



Conservation champions unveiled

The owners, developers and professionals behind the excellent restoration of five heritage buildings took centre-stage at the 2013 Architectural Heritage Awards.



The ornate Hong San See Temple is a revelation to most visitors who step into its compound. Tucked away along a street of nightlife spots and watering holes, the century-old temple, also known as The Temple of the Phoenix Hill, looms over an otherwise unassuming compound. The venue for this year's URA Architectural Heritage Awards (AHA), the temple was also one of this year's award recipients, among a group of winners commended for their high standards.

The awards were presented to the owners, architects, engineers and contractors behind five masterfully and creatively-restored heritage buildings at the ceremony on 3 October 2013.

Guest-of-Honour Acting Minister for Manpower Tan Chuan-Jin noted the pride awardees had taken in their conserved buildings.

These included: (i) the meticulously restored historic temple – the Hong San See Temple; (ii) two boldly re-claimed shophouses along North Canal Road; (iii) a stately colonial bungalow re-imagined as a multi-generational family home along Chatsworth Park; (iv) a Joo Chiat neighbourhood bookstore converted into an unconventional residence; and (v) a series of Geylang shophouses unique in their interpretations of heritage spaces – the Lorong 24A Shophouse Series.

Now into its 19th year, the annual awards were set up to recognise the dedicated and sensitive owners, developers and professionals behind well-restored heritage buildings. The awards also promote public awareness and appreciation of such quality restoration.

Category A of the awards recognises National Monuments and fully

conserved buildings, while Category B winners are integrated “old” and “new” developments.

Appreciating existing heritage

Minister Tan highlighted the roles communities and individuals played in driving thoughtful restoration. For example, the commitment of the temple's trustees resulted in it winning the Award of Excellence in the annual UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation – the first building in Singapore to do so.

Conservation stood out in rapidly-developing Singapore, said Minister Tan, as it called for a greater appreciation of what existed rather than for more to be built.

“Over 7,000 buildings have been conserved since 1989, but not many of us are aware of the significance of buildings we walk or drive past every day,” he said.

In line with the effort to encourage greater awareness of buildings already conserved, URA would soon roll out two initiatives.

Firstly, mini-storyboards would be installed next to the AHA plaques presently displayed on winning properties. The storyboards would introduce the buildings' restoration efforts and histories.

Likening the mini-storyboards to guides in museums or historical sites, Minister Tan said gaining greater insight into a building could completely change one's experience of it.

“In this way, conservation can be more than a label, with buildings becoming part of our living history and present understanding,” he added.

Secondly, a new online portal, “My Conservation Portal”, would provide a one-stop destination for professionals and members of the public on conservation areas and conserved buildings. A search would produce their histories, backgrounds and restoration guidelines.

Members of the public would also be able to contribute their stories about the buildings, through the portal's sharing platform.

In addition, students from the School of the Arts (SOTA) and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts had partnered URA for the first time for short films on the 2012 AHA winners. Students from Nanyang Technological University's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information would work on films on the 2013 winners.

Conserving our heritage touchstones

Three newly conserved buildings were also revealed by Minister Tan during the ceremony.

The Queenstown Library, former Commonwealth Avenue Wet Market and Alexandra Hospital were heritage touchstones for Queenstown and Singapore, said Minister Tan. They were also buildings that a Queenstown community group, My Community, had recently proposed to URA for conservation.

“All three buildings are important representations of what conservation can do to reinforce a community's identity and preserve its ‘flavour’ for past, present and future generations,” he said. ☞

By Cassandra Yeap and Nur Farhana

Mini-storyboards

Visitors to an AHA-winning building will now not only know it has been awarded, they will glimpse why and how it staked its claim as a heritage tour de force. The storyboards, designed to complement the plaques that mark AHA award winners, will capture some of the buildings' histories and restoration efforts. Viewers will also be able to scan QR Codes on the storyboards to view more information on URA's website.

