaped the development of critical industrial and business areas such as the Jurong Industrial Estate, Jurong Island, Business Parks and other economic spaces.

**Key areas and infrastructure:** The 1991 Concept Plan laid the foundation for the development of the Marina Bay Financial Centre and envisioned more sustainable infrastructure such as the Deep Tunnel Sewerage System, a superhighway for used water management.

Under the Ring Plan, the development of the country would be concentrated in the southern swathe of Singapore between Jurong and Changi. High-density satellite towns would be located around the three sides of the Central Catchment Reserve, and an extensive transportation network of expressways and an urban rail system would connect these towns to commercial and industrial centres in various parts of the island.

The Concept Plan also introduced a frame of mind and way of thinking:

- 1Based on the fundamental premise that land is a scarce resource, the plan initiated and introduced a more systematic and comprehensive way of thinking about land use and how it could be optimised.
- 2It was the first blueprint to integrate land-use planning for a variety of major land uses, providing guidance on the allocation and development of land parcels for each use. It thus offered a more robust framework to organise and manage land uses, infrastructure and activities over time.
- 3It was viewed as never finished or completed. Instead, it was meant to be flexible, subject to continuous review.

E.E. Peacock, Senior Partner of Crooks, Mitchell, Peacock and Stewart, the United Nations consultants, reflected on the Concept Plan in 1971 as covered in *The Straits Times*: “It is human and it will always need careful updating, refining and management in order to keep it alive.”<sup>4</sup>

The long-term plans are reviewed regularly, roughly every 10 years (in 1991, 2001, 2011). While each review may consider different evolving challenges and changing needs, the key priorities remain the same: to cater for economic growth and a good quality of life for all, sustain and enhance a clean and green environment and to make the best use of our resources.

Balancing trade-offs

Decisions made in the past have catered for and preserved options for our current generation, providing

flexibility for us to explore new possibilities. And decisions made now for the future will have to also preserve options for future generations.

In making decisions at different points in time, we often need to make difficult decisions that may require trade-offs in the short term but will reap benefits in the longer term. One example was the decision to build the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit), which was not a clear decision then in weighing the various options and given the high cost. It took decades to realise but it has now become an essential part of our daily lives and landscape.

Importance of long-term planning

Read more on the Skyline Issue 14 online ([www.ura.gov.sg/skyline](http://www.ura.gov.sg/skyline)) on the value and impact of planning from two of Singapore’s pioneers, Chua Peng Chye and Joseph Yee, who shaped the first 1971 Concept Plan and the building of our transport network that we experience today.

Insights are taken from interview transcripts for the new book, *Singapore, Unlimited*, by the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC). It features 13 pioneers who significantly shaped our built modern Singapore. It is an adapted translation from CLC’s Chinese book published in 2017, 小红点,大格局.



More information about *Singapore Unlimited*



<sup>4</sup> Rewarding City and the Master Plan, *The Straits Times*, 30 April 1971, page 7.

Above | The front and back covers of the book by CLC and Studio Swell feature patterns inspired by the curving boundaries of areas and regions in the Master Plan 2019. These patterns, which are composed of a series of small circles, are also a play on Singapore as a “Little Red Dot”. Image credit: CLC.

“We need the courage to re-write stories we tell about ourselves, the imagination to reinvent our identities where needed. In charting our future, we need to tap on this courage and confidence in embracing changes and opportunities grounded in our shared values and destinies.”

– URA Chairman, Peter Ho

In carefully managing diverse and competing land use demands and priorities, it is not about keeping every tree and shrub in Singapore untouched or about building as many petro-chemical plants as we can. It is about considering all land use demands comprehensively so that potential trade-offs between uses can be evaluated holistically for continued economic growth and the provision of good quality living environments.

Shaping our future together

The long-term plan will be undergoing a review this year, in 2021, which marks 50 years since the first long-term plan in 1971 was formulated.

The world today is vastly different from decades ago. There are a lot more uncertainties, disruptions and a greater rate of change. With issues such as climate change, major geopolitical and economic shifts and changing demographics, with a rise of an ageing population, challenges and demands are far more complex and interconnected.

How can we plan in an age of rapid change and uncertainty?

“Certain fundamentals remain when it comes to urban planning—a uniquely complex problem for Singapore. Planners need to continue to take into account the challenge of packing in housing, green spaces, industrial land, land for transportation, military training areas and many other uses all within the confines of Singapore as a city-state,” shared URA Chairman, Peter Ho, in an earlier Skyline issue, on gearing up for the future.

He added: “What has constantly guided us well will continue to anchor our planning approach focused on being far-sighted, holistic and comprehensive. This allows us to prepare for the future yet be grounded in responding to surprises and adapting to changes along the way. What has evolved are deeper partnerships formed across

government, industry and the community to confront challenges of our time and develop urban solutions together. It is the ability to steer, to connect the dots not just locally but globally that will help us manage accelerated changes that are exponential and non-linear.

In embracing the future, we need to constantly develop new skill sets in futures thinking and learn to leverage technologies effectively for significant outcomes. Planners are already taking the lead in this space developing many critical tools to visualise and go deeper in understanding city dynamics to make more evidence-based decisions.”

Despite our small size and constraints, we have always dreamt big.

“We need the courage to re-write stories we tell about ourselves, the imagination to reinvent our identities where needed and the humility to change decisions when we go off course.

In charting our future, we need to tap on this courage and confidence in embracing changes and opportunities grounded in our shared values and destinies<sup>5</sup>,” said Peter on carrying on the spirit of optimism in shaping our future together.

Long-Term Plan Review 2021

The Long-Term Plan Review is now ongoing from July 2021 to 2022. Your views are important in charting our landscape and home. Join us in shaping our future together.



[go.gov.sg/ltp21](http://go.gov.sg/ltp21)

<sup>5</sup> The quotes are adapted from the article, “Planning for uncertainty”, featuring an interview with URA Chairman, Peter Ho, on planning for the future. It was published in Skyline Issue 7, 2017.

# Our future, our home

How can we shape our built environments to meet our changing lifestyles for the future?

Writer **Justin Zhuang**

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced many fundamentals and facets of this city that we love and treasure, but it has also opened a new lens to thinking about our relationships with our built environment and how we can shape it to meet our changing needs for the future.

From the office, to the neighbourhood and our natural environments, five experts and citizens reflect on evolving lifestyles and envision and hope for a more purposeful office, adaptable living spaces and a richer connection with our natural worlds and with each other.

## Going to the office with a greater purpose



Randy Hunt  
Image credit: Grab

*Randy J. Hunt is the Head of design for Grab, the Singapore-based technology company offering ride-hailing transport services, food delivery and payment solutions. He leads a team of designers, writers, engineers and researchers who create and manage Grab's app. He was living and working in New York before moving to Singapore in 2019. He is also a Jury Member of the 2020 President's Design Award Jury Panel.*

### How did the pandemic reshape the way you work?

**Randy:** Grab is a regional company with global operations so remote collaboration and working across time zones is quite normal for us. What changed during the pandemic was our total dependence on working remotely.

Unable to meet physically, the design team realised some of our research and prototyping work can be done faster and at a lower cost remotely.

When you work remotely with collaboration tools, more people can participate, and you can easily share the materials created as opposed to having to take a photo of what you physically draw on a whiteboard. Many of the tools support some form of documentation which feels more accurate and complete. It's also easier to invite someone along later.

The other thing is intentionality and mindset around how we meet. In the past, the default was to book a meeting room because everyone else was around and you assumed that was the best way of doing it. Now, we have a better understanding of which meeting is best done in-person and which is better done in a distributed way, or it doesn't matter so much.

### How do you think workplaces will evolve?

**Randy:** The pandemic made us experience what it was like to be fully remote and how much people wanted to—or not to—work from home. When they craved coming to the office, why was it? These insights informed the design of our upcoming headquarters, where we are taking on a much more task-oriented space planning approach for its interior design.

One is for more in-between spaces that allows for organic collaboration. It's not just choosing between conference rooms or a couch where people can gather with their laptops. It's semi-private spaces with a little more infrastructure for greater flexible use of space.

The other is simply a space to gather for human connection. Many of us don't need to be in the office to get our core work done, but we want to just bump into our colleagues in the hallway.



“The office is more like a place you desire to go to. It still creates the serendipitous and organic connections that are not driven by meetings or deadlines.”

So, the office is more like a place you desire to go to, even if that is now only a couple of days a week. It still creates the serendipitous and organic connections that are not driven by meetings or deadlines and allows people to feel they are a part of this together.

The challenge for now and the future is how can we continue to design office spaces in a way that can further complement people's changing lifestyles.

### With an increasing emphasis for on-the-go services in the city, what are some challenges policy makers and designers should pay closer attention to?

**Randy:** From the urban logistics perspective, a key challenge is how deliveries and movements getting into and out of developments and shopping malls can be made quickly and with great confidence.

What does getting into and out of developments look like? Are there special routes and entrances for those who are providing on-the-go services? Are there different characteristics in wayfinding or ways the developments may express their data on movements that may be helpful for service industry professionals like ourselves?

In a shopping mall context, it is designed for people to stay in the space. But when some of those things are on-demand, that is the inverse of the efficiency of space because people may want to get in and out as quickly as possible to get their stuff.

So, there are a lot of considerations for adapting existing environments and imagining new environments that can serve emerging needs. It is also not always about going into things but things coming to you.

### What do you love about Singapore and what do you miss about New York?

**Randy:** They are interrelated in a way. What I love here is how good the public services are. Things are highly predictable and reliable which lowers the collective anxiety and adds to the quality of life.

What I miss about a place like New York is the serendipity and unpredictability. The tension and friction that makes for interesting places. Not everything has a place in a way, and the jumbled-up spaces are where interesting stuff happens.

# Making our living spaces more adaptable

*William Ng is the Founder of Studio Wills + Architects, formed in 2013 and is focused on residential design. In 2018, he re-configured his 64-square metre three-room public housing flat in Serangoon (called Project #13), together with his colleague, Kho Keguang, to create clearer home and office spaces.*

## Why did you reconfigure your flat to have more distinct home and office spaces?

**William and Keguang:** The unit is located along a common corridor, so in a way, it lacks privacy. We wanted to do something about it because my great grandmother (William's) used to stay in a unit like this. When I visited her, her doors were completely open.

We designed a buffer zone to create a physical distance between the corridor and the unit. By doing that, you don't really have to shut your doors and draw your curtains which is happening now. It brings back the neighbourliness in a way. Our neighbours feel comfortable looking into our unit and so do we.

