

New awards for excellence in building restoration



Minister for National Development Mr Lim Hng Kiang shares a point of interest with URA's Head of Conservation, Mrs Teh Lai Yip.

Six buildings have been given the first-ever URA Architectural Heritage Award for excellent work in building restoration.

The inaugural Awards were presented to the winners by Mr Lim Hng Kiang, Minister for National Development, at the Raffles Hotel on 5 July 1995.

The Awards were given to the team responsible for the restoration of the monument or building. This includes not only the architect but the owner, engineer and contractor as well.

The introduction of the Architectural Heritage Awards at this point is timely. As the Minister pointed out, our conservation efforts have come a long way since 1987, when we made a modest start with the restoration of 38 shophouses in Tanjong Pagar.

Said Mr Lim: "In a short span of eight years, we have restored 1,360 buildings or a quarter of the 5,320 buildings gazetted for conservation and preservation. The fruits of our labour are visible around us - in the revitalised historic districts of Chinatown, Kampong

Glam and Little India, Emerald Hill, Raffles Hotel, Boat Quay and Clarke Quay are other fine examples of our conservation efforts."

He added: "We can be proud of our achievements, given the complexity of restoration works and the initial lack of experience in this new field."

The Minister highlighted that our conservation programme has achieved three very important things.

Firstly, it has succeeded in preserving Singapore's past as these buildings represent our historical, architectural and multi-cultural heritage. Secondly, they have given our cityscape a distinct Singaporean character, with its blend of modernity and old-fashioned charm.

And thirdly, we have managed to inject new economic vitality into old buildings and historic districts through creative and innovative restoration. We have managed to give these old buildings "a new lease of life".

Elaborating, the Minister said the revitalised Boat Quay and Clarke Quay

are excellent examples and reminders of how run-down shophouses and godowns can find new and creative uses. They have been transformed into attractive food and entertainment outlets which are a great hit amongst locals and visitors.

Mr Lim also called on present-day developers and architects to create new buildings worthy of conservation in the future, to be "bold and innovative" to produce more works of architectural art in future and not mere functional buildings.

1996 awards

The URA has begun a registration scheme to encourage more participation in the Award. Projects that have obtained their Written Permission or are already in the midst of restoration works can now register their interest to participate in next year's Architectural Heritage Award.

Early registration will enable complete and orderly documentation of the project during the course of restoration and will help the Assessment Committee to assess each project more thoroughly.

Celebrating our built heritage

The six buildings awarded this year's Architectural Heritage Award constitute a good mix of residential terrace houses, buildings re-adapted for commercial uses and a religious monument.

URA's Chairman Associate Professor Khoo Cheng Lim said: "The Awards have been introduced to accord recognition to national monuments and conserved buildings which have been well-restored. In doing so, the URA hopes that it will spur owners, architects, engineers and contractors to pay particular attention to quality restoration and encourage them to achieve greater excellence in their restoration efforts."

These buildings have one thing in common — they have been carefully and sensitively restored, using appropriate restoration methods. That was the verdict of the Assessment Committee, headed by Asso. Professor Khoo.

Skyline takes you on a pictorial tour of the award-winning buildings in the following pages.

URA relaxes conservation guidelines

The URA has reviewed its conservation guidelines and relaxed some of them to give owners more flexibility to re-adapt old buildings to new uses and to allow more room for creative restoration.

The URA has undertaken this comprehensive review of conservation guidelines based on feedback from applicants and individuals and advice from conservation consultants.

Through the review, the URA has simplified and re-packaged the guidelines to make them less voluminous and more user-friendly. The original 12-volume guidelines have been revamped and streamlined to four volumes, to correspond to the four main groups of Conservation Areas, where descending degree of conservation is practised.

The new, concise edition comes in the form of a complete package comprising the four volumes of guidelines, 10 conservation plans and four updated sample submission drawings to assist architects in preparing drawings for submission to URA for planning approval.

The four volumes are:

- Vol 1 — Conservation guidelines for the historic districts: Boat Quay, Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India
- Vol 2 — Conservation guidelines for historic districts: Blair Plain, Cairnhill, Emerald Hill
- Vol 3 — Conservation guidelines for secondary settlements: Beach Rd, Geylang, Jalan Besar, Joo Chiat, River Valley
- Vol 4 — Conservation guidelines for bungalows: Chartworth Park, Holland Park, Mountbatten Rd, Nassim Rd, Rideout Park, White House Park



The new guidelines come in a complete package.

The 10 conservation plans, which URA is releasing for the first time, show the boundaries of the key conservation areas, the core areas, the buildings to be conserved, the residential fronts to be retained/restored, national monuments to be preserved and the envelope control sites.

To explain the principles of conservation and the revised conservation guidelines to professionals and practitioners, URA and the Singapore Institute of Architects organised a joint workshop on 28 July 1995 at the RELC Auditorium.

The full set of revised Conservation guidelines can be obtained at \$50 per set from the URA 1st storey customer service counter, URA Building or DCD cashier counter at 4th storey National Development Building, Annex A.

