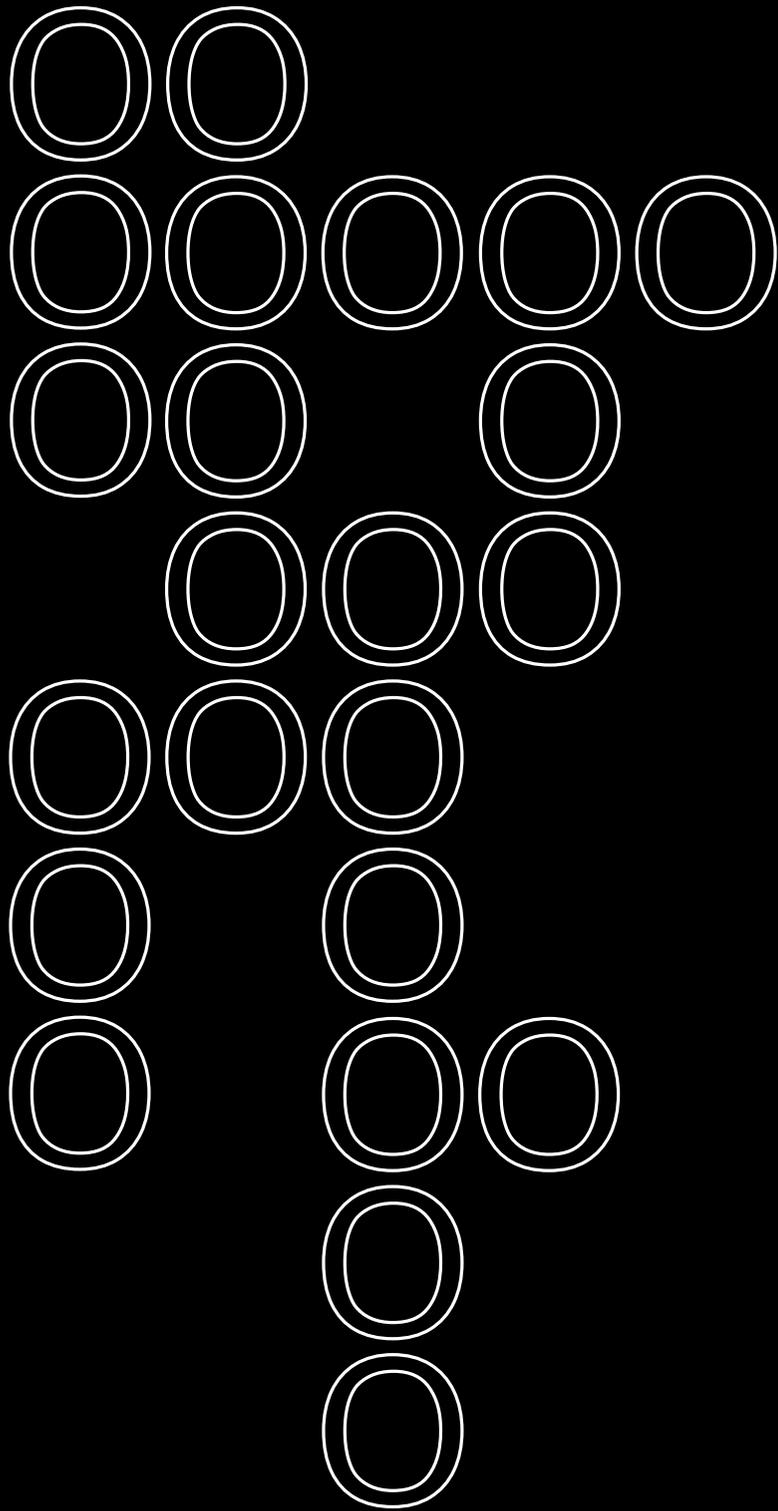


GIVING
NEW LEASE
OF LIFE TO
SINGAPORE'S
MODERNIST
ICONS

TOO
YOUNG
TO DIE



A
Position
Paper

by
Singapore
Heritage Society

August
2018

TOO YOUNG TO DIE: GIVING NEW LEASE OF LIFE TO SINGAPORE'S MODERNIST ICONS

CONTENTS

06	INTRODUCTION	31	BOX STORY: THE PEARL BANK REGENERATION PLAN
06	THREE SINGAPOREAN MODERNIST ICONS		
07	Transformation of the City: the Sale of Sites Programme		CURRENT OBSTACLES TO VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION
08	People's Park (1972)	35	i. Lack of clarity in conditions for voluntary conservation
12	Golden Mile Complex (1973)		
16	Pearl Bank Apartments (1976)	37	ii. Lack of clarity in criteria for lease top-up
20	BOX STORY: BRUTALISM AND METABOLISM		
	WHY THESE ICONS ARE ENDANGERED NOW	39	BOX STORY: CAN MODERN ARCHITECTURE BE 'HERITAGE'?
26	i. Debt financing for older properties	45	RECOMMENDATIONS
26	ii. Maintenance issues	55	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
	OTHER CONSIDERATIONS		
28	i. Environmental cost & ethics of demolition		
29	ii. Knock-on effect on other strata-titled, individual-owner malls		
30	iii. Impact on sense of place and community		

INTRODUCTION

Three of Singapore's most iconic and historically-significant buildings from the post-independence era — Pearl Bank Apartments, People's Park Complex, and Golden Mile Complex, are currently at risk of collective sale and demolition. To date, no post-independence strata-titled modernist building in Singapore has received official conservation status. Given the historical and architectural significance of these buildings, the Singapore Heritage Society believes that it is timely for current land-use policies and regulatory frameworks to be re-evaluated to facilitate the conservation of modernist structures for adaptive reuse, and for private owners and developers to plan for a longer building lifespan incorporating evolving ideas for rehabilitation and regeneration.

THREE SINGAPOREAN MODERNIST ICONS

Pearl Bank Apartments, People's Park Complex, and Golden Mile Complex are of great historical and architectural significance to Singapore. They are:

- outstanding examples of the earliest phases of the government's successful urban renewal under the government's Sale of Sites Programme during the era of nation-building - People's Park Complex and Golden Mile Complex were the first public-private, mixed-use buildings on this scale in Singapore;
- visionary, innovative architecture which received international praise, based on cutting-edge urban design principles providing liveable solutions for dense urban centres;
- large-scale megastructures that have shaped the visual character of the downtown landscape; and
- designed entirely by Singaporean architects.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE CITY: THE SALE OF SITES PROGRAMME

All three developments, Pearl Bank Apartments, People's Park Complex, and Golden Mile Complex, are important in the urban transformation of Singapore's city centre as they were part of the earliest sites sold to private developers under the Sale of Sites Programme by the Urban Renewal Department (URD, the predecessor to today's Urban Redevelopment Authority). The Programme was established to overcome the obstacle to comprehensive urban redevelopment of small land plots under separate private owners. URD assembled small plots into a single larger parcel of land, which was then sold by tender to the private sector, accompanied by conditions and concessions to ensure developments would be in line with larger urban planning objectives. This was a major turning point in transforming downtown Singapore from a landscape of shophouses to modern high-rise developments.¹ Unlike today, where large-scale architectural projects in Singapore often hire foreign corporate professionals for their "international renown and brand name assurance",² Pearl Bank Apartments, People's Park Complex and Golden Mile Complex were wholly the work of Singaporean talent. These Singapore architects did not merely copy foreign styles but drew on concepts from diverse international sources to "devise buildings that responded inventively to local conditions."³

1 Urban Redevelopment Authority, *A Pictorial Chronology of the Sale of Sites Programme for Private Development* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1983), p. 7-9.