School film projects

Tapping the skills and interests of young people, URA is piloting a series of short film projects on AHA winners to capture the stories behind conserved buildings. SOTA's video on a 2012 AHA winner, regal boutique hotel The Sultan, is directed, produced and filmed by its students, and gives viewers fresh insight into the building's significance.

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Newly conserved buildings

A library, wet market and military hospital. All three have been identified as heritage and community touchstones for Queenstown and Singapore. They add to three other buildings – Princess House, the Church of the Blessed Sacrament and the former Anchor Brewery – that have already been conserved in Singapore's oldest satellite town.

01. Alexandra Hospital

Built by the British Armed Forces on the brink of World War Two to serve the troops and their families, it was the largest and best-equipped military hospital in Britain's "Far East Command" at that time. The hospital later witnessed a massacre by Japanese troops, the Malayan Emergency and the first successful limb re-attachment in Southeast Asia.

02. Former Commonwealth Avenue Wet Market

The only remaining market designed by the Housing Development Board's predecessor, the Singapore Improvement Trust, the striking building is a reminder of when itinerant hawkers were first housed in purpose-built covered markets.

03. Queenstown Library

Singapore's first branch library, a modern-style building, was opened in 1970 by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Besides its books and resources, it has also hosted arts and cultural programmes over the years. It remains a popular gathering place for Queenstown residents.



01



02



03

Portal pioneers

URA's officers combed the archives and the streets to give Singapore's conserved buildings a home online.

All that was on hand – a photograph of a carpet shop's interior, with a group of people eating in the foreground. Working from this single clue, taken from URA's archives, officers drew on their knowledge of conservation areas and the hint of how the internal staircase was configured, to pinpoint the exact location of the shop along Arab Street.

The prize – being able to tag and upload the photograph to its location on the new online portal, where all of Singapore's conserved buildings could be searched for the first time. Such “detective work” was just a small part of the process that went into preparing the website, launched in early October.

A one-stop resource

The idea for the portal first came from the desire to make URA's resources on conserved buildings and conservation areas accessible to the public. This included over 13,000 photographs, some of which dated from the 1960s. The end product was “My Conservation Portal”. Building professionals, property owners and members of the public could now view those resources at a click, and even share stories of their own – one such personal account has been given on 25 Grange Road.


Preparing and uploading the information on over 7,100 conserved buildings in

more than 100 areas, took around eight months. A core team of six officers worked on the project, supported at various times by 10 interns and temporary staff. Photographs were often needed to fill in gaps; these had to be taken at the crack of dawn to minimise the traffic in the shots.

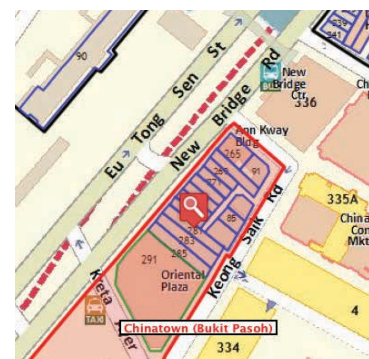
“Sometimes we felt like tourists in our own city,” said planner Jevon Liew, who led the photo collection efforts, recalling how he had to strike up conversations with drivers and property owners in order to get the best shots.

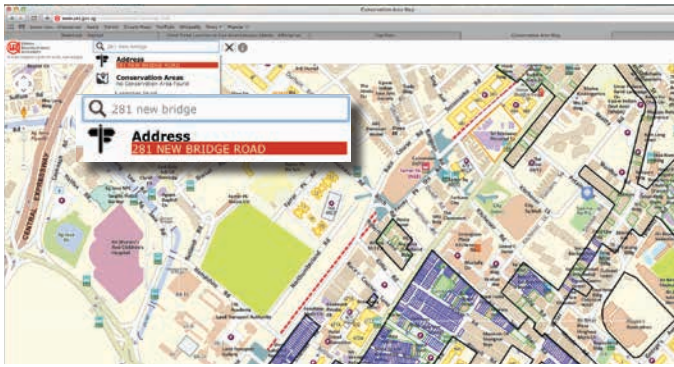
Some of the photographs on the portal come from his personal collection, taken when he was a student.