"A little gem of a church"

That was how architect Mr Quek Tse Kwang described Singapore's oldest church, the Armenian Church.

Built in 1835 and declared a national monument in 1973, the Armenian church is today still a 'living' church. At least two times a year, during Easter and Christmas, members of the Greek Orthodox Church in Singapore still gather there for worship.

With its interesting blend of Palladian style and traditional Armenian architecture, the church is perhaps the finest example of the works of G. D. Coleman, Singapore's first architect. Incidentally, it was also the first building in Singapore to have electricity.

The church has been sensitively and carefully restored. The existing timber roof structure was strengthened and termite treated and the entire roof was repaired to prevent water seepage. All cracked surfaces were carefully repaired and resurfaced.

Award recipients: trustees of the church; architect from Quek Associates; engineer from SQ Loke & Associates; contractor from Blue Star General Contractor.



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A southern Chinese legacy

River House at Clarke Quay was built in the 1880s in the traditional architectural style of Minnan, Chaozhou in China. It is one of the only two traditional Chinese-style dwellings remaining in Singapore, the other being the House of Tan Yeok Nee at Clemenceau Avenue.

River House has literally seen the ebb and flow of life along the Singapore River. It had variously served as a residence and godown for gambier, biscuits and other

commodities before it fell into disrepair, together with the godowns along the Singapore River.

In 1993, skilled craftsmen painstakingly and meticulously etched out the original intricacy of the mansion to recapture the spirit of Singapore's heritage. Restored to its original splendour, River House is now a popular Chinese restaurant, contributing to the rejuvenation of the Singapore River.

Award recipients: owner Clarke Quay Pte Ltd; architect and engineer from RSP Architects Planners & Engineers; contractor from Singapore Piling & Civil Engineering Pte Ltd.

Where peace and harmony rule

The distinctive Chinese characters above the windows of the two-storey terrace house along Neil Road tell us much about the man who built the house.

The first owner, Mr Choa Kim Kiat, believed that peace and harmony will help a person to lead a life of honour. Mr Choa was one of Singapore's pioneers. Kim Kiat Road in Balestier was, in fact, named after him.

Mr Choa's belief in peace and harmony is reflected in the design of the house which has a generous forecourt and a tranquil garden at the rear. Throughout the restoration, the ambience of the original house has been preserved. The result? A graceful, tranquil home that retains the spatial experience of old terrace houses. A house that remains a celebration of the first owner's philosophies.

Award recipients: owner Mr Low Seow Liang & Mdm Ho Lye Keng; architect from Liu & Wo Architects; engineer from E3 Consulting Engineers; and contractor from Kwong Fook Seng Building Contractor.



A charming and elegant commercial building

No. 161 Lavender Street, with its Art Deco Front facade painted in pastel hues, has helped to enhance the streetscape.

Located in the Jalan Besar Secondary Settlement where a four-storey rear extension is allowed, the development retains the main buildings of the 11 shophouses and integrates a new four-storey extension at the rear.

This ensures the retention of the shophouse streetscape whilst maximising the development potential of the site through the creation of new and additional floor space at the rear.

The owner has also taken the initiative to conserve part of the two corner units of shophouses to provide facade continuity to the streetscape.

Award recipients: owner Lee Rubber Company (Pte) Ltd; architect SA Chua & Associates; engineer DE Consultants Pte Ltd; contractor Sysma Contractor Pte Ltd.

A labour of love

The phrase "labour of love" is no cliché when we speak of the restoration of No. 77, Emerald Hill.

The owner, Mr Richard Helfer, has carefully and painstakingly restored, preserved and enhanced much of the original finishes of the building. Yet, he has managed to achieve his goal of integrating a busy, modern lifestyle in a conservation structure that retains its original character.

The house was built for towkay Low Koon Yee in 1925 and the Low family had lived continuously in it until Mr Helfer acquired it in 1990. The beautifully restored house has that special feel of long-time residential usage and is indeed a "house that has been turned into a home". Mr Helfer has christened it "Kakelani" which in Hawaiian means "where the mind is at peace".

Award recipients: owner Mr Richard Helfer; architect from N K Lim Architect; designer from KKS Consultants & Designers; contractor from Hock Ming Construction.



New lease of life for historic terrace house

No. 11 Kim Yam Road is situated off bustling River Valley which was once populated by wealthy Straits Chinese.

This house was purchased by Mr Daniel Teo in 1989 and is now used as a private art gallery.

The two-storey building is located within the River Valley Secondary Settlement where a 10-storey rear extension is allowed. However, Mr Teo has chosen the full conservation approach and kept the rear extension to two-storey up to the existing eave level.

The house has been carefully restored with its architectural and spatial quality and charm retained.

Award recipients: owner Mr Daniel Teo; architect from Kng Architects & Urbanists; engineer from SCE Consultants; contractor from Tak Lee Huat Construction.