With the zone, we naturally created two entrances and the idea of two units came about. We didn't really start with programming the spaces but instead thought of their relationship as an open space and a cellular space. We suspect it is one of the reasons why the flat is so adaptable.

## How did the design of your flat become even more useful during the pandemic?

**William and Keguang:** One thing we didn't imagine to be so useful was the buffer zone. You can choose for deliveries to be contactless, so, they can leave the food or parcel in the foyer and they can still see us. Our neighbours have also left food there for us too.



The flat also offers distinct separated living and working spaces. Many may face challenges working from home because many of their spaces tend to be connected. You may have screaming kids while the parents go into a Zoom meeting. We have also observed many of our friends working from home on the dining table or in their bedroom where they can see their bed.

Being able to have a separation of spaces may be challenging to achieve for everyone. Houses or flats these days are designed with a single doorway, so you must trot through all the other spaces before you get to your office set-up at home.

When we reconfigured this flat, we created two separate spaces or units. These are built with the same materials but differ in the colour and proportion. Having this spatial difference is important because when you are in your living space, you don't want to keep thinking about work.

## What is one insight your flat offers in reflecting about the design of future living spaces?

**William:** If there is no need for the office set-up at home, I can continue to use all the spaces as my living area. When I get older, my sister can also come to live with me, and our paths need not cross. It's not that we don't get along.



If someone takes over, they can start a small business from home and turn one half of the flat into an office space again. In this sense, the flat becomes more flexible and you can keep adapting the uses.

## As the boundaries between work and home continue to blur, how might the design of such spaces in Singapore evolve?

**William and Keguang:** Adaptability has always been something very close to our hearts. For this slab block, you can come in from different directions unlike a lot of new flats where you come through a lift and go to the individual units. This changes the relationship of the circulation area to the unit and provides a lot of leeway to rethink typologies.

We've also always liked the idea of differentiation, duality and contrast. When we design houses or flats, we never just think

about a flat as just a flat or a house as just a house. We think about how we can create relationships between spaces.

At some point, the family composition will change. A building must be designed to accommodate this reality. The challenge is how can we adapt our buildings further to last for a longer time.

# Designing our neighbourhoods for mixed uses and social resilience

*Associate Professor Ho Kong Chong is an urban sociologist with the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore and the incoming Head of the Urban Studies Programme at Yale-NUS. He has researched and written about East and Southeast Asian cities including Singapore, delving into topics such as the neighbourhood, social cohesion, community life, heritage and the political economy of cities.*

## With people spending more time in their immediate neighbourhoods, how can we cater for a greater variety of mixed uses?

**Kong Chong:** When it comes to the built environment, once you build specific infrastructure, they are very hard to take down if they don't work.

But you want some flexibility because in the mid-to long-term, the profile of a neighbourhood changes. It could become younger, older or have more families or more singles. You want to be able to arrive at a configuration that serves the population living there.



We should think of neighbourhoods that can accommodate activities and services which are more portable and mobile. For instance, the National Library Board has a mobile library at community centres. This pop-up model can be expanded to a library on wheels which could visit more neighbourhoods. Facilities move to residents rather than residents move to facilities.

Imagine the town council or residents' committee working with the polyclinic, library or NTUC to offer mobile amenities that visit different precincts one day a week. It makes things even more convenient for residents and neighbourhood spaces can become more multifunctional. Sometimes it can be food and sometimes it's books, groceries, healthcare or other things. "Things on wheels" can become a regular weekly fixture and residents can look forward to these events and have a chance to meet.

The other thing is to look out for neighbourhood spaces to cater for more workspaces. We never really anticipated this but during this pandemic, we started to plan for spaces for students to do their homework away from home. So, the neighbourhood can become a third space by having work pods that mediate between home and school as well as work.

**What else should we focus on in shaping our neighbourhoods for the future?**

**Kong Chong:** As the economy changes in the longer term, we need to rethink the kinds of economic spaces to plan for in new towns. We already have light industries, but what else? Also, how do we think about logistics and its impact on congestion in the neighbourhood? Can we think of smaller-scale craft-based workshops? We have work from home now. Can we have work from neighbourhoods? Siting economic activities in neighbourhoods may also have other implications if such activities have the tendency to produce too much noise and different kinds of pollutants.

If the pandemic cycles become shorter and occur frequently, we must rethink the movement of residents in a neighbourhood too. Some students at the National University of Singapore's School of Architecture have as their assignments a redesign of the neighbourhood block so when certain facilities and access routes are shut down during a pandemic, there will still be opportunities to allow for a small group of families to meet and interact.

These are some ways in which we can rethink the movement of residents such that when some places are closed off, you don't lose the sociability of the neighbourhood.

Engineers can also work on improving air circulation in dense neighbourhood environments. As a tropical city with many sheltered areas, how do we control airflow to reduce the possibilities of infection?

**The pandemic has reinforced the importance of social resilience. How can our neighbourhoods help build stronger communities?**

**Kong Chong:** Building stronger communities will involve regular participation from different residential segments of the neighbourhood. The Sungmisan Village in Seoul<sup>1</sup> challenges us to rethink how the neighbourhood can help to build more resilient communities.

In this village, they have included a thrift shop where you can donate items and receive vouchers that can be used in other village businesses, such as a restaurant and a co-op supermarket.

They have created an alternative school where students of different ages study together and learning includes the history of the community.

Some families have also worked with architects to build their own multi-family apartments where they decide together the types of social spaces which they share.

All these features in Sungmisan work together to create strong participation and commitment of the residents to their neighbourhood.

Several years ago, I was doing some work that involved neighbourhood efforts in Tampines Central. One of the efforts was led by the Resident Committee (RC) group that saw to the storage and deployment of mobile furniture that could be used at void deck spaces. When there was an activity, the furniture was used and when there was no activity, the furniture was stored at the void deck.



On one of the days, I observed that a cooking class was conducted. It attracted a rare and elusive population, which are mothers with young children. They don't usually approach the RC for things but if you have cooking classes and the kids are interested, then moms are interested too. Another RC decided on a morning café where residents can come together for a quick drink and snacks before school or work. Some come after their morning exercise.

These are all innovative and simple ideas that are not too costly to do and is something we should continue to explore and experiment to increase participation.

**How might the role of the neighbourhood evolve in the future?**

**Kong Chong:** Fundamentals such as harmony, cohesiveness, resilience and community participation will become even more important as our city becomes more diverse.

One of the functions of the neighbourhood is to integrate diverse communities. This function remains relevant and is even more critical as the neighbourhood continues to be a place where we spend significant periods of time in.

Above and the next page at the top | Various spaces in Bukit Gombak, as taken by photographer Juan Chee, reflecting familiar and loved spaces in our neighbourhoods and Professor Ho (on the far right) and his research team (image credit: Ho Kong Chong).

<sup>1</sup> The Sungmisan Village is a small neighbourhood in the Mapo-gu district, in the north western part of Seoul. It was initiated by neighbours in the vicinity in 1994 to address an urgent urban challenge then and have over the years evolved into an alternative model of community living with cooperative businesses and activities developed that are shaped by the citizens themselves based on common shared values. Read more about this village in Professor Ho's book, *Neighbourhoods for the City in Pacific Asia* (University of Amsterdam Press, 2019).

It's a place that we relax and recharge. It's a place where we grow up in and have strong childhood memories. The neighbourhood is really an intimate and familiar extension of our home.

Building upon this idea of social mixing, we need to continue to ensure that the future designs of our neighbourhoods include a higher element of inclusiveness. The social elements of the future are determined in our schools and our neighbourhoods.

# Building a deeper connection with our natural worlds



Sarah Ichioka. Image credit: Desire Lines Pte Ltd.

*Sarah Ichioka is an Urbanist, Curator and Writer. She currently leads Desire Lines, a strategic consultancy for environmental, cultural, and social-impact organisations and initiatives. In previous roles, she has explored the intersections of cities, society and ecology within institutions of culture, policy and research. Her coming new book,*

*“Flourish”, co-authored with Michael Pawlyn, proposes regenerative design principles to restore balance to our world for future generations.*

[www.flourish-book.com](http://www.flourish-book.com)

## How should we think about our relationship with nature?

**Sarah:** Childhood exposure to nature is a key factor in conservation attitudes and behaviours in later life.

While I was growing up, many weeks spent at the beach, on mountains and in forests shaped my appreciation of how dependent we humans are upon the rest of nature, a fact that urban life can often obscure.

I see tremendous opportunities for hands-on outdoor education within our cities, from toddlers to adolescents.

I hope to see an explosion of “Forest Schools” and Outward Bound-style programmes that cultivate skills of stewardship, curiosity and interdependence with the natural world.

The success of such programmes will need to rely upon suitably large and ecologically complex spaces to host them.

**In a 2019 Archdaily article<sup>2</sup>, you suggested that cities should design modes of urban “vision” that enhance inter-species communication, allowing us to better see, appreciate and accommodate non-human lives unfolding around us. For example, could the office elevator remind us to pop up to the roof on our coffee break to watch the butterflies emerging from their chrysalises?**

**Sarah:** At the root of so many of our problems, from social inequality to human-induced ecological breakdown, is what Charles Eisenstein<sup>3</sup> calls ‘the story of separation’.

In this mental model, each individual person is separate from other humans, and humans are in turn separate from the rest of nature.

My plea for new forms of interspecies seeing grew from my observation that so many of us are busy building a brave new



world run by machines, in virtual spaces, on other planets even, without reconciling ourselves with the fundamental truth of our interdependence with the earthly systems that sustain us.

The pandemic has helped us to recognise how interconnected we all are.

**The pandemic has also contributed to a growing interest in urban farming and gardening. How can neighbourhoods in Singapore be better designed to accommodate them?**

**Sarah:** In order to support and scale these activities, my mind turns to software rather than hardware. For example, let's design neighbourhood-level soil rebuilding programmes that include composting of food “waste”, use of clippings and leaves for in situ mulching, and no-till planting techniques<sup>4</sup>.

Let's design a geo-location app that enables gardeners to signal when they're happy for passers-by to sample their

crops, or when they'd rather keep them for their own families. Let's design a community time banking system that enables youths to swap their labour for vegetable growing lessons from knowledgeable elders in their block. And so on.

**Having lived in Singapore since 2014, what are some of the things you love about your neighbourhood and being here?**

**Sarah:** Many of my neighbours live in multigenerational households, and I love observing the daily and weekly patterns of intergenerational living and socialising.