2 Ho Weng Hin, Dinesh Naidu & Tan Kar Lin, *Our Modern Past: A Visual Survey of Singapore Architecture, 1920s-70s* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society and Singapore Institute of Architects, 2015), Vol. 1 Part 1, p. 11.

3 Ho, et. al., *Our Modern Past*, Vol. 1 Part 3, p. 472.

People's Park Complex (1972)



The residential slab block of People's Park Complex.



Retail kiosk on the ground floor of People's Park Complex's shopping zone.



FACTS AND FIGURES⁴

DEVELOPER	People's Park Development Ltd
ARCHITECTURAL FIRM	DP Architects (formerly Design Partnership)
ARCHITECTS-IN-CHARGE	William SW Lim, Koh Seow Chuan and Tay Kheng Soon
USAGE	Retail / Office / Residential flats
SITE AREA	10,358.6m ²
LOCATION	Eu Tong Sen Street
COST	\$40 million
31 STOREYS	6 storey podium block for retail & offices / 25-storey slab block for residential use / 56 offices / 233 shops & 44 kiosks / 264 apartments: 98 one-room flats, 144 three-room flats, 18 four-room flats / 302 shops / 633 parking lots

⁴ Mok Sin Pin, 'Majestic landmark in Chinatown', *Straits Times*, 7 February 1972; Urban Redevelopment Authority, *A Pictorial Chronology*, p.25; National Library Board, 'People's Park Complex' written by Michael Lee Hong Hwee, *Singapore Infopedia*, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1597_2009-10-31.html; Eunice Seng, 'The Podium, the Tower and the People': The Private Development of a Public Complex, c.1965-1970 in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*: 30, edited by Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Qld: SAHANZ, 2013), vol. 1, p.224.

The site was formerly the People's Park Market (珍珠巴剎) which comprised makeshift stalls and single-storey shops selling food, clothing, and housewares. After a major fire broke out in December 1966, the government re-parceled the site for sale to a private developer in 1967, under the first round of the Sale of Sites Programme. The architectural firm responsible was the newly-established Design Partnership (now DP Architects Pte Ltd), led by William SW Lim, Koh Seow Chuan, and Tay Kheng Soon, then only in its first year of operation.⁵

The complex was divided into two zones, a public podium at ground level for retail and businesses, and a private residential block. Both were planned around shared public spaces. The podium was based on an innovative concept of the “city room”, as the architects called it — “an arrangement of scales (of spaces), levels and movement designed to invite the people in and to accommodate them at a variety of ways and speeds.” A three-storeyed atrium with a sunken plaza for events was accessible from all four sides of the building, with all shops visible at once, and the small stalls and shops on the ground floor were intended to evoke the bazaar market that had once stood on the site.⁶ The public atrium was intended as “the people’s living room”, open at all hours for Chinatown’s residents to interact, eat, shop, play, and carry out daily activities. Residences in the high-rise block were lined along “streets-in-the-air” and had a roof deck for community interaction.⁷

At the time, People’s Park Complex was the largest and tallest shopping-cum-residential complex ever built in Singapore and the atrium was the first in Asia.⁸ The developer, Ho Kok Cheong, described it as the “first and the grandest

5 Robert Powell, ‘Inciting Rebellion’, in *No Limits: Articulating William Lim* (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2002), p.25.

6 Seng, ‘The Podium, the Tower and the “People”’, p.226-227.

7 Collin Anderson, *DP Architects* (Mulgrave, Vic.: Images Pub., 2012), p. 22; National Library Board, ‘Completion of People’s Park Complex, May 1973’, *HistorySG*, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/bad9f4ed-c644-462d-8124-de3b7f208049#8>; J. Beamish, *A History of Singapore Architecture: The Making of a City* (Singapore: G. Brash, 1985), p. 160; Y. C. Wong, et. al., *Singapore 1:1 City: A Gallery of Architecture & Urban Design* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2005), p. 160; R. K. Tyers & J.H. Siow, *Ray Tyers’ Singapore: Then & now* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1993), p. 185.

8 Wong, et. al., *Singapore 1:1 City*, pp. 158–161.

multiple complex in Asia, catering for everything under the sun in one roof”.⁹ Over a million people visited the shopping complex in the first month of its opening in October 1970.¹⁰

While the exterior was initially finished in exposed raw concrete associated with the Brutalist movement, the spatial design incorporated other schools of thought. In the words of Eunice Seng, “[People’s Park Complex] has been celebrated as an exemplary urban architectural model that is specific to its place and historical condition where the nationalizing moment intersected the architectural context of the 1960s.”¹¹ People’s Park Complex was internationally-hailed as a masterpiece of 1970s experimental architecture. Inspired by the Japanese Metabolist movement, People’s Park Complex was a rare example of these concepts applied in practice. When Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki, a founding member of the movement, visited the site during construction, he commented, “we theorised and you people are getting it built!”¹² Two decades later, Pritzker Prize winner, Rem Koolhaas noted, “Ostensibly a brutal high-rise slab on a brutal podium, People’s Park Complex is in fact a condensed version of a Chinese downtown, a three-dimensional market based on the cellular matrix of Chinese shopping — a modern-movement Chinatown.”¹³

With a large covered overhead bridge connecting People’s Park Complex to the other side New Bridge Road, the building also embodied other contemporary architectural theories: CIAM 8’s emphasis on the needs of the pedestrian in the city, and the Team 10’s concept of urban reintegration by providing a continuous space from residence to shops to the exterior and rest of the city. This was the first such bridge in Singapore, gifted by the developer to the Singapore government.¹⁴

9 ‘Coming up fast, grandest complex in Asia’, *Straits Times*, 30 September 1969.

10 National Library Board, ‘Completion of People’s Park Complex, May 1973’, *HistorySG*.

11 Seng, ‘The Podium, the Tower and the “People”’, p.221.

12 Calvin Low, ‘Model of a modern marketplace’, *Straits Times*, 4 November 2006.

13 Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), p.1067.

14 Seng, ‘The Podium, the Tower and the “People”’, p. 226. Please refer to the Box Story on “Brutalism and Metabolism” (p. 23) for more on CIAM and Team 10.

Golden Mile Complex (1973)



FACTS AND FIGURES¹⁵

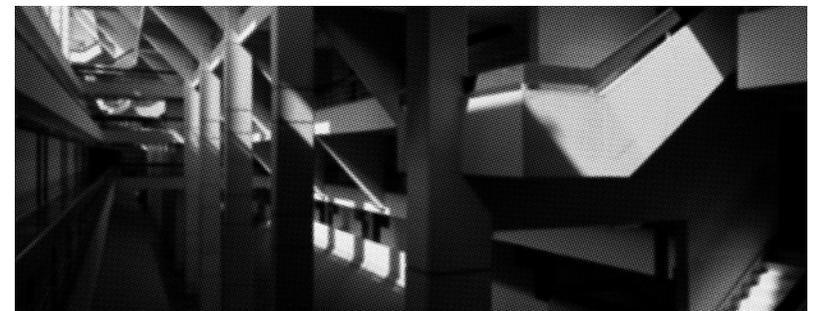
ORIGINAL NAME	Woh Hup Complex
DEVELOPER	Singapura Development (Pte) Ltd
ARCHITECTURAL FIRM	DP Architects (formerly Design Partnership)
ARCHITECTS-IN-CHARGE	William SW Lim, Tay Kheng Soon, Gan Eng Oon
USAGE	Retail / Office / Residential flats
SITE AREA	13,525.3m ²
LOCATION	Beach Road
COST	S\$18 million
16 STOREYS	first 3 storeys for retail / 411 shops 226 offices / 68 residential units / over 500 parking lots in the basement

¹⁵ Mok Sin Pin, 'Golden Mile complex', *Straits Times*, 12 January 1970; Urban Redevelopment Authority, *A Pictorial Chronology*, p.30; "'Slum' becomes landmark", *Straits Times*, 5 August 2007; Melody Zaccheus, 'Architects who helped build nation', *Straits Times*, 9 October 2015.



