



Historic gems, gracious spaces steeped in memory, quaint streets and handsome landmarks – these have become an important part of Singapore's character and soul, without which, we would become faceless and anonymous. Skyline uncovers some of Singapore's precious gems and discovers it is not just these gems that have been making our city so alive and charming.

Photograph by Spencer Chung Kun Soon, Lianhe Zaobao.



500 people joined in an exciting heritage trail to Balestier, Joo Chiat, Tanjong Katong and Jalan Besar, as part of the launch of the Identity Plan coins on these areas.



# The sum of hearts



Photograph by Casey Seyu Tzyy Wei, Lianhe Zaobao.

**Beyond** just the historic districts like Chinatown and Little India, planners have been retaining shophouses along the historic streetscapes in secondary settlements like Balestier, Joo Chiat, Jalan Besar and Tanjong Katong. These settlements grew out from the main city centre to meet the needs of our growing population and are slightly off the beaten track. But these areas have charmed us. With strong support from the public and stakeholders, 600 shophouses


from these four areas were gazetted for conservation in December 2003, bringing the total number of conserved buildings to 6,400 to date.

## Own a piece of heritage

It is not enough to just retain a historic building. People must find meaning and appreciation for such buildings in order to keep them alive and part of our city's fabric. That is what planners also try to do. To enable Singaporeans and others

to enjoy our precious gems and even "own" a piece of their neighbourhood, a walking map and seven heritage markers have been produced for the Katong/Joo Chiat area in November 2003. This was done in partnership with, Joo Chiat Citizens' Consultative Committee, Singapore Tourism Board and National Heritage Board. This is in addition to URA's series of other walking maps on Bras Basah, Bugis and Changi Point areas.

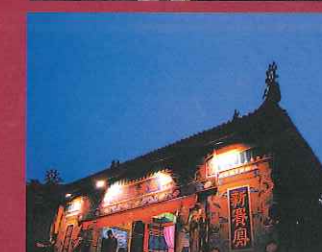
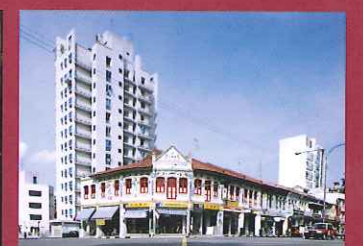
The Katong/Joo Chiat and Bras Basah. Bugis walking maps are now also available on URA Online.

Planners have also worked closely with the Monetary Authority of Singapore to produce coins on all the areas featured under URA's Identity Plan. To launch the first in a series of Identity Plan coins on the four Old World Charm areas, 500 people joined in a heritage trail to these areas. 

## Old World Charm

### Balestier

Balestier Road has more than 160 years of history. The road developed as part of the expansion from the city centre and was named after Joseph Balestier, the first American consul in Singapore who opened the area as a sugar-cane plantation. The early Chinese labourers called the area "Go Chor Tua Pek Kong" after the landmark temple, built in 1847, which is still standing. Its "wayang" stage was built in 1909 by Tan Boon Liat. The wayang stage is the only free-standing wayang stage on mainland Singapore.



Photograph by Wang Hui Fen, The Straits Times.





## Jalan Besar

Jalan Besar Road or "Wide Road" appeared on maps as early as the 1830s. This area has a very unique historic streetscape along Serangoon and Lavender Roads.

The New World Amusement Park and Jalan Besar Stadium, built to the north of Kitchener Road in the 1920s, were well-known in the area. Together with Great World in River Valley and Gay World in Geylang, these amusement parks provided entertainment for the people until the late 1960s. From the 1950s to the early 1970s, major civic events such as State and National Day Parades were held at the Jalan Besar Stadium.

## Katong/Joo Chiat

Known as either Katong or Joo Chiat, many commonly associate this area as bounded by Still, Haig, Changi and Marine Parade Roads, with Joo Chiat and East Coast Roads as the main roads to the area.

