SPEECH BY MR LIM HNG KIANG,
MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
SECOND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE PRESENTATION OF
THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AWARDS 1995
AT JUBILEE HALL RAFFLES HOTEL
ON WEDNESDAY, 5 JULY 1995 AT 10.15 AM

Our building conservation programme started modestly with
38 shophouses in Tanjong Pagar. In a short span of eight years,
we have restored 1,360 buildings or a quarter of the 5,300
buildings gazetted for conservation and preservation. The fruits
of our labour are visible around us - in the revitalised historic
districts of Chinatown, Kampung Glam and Little India. Emerald
Hill, Raffles Hotel, Boat Quay and Clarke Quay are other fine
examples of our conservation efforts.

We can be proud of our achievements, given the complexity
of restoration works and the initial lack of experience in this
new field.

We have accomplished three important things in our
building conservation programme. The first and most important
accomplishment is the preservation of our past. The buildings
that we have chosen to conserve represent our historical,
architectural and multi-cultural heritage. They are living
anecdotes of our past and provide the vital link with our
history. They impart invaluable lessons to our children and
future generations on our roots, our developments and the
struggles of our forefathers. Conservation has also allowed
Singaporeans to enjoy such fine architectural heritage as the
Fullerton Building, Supreme Court and Raffles Hotel.
Our second accomplishment is the distinct Singaporean character that building conservation has created for our city. There is an exciting blend of modernity and old-fashion charm. Singaporeans and tourists will find the multi-cultural heritage in the revitalised Chinatown, Kampung Glam and Little India alluring. Yet, they give you an exciting sense of the hustle and bustle of modern-day city life.

Our third accomplishment is the new economic vitality we have injected in our old buildings and historic areas. This has been achieved through creative and innovative restoration. Old buildings and areas not only regained their architectural splendour, but were also given a new lease of life. The revitalised Boat Quay and Clarke Quay now boast of a bustling night life. The run-down shophouses and godowns have been transformed into attractive food and entertainment outlets. In turn, Boat Quay and Clarke Quay act as catalysts to transform the Singapore River into a new and attractive setting for commercial, recreational and residential uses. Given our land constraints, adapting restored buildings to new uses is a pragmatic approach to building conservation in Singapore. We have demonstrated that old buildings, after restoration, can be an economic asset, and not a liability.

As building owners, developers, architects, engineers and other professionals, you have played a major role in Singapore's building conservation. Building owners have shown a keen interest in conserving their old buildings. Private developers readily took on conservation projects, commercial as well as non-commercial ones. I am heartened by your active participation in conserving our built heritage.

While we conserve our built heritage, I urge developers, architects and other professionals to design and create new buildings to be worthy of conservation in the future. In time to come, present-day buildings will represent our built heritage to be bequeathed to future generations. Your buildings will have
to stand up to the test of time.

I am told that there are four values upon which your buildings will be judged. Whether your buildings will become worthy assets will depend on how well you incorporate these four values in your building concept. The first two values are aesthetic and historic value. Most laymen can appreciate this. The other two values are social and technological value. Let me illustrate by an example. The Telok Ayer Market, better known as Lau Pa Sat, embodies the social and technological values. It was a popular congregation place for the community, and the extensive use of cast iron structures for the market reflects Singapore's technological advancement in its early history.

I urge our present-day developers and architects to keep this objective in mind. Individually, you have the opportunity to produce Singapore landmarks of good architecture. Collectively, you leave behind the heritage for future generations. It is too early to tell which of our present buildings will eventually make it to our future list of gazetted landmarks for conservation. I am confident that our professionals are capable of producing more works of architectural art in future, and not mere functional buildings. I urge you to be bold and innovative.

I would now like to congratulate the winners of the Architectural Heritage Awards for excellence in building conservation works. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) has introduced these new awards to recognise your significant contribution towards conserving our built heritage.

Restoration works on buildings are demanding. They challenge not only your technical expertise, but also your creativity. You have to restore old buildings to their old charm and character, and yet recreate new relevance and usefulness to the restored buildings.
You have demonstrated that we have the expertise to do a good job of restoring our built heritage. This is important as there is a limit to what we can conserve in land-scarce Singapore. What we can afford to conserve, we will conserve it well, so that our built heritage is passed on and held in high esteem by future generations.

I hope that these annual architectural heritage awards will encourage you to achieve greater excellence in your works.