

**SPEECH BY MR DESMOND LEE, MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT AND SECOND MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, FOR ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AWARDS 2017, AT ROMAN CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, 'A' QUEEN STREET, ON 31 OCTOBER 2017, TUESDAY, 3.00PM**

Our hosts from the Roman Catholic (R.C.) Cathedral of the Good Shepherd,

His Grace, Archbishop William Goh,

Monsignor Philip Heng,

Friends of Singapore's heritage,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1 Good afternoon. I am very happy to be here at the Architectural Heritage Awards (AHA). Today, we celebrate the restoration of our heritage buildings and recognise the teams who made it happen.

2 This year, we celebrate the following Award winners: The Cathedral of the Good Shepherd – an iconic landmark in the Bras Basah Bugis area; and The Warehouse Hotel – a unique building typology located along the Singapore River. We also recognise the Red House at 75 East Coast Road with a Special Mention, for the efforts of MUIS, Warees and the trustees in finding a suitable use which revives the social memory of a community landmark.

3 I am encouraged to see such care and effort put in by the building owners and community to restore and maintain these heritage buildings. These buildings provide us with a physical and visual link to Singapore's past amidst our changing urban landscape.

4 Conservation, however, is much more than just the quality restoration of the façade of a building. It is also important that we retain the inherent spirit and original ambience of these historic buildings as far as possible. It is therefore meaningful for us to look beyond the physical structure to tell the story of the building.

**Bringing our heritage buildings alive through good story telling**

5 This brings me to my first point - we should keep our heritage buildings alive and keep these buildings meaningful for everyone, especially future generations, through good story telling.

6 Our winners this year have done just that. The Cathedral of the Good Shepherd and The Warehouse Hotel have captured the stories of the buildings' past beautifully.

7 The Cathedral community and the project team enhanced the heritage value through the creation of a heritage gallery, onsite storyboards, publications and a docent programme. The church grounds are open to people from all walks of life for secular activities, allowing it to share its story with the wider public.

8 The Warehouse Hotel's project team researched the building's history to better understand its past. They found out that it was used as a warehouse in its early days and was the Warehouse Disco in the 1980s. They then charted the story of Singapore's industrial development in the hotel's collaterals, website, and onsite storyboards. They also incorporated the industrial aesthetics in their interior design.

9 As for the Red House, time and effort was put in to bring in a suitable F&B operator, a local café, that revives the social memory of a community landmark. Warees and the trustees have managed to do this while fulfilling this *wakaf* property's obligation to philanthropy and maximise its revenue to benefit more people. The team also captured the stories of the building and shared them with the local community through onsite storyboards.

10 Besides building owners, the wider community plays a part to ensure that the buildings stay relevant. I am therefore glad to see participation from university and primary school students in the story telling of our heritage buildings this year, This is a wonderful way to get them to revive the heritage of our city and the stories of our past.

11 URA has been working with Nanyang Technological University students over the past three years to produce short documentaries about our built heritage. This collaboration allows students to hone their technical skills, and also provides them with the opportunity to research and understand the significance of our heritage buildings.

12 We have over 7,000 conserved buildings, and it is important for each building to be distinguished by their history, and for people to continue to tell their stories so they remain relevant. I encourage you to take a look at the video clips which are available on the URA YouTube channel, to view the stories of our heritage buildings through these students' eyes.

13 URA has also worked with Teck Whye Primary School to publish two storybooks about Joo Chiat. A group of Primary 5 students were brought on a tour around the Joo Chiat area by URA planners, to learn about the architecture and history of the area. The students then translated the information into two storybooks. It is remarkable that a group of 10 year-old kids, with some guidance, were able to put together such colourful and engaging stories.

14 We hope that we have ignited interest in our young school children to embark on a learning journey of our history. It is important to teach them about future-looking skills, but also to cherish what we have, and remember and respect our past.

## **Sustaining our heritage building through higher standards of technical restoration**

15 Secondly, we should sustain our heritage buildings into the future, through quality technical restoration. Building owners and industry professionals such as architects and conservation specialists have a responsibility to ensure that restoration works done are of the highest standards.

16 Currently, URA organises many seminars and talks for practitioners to share best practices and technical expertise on restoration works.

17 In addition, URA has been working with the local chapter of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS SG) to produce a series of Conservation Technical Handbooks. The series will provide an informative and easy to read resource for professionals and building owners. They will be available online for free download by the public. The first of eight volumes will be available by end of the year.

18 URA has also carried out its five-yearly review of the Conservation Guidelines. URA consulted practising architects and conservation specialists, from both Singapore and abroad. The revised guidelines aim to raise the standard of restoration, and guide owners and developers to strive for better protection of key architectural features and the historic streetscape. These guidelines will similarly be available by end of the year.

## **Celebrating our built heritage with the community**

19 Finally, we must continue to collaborate with the larger community on our conservation work. Conservation is not just for the conservation and heritage community, but intended for the benefit of the wider public. It is important that conservation efforts go beyond the government and industry practitioners. Heritage buildings and their stories belong to all of us. When the community steps forward to participate, it sustains and bolsters our efforts in protecting our built heritage.

20 Over the years, we have seen a growing awareness and appreciation for our built heritage. This has translated positively into more ground-up initiatives such as walking tours and publications. This is the right way forward.

21 I am therefore pleased to announce that with this increased interest, we will launch the Architectural Heritage Season (AHS) this year. The AHS is a month-long celebration of our built heritage. It has a line-up of activities consisting of talks, seminars, exhibitions and tours put together by the URA with the support of a passionate community.

22 Professionals have come forward to share their expertise in technical restoration with the industry. Volunteers – including docents and students from ITE College West, Nanyang and Ngee Ann Polytechnics, National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University – have also offered to lead guided tours to some of our beautifully restored heritage buildings.

23 Thank you all for the hard work that everyone has put in to realise our inaugural Architectural Heritage Season and congratulations to all of this year's winners!