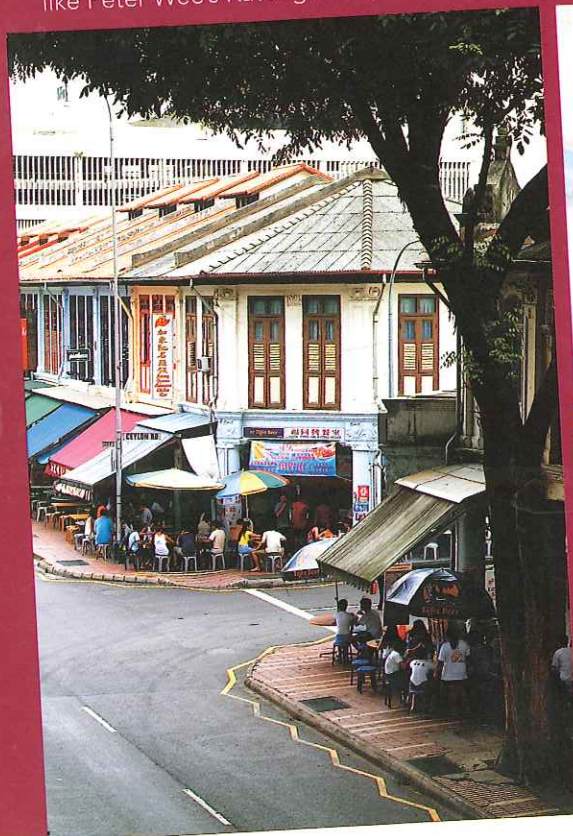
The area has a unique blend of multi-racial and multi-cultural communities. From bungalows to shophouses and high-rise condominiums, it is a residential haven, with distinct architectural styles. It is also a food paradise. The buildings and people offer intriguing stories about the past that are still alive today. The colourful Peranakan culture and influence can be seen in the distinctively styled shophouses and terrace houses; and also in unique institutions like Peter Wee's Katong Antique House and Rumah Bebe.



## Tanjong Katong

Katong News Agency, the Tanjong Katong Post Office, "Chung Cheng" coffeeshop, Sin Poh Poh, sounds of marching bands from nearby school fields. For those of us who frequent Tanjong Katong, these would have a familiar ring.

With the increasing residential developments, more and more shophouses were built between 1920s and 1950s to provide amenities and services. The former Tanjong Katong Girls' School was the one of the many post-war schools to meet the increasing number of children living in the area.





### Increasing appetite for heritage

It is not just these old world charm areas that have been warming our hearts. There are so many more gems we have to offer. But what is more significant over the years is that people are now more appreciative of historic buildings and streetscapes and want them to be retained.

# 35,000

is the number of people who visited URA's exhibition on the Identity and Parks & Waterbodies Plan in 2002.

# 4,200

is the number of feedback submissions received for URA's Identity Plan and Parks & Waterbodies Plan in 2002, of which 97% supported the plans.

# 500

is the number of people who participated in URA's Old World Charm heritage trail in November 2003, in which four Old World Charm coins were launched.

# 58

is the number of projects achieving URA's Architectural Heritage Awards so far, since it was introduced 10 years ago in 1994.

These numbers show people increasingly care and want to have a stake in shaping Singapore's identity. Kelvin Ang, URA's executive architect sums up this sentiment: "For Singapore to really work as a country, it must have something beyond economic significance. It must have memories. And memories are best captured through old buildings and old familiar areas."

He quotes a favourite story he learnt from his Confucian Ethics class from his secondary school days, when it comes to keeping old things: "A young boy questioned his mother on why she insisted on keeping an old piece of furniture, like an old table, for which she replied: 'If we don't keep the good things of today, where will the antiques of tomorrow come from?'"



*Silent sentinel – Like this ancient warrior, conservation safeguards the authentic legacy left by our founding forefathers. Photograph by Jonathan Choo, The New Paper.*



*Restoring, reinventing – Old world charm is a premium when historic buildings are skillfully adapted to contemporary uses. The adaptive re-use of the former General Post Office to The Fullerton Hotel demonstrates this. Photograph by Lee Tiah Khee, Lianhe Zaobao.*



*Crossroads of time – A newspaper vendor reminisces the changes that have taken place at the corner of Trengganu and Smith Streets, graced by the historic Lai Chun Yuen opera theatre building. Photograph by Spencer Chung Kun Soon, Lianhe Zaobao.*