

**SPEECH BY MR DESMOND LEE, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE
URA ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AWARDS 2016 ON 6 OCTOBER
2016 AT 3.00PM**

Mr Peter Ho

Chairman, URA

Mr Ng Lang

CEO, URA

Friends, award recipients, ladies and gentlemen,

1. Today, we recognise four wonderfully distinctive projects and the teams behind their remarkable restoration efforts.

2. They are, in no order of merit, the **Sultan Mosque, or Masjid Sultan** – an important religious and cultural landmark for our Muslim community in Singapore, the **Roman Catholic Church of Saints Peter & Paul** – a beautiful church nestled right here within our city area, the **Goh Loo Club** – a site with a rich history of about a hundred years, and the **Capitol Singapore** - with its Capitol Theatre,

Capitol Building and Stamford House, all of which are part of our nation's social memories.

3. At the same time, the **old Beach Road Camp – South Beach Project** has been recognised as a Special Mention for the project team's effort at restoration.
4. A total of 128 projects have been recognised so far with our Architectural Heritage Awards. They reflect the tremendous effort and care that building owners, communities and professionals have put into restoration as well as maintenance, so that our heritage buildings connect us to our past while they live and breathe in the present.

Knowledgeable approach to heritage restoration

5. Over the years, we have seen a new generation of conservation specialists in Singapore involved in many projects that have won heritage awards. Specialists such as Prof Yeo Kang Shua, Mr Wong Chung Wan, Mr Ho Weng Hin and Ms Tan Kar Lin, just to name a few, have contributed greatly to the cultural and scientific understanding of our heritage buildings, and the work that needs to go on for their restoration.

6. I think it timely that we recognise and formally appreciate the important role that these specialists play in helping us achieve good restoration outcomes. And so, from this year's Awards onwards, we will also be presenting the Architectural Heritage Awards to our conservation specialists involved in each project. I think it is high time to do so.

Working hand in hand: Planners, Professionals, People

7. Now, this brings me to my next point – on the need for us to understand and use different skills sets, and involve and recognise the role of the wider community in our conservation efforts.

8. While we can conserve buildings, we can achieve better heritage outcomes if they are restored through appropriate research, considered design and technical/scientific methods by professionals, are put to good adaptive use by understanding the significance of our heritage and the needs of today, and the community takes pride in being involved in shaping their use and committing to their care.

9. Let me start with **Capitol Singapore**. This site was envisioned as a high quality mixed-use complex that integrates the heritage architectural elements and historical social significance of the

conserved buildings of this complex. To achieve this, URA adopted an innovative concept and price revenue tender approach. URA also put in guidelines to ensure that the Capitol Theatre would be revived as a performance space, in line with the role that it played in the past.

10. Even after the project was awarded, we needed a strong team effort to realise the planning vision - with the developer, the architect, the conservation expert, the engineers, the builders, and the URA planners - all working together. And so we have the Capitol Theatre you see today, first built by the pioneering Namazies family, with its gloriously restored interior once more intact. When you look up at the ceiling in the theatre, if you visit, you will see the beautiful gold gilding on the ceiling grid - the result of very careful and painstaking restoration work.

11. To ensure the relevance of the space to today's needs, the Theatre can also be converted into a grand dining hall, or an event space. The new technology needed for the lighting and the acoustics of this space to serve an expanded range of use in the Theatre has been innovatively and sensitively integrated into the historic interior finishes.

12. Such combination of delicate restoration, thoughtful and innovative design allows more people to enjoy the theatre space, celebrating its heritage and creating new collective memories that link our past to our future.

13. We can see the same passion and dedication in the other three winners.

14. The refurbishment of the **Roman Catholic Church of Saints Peter & Paul** recaptures the original architectural and heritage ambience of the church. Expert craftsmen were engaged for repair works, and many of the original finishes and fixtures were retained in the restoration.