I also love the way that Singapore's water infrastructure is woven into its public spaces. My neighbourhood's network of stormwater canals are key arteries for human, and more-than-human activity. To spot an egret stalking his fish for breakfast on my walk to the train station never fails to delight.

<sup>2</sup> Archdaily article: <https://www.archdaily.com/920122/urban-refuges-and-interspecies-seeing-sarah-mineko-ichioka-for-the-shenzhen-biennale-uabb-2019>

<sup>3</sup> Charles Eisenstein is an American public speaker and author. His work covers a wide range of topics, including the history of human civilisation, economics, spirituality, and the ecology movement. According to Charles, global culture is immersed in a “story of separation”, and one of the main goals of his work is to present an alternative “story of interbeing”.

<sup>4</sup> Mulching refers to applying a layer of material to the surface of soil to conserve the soil moisture, improve its fertility and health and to reduce weed growth. No-till planting or no-till farming is the practice of planting crops without tilling the soil.

# Re-exploring our own backyards and supporting diverse communities



Cai Yinzhou is the Founder of the social enterprise, Citizen Adventures, that raises awareness on social issues and provides support for more minority communities. He also co-founded the COVID-19 Migrant Support Coalition in April 2020, mobilising volunteers across different groups to provide support for migrant workers.

[www.citizenadventures.com](http://www.citizenadventures.com)

## What is Citizen Adventures all about?

**Yinzhou:** I started it in 2013 as a social experiment to see how we can design experiences for Singaporeans to better understand our neighbourhoods as social ecosystems and our interconnectedness as individuals relative to these systems, and the issues within.

One example is the Backalley Barbers that we started. We encountered a migrant work friend who did not cut his hair for four months to pay off his father’s medical bills. So, I started learning to cut hair by watching YouTube videos in order to be able to give him a free haircut.

From one to three barbers and eventually to a team of 60 volunteer barbers, Backalley Barbers has given more than 5,000 haircuts (as of 2021). Beyond migrant workers, Backalley Barbers also cuts residents’ hair free-of-charge in nursing homes and low-income communities on a weekly basis.

## What other initiatives have you pursued?

**Yinzhou:** Since 2014, we have been conducting walking tours in Geylang. As a life-long resident of Geylang, I am interested to see how we can further appreciate our diverse and vibrant neighbourhoods through the eyes of many local communities.

Our walking tours are different from others as they also share more about the relationships between communities and the social dynamics within neighbourhoods.

For instance, we involve migrant workers who are my friends in our tours. They would share openly who they are and their journey to Singapore and it would leave lasting impressions on visitors.

## How did the pandemic impact on your activities?

**Yinzhou:** When COVID-19 hit, our tours had to be stopped. We realised the migrant worker community had many needs and we were able to do something.

We tapped on our network of volunteers to raise funds, procure supplies and deliver them to the foreign workers’ dormitories. We recognised that collaboration with the dormitories was necessary because they are the primary caregivers.

## How has Citizen Adventures since resumed its activities?

**Yinzhou:** Previously, we had two walking tours in Geylang and Dakota. In August 2020, we developed two others. One is kayaking at Marina Reservoir to learn about environmental sustainability. The other is a yacht tour covering development and food security off the coast of Pulau Ubin where we took visitors to visit the coastal area to understand kelongs and how they operate.



We started these because when COVID-19 hit, we realised how vulnerable our food supplies were. Living in an urban city, we may not understand what’s out there and we may not ask enough questions such as how we get our seafood.

## Travel restrictions have made citizens seek adventures in their own backyards. How might tourism in Singapore evolve?

**Yinzhou:** What I find meaningful about travel is learning about the way of life of others and the wisdom of the land. On our tours, we call these “non-Googleable”—things you cannot Google.

We see local tourism as a way of re-reading and deepening our ideas of history in Singapore. There are many facets



of our success story that can be told differently from the perspective of different types of communities, for example, by a samsui woman or a construction worker.

The curation of Singapore’s history is something we have done very well to appeal to the mass market, but today, we are hearing new sides of our history and it’s a great time to explore these rich narratives.

Even in schools, we can encourage self-discovery such as getting students to interview their grandparents. These are important ways of appreciating the context of our history towards one’s identity.

Above | Cai Yinzhou providing a haircut for a migrant worker (image on the left page at the top) and other activities carried out by Citizen Adventures (images above) prior to COVID-19. Image credits: Citizen Adventures.

# A future by design

If these creatives have their way, the Singapore of tomorrow will be defined by care, human connection and a little bit of magic.

Writer **Low Shi Ping**

How can the Marvel Universe shape the liveability and lovability of Singapore?

At first glance, the two are as different as day and night, but listen to Welby Altidor and it is easy to be convinced that there is causality.

Welby is the Group Chief Creative Officer at Cityneon Holdings, an entertainment company that creates large-scale, immersive experiences for people to enjoy.

Of note are the licensing rights it owns to stage exhibitions with partners such as Marvel, The Walt Disney Company and Hasbro.

For instance, it created the Marvel Avengers S.T.A.T.I.O.N<sup>1</sup>, where visitors get to interact with popular characters like Iron Man and Thor, as they “train” to become a S.T.A.T.I.O.N. agent.

“One of the most important elements of a thriving city is to have citizens who are inspired, and at the heart of that is a connection with beauty,” explains Welby.

“We create spaces where people can experience a little bit of beauty and be inspired by it in one way or another.”

While the definition of beauty is broad and subjective, he feels that fundamentally, it promotes harmony, inclusion and care.



These thoughts are echoed too by Lekshmy Parameswaran, Co-Founder of service design practice, The Care Lab.

“An element that is important for me to feel connected to a city is that there are spaces and ways to nurture the soul,” she shares.

Based in Barcelona, Spain, she is unfortunately too far from any Marvel Avengers S.T.A.T.I.O.N. exhibition but substitutes it with day trips to the nearby natural reserves and beaches.

“It is an incredible experience to be able to find environments within the city to escape the noise and connect with nature.”

## Nurturing caring neighbourhoods

It does not stop there; Lekshmy points towards the need to have socially sustainable urban planning and design to increase a city’s liveability and lovability.

Just over five years ago, Barcelona pioneered the concept of a “Superblock”; an urban mobility strategy creating city blocks around which traffic was rerouted and green spaces were included as a means of reducing air and noise pollution, while increasing life expectancy and cleanliness.

A collaborator of The Care Lab, the city council’s Social Rights team also started to integrate social services and create the notion of a “Social Superblock” to enable care teams to deliver support more effectively within a neighbourhood.

“This idea of fair access to services is something that I think is very important. When you see that a city cares for everyone, you want to care back, so it builds a kind of solidarity that I think leads to liveability and lovability.”

On a more tangible note, this means, for example, having childcare or primary healthcare facilities within a 15-minute walkable radius.

It is also about nurturing relationships between people, which is an aspect she feels needs more attention, especially since there are gaps to be plugged.

Lekshmy illustrates how Radars<sup>2</sup>, a community-initiated programme promoted by the city council to target unwanted loneliness among the elderly, is a good example.

“What it does is it looks, on a neighbourhood scale, at the different touch points and services that already exist; in Singapore, it would be the kopitiam that the elderly visit daily.

<sup>1</sup> The Avengers S.T.A.T.I.O.N (Scientific Training and Tactical Intelligence Operative Network) was an immersive travelling attraction that was presented at the Singapore Science Centre from 2016 to 2017, taking visitors on an action-filled journey into the Marvel cinematic universe.

<sup>2</sup> Radars is a community-driven programme promoted by the Barcelona City Council from 2008 together with networks that consist of neighbours, shops, pharmacies and other groups within neighbourhoods to reduce the risks of isolation and social exclusion among the elderly and to make neighbourhoods a safe and friendly space for them.

Above | Situated within the Marvel Avengers S.T.A.T.I.O.N. experience, the Hall of Armor showcases the many variations of the iconic Iron Man suit. Image credit: Cityneon.



“The project then engages shop owners and people working in these places to become radars or early detectors of changes in elderly routines.

“They are trained to raise a red flag and connect to social care services and a team of local neighbourhood volunteers who take on this role of befriending.”

She reveals that such social innovation projects are being developed in Jurong in Singapore, with the involvement of the Ministry of Health Office for Healthcare Transformation, whom she hosted some years ago in Barcelona to introduce them to Radars and the Superblocks strategy.

“It is a participatory process; it’s about listening and learning what each community actually is ready and wanting to do and letting them drive the design process. Community engagement as a mechanism of creating solutions is essential.”

In fact, this is not the only connection that The Care Lab has to Singapore.

It is currently working on a new model of palliative care with HCA Hospice Care, the Lien Foundation and Lekker Architects; where HCA’s day-care services would be launched in a new day hospice—Oasis@Outram—located within the new Outram Community Hospital<sup>3</sup>.

“It really is a first for Singapore and uplifts what is available in terms of care for people at the end of life,” she explains.

“It repositions that whole experience from being something that we dread to think we, or any of our loved ones, may end up in, to one that nurtures growth, even at the end of life.”

<sup>3</sup> The Outram Community Hospital is located beside the Singapore General Hospital, with 500 of its beds earmarked for general rehabilitation and sub-acute patients. The remaining is allocated to palliative care patients. The hospital focus on optimising patients’ recovery through rehabilitation, even as they receive inpatient care. This is integrated into the structure of the hospital, with rooms for practising rehabilitative exercises joined to the wards, and facilities that help with developing patients’ abilities.

Above | This image is a conceptualisation of an original Big Lab IP of Cityneon, showcasing Big Lab’s vision of a future garden. The team behind this vision is led by Welby Altidor. Image credit: Cityneon.

### Designing magical moments

There are other ways to demonstrate care for people too.

Even as he designs exhibition experiences, Welby is mindful that he leads a team that needs to be moved and inspired too.

“How do you create amazing work, amazingly, is really fundamental to the way I try to work every day,” he explains.

To him, everything starts with the fundamental notion of caring for people around him; as a creative leader at work, it is about bringing out his team’s abilities and potential to be their best.

His primary goal, at the moment, is to develop Big Lab, the innovation driver at CityNeon he established, focused on shaping the future of immersive entertainment.

To do this, he has been tasked to identify and build a community of creative collaborators from around the world.

Together, they strive towards creating experiences that are highly personalised, memorable, interactive and, most importantly, collectively fun.

“We are really aware that people are looking to accumulate, share and spend social capital on all kinds of platforms.

“In a way, our own entertainment platforms are essentially their broadcast place, allowing people to accumulate some of that social capital.”

Welby feels that the outlook for his industry is an increase in the need for “proximity entertainment”, or opportunities for visitors to drop in somewhere near home to a different world to escape.

