

Final Batch of Jalan Besar Shophouses Conserved

By Heng Chan Yeng

More of the famous old world charm of Jalan Besar has been retained with an additional 51 shophouses and two Art Deco structures at Tyrwhitt Road conserved. This wraps up URA's conservation plan for the area, adding to the 466 buildings already conserved in Jalan Besar since 25 October 1991.

Jalan Besar or 'Wide Road' in Malay, is well known for its diverse mix of architecture, history and culture. It is one of the first roads to be built in Singapore. The shophouses and structures were selected for their rich variety of architectural styles and designs, from the Transitional, Late and Art Deco style of the early 1900s to the Modern style shophouses of the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the Late style shophouses boast of highly decorated and ornamented facades with fine artisan workmanship, while the Modern style shophouses have cleaner geometric lines and well-proportioned fronts. Among the landmark buildings conserved are the Thai Sun Pawnshop and Lee Clan Association, which are over 50 years old.

The Conservation Advisory Panel¹ which deliberated on these additional buildings for conservation felt that this final batch will extend the old world charm, contribute significantly to the streetscape and strengthen the unique character of Jalan Besar. They added that "the conservation of the two gateway structures and the two-storey building at Tyrwhitt Road will serve as a reminder of the past warehouse / store sheds district in the locality."



The Thai Sun Pawnshop present (above) and past (below). This landmark building has been conserved.

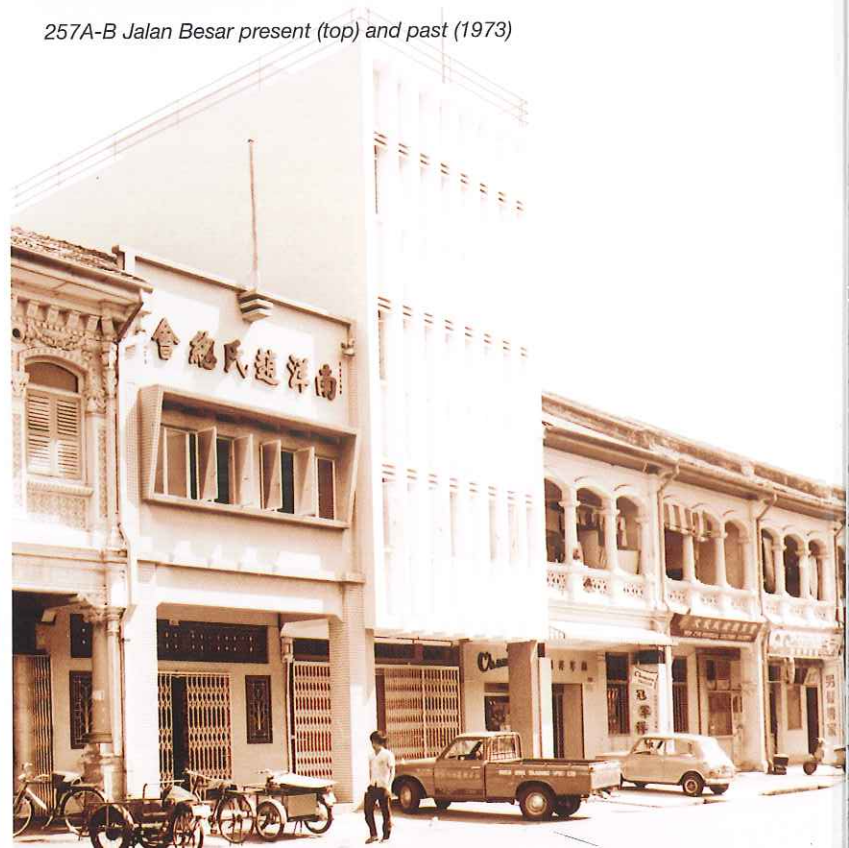
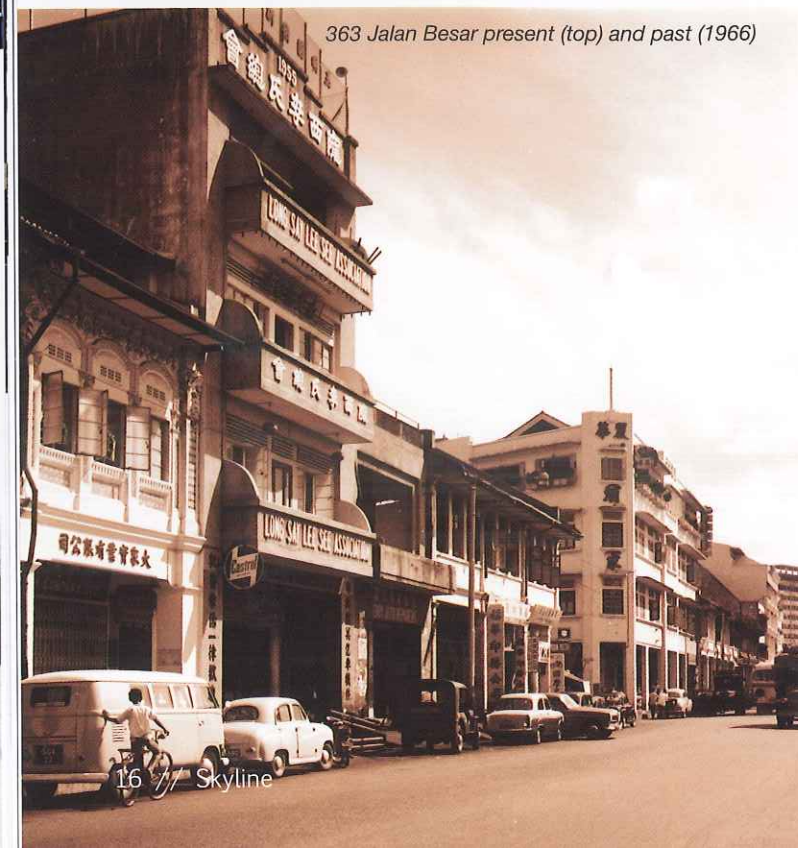
¹Formed in 2002, the Conservation Advisory Panel is an independent panel set up to offer advice on Singapore's building conservation efforts. The role of the panel is to give inputs on built heritage proposals put up by URA and to also propose buildings to URA to study for possible conservation. It also promotes greater public education and understanding of Singapore's gazetted built heritage.