Golden Mile Complex's sloping terrace provides shade on the Beach Road-facing side.

On the seaward-facing side, the sloping terrace offers panoramic views and sunny balconies for each residential unit.



Originally named Woh Hup Complex, this was one of three sites along Beach Road developed under URA's first Sale of Sites Programme, an ambitious plan to transform the city with 14 large redevelopment sites. Along Beach Road, "it was intended to raise a 'Golden Mile' of modern skyscrapers — hotels, shops and luxury apartments."¹⁶ Besides Woh Hup Complex, the sites included Golden Mile Tower and The Plaza.¹⁷ "We are convinced this stretch hitherto a squalid shanty area and dumping ground will become Singapore's Golden Mile", said Alan Choe, head of the Housing & Development Board's Urban Renewal Department.¹⁸

Golden Mile Tower was designed by Gan Eng Oon, William Lim and Tay Kheng Soon of Design Partnership (now known as DP Architects). Replacing a landscape of shophouses facing the sea, it sat on a plot situated between Nicoll Highway and Beach Road which was a major vehicular route to the city centre. Golden Mile Complex was designed as a high-density, vertical, "self-contained city", combining everything needed for urban life, similar to People's Park Complex. The lower three floors were dedicated to public, commercial uses with shops, kiosks, coffee bars, a bank, department store, supermarket and office studios, all located within a central atrium along the length of the building. Resembling a vault, it was intended to provide full visibility to the shopping on offer on each level. Rising above this were the residential units which was served by a public space on the 12th floor, a "garden in the sky" terrace for recreation and socialising.¹⁹

Responding directly to site conditions, climate, view, sun orientation and circulation, the architects and a team of specialised technical consultants came up with the distinctive "stepped-back terrace" form, the first of its kind in Singapore. On one side, it gave offices and flats unobstructed panoramic views of the seafront and surrounding Southern Islands, terraces for small sunlit gardens, and on the opposite side of

16 'The Golden Mile', *Straits Times*, 19 June 1967.

17 Urban Redevelopment Authority, *A Pictorial Chronology*, p.30.

18 William Campbell, 'Selling the Golden Mile', *Straits Times*, 27 March 1969.

19 Mok, 'Golden Mile complex'; Anderson, *DP Architects*, p. 26.

the building, the reversed tiers meant that each floor shaded the floor below from the midday sun. The shallow, staggered profile also allowed for better ventilation and natural lighting.²⁰

Just as People's Park Complex gave much attention to how the building would connect with the surrounding neighbourhood, at Golden Mile Complex, a platform was designed with the possibility of being extended into a mile-long pedestrian walkway that would connect each building along the "golden mile", acting as a parallel to the vehicular transportation network at ground level.

Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas said at a press conference when he visited Singapore in 2005: "These buildings [Golden Mile Complex and People's Park Complex] were not intended to be landmarks, but became landmarks. Pritzker Prize-winning Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki said it was a prime example of an urban building where people can live, work, shop, and play - all in a single development."²¹ Although Golden Mile Complex drew on the Brutalist and Metabolist movements in Britain and Japan, "its bold intentions, unique form, and complex spaces have seen it recognised as an important and original work in its own right."²²

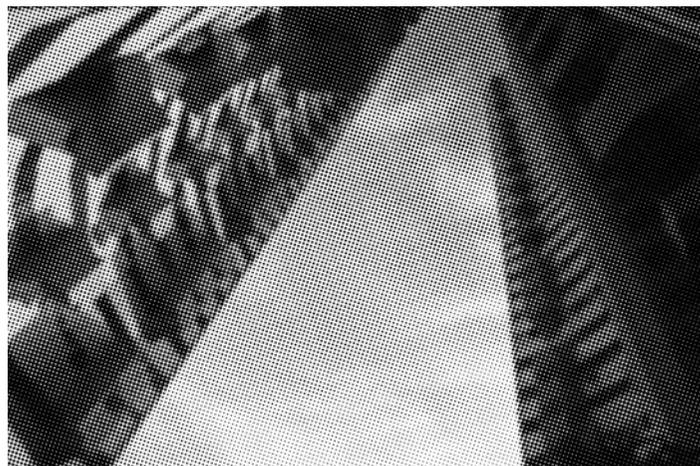
20 Mok, 'Golden Mile complex'; Urban Redevelopment Authority, *A Pictorial Chronology*, p.30; Anderson, *DP Architects*, p. 26.

21 "'Slum' becomes landmark", *Straits Times*, 5 August 2007.

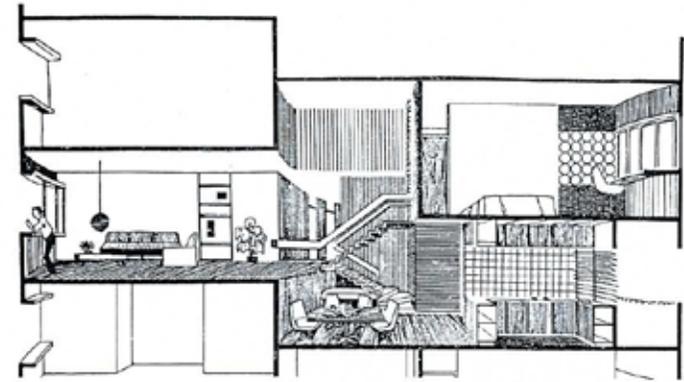
22 Ho, et.al., *Our Modern Past*, Vol. 1 Part 3, p. 472.

Pearl Bank Apartments (1976)

The horseshoe shape of Pearl Bank Apartments maximises panoramic views for each unit.



The interior-facing side is shaded from the sun by the curved design.



Split-level apartments in Pearl Bank are cleverly interwoven with each other.

FACTS AND FIGURES²³

DEVELOPER	Hock Seng Enterprises Pte Ltd
ARCHITECTURAL FIRM	Archynamics
ARCHITECTS-IN-CHARGE	Tan Cheng Siong, Mok Yew Fun
USAGE	Residential
SITE AREA	7,943.1m ²
LOCATION	Pearl Bank, Outram
HEIGHT	113 metres
COST	\$15 million
41 STOREYS	288 residential unit: 24 two-bedroom units; 248 three-bedroom units; 16 four-bedroom units
CAPACITY	2000 residents
FACILITIES	ground floor: 4 shops / 8th floor: creche, hall for toddlers with adjacent mother's club, gymnasium, laundrette / 29th floor: men's clubhouse, women's association, library, multi-purpose hall / multi-storey carpark for 300 vehicles / carpark roof: turfed open space, kindergarten for 40 children

²³ 'Going up in S'pore S-E Asia's tallest flats', *Straits Times*, 13 July 1970; Urban Redevelopment Authority, *A Pictorial Chronology*, p. 62.