When they do, he hopes they feel that they are entering a space where they are treated “extraordinarily well” and “feel good”.



Even as they immerse in the technology and storytelling, he wants them to feel like walls are coming down.

“We think that from a social standpoint, there is an incredible value in creating a few moments of magic, fun and entertainment that bring people just a little bit closer together.”

### Designing a better normal

Yet, as the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, that closeness cannot be manifested physically.

It points to how a new normal is needed, and designers should play an important role in defining that, especially when it comes to urban design.

Above | From the top, a visioning workshop by The Care Lab with HCA Hospice Care’s frontline and management staff, volunteer programme partners and Lekker Architects to envision the new Oasis@Outram service (image credit: The Care Lab/fuellor, with permission from Lien Foundation and HCA Hospice Care; photo was taken prior to COVID-19) and a strategic planning toolkit co-created in 2015 by The Care Lab with Apex Harmony Lodge in support of their person-centred model of dementia care (image credit: The Care Lab/fuellor, with permission from Apex Harmony Lodge).

This means shifting the focus to reflection and re-examining purpose. “I know everybody is navel gazing but this idea of finding what it is that you want to contribute is the question that we have to ask.

“There is a tonne of work to be done. Systems have fallen apart that have to be rebuilt. We must have a clear sense of who we are and what we want to achieve,” says Lekshmy.

Part of that reinvention is to reframe the thought process around how to serve people and communities.

Lekshmy adds: “It is about designing solutions and strategies, whether they be toolkits or campaigns, interiors or service experiences, policies or programmes that have those qualities that reflect the social value that we collectively need to bring forth.”

Chan Soo Khian, Founding Principal and Design Director of multidisciplinary firm SCDA feels that architects are also adept at doing this.

“We have the ability to understand and synthesise larger issues, bring them together and offer advice on how to solve them.”

He offers some practical tips by way of generous landscaping in buildings. “I would like to see more sky terraces and the allowance for bigger balconies so Singapore can truly be a green tropical city in the sky.”

He is desirous of a more differentiated sense of neighbourhood within the country, which would celebrate cultural diversity and promote a stronger identity of Singapore’s melting pot heritage.

Welby agrees that going “back to normal” is not an option but instead, is preoccupied with discovering what is a “better normal”.

“How do you bring more beauty to the world?” he asks.

“How do we go beyond being mesmerised by the technicality of technology?

“How do we bring that mindset of innovation towards experiences that are including more and caring for more people?”

He wonders out loud about being inspired to design an event that brings together the beauty of music and the power of video to showcase the unique elements of Singapore within a public space in a safe manner.

“Often in my trade, I say constraint is the mother of creativity. I want to bring people together from different horizons, break open the box and create an unexpected spark,” he muses.

“What if we were to bring music in the middle of a housing estate and suddenly its visual expression could take over and offer a moment of magic to a large number of people?”

And don’t be surprised if in the middle of it all, Iron Man or Thor pops up, because we know our city could do with some tender loving superhero care too.

#### About the President\*s Design Award

*Welby Altidor, Lekshmy Parameswaran and Chan Soo Khian are part of the President\*s Design Award’s 2020 Jury Panel. The award is Singapore’s highest honour for designers and designs across all disciplines and it is administered by the DesignSingapore Council and URA. Lekshmy together with The Care Lab Co-founder, László Herczeg and the National Council of Social Service Singapore, was also awarded the Design of the Year in 2018 for their design strategies to transform the future of caregiving in Singapore.*

[pda.designsingapore.org](http://pda.designsingapore.org)

## To gather

With scarcer resources and the rise of sharing activities, how are people re-negotiating their relationships with urban spaces and each other?

Writer **Justin Zhuang**

Public seating in Singapore’s hawker centre has become barriers because of social distancing measures. While the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged how we share spaces in the city, sharing will persist.

“As a matter of fact, it will challenge us in discovering and designing new ways to share,” said Dr Ye Zhang and Dr Jeffrey Chan. They and other designers and citizens are delving deeper into the different ways in which we share spaces in our city, with one another and with nature.

These efforts are presented at the 17th Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition Singapore Pavilion from May to September 2021, which feature 16 built and speculative projects, based on the theme of “to-gather: the architecture of relationships”.

We catch up with some of them.

## Both Sides, Now

*It is sometimes said, with both candour and a tinge of macabre humour, that the two main events which bring families and friends together, are weddings and funerals. A humanised city must give dignity to death and dying. Despite its significance, conversations around care, grief, and dying are often considered taboo in Singapore. Both Sides, Now is*



*a project that uses artistic processes to normalise end-of-life conversations in public spaces.*

*Both Sides, Now is a multidisciplinary arts-based community engagement project that seek to create end-of-life friendly communities. Presented by Lien Foundation, Ang Chin Moh Foundation, Drama Box and ArtsWok Collaborative since 2013, the project has created and installed work with various diverse communities in Singapore on living well and leaving well.*

[www.bothsidesnow.sg](http://www.bothsidesnow.sg)

Kok Heng Leun, Artistic Director of Drama Box and Ngiam Su-Lin, Executive Director of ArtsWok Collaborative reflect on how important the subject is and how physical spaces can influence how people are coming together to support each other.

**End-of-life matters are highly personal. Why is it important for communities and the whole city to manage this together?**

**Su-Lin:** Dying is a very relational act and we are all part of communities. So, how can we create a space to feel like we’re not alone in this? Community engagement allows us to learn from one another, and the arts offers a space to practise having these difficult conversations.



**Heng Leun:** Cities tend to only talk about how to live well. I think it must also learn to embrace dying in order to respect the human being. That's why it is important that it's not just individuals, but the whole city must recognise the importance of living and dying with dignity. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown why we must acknowledge dying in a very real way.

**What is the role of the urban environment in bringing people together?**

**Su-Lin:** Going into residential estates was key for us to get to the heart of communities in Singapore. By bringing end-of-life out into the open and literally to people's doorsteps, we made the issue visible and safe to engage with. Death and dying is part of the everyday and we wanted to remind people that it is natural.

**Heng Leun:** In Chong Pang, they had readily available spaces that were well used for communal

gatherings, so the residents were already comfortable with one another when we came in. Thus, we focused on facilitating discussions on end-of-life issues and creating opportunities for the residents to talk about it with their family members back at home.

Telok Blangah did not have readily available spaces that residents naturally gathered around. This made it difficult for us to talk to them at first. We began engaging the residents by asking them how to improve the communal spaces, and even convinced one to open her house for neighbours to be part of a cooking programme.

**How does your project reflect the theme of "to gather"?**

**Su-Lin:** Heng Leun created a participatory theatre piece, "Last Dance", where audiences could respond to a personal story about a mother and son working through the loss of their father. There were many

**"It says a lot when a stranger gives you access to their space. It's no longer an art project, but about building relations. Isn't urban planning about organising space so that sociality can happen?"**

layers of gathering: the community sat around a public performance space to watch the show; they could participate at various points to unpack what happened; while other audiences listened to what they had to say.

There were also those residents who simply sat outside the performance space and watched throughout. So, it was a space designed for many layers of people to gather.

**Heng Leun:** Our work in Telok Blangah moved from the communal to the personal with one of the elderly residents. At first, she did not want to interact with me, but over time, she opened up and now even welcomes me to her house when I visit.

It says a lot when a stranger gives you access to their space. It's no longer an art project, but about building relations. Isn't urban planning about organising space so that sociality can happen?

**What are some principles to consider when designing spaces for people to gather?**

**Su Lin:** People want to create their own presence in a community. It can be temporary or relationships in space, but we need space to do that. It's not about creating comfort like having tables and seats, but more consideration for social engagement to happen.

**Heng Leun:** Many public spaces with high footfall have been turned into commercial spaces. We need to rethink this because it takes away social interactions.

We also need space for things to be slightly messier and trust people to organise their spaces. We created a mural in Telok Blangah for our project and were initially worried it would be torn down after we left. Today, it is still intact. We also left a huge table at the void deck and some of the residents have taken up the responsibility to clean and use it.



# Architecture of Sharing Culture

*In a sharing culture, individuals participate in sustained practices of togetherness characterised by the co-creation, co-management, co-ownership and co-consumption of resources. Crucial to this sharing process is the recognition of architectural spaces as a shareable asset and an enabler for more effective sharing activities.*

*The NUS-Tsinghua Design Research Initiative for Sharing Cities seeks to bring together scholars, students, experts and professionals to study emerging space-sharing practices and explore new dedicated typologies of shared spaces in the city. It is a collaboration between the Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore (NUS) and the School of Architecture, Tsinghua University, in partnership with DP Architects.*

[www.nt-drisc.org](http://www.nt-drisc.org)



Dr Ye Zhang and Dr Jeffrey Chan reflect on considerations and implications for architects and designers in creating spaces that motivate sharing and build stronger communities.

Dr Zhang is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Architecture, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore and Dr Chan is an Assistant Professor with the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences cluster, Singapore University of Technology and Design.

## What are “sharing cities”?

**Ye and Jeffrey:** The city is a geographical configuration where human activities congregate. The activities are highly differentiated because of the division of labour and specialisation, but they also overlap in a great number of ways. Their juxtapositions generate new interactions, negotiations, co-operations, and collaborations—the richness that enables sharing activities and practices.

Sharing does not always naturally occur even when many different and overlapping enterprises are pooled in one place. To share effectively or more efficiently, we need to plan or design for an enabling infrastructure. For example, tool-hobbyists may want to share a collection of tools with others near them, but how would they reach out to these prospective people?

By using digital platforms or other means to organise the sharing, the good could then foster new social relations and new social capital, which are among the key values of “sharing cities”.

## The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our understanding of sharing. How might we rethink the design of “sharing cities”?

**Ye and Jeffrey:** It is the central concern of our recently published book, *Sharing by Design*<sup>1</sup>. We argue that humans

are the only species that can synchronously design and share at the same time—what American psychologist, Michael Tomasello, refers to as “shared intentionality”<sup>2</sup>. We not only share resources, but also ideas that can improve how we share them. When present configurations no longer work—for instance, because of the pandemic—we can modify and reshape them to enable sharing in more effective, efficient, ethical and beautiful ways.

The pandemic has revoked some of our most deeply cherished ways of sharing space. In our hawker centres, “social distancing” has turned what used to be a seat into a barrier-in-place.

The pandemic is challenging existing paradigms of sharing space, but it does not, and cannot, revoke sharing. In fact, it will challenge us in discovering and designing new ways to share.