363 Jalan Besar present (top) and past (1966)



257A-B Jalan Besar present (top) and past (1973)



Life in Jalan Besar began...

Heritage is home

The conservation of the additional buildings was announced at URA's annual Architectural Heritage Awards in October 2010. Underscoring the importance of this latest effort, Minister for National Development, Mr Mah Bow Tan said: "...our built heritage is what makes this place home. Even as we seek to become a global city, we need to remind ourselves why this is home, and not just another modern city that we work or play in."

Balanced approach in partnership

The conservation exercise for Jalan Besar was carried out following consultation with building owners and businesses of the area. Given Singapore's limited land, a balanced approach in partnership with stakeholders and the community has always been adopted in deciding what to conserve, taking into account development needs, the value of conservation, and the wishes of the majority and the rights of individual property owners. With these additional Jalan Besar buildings conserved, more than 7,000 heritage buildings and structures are legally protected, including pre-war colonial buildings, shophouses, bridges along the Singapore River and some post-war modern buildings.



167 Tyrwhitt Road



318-314 Jalan Besar Late style shophouses built in the early 1900

Tyrwhitt Road in the 1960s



To many Singaporeans, Jalan Besar is known for the Jalan Besar Stadium where many exciting soccer matches were played. The New World Amusement Park is also another much loved landmark closed in the 1980s. Life in Jalan Besar began in the 1830s as a road through the estate of the Norris' brothers' betel nut and fruit orchard. Due to increasing traffic, the Municipality expanded the road in the 1880s and 1890s, and subsequently named it Jalan Besar. After the first World War, urbanisation took off in a big way with new roads named after wartime personalities such as Foch Road, Tyrwhitt Road, Allenby Road and Petain Road. ●