For staff assigned to tag and post the details of each building online, the learning curve was steep. Temporary staff Lanni Valberg knew next to nothing about conservation when she first came to URA a few months ago. Working on the portal was an “eye-opening” experience, she said laughingly. She can no longer look at the shophouses in Kampong Glam, where she regularly hangs out with friends, in the same way.

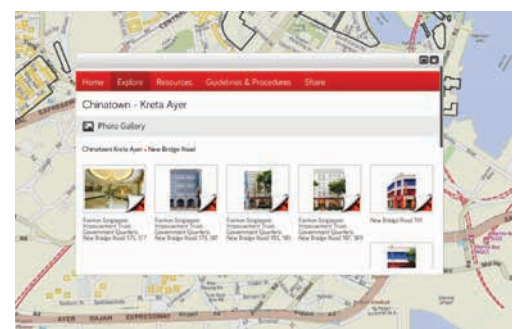
After all, to the team behind the portal, a carpet shop is a clue. 

Visit “My Conservation Portal” and share your stories at <http://www.ura.gov.sg/conservationportal/consmap.html>





Portal users can search for conserved buildings by their addresses. The website can be accessed on desktop and mobile interfaces.



The portal features information on conserved buildings and conservation areas.

Features include photo galleries of archival and recent photographs, write-ups and a platform for users to share their own stories.

Winners of the 2013 URA Architectural Heritage Awards

CATEGORY



30 Mohamed Sultan Road Hong San See Temple

A temple for devotees

The large-scale restoration of this 100-year-old National Monument to its original Singapore-style Minnan architecture is the result of thorough research and investigations, exemplary teamwork and community spirit; it reflects the owner's passion for heritage.

"This is the legacy that our forefathers left us. We have to restore it because they worked very hard to build it, and future generations can learn about their heritage from this temple," said Mr Patrick Goh, chairman of the Hong San See Monument Restoration Committee.

Commending the team for their faithfulness to the original architecture, the jury highlighted their dedication in poring through the temple's century-old accounts books to check the original colour for the tiles on the overhanging eaves.

"Praise is also in order for the ingenious community-based fund raising effort where the public played a part in the revival of the temple through the purchase of old bricks that could not be reused. This was a truly bonafide textbook example of how built heritage should be valued," the jury noted.



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CATEGORY

**5 Chatsworth Park**

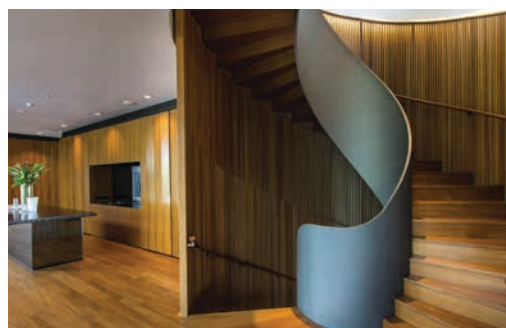
A multi-generational family home

This delicately restored iconic Frank Brewer bungalow has retained its frontage and remains the centrepiece of the property, even after the addition of an extensive new wing and clever repositioning of its new driveway. The old-and-new integrated residential project now celebrates the character and heritage of this stately mid-20th Century colonial home and is a fitting address for a multi-generational family.

The insertion of a new wing three times the size of the original house posed the biggest challenge for the team.

Mr Sim Boon Yang, the project architect, said that there was a need for the new extension to be delicately placed, with a discreet design and layout, so as not to distract attention from the older building's significant presence.

The jury praised the team for giving the property "a new lease of life with a substantial new wing that is impressive, yet plays up the grandeur of the original".