Located on Pearl's Hill, next to Pearl's Hill Park, this site enjoyed privacy and quiet which made it ideal for residential development. Rather than following the standard model of shorter tower blocks clustered together, architect Tan Cheng Siong created a single 113-metre skyscraper which would have panoramic views and greater privacy, at a height comparable to Singapore's highest peak, Bukit Timah Hill.²⁴

The distinctive 'broken cylinder' horseshoe-shaped form was driven by efficiency and functionality. Compared to a slab block, this shape had the smallest wall-to-floor ratio, meaning greater economy in terms of building materials. The opening in the C-shape cylinder allowed for better ventilation and mitigated against the afternoon sun. Another innovative feature was the interlocking, split design apartments which maximised the number of apartments and allowed for a variety of two, three and four-bedroom split-level maisonettes. In the words of architectural historians Ho and Chang, 'Its monumental courtyard frames dramatic vistas and is among Singapore's most spectacular spaces.'²⁵

Remarkably, Pearl Bank achieved extreme urban intensification of 2,000 people in 288 units, whilst providing a high-quality living environment aimed to appeal to the growing middle-class of the time. In comparison, a similar density was found in the shophouses of Kreta Ayer, a stone's throw away, but which were overcrowded and unsanitary.

Pearl Bank Apartments chalked up a number of Firsts in Singapore:²⁶

- First all-housing development built on a URA land parcel
- Highest density for a residential development
- Tallest apartment block in Southeast Asia

24 Justin Zhuang, 'Saving Pearl Bank Apartments', *Biblioasia*, Vol 12 Issue 3 (Sep 2016).

25 Ho Weng Hin and Chiang Jiat Hwee, 'Adding Value without demolition, rebuilding: Regenerating Singapore's modernist icons', *Business Times*, 7 April 2018.

26 'Apartment block ready at last', *New Nation*, 10 October 1975; 'Cylindrical tower provides high density accommodation in split-level apartments', *Building Materials & Equipment*, April 1976, p.35.

- Largest number of apartments in a single block
- Split-level apartments available on large scale for middle income group

Consequently, Pearl Bank has been studied and heralded as a intelligent solution to urban challenges, as well as for its striking modernist aesthetics, by architects, planners, urbanists, architectural historians and heritage enthusiasts. In May 2015, the Urban Redevelopment Authority also acknowledged that there was merit in conserving Pearl Bank Apartments.²⁷



27 Rennie Whang, 'URA sees merit in conservation plan for Pearl Bank', *Straits Times*, 30 May 2015.

BRUTALISM AND METABOLISM

By Fauzy Ismail

BOX
STORY

Brutalism

Brutalism in architecture, is a subset of the modernist architectural movement that began in the early 1950s. The word Brutalism originates from the French word for “raw” where Swiss-French architect, Le Corbusier, described his choice of materials as “béton brut” meaning raw concrete in French. One of his best known proto-Brutalist architecture is his work of Unité d’Habitation in Marseille, France, that was completed in 1952 and Secretariat Building (Palace of Assembly) in Chandigarh, India, which was completed in 1953.

The architecture of Brutalism is often expressed as a megastructure in a form of office towers, residential blocks and shopping podiums. The architecture is expressed with exposed concrete construction and rugged concrete details, and has a tendency to express the circulation graphically.

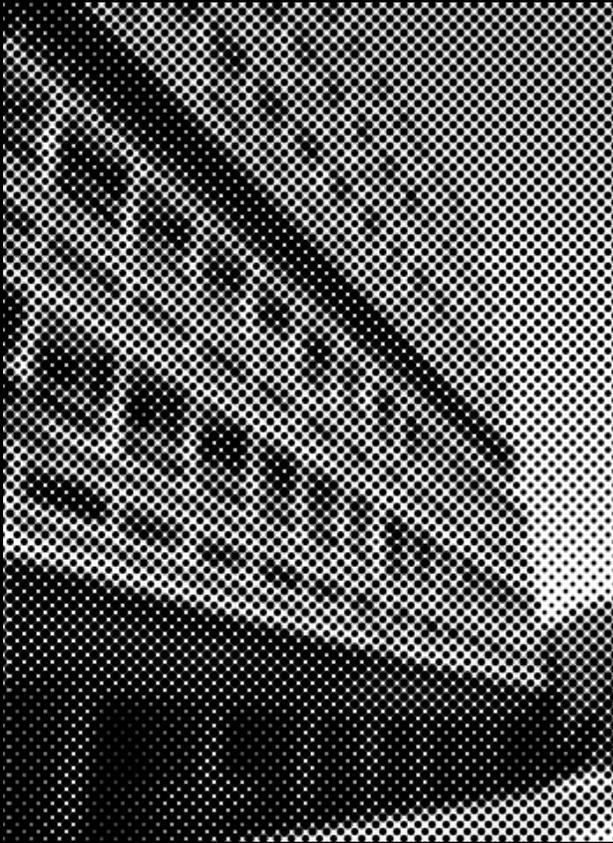
English architecture critic, Reyner Banham (1966), posited Brutalism as an expression of the atmosphere of moral seriousness rather than an architectural style.²⁸ Brutalism represents honesty in the materials, sculptural quality of the architecture and an uncompromising anti-bourgeois nature of the style. Banham solidified the status



Palace of Assembly, Capitol Complex, Chandigarh.
Source: Lillottama, Wikimedia Commons, 4 Sept 2016.

²⁸ Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (New York: Reinhold, 1966).

Unité d'Habitation in Marseille. Source: Anapuig, Wikimedia Commons. 16 Sept 2013.



of Brutalism more than a decade after its emergence in the 1950s, the period when English architect, Peter Smithson, was believed to have coined the term “Brutalism”, and as such, the term may not be used consistently by architect and critic. Brutalism gained momentum in the United Kingdom and other English-speaking countries due to its inexpensive low cost construction and design methods in the context of economic depression arising from World War II.

Metabolism

Metabolism (Japanese: 新陳代謝, an idiomatic expression which means “replacing the old with the new”) was an architecture movement originating in Japan in the late 1950s,

which suggested that architecture megastructures should model themselves after nature and that designed buildings and cities should emulate living beings with a continuous cycle of growth and change rather than being mere static entities. Metabolism promoted a dynamic city and flexible architecture that could meet the needs of an ever-changing environment. Metabolist architects felt that the static postwar structures created after World War II in Japan had a limited lifespan.

Metabolism had its first international exposure in the final Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Modern (CIAM, International Congress of Modern Architecture) in 1959 when CIAM invited Kenzo Tange to attend. Le Corbusier and his contemporaries founded CIAM in 1928. It ended in 1959 when a splinter group Team 10 was created. Many of the ideas



Nakagin Capsule Tower. Source: Jordy Meow, Wikimedia Commons. 4 May 2013.

were tested by Kenzo Tange's students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and many Metabolist architects studied under Kenzo Tange in Tange's Laboratory at Tokyo University.

Subsequently, in the Tokyo World Design Conference in 1960, a group of young Metabolist architects and designers, including Kisho Kurokawa and Fumihiko Maki, published the Metabolism manifesto which challenged European ideas about static urbanism. The manifesto, presented in a series of essays and designs, was influenced by a wide variety of ideas and philosophies including Marxist theories and biological processes. Despite the international exposure of metabolism, many ideas were never realised and remained theoretical as they were considered too futuristic.

However, a few were built, one of them being Kisho Kurokawa's Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo, Japan. Nakagin Capsule Tower had over 100 prefabricated cell-capsule units individually bolted onto a single concrete shaft. Kurokawa had an idea of a Helix City modelled after the structural metaphor of DNA - building around a spine-like infrastructure with prefabricated, replaceable cell-like parts which are easily attached and readily removable when their lifespan is over.²⁹

Brutalism & Metabolism in Singapore

Back home in the 1960s, the Singapore government recognised the important relationship between architecture and nation building, and architecture was a key criterion for the government in selecting urban redevelopment projects. The government took reference from projects such as those in Chandigarh and was familiar with CIAM's philosophy, ideas, urban design and architecture.³⁰

In March 1963, Singapore put up an exhibition on loan from the New York Museum of Modern Art on visionary architecture and housing showing unbuilt architecture and

29 Jackie Craven, 'What is metabolism?', *ThoughtCo*, 19 June 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-metabolism-in-architecture-177292>.