15. Even more commendable was the research effort put in by the team to uncover historical information on the social and physical changes to the church since 1870. This research was then used as a guide to recapture not only the physical structure, but more importantly the spirit and original ambience of the Church.

16. Rev Father John Chua also helped to design new lamps for the interior that reflected the heritage of the Church, and this

demonstrates the strong involvement of the Church community in this restoration process – and that is indeed what we want.

17. As a community and national landmark, **Masjid Sultan** has been consistently and lovingly cared for by our multi-ethnic Muslim community.

18. And indeed, protecting our heritage building is not just about formal conservation status or a major restoration effort. It is also very much about the day-to-day use and careful maintenance of the building.

19. The Mosque Trustees, if you do your research and understand, it is a historical arrangement, where different communities that make up the Muslim community in Singapore come together and have representatives on the Board of Trustees. And the Board of Trustees, in particular, has taken good care of this landmark to ensure that it is well-used and well-maintained.

20. This round of refurbishment has helped to enhance the profile of the Mosque and its stately Indo-Saracenic architecture. The Mosque's strong volunteer group welcomes visitors and shares insights into its

heritage, playing an important role to build social harmony through mutual understanding.

21. Let me move on to **72 Club Street, or the Goh Loo Club** is a townhouse with close to a hundred years of history. Here, we see how the owners view their heritage as a resource and a springboard into the future.

22. Leveraging the skills of the architect, and the support of the conservation planner, elements of the Club's history have been captured, sustained and shared through meticulous restoration and reuse of original material such as brick and timber. Old photographs, significant pieces of old furniture and calligraphic works were restored and put on display.

23. To commemorate the rich history behind this compact building, and to share it with the wider community, a mural was commissioned on an exterior wall of the building to showcase significant historical personalities involved with the Club, and their role in the history of Singapore and the region.

24. The Special Mention project, the **old Beach Road Camp – South Beach Project**. There was a lot of effort put into the approach, the

methodology, and technique used to restore the old military buildings that make up that complex. With the extensive material compiled by the team, it has provided an opportunity for the owner to capture the history of the wider Beach Road area into a commemorative publication, creating a valuable reference source.

Balancing act between the past and future

25. In the context of our island nation, the role of the URA and other related agencies to conserve heritage buildings is a complex and difficult one. It needs a measured approach to strike a delicate balance – conserving and celebrating our built heritage and at the same time ensuring dynamism to continue to meet the needs of current and future generations of Singaporeans. Sometime there is alignment, but sometimes there are tensions that pull in different directions, and that is where the URA, together with various agencies, together with the community, have to work together to try to address those tensions.

26. We are also mindful of the need to ensure that the restoration and long-term maintenance of our heritage buildings are properly carried out, to sustain not only the body, but also the soul of these buildings and the areas around them.

27. This year's winners demonstrate the Public, Private, and People approach of careful planning, technical expertise, continued dialogue, as well as enlightened community-driven decision-making – that has enabled their original uses to be retained, where possible.
28. We hope to achieve this for many more of our conservation projects. And where the opportunity presents itself, we must pursue conservation and restoration in partnership with the wider community, and also support the community to their drive to do so.
29. Now beyond conserving our old buildings, we should also look into the stories that these old buildings can tell us. This is something that URA has been encouraging building owners and heritage enthusiasts to do so, and to work with the URA to do so – to document and bring out the stories behind our old buildings, the people who lived in them, as well as the activities that took place in and around them. So that we can piece together a more complete and textured story of Singapore of the past, and ensure that the lessons of our past, embodied in what when on in these buildings, continue to guide us well into the future.

Conclusion

30. Together, the winning projects this year – a mosque, a church, a Chinese social club, an old theatre, and an old army camp, tell the story of a culturally-rich and diverse Singapore. It is only possible when we have a community that is passionate about our heritage, professionals who are dedicated in their field and agencies that support these efforts.
31. Please join me in congratulating this year's winners and the hard work that all of you have put in.
32. Thank you.

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