CATEGORY



48 North Canal Road

An office complex

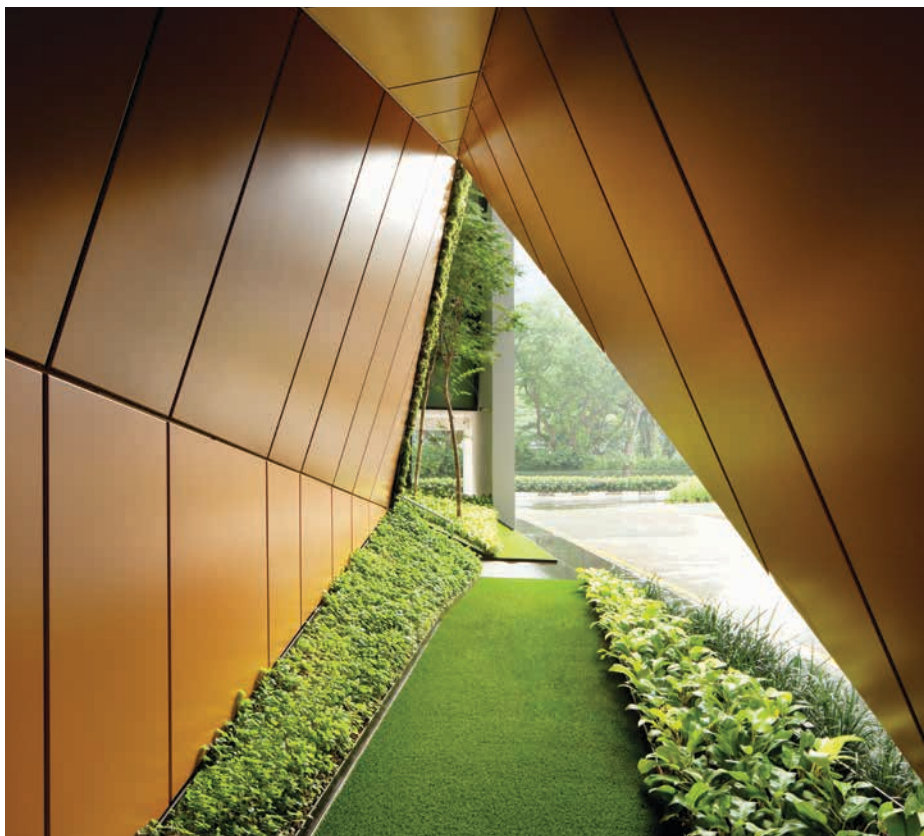
The faithful reconstruction of two 1940s and 1950s conserved shophouse units along North Canal Road has successfully restored the visage of the heritage streetscape.

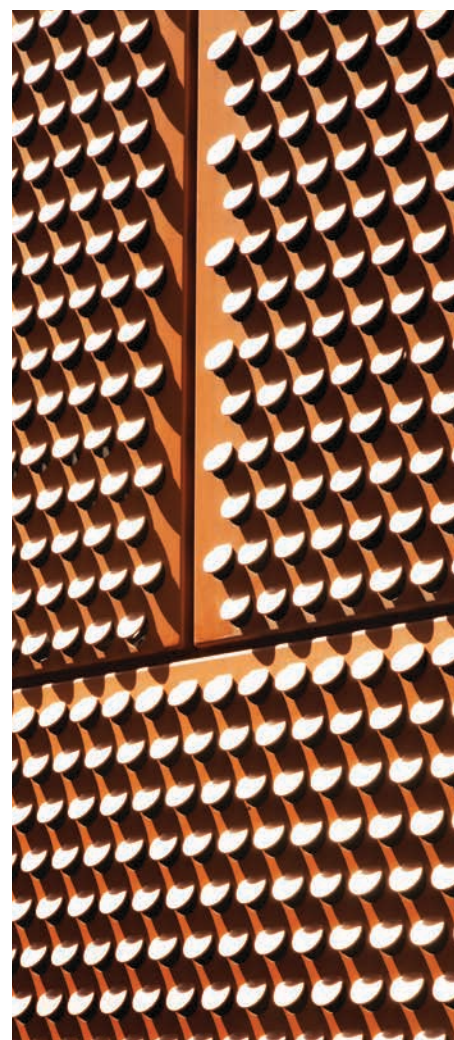
Armed only with carefully documented data, measured survey drawings and post-demolition images, the project team revived the shophouses with painstaking faithfulness to the originals – complete with their definitive architectural elements of mild steel windows, concrete canopies, rounded façade pediments and concrete flagpoles.