30 Seng, "The Podium, the Tower and the 'People'", p. 228.

urban design proposals by thirty architects from the early to mid-twentieth century, including Metabolist projects. This exhibition defined the spirit of the time when the government brought in private sector individuals to collaborate as part of the nation-building endeavour.³¹

In 1967, William Lim co-founded DP Architects with Koh Seow Chuan and Tay Kheng Soon. Lim attributed the design influence of People's Park Complex to modernists such as Le Corbusier and Team 10.³² While studying at the Architectural Association, Lim was influenced by Peter Smithson (Team 10) and Otto Koenigsberger, who was part of the UN Team assisting in creating Singapore's first concept plan in 1971. Lim observed the last CIAM meeting where debates took place regarding the ideological shift in modern architecture towards a systematic approach in designing cities. This created a lasting impact on his architectural philosophy.³³

These respective events planted the seeds for the Brutalist and Metabolist influence found in the People's Park Complex, Golden Mile Complex, and Pearl Bank Apartments. Metabolist architect Fumihiko Maki visited the construction of People's Park Complex and commented, "We theorised and you people are getting it built!"³⁴ Star architect Rem Koolhaas has described People's Park Complex as "a brutal high-rise slab on a brutal podium."³⁵ These modernist icons embodied the preoccupation that CIAM, Team X, and Japanese Metabolism had with designing public spaces, having been built in a specific time and place when architecture sought to meet urgent post-independence needs for nation building, as well as the desire for social integration. ●

31 'Housing "a dream come true" - Raja,' *Straits Times*, 19 March 1963.

32 Seng, 'The Podium, the Tower and the "People"', p. 229.

33 Seng, 'The Podium, the Tower and the "People"', p. 229.

34 William Lim, *Cities for People* (Singapore: Select Books, 1990), p. 8.

35 Koolhaas et. al., *S,M,L,XL*, p.1067.

WHY THESE ICONS ARE ENDANGERED NOW

There are two main reasons why the pressure for collective sale is particularly pressing now.

i. Debt financing for older properties

At this point in time, all three buildings have about 50 years left on their leases, which has led to a sharp drop in their property value. In terms of debt financing, the CPF Board has stricter rules for properties with remaining leases of less than 60 years.³⁶ Banks follow suit and are reluctant to give loans for the major repairs, upgrading works, or lease extension of older properties.

ii. Maintenance issues

However, most buildings require major repairs after 40 to 50 years, and these modernist icons have suffered from poor upkeep over a long span of time. Their relatively run-down condition has led to a decline in their status and this has changed the character of the businesses, residents and communities that occupy them. People's Park Complex and Golden Mile Complex have become well-known as centres for the migrant mainland Chinese and Thai communities respectively. As a result, negative public perception has overshadowed the value and potential these buildings still hold.

These factors have stimulated owners to see collective sale as the best way forward, whilst also bringing a financial windfall.

In February 2018, it was reported that Pearl Bank Apartments has been sold for S\$728 million to CapitaLand through a private treaty collective sale, its fourth attempt

³⁶ Central Provident Fund Board, 'Housing Scheme', <https://www.cpf.gov.sg/Members/FAQ/schemes/housing/housing-scheme#faq2185500>.

at en bloc sale. CapitaLand announced that it intended to redevelop the site into a high-rise residential development comprising about 800 units.³⁷ Soon after, it was reported that Golden Mile Complex had formed a collective sale committee on 7 February and appointed marketing agent, Edmund Tie and Company, whilst People's Park Complex had formed a collective sale committee on 5 March 2018 at an extraordinary general meeting with "unanimous consensus".³⁸ Golden Mile Complex obtained the approval of owners comprising 80.83% total share value on 3 August 2018.

Under Strata Title Board rules, '[o]nce a Collective Sale Committee has been formed, the sale committee should propose a reserve price in the Collective Sale Agreement (CSA) and collect signatures to the CSA from owners agreeing to the en bloc sale. The requisite majority consent by share value and strata area (80% or 90% majority depending on the age of the development) must be obtained within one (1) year before the sale attempt can proceed further.³⁹ Hence, by March 2019, it will be clear whether People's Park Complex will proceed with the collective sale.

In the event that these buildings are sold en bloc in the near future, within a short span of time, we stand to lose all of these major landmarks, along with their communities and the sense-of-place identity that have developed and evolved around these sites over the last 40-odd years.

³⁷ 'Pearl Bank Apartments sold to CapitaLand for S\$728m', *Channel NewsAsia*, 13 February 2018.

³⁸ 'People's Park Complex, People's Park Centre, Golden Mile Complex and Golden Mile Tower attempting collective sales', *Business Times*, 7 March 2018; Aequitas Law LLP, 'Notice: Proposed En-Bloc Sale under section 84A of the Land Titles (Strata) Act for the development known as Golden Mile Complex at 5001 Beach Road Singapore TS 15 Lot no. 359T', 3 August 2018

³⁹ Strata Title Board, 'Steps relating to an application under Part VA of the Land Titles (Strata) Act', <https://www.stratatab.gov.sg/applicant-steps-relating-to-ltsa.html>.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

i. Environmental cost & ethics of demolition

From an environmental and ethical perspective, these buildings have not yet outlived their intended lifespan and there is an unjustifiably heavy environmental cost, calculated in terms of embodied energy, which is the labour and energy consumed in a building's lifecycle, including the extraction of natural resources, transportation, construction, refurbishment, maintenance, and eventual demolition and disposal of the debris. Research has shown that in the construction process, embodied greenhouse gas emissions of concrete and reinforced steel account for 94–95% of such emissions for all building materials, this being emissions due to energy consumption for the manufacture of building materials before transporting to construction sites.⁴⁰ To demolish and rebuild these huge concrete megastructures before the end of their lifespan, and erect a new building of equal capacity, would result in a massive carbon footprint, due to the loss of embodied energy and carbon cost of the new structure.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has noted that the building sector represents 30% of global carbon dioxide emissions. Hence at the UN Conference of Parties 21 held in December 2015, 20 countries — including Singapore, and over 60 organisations jointly launched the Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction to work towards climate-

resilient solutions for the industry.⁴¹ Already in 2013, Singapore's Building and Construction Authority demonstrated its commitment to combating climate change with the BCA Centre for Sustainable Buildings, embarking on a partnership project with the United Nations Environment Programme, for "The Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action Development for the Building Sector in Asia".⁴²

ii. Knock-on effect on other strata-titled, individual-owner malls

Once sold en bloc to developers, each of these iconic buildings is likely to be demolished and replaced by a new development. People's Park Complex, Golden Mile Complex, are strata-titled malls known for a unique and diverse organic collection of small enterprises. They are likely to be redeveloped as centrally-managed malls, quite possibly by real estate investment trusts (REITs). The successful collective sale of these major strata-titled malls will also trigger more en bloc sales. Other commercial and mixed-use developments currently in the process of attempting en bloc sales include Goldhill Centre, Katong Shopping Centre, People's Park Centre, Sim Lim Square and Tanglin Shopping Centre.

While more glitzy with a curated range of shops, professionally-managed malls tend to have the same generic chain stores, which are the ones able to afford the high rentals of REITs malls. The disappearance of individual-owner malls is therefore likely to result in

40 Hui Yan, Qiping Shen, Linda C.H. Fan, Yaowu Wang, Lei Zhang, 'Greenhouse gas emissions in building construction: A case study of One Peking in Hong Kong', *Building and Environment* 45 (2010). Pp. 949–955, doi:10.1016/j.buildenv.2009.09.014.