## What are some principles to consider when designing spaces for people to gather?

**Ye and Jeffrey:** Our book discusses a handful, one of which is that architects and designers must go beyond the design of cartesian, geometric and material space by envisioning architecture as one of the many components of a far larger system.

To paraphrase architect and activist Stavros Stavrides’ remarks, without changing the spirit of his words: while inventive architectural solutions can contribute to the creation of sharing configurations (for example, co-working or co-living spaces), architecture alone cannot guarantee that these spaces continue to motivate sharing.

What features and conditions can be designed to ensure that a shared space can aspire to a sharing practice? In our book, we recall the concept of the “guarantor” by American philosopher and systems scientist C.W. Churchman (1913 - 2004)<sup>3</sup>. A guarantor aims to guarantee the performance of a system in the direction envisioned by the designer.

In the context of sharing, a possible guarantor is to situate the sharing configuration in a larger system of other reinforcing



relations and programmes. For instance, if given a brief to design a co-working space, the architect may counter-propose to add a makerspace to create a self-reinforcing ecology that can in turn attract other sharing activities.

The architect may also become involved in the design of the governance and operation of this newly formed community. Regardless of the form the guarantor may take, it must augment the architecture to go beyond its materiality towards the performance of some collective good.

<sup>1</sup> The book, *Sharing by Design*, by authors Jeffrey Kok and Ye Zhang, published in March 2020, is a guidebook that connects sharing with design. With urgent environmental issues and scarce urban resources, sharing could be the new approach to sustainability. The book explores considerations, principles and ideas for designers in purposefully designing sharing systems in the urban environment.

<sup>2</sup> Shared intentionality enables humans to share goals and other mental states with others and at the same time coordinate their individual roles and perspectives within acts of collaboration and communication. It is this shared intentionality and the cognitive infrastructure supporting it that may be the crucial feature that makes humans unique.

<sup>3</sup> C.W. Churchman pioneered the “systems approach” in 1968 as a way of thinking about the ways in which human organisations work, change and interact with their environments. It is interdisciplinary and an approach to problem solving and decision-making.

# Pulau Ubin Lives

*Pulau Ubin is an offshore island that sits northeast of mainland Singapore. The settlements on Pulau Ubin are called kampung, a term which comes from the Malay verb berkampung (coming together).*

*The houses on this island have functioned as gathering spaces and actively facilitate dialogue across diverse sections of society. The opportunity for Dr Imran bin Tajudeen to document the architecture of some of the Malay houses on Pulau Ubin in 2018<sup>4</sup> has reaffirmed the value of such houses, not just as a historical and architectural record but for encouraging communities to gather in shaping the island’s cultural landscape.*

*Dr Imran is a Visiting Senior Fellow at the Department of Malay Studies and Department of Communications and New Media, National University of Singapore. He researches on architectural and urban histories in Singapore and Southeast Asia.*

[singapurastories.com/2020/04/studio-do](https://singapurastories.com/2020/04/studio-do)

Dr Imran reflects on how these kampung houses are integral to the island’s cultural history and why those that survive continue to serve as living community spaces today and into the future.

## Why is Pulau Ubin a “socio-cultural green vernacular”?

**Imran:** Pulau Ubin’s significance is more than just a space for adventure and greenery. It is also a cultural landscape, encompassing a variety of examples of timber architecture, communities and place histories. Although we nowadays talk about the island as a nature park, it has historically had a thriving population—at its peak, there were thousands of residents—who lived in kampung houses.

Many of these homes were abandoned or demolished in the 1990s. Today, a small group of residents still live in what was once a large Malay village in the island’s eastern part.

## How have the surviving kampung houses been turned into community spaces?

**Imran:** Each house has its own history. Two of the houses we studied host activities that are part and parcel of why people visit Pulau Ubin today. Since 2003, house 760D owned by Madam Kamariah Abdullah hosts cooking classes that use the surrounding herbs and plants.

After taking over the house when her grandmother passed away, she teamed up with her sister and some friends to run these classes to financially sustain its upkeep.

Another house, 488A, is owned by Ahmad Kassim, who runs a drinks stall, hosts regular school and tour group activities, and is one of the last residents with knowledge of constructing traditional vernacular houses. He is also familiar with different types of wood as well as the island’s trees. His is the kind of embodied forms of knowledge found in a community that would be lost if not properly documented.

## Why is restoring the kampung houses important to Pulau Ubin’s community?

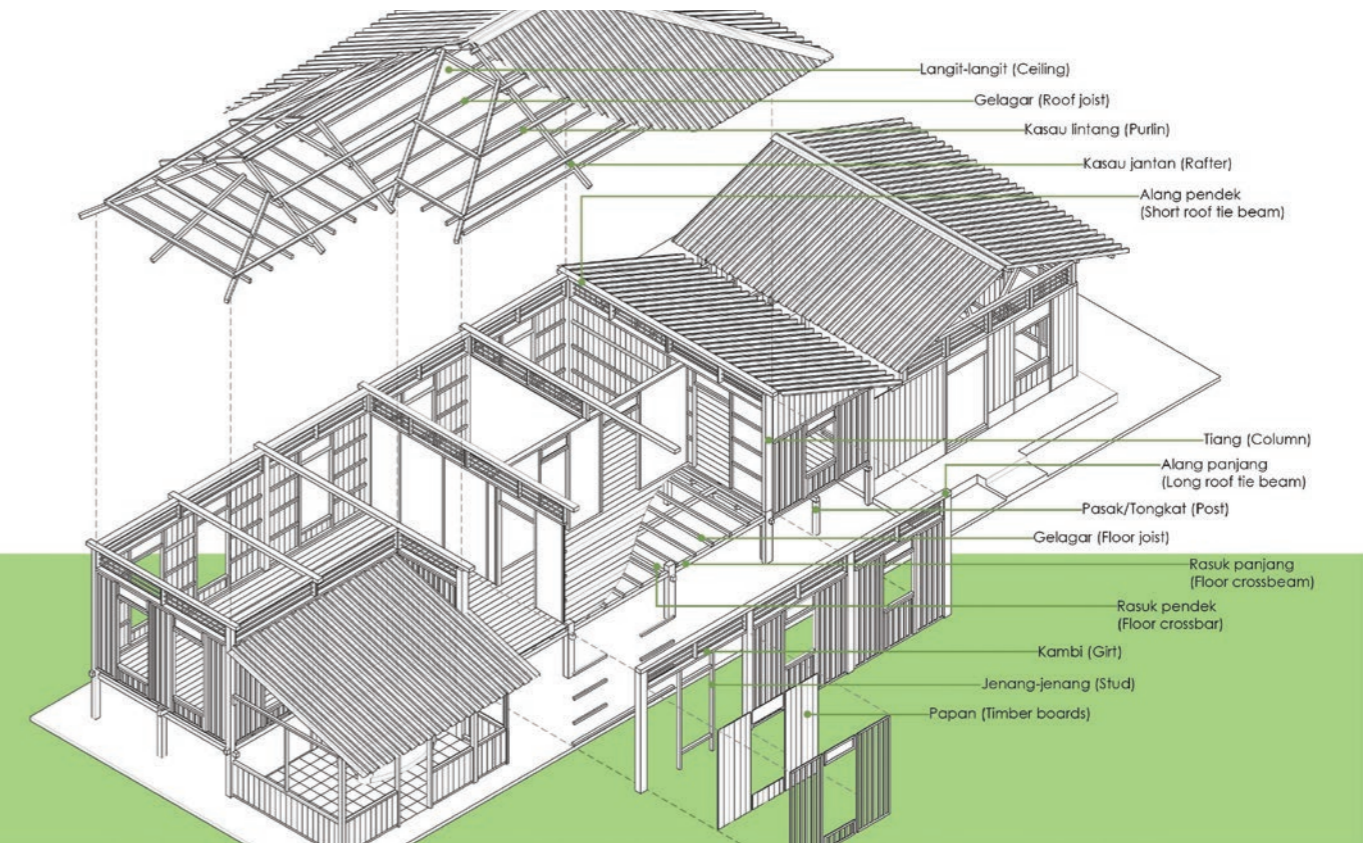
**Imran:** Cultural landscapes are interconnected and all encompassing. You cannot divorce a place setting from community memories, so there is no point in talking about Pulau Ubin’s cultural history without these houses.

The future of Pulau Ubin will probably see a combination of residential and retreat settings. It brings to mind offshore



<sup>4</sup> In 2017, the National Parks Board initiated concerted efforts together with the Friends of Ubin Network to restore five kampung houses on Pulau Ubin for community use in the short-term in continuing to shape the communities and heritage on the island, keeping its idyllic charm for future generations.

Above | Dr Imran (in white shirt) and his team, together with Madam Kamariah Abdullah at the 760D kampung house. Image credit: Studio DO: PULAU.



islands elsewhere, such as Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard, both in Massachusetts, United States, where old wooden houses and shops form part of the reason to visit.

Pulau Ubin contains reminders and living entities of a settlement that you cannot find on the main island. It becomes like a historical record, an architectural record and even a landscape record.

## How does your project reflect the theme of “to gather”?

**Imran:** Since the late 1970s, the notion of “kampung spirit” has been used to stand for an old sense of community and contrast with a perceived lack of sociality in modern public housing in Singapore. The way we invoke it suggests people are nostalgic about how residential communities gathered together more easily in the past.

One reason people living in a kampung were closer knit is because you gathered as a community out of your own volition. In many cases, you build your own houses, so the sense of ownership is stronger; some of the streets are even named after one’s grandparents.

## Singapore Pavilion at Venice Biennale

*These projects are part of the 16 built and speculative projects that are presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition Singapore Pavilion, based on the theme of “To gather: the architecture of relationships”. These projects explore how designers, academics, artists, citizens and others are forging new spatial contracts and paradigms on what it means to be living well.*

*The Venice Biennale is a global platform that presents emerging and new architectural ideas and projects from around the world. Singapore has been participating in the Biennale since 2004. The 2021 event will take place from 22 May to 21 November 2021.*

[to-gather.sg](https://to-gather.sg)

Above | A drawing of the 760D kampung house as part of Dr Imran’s documentation. Image credit: Studio DO: PULAU.

# Shaping age-friendly neighbourhoods

The seminal study on age-friendly neighbourhoods inspires us to go deeper into understanding how diverse our neighbourhoods and communities are and to reflect on how we want to shape our future neighbourhoods.

Writer **Serene Tng**

“Our neighbourhoods and the people who live in each of them are very diverse, including our seniors,” said Dr Belinda Yuen.