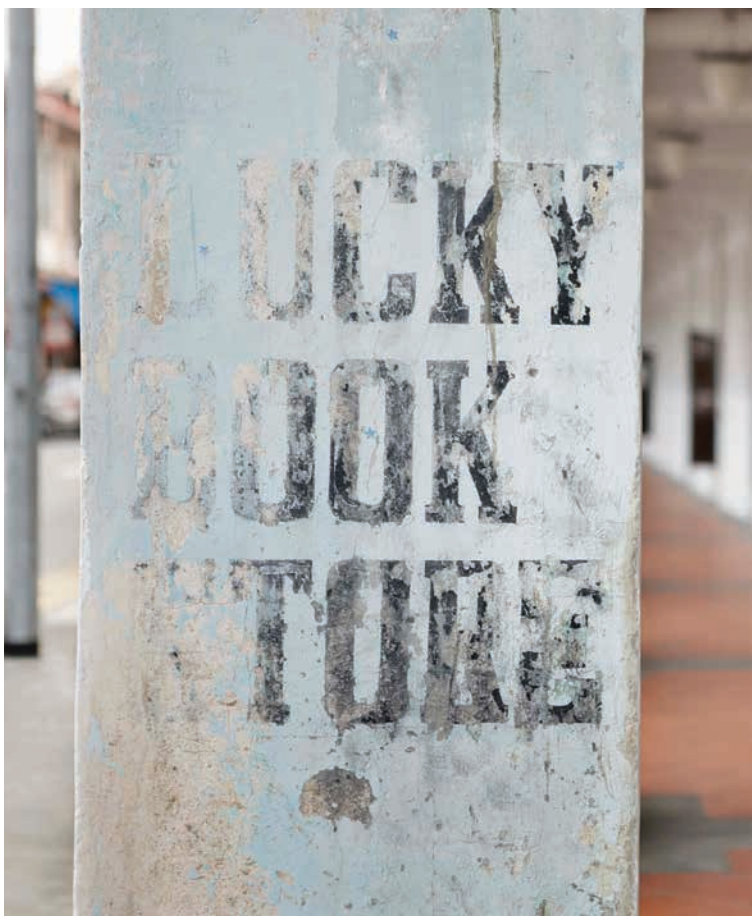
To accommodate the client's brief for a modern office complex, the original levels of the two shophouses were updated into flexible and functional spaces. An original sky terrace at one of the units was restored to create a private garden. A new rear extension was also

added and sensitively reintegrated with the shophouses. The jury was impressed with the “sensitive way in which the bold new rear extension allows the conserved shophouses to stand out while accentuating the uniqueness of the site's park-facing frontage. The choice of colour, form and façade design of the new extension also helps to play down its scale and differentiates the new from the old”.

Project architect Mr Ang Chow Hwee said: “This pair of conserved shophouses ‘fronts’ the historic road of North Canal and Hong Lim Park, they serve as a gateway to a street that had huge historic and cultural significance to the growth of the nation. Such (restoration) efforts will not only allow the average Singaporean the opportunity to understand our past, but it gives us another entity that defines our identity.”







CATEGORY

B

125 Joo Chiat Place

An unconventional residence

Formerly The Lucky Book Store, this 1920s Transitional-Style shophouse has been restored and reinvented for its new purpose as a modern family home. Having grown up in the Katong and Joo Chiat areas, the owners remembered leafing through comics, buying music cassettes and stocking up on chewing gums in the former bookstore and regarded the project as somewhat of a homecoming.