41 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 'Press Release LPAA Focus Building: 20 Countries and over 60 Organizations Launch an Unprecedented Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction to Combat Climate Change', 3 December 2015, <https://unfccc.int/news/press-release-lpaa-focus-building-20-countries-and-over-60-organizations-launch-an-unprecedented-global-alliance-for-buildings-and-construction-to-combat-climate-change>.

42 Building and Construction Authority, 'News Release: The BCA Centre for Sustainable Buildings collaborates with UNEP to contribute to climate mitigation in Asia', 9 September 2013, https://www.bca.gov.sg/Newsroom/pr09092013_CSB.html.

a less diverse and interesting retail scene, and fewer opportunities for smaller local enterprises.

iii. Impact on sense of place and community

These are not merely lifeless buildings, but megastructures designed to accommodate communities of people in the myriad functions of living. Over the decades, a community of residents and users have built up an attachment to the place, and relationships with people and businesses there. In turn, these communities and activities have given each of the buildings an intangible place identity. An important consideration is then the intangible assets of the buildings. Even if lease top-up and conservation were to take place, the question is whether the primary intention is to allow continuity for the residents, or to have adaptive reuse via collective sale to a property developer, with the accompanying eviction of current residents. The solution need not be either/or, but some negotiation between these two perspectives.

THE PEARL BANK REGENERATION PLAN

BOX
STORY

The repair and rehabilitation works that must accompany any attempt to conserve a large modernist structure often requires rethinking the function of the building, within the context of development of the entire site. The most important example of this is the Pearl Bank regeneration plan developed by its original architect, Tan Cheng Siong, and his firm, Archurban. They first presented this proposal to the Pearl Bank Apartments Management Corporation in September 2013.

The objective of Tan's proposal was to give Pearl Bank Apartments a new lease of life by unlocking its value through voluntary conservation, with a lease extension up to 99 years, alongside upgrading of the development with new amenities. He saw that Pearl Bank Apartments had strong inherent value which justified this:

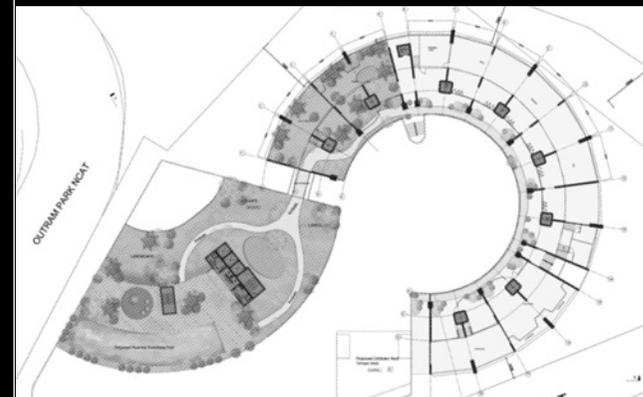
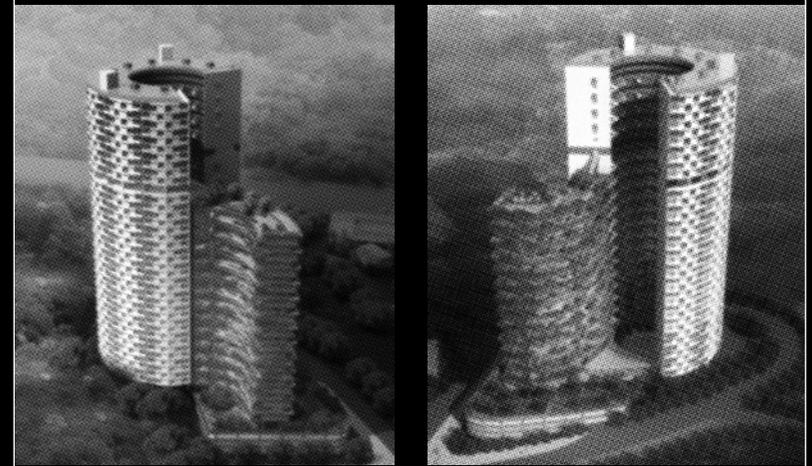
- prime location in the CBD, next to three MRT lines (2 existing, 1 in future)
- panoramic views
- iconic architecture
- strong structure
- high potential rental returns
- 53 years remaining lease in 2013 (with proposal to extend to 99 years)

Tan pointed to examples of Tiong Bahru and the Asia Insurance Building as highly-successful examples of rehabilitation and conservation, resulting in strong financial yield.⁴³ Tiong Bahru experienced skyrocketing prices for HDB flats, pushing up land prices in the area, and in April 2013, for a site in Kim Tian Road, Keppel Land offered the highest ever

43 'Saved... but it's a numbers game', *Straits Times*, 7 June 2008.

price per square foot for a Government Land Sales site in Singapore at \$1,162.9 psf ppf.⁴⁴

While costs would be incurred to pay for lease extension, upgrading and addition of new facilities, as well as for construction, professional services and other expenses, Tan came up with a innovative solution to fund these costs. With extra Gross Floor Area (GFA) allowance to be obtained from URA, he proposed a new, additional block which would be attractive to investors and developers. This would be 'Vertical Gardens', a 27-storey residential block on top of the existing low-rise carpark block. There would be additional facilities on the ground floor, as well as an expanded community sky deck on the 28th floor. ●



Images of Tan's regeneration plan for a new 'Vertical Gardens' block, linking to the existing block on the 28th floor.

44 'Tiong Bahru basks in a property boom', *Singapore Business Review* (September 2013), p. 12, https://sbr.com.sg/sites/default/files/singaporebusinessreview/print/SBRSeptember2013_lr%2012.pdf.

CURRENT OBSTACLES TO VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION

An alternative future for these buildings is to gazette them as conservation buildings under URA's Planning Act, upon which Conservation Guidelines and the Specific Facade Restoration Guidelines (SFRG) must be complied with, and Conservation Permission granted, for all additions and alteration works and operations of new use. URA's approach to conservation is based on the "3R" Principle of maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair, so as to retain the inherent spirit and original ambience of each building.

Started in 1991, URA has the "Conservation Initiated by Private Owners' Scheme", in which owners may voluntarily offer buildings of architectural or historical merit for conservation, in exchange for development incentives such as an increase in the Gross Floor Area (GFA) and waiver of Development Charge.⁴⁵ Successful cases under this scheme include seven buildings at the junction of Armenian Street and Loke Yew Street, Spring Grove bungalow, 43 Amber Road, and 26 Still Road South.⁴⁶

In the case of a multi-strata private development volunteering for conservation, Pearl Bank Apartments' application in 2015 was the very first, and was unsuccessful. Neither has there been a residential development which has been approved for a lease top-up. The government regulations do not provide clear answers on the conditions for voluntary conservation, or for lease top-up.

45 Lily Kong, *Conserving the Past, Creating the Future* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011), pp. 57-58; Urban Redevelopment Authority, 'Circular on Extra Gross Floor Area (GFA) for all Bungalows Conserved in Future on Sites with Gross Plot Area (GPR) Control', 7 June 2004, <https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Guidelines/Circulars/dc04-13>.

46 Kong, *Conserving the Past*, p. 58; Speech by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister of State for National Development and Trade & Industry, at the 2003 URA Architectural Heritage Awards presentation ceremony, Asian Civilisations Museum, Empress Place, 16 October 2003, <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=2003101602.htm>.

