



The well-known Chin Mee Chin Coffee and Cake Shop on East Coast Road serves up a traditional breakfast of kaya toast and homemade cakes and buns.

insist on restoring the shophouse faithfully to its original conditions, for it is unrealistic to try and embalm the past.

Walking along Joo Chiat, Koon Seng, Everitt and East Coast Roads, one is immediately struck by the increasing number of new shops, restaurants, entertainment outlets and residents that have moved in and called the East Coast home. While they have injected the place with new life and activities, they have also maintained the historic look of the shophouse – and related charm – of old.

Balestier Road

Balestier Road, known for its stores selling *tau sar pia*, *bak kut teh* and lighting fixtures, was a swampland before it was cleared in the first half of the 1800s. Named after Joseph Balestier, the first American Consul to Singapore in 1837, the area was made up of a large sugar plantation, which he owned and called Balestier Plain. In Chinese, Balestier Road was called “Go Cho Tua Pek Kong”, after the Rochor Temple that was built in 1847 in the area. In Tamil, the area was known as “Thannir Kampam” or “Water Kampong”, as water was conveyed from the Balestier area to town for sale then. The area also housed many cottage industries set up by early immigrants, and by the 1880s, bungalows were built in the area for the richer immigrants.

The Balestier Road area is known for a number of notables. For example, one of the surviving bungalows is the Sun Yat Sen Villa, located at the junction of Tai Gin Road and Ah Hood Road. It was the Southeast Asian headquarters for the revolutionary leader, who stayed there for two weeks on one of his trips to Singapore. The Victorian-style bungalow, built in the 1880s, was gazetted as a National Monument in October 1994. It is today restored by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce as the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall.

Another unique building is the only remaining free-standing *wayang* stage on mainland Singapore, which was built by Tan Boo Liat, the grandson of Tan Kim Cheng, a prominent businessman who was the Consul for the Kingdom of Siam. Tan Boo Liat also built the “Golden Bell”

The Sun Yat Sen Villa today, a historical landmark built in the 1880s. After restoration, it was transformed into a memorial hall housing documents and artefacts associated with its namesake.

house featured earlier, where Anna Leonowens, who was fictionalised in Rodgers and Hammerstein's hit musical *The King and I*, stayed when she was on her way to the Thai court.

The Balestier Road area is also known for other reasons. It seems the once well-used mode of transportation, the trishaw, was invented by a Suny Tan of Balestier Road during the Japanese Occupation. The first jewellery factory to use machines to make necklaces in Singapore was set up at Kim Keat Road in the area in 1958.

Today, the Balestier Road area is characterised by two-storey shophouses of mixed architecture, ranging from Early to Art Deco styles, with Modern style shophouses in between. Its street corners are





Balestier Road has more than 160 years of history and many food haunts including bakeries and shops selling ground coffee.

prominently marked by ornate eclectic terraces, for example, at Kim Keat Road, Martaban Road, Pegu Road and Jalan Kemaman. The shopping area that it is known for emerged only in the 1970s, with the growth of public housing in St Michael's and Balestier estates in the same period. In 2012, a hotel will be completed opposite the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, fronting the Zhongshan Park.

The area was gazetted for conservation on 1 December 2003 after deliberations and recommendations by one of URA's Subject Groups in 2002 (see Chapter Five). This brought to a high point URA's efforts, for its documentation of the area had already been undertaken in the 1980s and its potential for conservation spotted then. However, because the focus was on conserving central historic areas first in the 1980s, it was not yet timely to consider gazetted secondary settlement areas. With much of the work done in the Central Area by the 2000s, the documentations of the 1980s became most useful.

Wayang stage built in 1909 by Tan Boo Liat. This is the only free-standing wayang stage on mainland Singapore.

Tiong Bahru

During URA's Parks & Waterbodies and Identity Plan Public Exhibition and Consultation from July to October 2002, URA exhibited 15 nodes as places with a sense of identity that might be conserved. Although Tiong Bahru estate was not included in the exhibition, there were numerous calls for it to be considered for conservation. In fact, Tiong Bahru garnered the highest number of votes from the public as an important identity node. In Chapter Five, URA's Subject Groups, formed to study proposals for conservation in 2002, will be introduced. One of the three Subject Groups also highlighted the Tiong Bahru estate as a unique area of Singapore and