The multi-layered paint coatings on the front façade had to be carefully removed to reveal the original patina of age on the walls. “Conserving the front of the shophouse resembled working on an archaeological site,” said project architect Mr Chang Yong Ter.

The original fading “Lucky Book Store” signage was also retained. “Many residents of this area have fond memories of this

place, and this simple signage helps them to reconnect or recollect what was here before,” said Mr Chang.

Beyond the façade was a different story. The interiors were stripped of plaster and the original brickwork left exposed, cavities in the walls where timber joists used to be were kept to reflect how internal spaces were once configured and a double-volume dining area was created by removing a second storey passageway.

Citing how the project architect and owners have embraced the shophouse’s “imperfections”, the jury remarked: “In this honest and unpretentious interpretation, the project team has clearly shown that conservation is not just cosmetic work but the retention of the various aspects of history.”





CATEGORY



Lorong 24A Shophouse Series

A series of unique exhibition
and living spaces

Built circa 1900s, these eight outstanding specimens of conserved Chinese baroque style shophouses, have had their interiors transformed into a series of creative exhibition and living spaces while keeping their façades respectfully restored. Entrusted to the hands of different architects, each unit was given a distinctive interior expression that accentuates the eclectic character of its Geylang neighbourhood and spurs the rediscovery of a street of hidden treasures.

To inject diversity and contrast behind the relatively uniform façades, the owner engaged different local architects for each shophouse on the same fixed and modest budget.

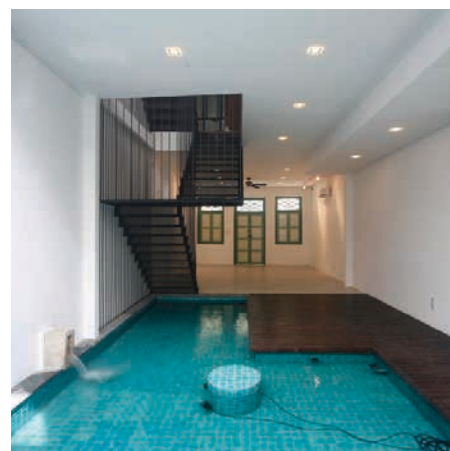
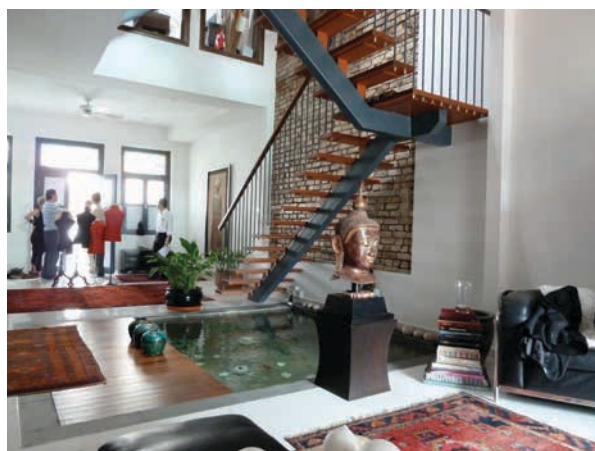
“This compelled the architects to come up with creative solutions to make the

most of the budget and yet, effectively demonstrate how similar shophouse spaces could be treated in different and exciting ways that add a new perspective to shophouse restoration,” noted the jury.

Notable design features and solutions include the reintroduction of airwells to bring in natural light and breeze and an array of interpretations for the central stairway structure.

The jury members added: “The owner is also commended for engaging the community with activities such as public tours and exhibitions held within these buildings between leases. Such effort appears to have transformed life in the area – strengthening the community spirit and reviving a social sense among the inhabitants there.”





The century-old Hong San See Temple was one of the award recipients of this year's Architectural Heritage Awards. Craftsmen and artisans from China used traditional techniques to preserve the temple's architecture. One of the more unusual methods used saliva to clean the gold leaf coating of the temple's timber. The roof's decorations were also restored with broken porcelain that came from some 40,000 pastel-coloured rice bowls.