The relevant legislative acts are:

- the Planning Act (Chapter 232, 1998 Revised Edition) (<https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PA1998>) which deals with conservation,
- Land Titles (Strata) Act (Chapter 158, 2009 Revised Edition) (<https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/LTSA1967>), and
- the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act (Chapter 30C, 2008 Revised Edition) (<https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/BMSMA2004>) that deals with strata titled properties.

i. Lack of clarity in conditions for voluntary conservation

This is demonstrated most clearly in the case of Pearl Bank Apartments management committee's attempt to propose their building for voluntary conservation to URA in 2015. Prior to this, they had already failed three times to achieve a collective sale. Pearl Bank's original architect, Tan Cheng Siong and his firm, Archurban Architects Planners, spent six months drawing up plans to build an additional 27-storey residential block of about 15,000 sq m on the area now occupied by a five-storey carpark. With an increase in GFA allowed under the "Conservation Initiated by Private Owners' Scheme", capital would be raised by selling the extra development quantum to external developers, then using the funds to pay for upgrading and lease extension, without imposing on existing residents to pay more.⁴⁷

By May 2015, the Pearl Bank Apartments management committee had received a positive

47 Rennie Whang, 'Pearl Bank owners bank on conservation order', *ST Property*, 23 April 2014, <https://www.stproperty.sg/articles-property/singapore-property-news/pearl-bank-owners-bank-on-conservation-order/a/161722>.

reply from URA, which was prepared to consider a maximum 15 per cent increase in GFA over and above the existing approved GFA of 55,102 sq m, subject to a cap of 430 units in all, including the 280-unit existing block. A URA spokesperson told the *Straits Times* that URA welcome[d] the ground-up initiative by the management committee to conserve Pearl Bank Apartments as there are merits for its conservation. When the distinctive horseshoe-shaped building was completed in 1976, it was the tallest residential building in Singapore and had the highest density for residential development". The spokesperson also stated that 'as the proposal affects the entire development and interests of subsidiary proprietors, all of them must be aware of the plan and agree'.⁴⁸

In October 2015, it was reported that the liaison committee of Pearl Bank Apartments had received approval from about 90 per cent of owners for the voluntary conservation proposal. This fell short of the 100 per cent required by URA. The committee was granted a six-month extension to get the required approval from all owners and to submit its conservation and development plans.⁴⁹ The liaison committee had also appealed to the National Development Ministry to review the approval criteria, to be on par with the 80 per cent required for en bloc sales of buildings over ten years old. The *Straits Times* reported committee chairman, Dr Lee Seng Teik as saying that, "no matter how hard we try, in any project, it is not possible to get 100 per cent approval". Some of the owners were very old and not in a capacity to give consent, and one owner in this situation also did not make a lasting power

of attorney.⁵⁰ Dr Lee also said that they had received support for the appeal from the Member of Parliament for the area, Dr Lily Neo.⁵¹

It was only much later, in a letter to the *Straits Times* Forum Page on 16 March 2018, that URA explained that while it did not object to conservation per se, the proposal included the addition of new residential units which would change the percentage share of each owner in the property, requiring the formation of a new management corporation (strata title) (MCST). To dissolve the existing MCST required the consent of 100 per cent of owners, which had not been attained.⁵²

These rules thus tend to prioritize demolition over conservation, and need to be urgently reviewed. It also remains unclear what percentage of owners consent is required to qualify for URA's voluntary conservation scheme.

ii. Lack of clarity in criteria for lease top-up

The Ministry of Law states that "[f]or residential uses, the Government may allow lease extension if it results in land use intensification, mitigation of property decay and preservation of community."⁵³ In 2011, Arcadia, a condominium completed in 1983, applied for a lease top-up but was rejected.⁵⁴ To date, successful cases of lease top-up have been for tabula rasa redevelopment, which is permitted even before half the lease has expired. Furthermore, in the case of these high-rise,

48 Rennie Whang, 'URA sees merit in conservation plan for Pearl Bank', *Straits Times*, 30 May 2015; Ler Seng Ann, 'Pearl Bank conservation: URA replies', letter to *Straits Times*, 13 June 2015.

49 Eileen Poh, 'Pearl Bank Apartments get extension to secure approval for conservation', *Channel NewsAsia*, 22 October 2015.

50 Rennie Whang, 'Pearl Bank owners appeal for change in conservation criterion', *Straits Times*, 23 October 2015.

51 Poh, 'Pearl Bank Apartments get extension'.

52 Chou Mei, '100 per cent owners' consent not needed for building conservation', letter to *Straits Times*, 16 March 2018.

53 Ministry of Law, 'Waiver of Building Premium', 1 Sep 2008, Annex A (c), <https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/news/press-releases/waiver-of-building-premium.html>.

54 Whang, 'Pearl Bank owners bank on conservation order'.

high-density modernist structures, further land use intensification should not be a priority.

Currently, none of the criteria for lease top-up includes heritage value, even though we may now find leasehold buildings that merit conservation under the Planning Act. Without lease top-up, and the threat of collective sale, we risk having most leasehold buildings never reaching “heritage age”. A review of the criteria for lease top-up is timely.

CAN MODERN ARCHITECTURE BE ‘HERITAGE’?

BOX
STORY

MODERN ARCHITECTURE AS UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

There are international precedents for recognising the value of exemplars of modern architecture, with numerous examples of modernist architecture around the world designated by UNESCO as World Heritage sites. As shown in the table below, there are 11 UNESCO listings, some of these include multiple buildings, with one site — Brasilia — being the entire historic core of the fourth-largest metropolis of Brazil, housing over 200,000 residents. Of these, the vast majority retain their original function, and the remainder have been adapted to related uses, as museums or maintained as historic sites accessible to the public.

To be inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage, a site must be of “outstanding universal value” and meet at least one of ten criteria. Examples of modernist architecture which have already been selected by UNESCO all appeal to one or more of the following four categories of outstanding universal value:

- i. to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- ii. to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- iv. to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- vi. to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ The numbering follows UNESCO’s defined categories. See UNESCO, ‘The Criteria for Selection’, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

	YEAR INSCRIBED	NAME	LOCATION	CURRENT USE	CRITERIA
1	1987	BRASILIA https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/445	Brasília, Brazil	Retains original use as urban centre	(i)(iv)
2	2000	RIETVELD SCHRÖDER HOUSE https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/965	Utrecht, Netherlands	Museum	(i)(ii)
3	2001	VILLA TUGENDHAT https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1052	Brno, Czech Republic	Museum	(ii)(iv)
4	2003	WHITE CITY OF TEL-AVIV – THE MODERN MOVEMENT https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1096	Tel Aviv, Israel	Retains original use as residential & commercial urban centre	(ii)(iv)
5	2004	LUIS BARRAGÁN HOUSE AND STUDIO https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1136	Jalisco, Mexico	Museum	(i)(ii)
6	2006	WROCLAW CENTENNIAL HALL https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1165	Wrocław, Poland	Exhibition & convention venue	(i)(ii)(iv)
7	2007	SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/166	Sydney, Australia	Retains original use as opera house	(i)
8	2009	STOCLET HOUSE https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1298	Brussels, Belgium	Retains original use as private residence	(i)(ii)
9	2011	FAGUS FACTORY https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1368	Alfeld, Germany	Museum	(ii)(iv)