This seems like an obvious insight. But when you unpack this, it has significant implications for how we plan and design our neighbourhoods for the future.

Dr Belinda Yuen is the Research Director and Programme Lead of the Lee Li Ming Programme in Ageing Urbanism at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University Technology and Design (SUTD).

From 2017 to 2019, she led a seminal study<sup>1</sup> that brought together researchers, architects and policy makers from health and planning & design fields, delving deeper into understanding the influence and impact of the built environment on seniors’ social, physical and mental health, especially those who are aged 55 and above.

What was unique about the study was its use of mixed methodologies, that included research, prototyping of design interventions and evaluation.

This provided more evidence-based insights and considerations in shaping age-friendly neighbourhoods now and for the future.

## Designing for diversities

“The study reaffirmed our understanding that the senior population is not homogenous. In fact, they are a heterogenous group in terms of their age, sociocultural characteristics, physical and cognitive abilities. Neighbourhoods also vary in their infrastructure, types of physical environments and amenities.

This is an important reminder for us. We need to be more sensitive in considering such diversities in greater detail, which will help us better adapt neighbourhood plans and designs.

It means that we must take the time to understand our seniors’ different needs, their motivations, their specific challenges and preferences in accessing and experiencing their neighbourhoods and to engage them actively when planning and shaping neighbourhood spaces,” Belinda added.

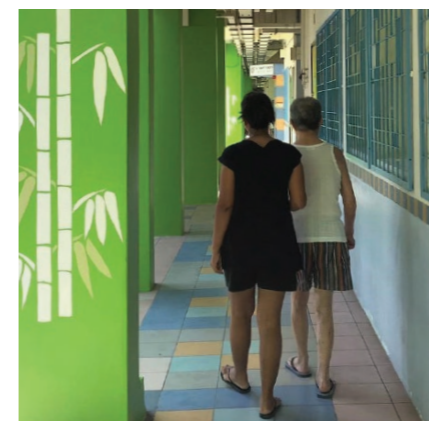
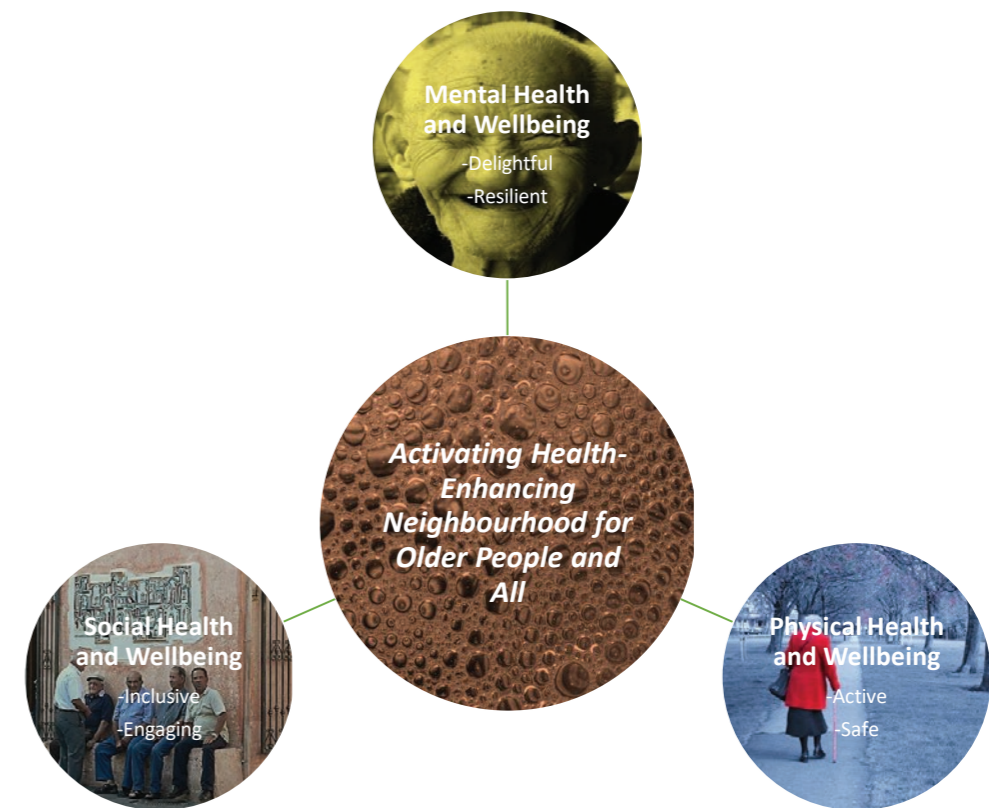
As part of the study, three architectural firms built upon the research and developed design strategies for three different neighbourhoods, Hong Kah North, MacPherson and Toa Payoh West, each with diverse communities and spaces.

Temporary design interventions were tested and tailored for each to see how these could improve the seniors’ well-being and health.

They were proposed based on carrying out in-depth studies of the neighbourhoods’ attributes and spaces and engaging the senior residents to understand their challenges and needs.

## Walking around confidently

For Hong Kah North, one of the concerns raised was the seniors’ fear of falling, as highlighted through a survey and focus group discussions. “In spite of this



fear, we noticed many preferred taking a less safe route along the main road as compared to through the flats.

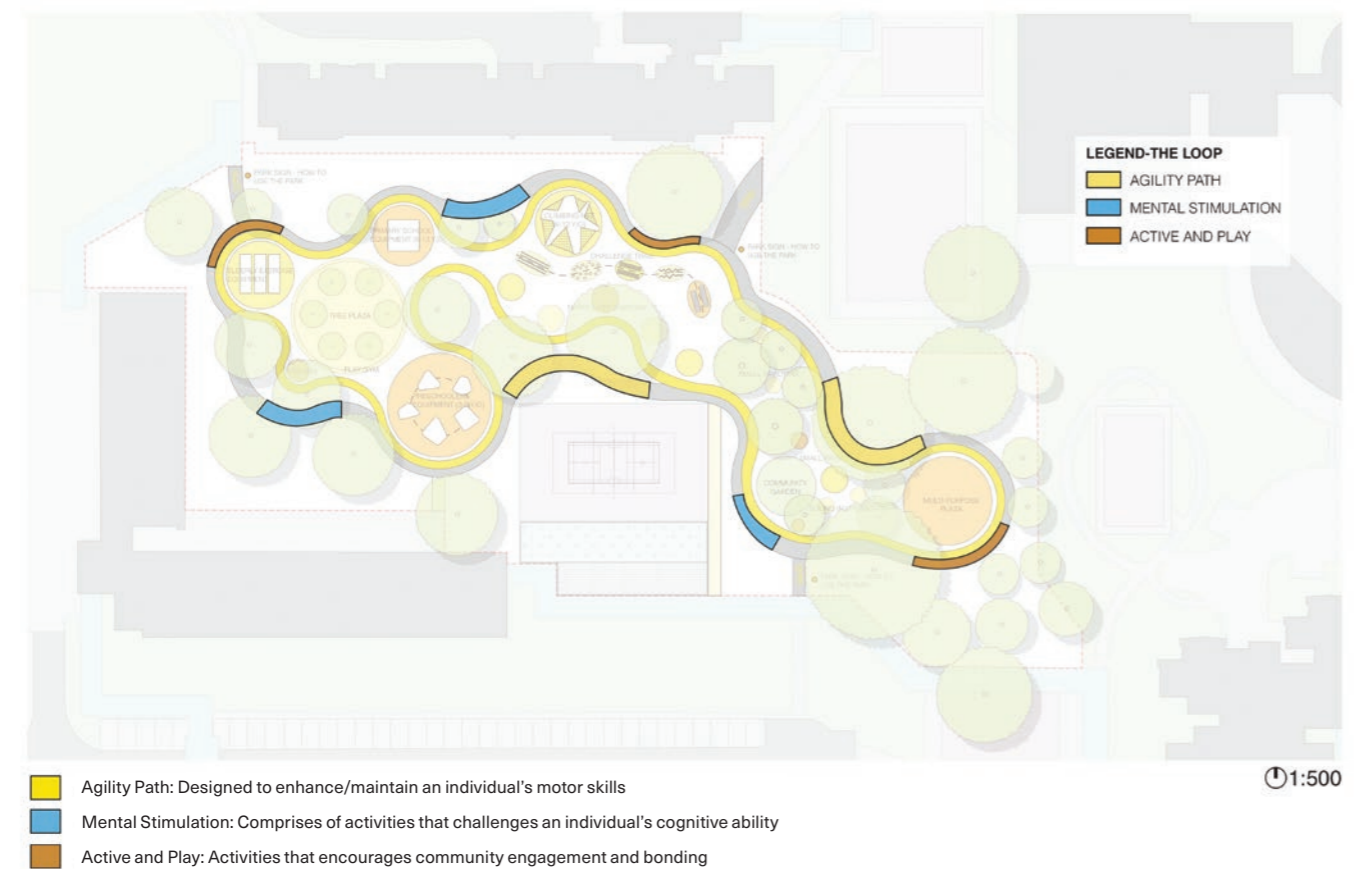
“This was because the pathways along the void deck spaces looked monotonous to them. After a while, they may not be sure of where they were,” shared Cerina Niken Rani Anggraini, Vice President from CPG Consultants (CPG), who focused on this neighbourhood with her team.

CPG worked with the Town Council to create temporary distinct motifs along the pillars of the sheltered walkway and void deck spaces at Block 338, Bukit Batok Street 34.

“The motifs offered an added level of interest moving from point A to B, which was sheltered and connected. The senior residents who were visually impaired also found the motifs helpful in enabling them to walk along the paths more confidently,” said CPG architect, Doreen Koh.

Above | From the top, all dimensions of seniors’ health and wellbeing that the study’s planning and design guidelines seek to enhance for age-friendly neighbourhoods and the temporary wayfinding prototype at Block 338, Bukit Batok Street 34, by CPG as part of the study. Image credits: Innovative Planning & Design of Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods study.

<sup>1</sup> The study, “Innovative Planning & Design of Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Singapore” is led by SUTD and is joined by Geriatric Education & Research Institute, CPG Consultants, Lekker Architects, and Tierra Design Studio. The government agency collaborators are URA, Housing & Development Board, Building & Construction Authority, Agency for Integrated Care and the Ministry of Health. The research is supported by the Singapore Ministry of National Development (MND) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) under the Land and Liveability National Innovation Challenge (L2NIC) Research Programme Award No. L2NICTDFI-2017-2. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the interviewees, and do not reflect the views of MND and NRF, as well as URA, other agencies and research partners involved in the study.



