

SPEECH BY MS GRACE FU, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION, AT THE 2009 URA ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AWARD PRESENTATION CEREMONY AT THE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION HEADQUARTERS, MONDAY, 5 OCT 2009, 5.35PM

Mrs Cheong Koon Hean, CEO URA

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to join you here today at the URA Architectural Heritage Awards.

Introduction

2. This year marks the 50th Anniversary of self-government. Singapore has undergone a dramatic

transformation in the last 5 decades since 1959. From a colony with squatter communities, poor sanitation and polluted rivers, we have become a cosmopolitan garden city, a magnet for business and people from all around the world.

And yet, when we examine the photos of “now” and “before”,

we notice many similarities in the presence of key landmark structures.

Twenty years of gazetting conservation areas

3. As a city, we must constantly remake ourselves to stay ahead as a global economic hub. But even as we change, we must make an effort to retain social memories -- memories of what we have gone through and of places that we grew up in – that define our identity as a nation and root us back to this place we call home. We also need to safeguard physical manifestations of our shared past for our people and especially for our younger generation who have not lived through those years of nation building.

4. It is for this reason that the Urban Redevelopment Authority embarked on its conservation programme 20 years ago. In 1989, we started the gazetting of conservation buildings in the historic areas of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam, as well as Boat Quay, to preserve our memories, conserve our heritage buildings and shape our physical environment. From just about 3000 buildings in 1989, we have now more than doubled the number of conserved buildings and structures to close to 7000 buildings. This is no mean feat considering our size and the pace of development. Three years ago, our conservation programme was awarded the prestigious Urban Land Institute Global Award for Excellence for its collaborative approach involving public sector, private sector and the community that achieved a balance between free-market economics and cultural conservation.

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Engaging conservation stakeholders and the community

5. But conserving the physical structures alone is not meaningful if these are not recognised and valued by the community as part of our common heritage. We need the community's support to achieve a sustainable and meaningful conservation programme. In recent years, URA has increasingly consulted our stakeholders, such as architects, owners, businesses and community groups, in implementing and expanding its conservation programme. In the future, URA also wants to work more closely with our stakeholders to come up with programmes that enhance the vibrancy of existing conservation areas while retaining the unique characteristics of these places. This will help to draw the community to visit, appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage in these conservation areas.

6. For instance, the Little India Shopkeepers & Heritage Association, or LISHA for short, is one of the key organisers of the annual Deepavali Light Up Ceremony, that makes Little India a unique and vibrant heritage area. We hope to forge more such partnerships with local stakeholders to liven up our conserved areas.

New conservation areas

7. Members of our community have also been taking a more active role in the conservation effort and volunteered their buildings for conservation. I am happy to announce the conservation of four new areas and buildings.

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8. First, following the voluntary conservation of a corner shophouse along North Bridge Road at the junction of Liang Seah Street, owners of four neighbouring shophouses have also agreed to conserve their buildings. Among these five buildings are a pair of corner shophouses that are mirror images of each other in their Neo-Classically influenced façades. Together, they form a landmark gateway into Liang Seah Street, giving a strong definition to the urban street edge and add another dimension to the nearby Beach Road Conservation Area.

9. Second, the trustees of the Church of St Bernardette at Zion Road have agreed to retain their original building as part of their refurbishment plans. This 1960s local landmark along Zion Road by pioneering Singaporean architect Alfred Wong, is one of our remarkable Modern Tropical designs built during the post-War period.

10. Third, 30 of the pre-war Army bungalows at Rochester Park, and 13 bungalows at the neighbouring Nepal Park, will be conserved. These bungalows serve as unique historical icons that enhance the attractiveness of the area.

11. Finally, the cowshed and the farmhouse at Dairy Farm Road that opened to the public a few weeks ago will now be conserved to remind us of the old Cold Storage 60-acre dairy farm set up in 1929. I am told that the cowshed at Dairy Farm Road was where the very first batches of high-quality fresh milk and delicious ice cream were produced in Singapore. This cowshed, once housing cows from Holland providing nourishing milk, is now re-used as an educational centre to teach our young about our natural heritage.

Lauding eight new winners

12. The success of our conservation programme lies in how we can work with the conservation stakeholders to enhance the character and soul of a place. This is one reason why URA created the Architectural Heritage Awards in 1995, to promote and inspire quality restoration and to accord recognition to the owners, architects and engineers and contractors who achieved architectural excellence.

13. This year, we are giving the awards to eight outstanding projects. These winning projects include hospitality establishments such as The Ascott Singapore Raffles Place at the old Asia Insurance Building, the Capella Singapore, as well as the beautifully restored residences such as the Indian High Commissioner's bungalow at Pierce Road, a townhouse at Cairnhill Road and a row of shophouses at Joo Chiat Place. Among the winners are also the Bukit Timah

Guild House, a religious educational centre at Gilstead Road, and finally, this building, which was the original Victoria School but now houses the People's Association Headquarters.

14. Please join me in congratulating this year's winners. I would like to thank them for their outstanding efforts in restoring these heritage buildings.

Conclusion

15. Looking back at the conservation journey over the past 20 years, there is much we can be proud of. But more remains to be done. Singapore is our home. Let's work to keep our built heritage and make this an endearing home for our current and future generations of Singaporeans.

Thank you.