

Going that extra mile

The URA Architectural Heritage Awards are given annually to recognise owners, professionals and contractors who have gone that extra mile to restore heritage buildings. Skyline takes you on a tour of this year's winners.

GRAND MASTERPIECES

These three national monuments and one grand colonial building were painstakingly restored to their former glory:

Thian Hock Keng Temple 158 Telok Ayer Street

Built in 1842, the Thian Hock Keng Temple is an exceptionally fine example of southern Chinese architecture. The decorative features inside and out are especially ornate. These include "swallow tail" roof ridge forms embellished with spirals, dragons and fire pearls. Internally, it features intricate carvings finished with gold leaf and lacquer paint, and artwork depicting gods and legends. Over the years, however, the temple had suffered extensive termite damage and weathering.

The project involved restoring the temple and adding two new linkways between the Middle and Rear Halls. Craftsmen from China used traditional techniques to restore all the elements of the temple's structures and detailed features, while those parts damaged beyond repair were replaced. Overall, the traditional layout of the temple was kept.

Some important discoveries were unearthed during the restoration, including an imperial scroll dating from the Qing Dynasty (now residing in the Singapore History Museum), and a dragon design on the main beam of the Middle Hall.

House of Tan Yoke Nee 101 Penang Road

The House of Tan Yoke Nee is a traditional Chinese Chou Zhou-style courtyard house built in 1885. The restoration of the House and the creation of an auditorium in one of the buildings were sensitively done. The aim was to keep the original architecture and ambience intact while meeting the needs of its new use as the 'campus' of the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business.

An aerial view of the House of Tan Yoke Nee.



Detailed decorative features on the roof.



Matching materials were used to replace termite-infested timber. To salvage four badly infested gilded beams in the main hall, the central portion was carved out and steel sections inserted to strengthen them. All original elements and traditional Chinese decorative features, such as paintings, clay sculptures and elaborate wood carvings, were retained and restored.

Modern needs such as air-conditioning are now carefully integrated into the architecture. For instance, frameless glass keeps the air-conditioning in but maintains the open-to-the-sky character of the courtyards.



Fine artworks adorn the uniquely shaped gable end walls.

Frameless glass keeps the cool in without spoiling the open ambience.



MITA Building 140 Hill Street

Formerly the Hill Street Police Station, this Neo-Classical building was designed by J F MacNair and completed in 1934. It has been restored and transformed into a modern office building with commercial spaces like art galleries and cyber-cafes on the ground floor. It now houses the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA).

Six of the original eight blocks of the building were retained and restored with their distinctive balconies, timber louvered windows and pedimented entrances. Even the inscription of the old building's name, prison cell grilles and the two building plaques with the names of the then Chief of Police, Director of Public Works and Government Architect were kept.

Of the two courtyards, the triangular one was landscaped and kept open-to-the-sky, while the rectangular one, previously a Parade Square, was covered with a glass roof and converted into an air-conditioned atrium.

Today, the rainbow-coloured timber windows reflect MITA's multi-faceted roles as developer of the information hub, protector of heritage and promoter of the arts.



The building's colourful past and present reflected in its windows.



The glass-covered courtyard now known as the ARTrium.

Brackets with decorative scrollwork.



Some of the temple's many intricate carvings and decorative features.



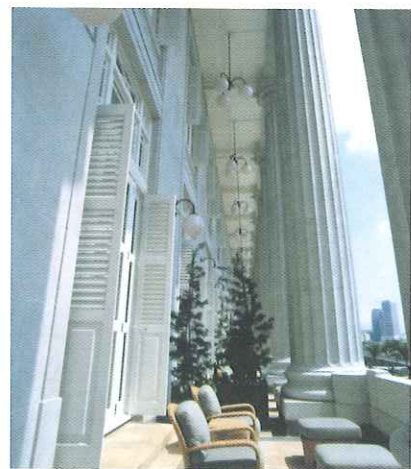
The dragon design discovered on the main beam.



The restored courtyards, rear hall and wings.



The sunlit atrium which doubles as hotel lobby.



Verandah with a view.

Fullerton Hotel 1 Fullerton Square

This eight-storey Neo-Classical building was purpose-built in 1928 as the General Post Office (GPO) Building by Keys and Dowdeswell. The main challenge was to maintain its architectural integrity while ensuring that it could meet the requirements of a luxury hotel.

The existing foundations were carefully shored up where deep excavation was necessary to create facilities like the ballroom and service driveways. The imposing external façade of the building was kept, as were its traditional windows. The building's Shanghai plaster panels were also cleaned, repaired and replaced where needed.

Internally, the four original airwells were reconfigured into a sky-lit atrium. Its centrepiece is a restored fourth-storey room with an ornate vaulted ceiling. Also kept was the grand GPO Hall with its high coffered ceilings and full height windows. The former GPO entrance was converted into a public lobby leading to the pedestrian underpass.

The result is a deluxe hotel that enjoys the best of old and new.



From colonial post office to luxury hotel.

HERITAGE HOMES

These homes show that a restoration project need not be on a monumental scale to exemplify the three 'R's (maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair):

1 Dalvey Estate

This 1927 two-storey Art Deco bungalow in the Whitehouse Park/Nassim Road Conservation Area was designed by Frank Brewer. The owner chose to restore the outhouse together with the main house. A new two-storey extension and a stand-alone open-sided garage were also added.



The restored bungalow, with brick arches resembling sunrays.

Quaint old chimney stays.



A spacious interior for comfortable living.



Geometric spiral brickwork and vents.

The bungalow was in fairly good condition except for some localised wood rot, roof leakage and damaged plaster on the external walls, which were all repaired.

Decorative elements like the brick arches and geometric window openings were retained and lovingly restored. The internal layout was adjusted to suit contemporary living while respecting the character and spatial quality of the bungalow.

24 Nassim Road

This two-storey Victorian-style bungalow, also in the White House Park/Nassim Road Conservation Area, dates back to the 1920s. The owner chose to conserve only the main building and to add an extension.



Top: The restored stained glass panels.
Left: The light well with moulded plaster panels.



Tree-lined driveway leading to the bungalow.



Top: The distinctive Chinese-style entrance gate.
Left: The restored facade with ornate windows.



45 Emerald Hill Road

This terrace house of the Late Shophouse Style is located in the Emerald Hill Conservation Area. Built in 1903 by M. T. Moh, it has a distinct Chinese entrance gate with a Chinese roof.

The house was dilapidated prior to restoration. The owner conserved the entire building, converting it into six apartments but retaining its cellular structure.

All the architectural elements, ornaments and features of the building were retained and restored. These include a timber door with Chinese calligraphy, Chinese-style motifs carved from granite, and a Chinese-style figurine fanlight. The coloured glass panels from the internal windows were carefully salvaged and reinstated. Chinese craftsmen were also engaged to restore the entrance gate and decorative panels framing the central courtyard. @



Colourful glass panels in the windows.