Above | The various play opportunities and routes proposed for the Toa Payoh West neighbourhood by Tierra Design as part of the study and the temporary mobile kopitiam at two void decks at 54 and 56 Pipit Road in the Macpherson estate by Lekker Architects. Image credits: Tierra Design and Lekker Architects.

“Being able to walk safely and with ease around the neighbourhood is critical for seniors as it gives them a greater sense of independence. This mobility is important in not just accessing nearby essential amenities but other spaces as well,” Cerina added.

### Coming out to play

On accessing a variety of spaces, Belinda shared: “Many of our public housing estates have done well in providing a range of open spaces, parks, gardens, offering opportunities for senior residents to engage in recreational activities.

This encourages them to come out more often and can help to reduce their sense of isolation. If they walk more, it can also improve their health. There is the added opportunity to socially interact. So, there is the social health too.”

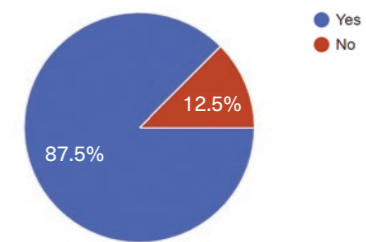
In making the environment more engaging for seniors, Tierra Design Studio proposed a series of simple exercises and activities that could be designed and encouraged along daily routes, to create more opportunities for seniors, children and everyone else to have fun and a sense of play.

Such exercises and activities are also helpful to keep minds and senses stimulated, especially for those with dementia and cognitive impairment, where Toa Payoh West had a higher percentage of older persons with these.

In addition, Tierra identified a possible route between Braddell MRT station and the wet market. Beyond improving the walkability of this route, the concept of creating destination points of interest along the way would add enjoyment for the neighbourhood's seniors. En route for example, a nearby park could potentially be turned into a new focal point for the community and serve as an additional fitness and exercise area.

### Creating a sense of place

Tierra also envisioned the addition of greenery to enhance the environment of the neighbourhood such as through the planting of unique tree



*I am more willing to leave my home if a mobile kopitiam like this came to the void deck below where I live.*

species. This could further contribute to the neighbourhood's identity.

Adding on, Ong Ker-Shing, Co-Founder of Lekker Architects believes that as neighbourhoods evolve, there should be a conscious effort to retain recognisable landmarks in neighbourhoods.

“They don't have to be architectural wonders. It could be just an old block that is always there and is tall enough that you can see it,” she suggested. Such landmarks that reflect old memories and the spirit of the place serve as not just identity markers but are likely cues that seniors may use in navigating spaces around them.

### Fostering social interactions

For the MacPherson neighbourhood that she and her team focused on, they were interested in further understanding the more intangible aspect of physical spaces.

“What really came out quite strongly in our interactions with the senior residents was how they paid close attention to social cues, encounters and interactions when they accessed physical spaces,” she shared.

“They were conscious about how they interact with younger people and others in the neighbourhood. Something as simple as a seating arrangement could hinder or foster interactions.

Above | A large proportion of survey respondents felt that the mobile kopitiams would draw them out of their homes. This is based on a survey done by Lekker Architects during the temporary set-up of the kopitiams. Most of the survey respondents were Macpherson residents and were aged 50 years and above. Image credit: Lekker Architects.

For example, some of the seniors shared with us that when they sat at a round table, they wondered if a younger person may feel comfortable sitting with them. They didn't want to feel like an imposition. Perhaps this perspective may be specific to this generation of older persons. Everyone interprets and respond to their social settings and physical spaces differently."

Given that Macpherson had a higher proportion of seniors living alone and could feel more isolated if they did not feel like they could interact comfortably within their estate, Lekker Architects created a physical mobile kopitiam to see if this could facilitate meaningful interactions.

They placed these at two locations for a few weekends. Volunteers and the community came forward to manage these. "The kopitiam culture took over. The culture of sharing tables with strangers prevailed. If there was coffee or tea, an older person felt more comfortable sharing the table with a young family because there was something to do. It broke the ice," said Ker-Shing.

"More than just having a place to relax in or having coffee and tea with others, the kopitiam offered something familiar but was also a bit unexpected. And it was mobile. If something was there every day, it would not be something to look forward to."

It's for everyone

So, where do we go from here?

The study's proposed planning and design considerations and an environmental audit toolkit developed could be used to build on current efforts to further understand the diversities in our neighbourhoods and prioritise potential areas for improvements.

Since the completion of the study, there has already been interest from Town Councils and others to use the toolkit to understand their neighbourhoods.

Belinda emphasised that the guidelines were not meant to be prescriptive as these cannot cater for every possible situation.

"What we want to do is to create an awareness of the diversities in neighbourhoods. We provide the guiding

principles and toolkit for anyone, from architect to community, to use these to understand the contexts of their neighbourhoods and people, to develop suitable solutions."

The study's insights and considerations were also not just catered for the senior population. "What works for older people also works for the younger people and children.

At some point or other, we may suffer physical limitations. You may sprain your ankle, for example. So, when we talk about age-friendly neighbourhoods, it is not just for older persons, it is for everybody," Belinda added.

Connecting people and spaces

In shaping age-friendly neighbourhoods now and in the future, one conclusion from the study stands out: it is important to understand and reflect the voice and needs of seniors and others in the community.

"We need to put in the time and effort to listen to the seniors and other stakeholders' concerns, to really get to understand the rationale and source of their preferences or frustrations so that solutions can really address their needs," said Doreen.

For Ker-Shing, she saw the value of community buy-in and participation: "The community leaders and volunteers who helped to manage the kopitiam really made a difference in creating the right atmosphere and connecting people. Some of them already knew the seniors and could greet them by their names."

Going further on how more can embrace and "own" spaces in our neighbourhoods, Ker-Shing said: "We like to label spaces. This is an exercise corner. That is a playground. Kids will be in the playground for two minutes and then they would go to the exercise corner.

People don't necessarily respond to labelled spaces. It is a mindset thing. It is about allowing people to use things how they want versus how we think they should use. It is about designing for a certain amount of 'misuse', to allow for different interpretations."

Franklin Po, Co-Founder of Tierra added: "It's not about introducing fancy, shiny new things. We need to find more opportunities to curate and design spaces that are already highly accessible. Those that are along daily routes for

Environmental audit toolkit

Desired elements of age-friendly neighbourhood



Purpose

- To assess age-friendliness of an outdoor space
- To identify age-friendly elements in your neighbourhood
- To identify areas that are not age-friendly enough
- To provide good practice examples

Who can use it

- A resident**  
*One can do an audit on one's own or in small groups*
- Built environment professional such as an architect or urban planner**  
*Built environment professionals can choose to do an audit with older adults or on their own*
- Town Council and township management professional**  
*Town council members can gather a small group of older adults and walk with them while asking the questions*

example. We need to think about how to connect people to spaces and vice versa.

In Toa Payoh West, we saw many little gardens that were adopted by people. Some of them put up handwritten signs that said, 'please don't steal my plants.' This is what I truly enjoy about neighbourhoods. As designers, we need to remember these little things and find ways to create spaces that can be spontaneously adopted by the community."

Continuing the efforts

Other recent related efforts are dementia-friendly guidelines for neighbourhoods developed by Dr Belinda Yuen and colleagues with the Agency for Integrated Care while Lekker Architects, Lien Foundation and Lanzavecchia + Wai Design Studio have published an IKEA-inspired manual, "Hack Care" to create dementia-friendly homes. CPG Consultants and Tierra Design Studio are also involved in developing senior friendly and ageing-in-place masterplans and designs for local neighbourhoods and for those abroad.

Above | A brief overview of the environmental audit toolkit proposed in the study. Image credit: Innovative Planning & Design of Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods study.

# Loving our city

What makes us love our city even more? Six Singaporeans share their passion for building communities. To them, creating a more loveable city begins with reconnecting with ourselves.

Writer **Dawn Lim**

## Connect to what we value

### What do you do at The Tender Gardener?

**Olivia:** I try to connect people with nature through stories, personal experiences, workshops, etc. I want to show people that interacting with nature is an intrinsic part of being human.

I believe a lot of our problems begin with a disconnection with ourselves. Being closer to nature can help us with that reconnection. Hopefully, that helps us form more empathetic relationships outside of ourselves: with people, animals and the environment.

### Tell us about your neighbourhood.

**Olivia:** I live near the Potong Pasir area. I like its sleepy vibe and the big green space nearby. A lot of my neighbours have been living there for a while.

Sometimes, I would take a 20-minute walk home and look at everyone's gardens. However, I can see the face of the neighbourhood changing quickly recently and the presence of new malls and condominiums can be quite cold.



### What kinds of community spaces would you like to see more of?

**Olivia:** I think the concept of a community centre is good, but I feel that it needs to go a bit further so that it's a place where people would want to gather. I think it's good that they have workshops and things like that, but perhaps they can look more into enhancing the comfort and aesthetics of their spaces for people to linger longer.

The spaces at the Tzu Chi Recycling Centre are very calm and welcoming and we should have more of such safe and therapeutic spaces. They have some small shops including a bookshop there and there is an area where people can sit down and do their work.

### What about a more endearing and loveable city?

**Olivia:** For me, it must be quiet, with lots of green spaces. You must be able to hear birds and creatures, not only traffic.

For some years, I used to live in Northern New South Wales, in a rural part known as the Byron Bay hinterland, in Australia. All I had there was a tiny house, but it didn't matter because all the good things were happening outside. With that said, it could never beat the home that I grew up in.

More importantly, I feel that we can be more liveable if we turn inwards towards our own community and be connected to what we really value. I think that in turn will enable us to care more about other people around us and the city in general.

### The Tender Gardener

*Olivia Choong started The Tender Gardener blog to connect city dwellers with nature. Through the contents on this platform, she hopes to inspire people to embrace a life of plants and the biodiversity that comes with it. She also works at the Edible Garden City Funan twice a week.*

[www.tendergardener.com](http://www.tendergardener.com)

## Be inclusive

### What motivated you to start "The Codette Project"?

**Nurul:** I've spent most of my adult life overseas. So, when I came back to Singapore, I didn't have a community or a space that I felt comfortable in. A lack of representation and diversity in narratives of success had also always been obvious to me.

So, in some ways, I created The Codette Project because I wanted this community that was committed to representation and diversity, and now I have it.

### Tell us about your hackathon events.

**Liyana:** We ran Singapore's first all-women hackathon in 2018 and again in 2019 to provide



a welcoming space for women to share their ideas and solve problems together. While most hackathons are intensive, technical, overnight events, which can be intimidating, we didn't think it had to be that way.

**Nurul:** We designed the hackathons based on the needs of women from diverse backgrounds and made sure the events ended at 8pm to accommodate those who were carers.

Many of the women played multiple roles in their day-to-day lives as students, professionals, mothers, and carers. So, attending our hackathon was very freeing because everything was provided for, from childcare, a breastfeeding room, prayer spaces and halal as well as vegetarian food.

**What do you need to create a welcoming space for your community?**

**Amilin:** Catering to women and minorities does not require a whole new building or an entirely new kind of space. It is about an attitude—to provide spaces that support diversity and inclusiveness. The central question we should be asking people is: “What do you need to make this space yours? What are your needs?”

For all the spaces that we have used for our activities, we were always allowed to create a space catered to our needs and that's important. It's important for people to feel like there's a wide variety of viewpoints and representations in every space.

**What about a more endearing and loveable city?**

**Atikah:** It is very important to get the people who live in those spaces to be active in creating the spaces that they want to live in. That's what I think will create a loveable city. It is when you have a vested interest in it. There's been a lot of such effort to involve the community in creating the spaces they want. We need to continue to build on these efforts.

The integrated complexes such as Our Tampines Hub or Heartbeat@Bedok are examples with great spaces because these have a good mix of different uses for the space. There are facilities, there's a running track, there's free movie screenings. These are good examples of using spaces effectively and making people feel welcome.

**Nurul:** A loveable city should have less inequality. I think it's only possible to love a city that commits to being more equal and more just to everyone who lives there. And that should be reflected in every experience they have with the city. It's who you see, where you live, what you eat.

**Liyana:** When I was growing up, my grandparents took care of me. Every time we go to the market called Pasar Bulat (“round market”) in Tampines, my grandfather would prop me up on the parapet and he would stand there talking to other uncles while my grandmother went around looking for stuff. Over time, the men got to know each other because they're always sitting there waiting for their wives. This is the kind of atmosphere and community I love to see. A loveable city is one that is inclusive and non-judgmental, where people extend themselves forward to say hello, to reach out to somebody that doesn't look like you.

### **The Codette Project**

*Nurul Jihadah Hussain started The Codette Project in 2015 to empower minority/Muslim women by providing access to social and economic opportunities, opportunities in the tech industry, and a safe and welcoming space to explore technology. Liyana Fauzi, Amillin Hussain, and Atikah Razak are part of the Codette team. They are also in the technology, built environment and communications fields.*

[www.thecodetteproject.com](http://www.thecodetteproject.com)

## Grow relationships

**What does Common Ground do?**

**Shihui:** Common Ground is a civic centre dedicated to helping citizens, practitioners and organisations develop their capacity for bridging divides and building communities to collaborate on solutions to community or societal issues together.

It is a place for community to hone their skills in initiating and navigating conversations across diverse perspectives. We are a campus, community

and consultancy—the organisations gathered here each have their specific areas of focus. This facilitates the exchange of community expertise and resources.

We are constantly experimenting with new forms of engagement and community-building. We welcome groups and individuals who share the common purpose of building a resilient and cohesive society to reach out to us and other members of Common Ground.

### What is one significant project you are working on?

**Shihui:** We are currently working on a multi-year exploration of mental health and wellness. The work began in 2020 during the Circuit Breaker<sup>1</sup> when many youths came to one of our resident partners, Campus PSY, to share their mental health concerns.

We supported Campus PSY and brought in another resident partner, Studio Dojo, a trans-disciplinary strategy, design and innovation practice, and worked on a digital dialogue series where young people who are experiencing different kinds of mental health challenges during the pandemic period could gather and learn from one another.

Given the experiences that were shared, this led to a deeper study where we spoke with different youths and young adults, on their experiences discovering and managing their mental health conditions in Singapore.

18 UX designers volunteered to analyse the data gathered. What was meaningful was how the design community lent their professional skill sets to explore this community issue that is relevant to all of us. When we shared the work with some sector stakeholders, they found new and surprising insights.

We are following up with a project on mental health and wellness at workplaces this year, in 2021.



“What makes a city loveable is understanding the relationships embedded within our communities. Inherently, all human beings want to feel loved and accepted.”

### What kind of community are you fostering?

**Shihui:** We bring stakeholders with different causes and skill sets together, as in the case of us bringing together the mental health and design communities.

Our work here is about creating a community experience where various partners in the community and social sector can work together from an alignment of vision, built upon trust and friendship, which allows for deeper collaborations.

### What will make our city more endearing and loveable?

**Shihui:** It would be very hard to have the bandwidth to think about what makes our city loveable if it was not already very liveable.

I say this from a point of gratitude and understanding of the journey that we took to make our city liveable, because that was an incredibly difficult journey. And now, we still have an exciting journey ahead of us to make our city even more loveable.

Going beyond the built environment and physical spaces, what makes a city loveable is understanding the relationships embedded within our communities, our connections and interdependencies. Inherently, all human beings want to feel loved and accepted.

It's important to think about the care that we take with the people around us.

### How are you rediscovering our city again?

**Shihui:** Recently, I've been going on long walks with friends around Singapore.

Walking is a way of discovering the city at a slower pace. With the gentler pace, there's more time to look at our surroundings and to see the magic in the mundane. It's a bit like, if we were only working partners, we will just meet and talk about the work. But the time that is needed to grow the relationship needs to be set aside intentionally.

And it's the same—I need to take the time to know more about my city and come to discover what I love about this city, what is the meaning that it has for me.

### The Thought Collective

*Khee Shihui is the Programme Director at Common Ground, which is part of the larger Thought Collective group that seeks to build up Singapore's social and emotional capital through its various groups of social enterprises.*

[www.thethoughtcollective.com.sg](http://www.thethoughtcollective.com.sg)

<sup>1</sup> Circuit Breaker was the nationwide stay-at-home order enacted as a preventive measure by the Government of Singapore from 7 April to 1 June 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

# The little things

Photographers Juan and Boon Pin re-explore their neighbourhoods and reflect on what they love about their hoods.

## Juan Chan on Bukit Gombak

**What is it about your neighbourhood that you love?**

**Juan:** I've lived here for more than 30 years. I love how everything can be found easily within 10 minutes of walking. The market is well-stocked, and the food centres are fantastic.

**What are some of the things that you are noticing more of in your neighbourhood?**

**Juan:** I appreciate a lot of the hidden and not so hidden corners that allow residents to come together. Some residents are so comfortable with their neighbourhood that they can literally come out, sit anywhere or even set up mini gardens right at the foot of their blocks.

**What are some features that are important for a good living environment?**

**Juan:** Having open spaces help since the heartland can be quite dense. I greatly appreciate the small resident's corner and spaces built into our living areas. Also, the greenery all around greatly helps with making the environment much more liveable.

**How about the softer or more intangible qualities?**

**Juan:** I think having people who bring other people together truly makes a place more human. Take for example, the resident's garden. I know that they have a leader who helps manage the place, share knowledge and bring people together.



*Juan Chan initially started photography to capture memories during his overseas travels. But as he continues to capture buildings and people over time, he fell in love with the energy and drama of street photography through his many walks around Singapore.*

[www.juanchanphotography.com](http://www.juanchanphotography.com)



# Chee Boon Pin on Bendemeer

**What is it about your neighbourhood that you love?**

**Boon Pin:** I've been living in the Bendemeer area for the past four years. This neighbourhood sits at the edge of the city centre. It feels like I have the best of both worlds.

I can quickly access the city for its vibrant energy and yet enjoy the tranquillity of a quiet

neighbourhood. Kallang River and Whampoa River and the Pelton Canal run through my neighbourhood, offering great environments where I can unwind after work or hang out during the weekends.

**What is one thing that makes you feel more connected to your area?**

**Boon Pin:** I often patronise a stall at the Upper Boon Keng Market & Food Centre for its Wanton Mee. It never fails to amaze me how the owner seems to know everybody and knows their order. I only just need to signal to them with my finger, making a number one sign and off I go to find a table and my noodles will be served to me.



Through small chit chats later, I found out that their parents have been operating the stall since the start of the market from around 1976. Now, they have taken over the stall from their parents and have seen many of their customers grow up over the years. Not only do they serve the delicious noodles that I like, I also feel like I am part of the community just like their other regular customers.

**What are some features that you believe are fundamental for a good living environment?**

**Boon Pin:** A good living environment should be safe and clean. It should also be accessible and have spaces for us to unwind.



*Chee Boon Pin initially started photography to document his various hobbies or travels. Over time, he has grown to love telling stories through his lens. He loves to capture poignant moments in time and what it means to be human and elements that contribute to our lives.*

*[cheebp.com](http://cheebp.com)*

# Long-term planning through the years

A look at highlights of long-term plans from 1971 to 2011.



A simplified version of the 1971 Concept Plan

## 1971

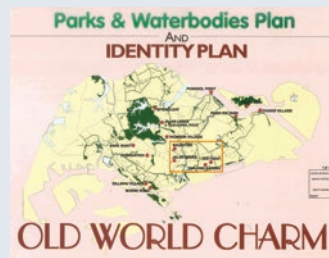
The first long-term plan in 1971 proposed a “Ring Plan” that allocated housing, industrial and transport networks in optimal ways, addressing pressing housing and economic challenges.



The 1991 Concept Plan envisioned more commercial centres outside the city centre to provide jobs closer to home.

## 1991

The 1991 Concept Plan focused on enhancing the quality of life, creating a tropical city of excellence. It envisioned more commercial hubs outside the city centre such as Jurong Lake District and Tampines, more interconnected green and blue spaces and laid the foundation for Marina Bay Financial Centre and more sustainable infrastructure.



## 2001

The 2001 Concept Plan focused on working towards shaping a thriving world class city with rich character and diversity. A key focus was on deepening efforts in protecting and enhancing local and natural heritage and identities. It also envisioned greater flexibility for industrial and business land uses and needs.

## 2011

The 2011 Concept Plan<sup>1</sup> deepened visions and efforts for live, work and play, making greater provisions for more diversified growth, more integrated green and blue spaces and a wider range of mobility networks, with more walking and cycling options. A wider range of homes and sustainable towns were also planned, with more inclusive spaces.



The 2011 Concept Plan envisioned more commercial centres, parks and park connector networks for the future across the island.



Above | Image credits: MND Land Use Plan 2013 Report.

<sup>1</sup> The review of the Concept Plan from 2011 to 2013 led to the release of the Land Use Plan 2013 by the Ministry of National Development (MND).