10	2016	THE ARCHITECTURAL WORK OF LE CORBUSIER https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1321	(i)(ii)(vi)
10.1		<i>UNITÉ D'HABITATION</i> Marseille, France Retains original use as private residences	
10.2		<i>MAISON GUIETTE</i> Antwerp, Belgium Retains original use as private residences	
10.3		<i>CAPITOL COMPLEX</i> Chandigarh, India Retains original use as government buildings	
10.4		<i>THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WESTERN ART</i> Tokyo, Japan Retains original use as a museum	
10.5		<i>WEISSENHOF-SIEDLUNG ESTATE</i> Stuttgart, Germany Historic site	
10.6		<i>MAISON CURUTCHET</i> La Plata, Argentina Retains original use as private residence, ground floor office space	
10.7		<i>DOMINICAN MONASTERY OF LA TOURETTE</i> near Lyon, France Retains original use as a convent	
10.8		<i>VILLA SAVOYE</i> near Paris, France Historic site	
10.9		<i>NOTRE-DAME DU HAUT</i> Ronchamp, France Retains original use as a chapel	
10.10		<i>MAISON LA ROCHE</i> Paris, France Historic site	
10.11		<i>VILLA LE LAC</i> Corseaux, Switzerland Historic site & exhibition space	
10.12		<i>IMMEUBLE CLARTÉ</i> Geneva, Switzerland Retains original use as private residences	
10.13		<i>IMMEUBLE MOLITOR</i> Paris, France Historic site	

10.14		<i>USINE CLAUDE ET DUVAL FACTORY</i> Saint-Dié, France Retains original use as a factory	
11	2017	BAUHAUS AND ITS SITES IN WEIMAR, DESSAU AND BERNAU https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/729	(ii)(iv)(vi)
11.1		<i>THE FORMER SCHOOL OF ART</i> Weimar Retains related original use under Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism and the Office of the President, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar	
11.2		<i>THE FORMER SCHOOL OF APPLIED ART</i> Weimar Retains related original use under Faculty of Art and Design and the Lehrhaus of the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar	
11.3		<i>THE HOUSE AM HORN</i> Weimar Exhibition hall and venue	
11.4		<i>BAUHAUS BUILDING</i> Dessau Office of Bauhaus Dessau Foundation	
11.5		<i>MASTERS' HOUSES</i> Dessau Under restoration as a museum	
11.6		<i>HOUSES WITH BALCONY ACCESS</i> Dessau Retains original use as residences	
11.7		<i>THE ADGB TRADE UNION SCHOOL</i> Bernau Retains related original use as residential training skilled crafts and trades	
N.B.: italicised items retain original, or related, function			

INTERNATIONAL REVIVAL OF INTEREST IN MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

Beyond the internationally-recognised UNESCO World Heritage sites, countries have also recognised modernist architecture as protected heritage buildings at the national level. The United Kingdom began listing such structures for protection in 1989 despite mixed public opinion, with some viewing them as “concrete monstrosities” and symbols of the underclass. In recent years, there has been a marked revival of interest in Brutalist buildings, partly driven by their bold, Instagram-friendly aesthetic. For architects and cultural thinkers today, it is Brutalism’s honest and pure, egalitarian architectural ethic that appeals.⁵⁶ Major exhibitions such as English Heritage’s *Brutal and Beautiful* in 2013, *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2015, or the 2014 BBC documentary, *Bunkers, Brutalism and Bloodymindedness: Concrete Poetry*, also demonstrate the current revival.⁵⁷ There are even tourist maps of Brutalist buildings in various cities.⁵⁸ ●

⁵⁶ Jonathan Glancey, 'Brutalism: how unpopular buildings came back in fashion', *BBC*, 28 August 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140828-why-brutal-is-beautiful>; Felix Salmon, 'Concrete jungle: why brutalist architecture is back in style', *The Guardian*, 28 September 2016; Nikil Saval, 'Brutalism Is back', *New York Times*, 6 October 2016; Tom Oliver Payne, 'This is why Brutalist architecture is more important now than ever before', *Architectural Digest*, 12 December 2017, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/london-brutalist-architecture>.

⁵⁷ Historic England, *Brutal and Beautiful: Celebrating Modern Architecture*, <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/brutal-and-beautiful-celebrating-modern-architecture>; The Museum of Modern Art, *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980*, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1456>; BBC, *Bunkers, Brutalism and Bloodymindedness: Concrete Poetry with Jonathan Meades*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03w7b7x>.

⁵⁸ 'Love Brutalist architecture? There are maps for that', *Straits Times*, 4 October 2017.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is of critical urgency now that serious efforts be put into exploring how our nation’s significant modernist landmarks can avoid demolition. Proper care and consideration to extend their lifespan requires action from different parties, as laid out in our recommendations below.

i. Maintenance responsibilities of building Management Corporations

The poor condition of buildings like Pearl Bank Apartments after 30 or 40 years is not an inevitable state. A proper long-term preventive plan is needed, rather than the piecemeal maintenance which is common in private apartment blocks. In contrast, old Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) and Housing Development Board (HDB) estates continue to be functioning, highly-liveable homes with strong resale prices, thanks to good management by HDB and Town Councils for periodic overhauling of lifts, pipes, waterproofing and so on.⁵⁹

Building management corporations should be made to develop and implement better long-term maintenance plans. Under the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act, the “Commissioner of Buildings may require building owners etc.”, to carry out repairs etc to maintain the building in a “state of good and serviceable repair”,⁶⁰ and it is the duty of the management corporation “to properly maintain and keep in a state of good and serviceable repair (including, where reasonably necessary, renew or replace the whole or part thereof”,⁶¹ as well as maintain

⁵⁹ Ho and Chiang, 'Adding Value without demolition, rebuilding'.

⁶⁰ Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act (Chapter 30C, 2008 Revised Edition), para. 6, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/BMSMA2004>.

⁶¹ Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act (Chapter 30C, 2008 Revised Edition), para. 29, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/BMSMA2004>.

management funds and sinking funds for the purposes of carrying out its duties and liabilities.⁶²

ii. Alternative models of urban regeneration for worthy buildings by the architectural fraternity

Considering that developers generally aim to complete redevelopment projects as quickly possible and to maximise profits, they are likely to choose the easiest path of wholesale demolition and rebuilding after an en bloc purchase. Architects should therefore step forward to propose alternative plans for building rehabilitation and possibly partial change of use – with careful consideration of the practicalities of implementation – to educate and convince property developers that conservation is a viable option. The regeneration plan for Pearl Bank Apartments developed by Tan Cheng Siong in 2013-2015 is one example.

iii. Government inter-agency deliberation and coordination to facilitate conservation and or regeneration of modernist landmarks

A. CRITERIA FOR LEASE TOP-UP OF LEASEHOLD PRIVATE PROPERTIES

Lease extensions are permitted for residential sites when the extension meets the Ministry of Law's objective of 'mitigation of property decay and preservation of community'.⁶³ We recommend that the conservation and rehabilitation of buildings of high historical/ urban/ social/ architectural significance

should be considered a valid means of achieving this objective, and hence the granting of a lease top-up.

B. LONGER TIMEFRAME FOR COMPLETION OF DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS OF PRIVATE LEASEHOLD/ STRATA-TITLED PROPERTIES PROPOSING CONSERVATION-REHABILITATION Under the Stamp Duties Act (Chapter 312) Stamp Duties (Housing Developers) (Remission of ABSD) Rules 2013, upon the 'conveyance, assignment or transfer on sale of residential property to a qualifying developer for the purpose of housing development by the qualifying developer', additional buyer's stamp duty (ABSD) is chargeable unless 'the qualifying developer completes the housing development, and sells all the units of housing accommodation that are the subject of the development within 5 years starting from the date of execution of the instrument', upon which ABSD will be remitted. However, as of 6 July 2018, ABSD for developers was raised from 15% to 25%, plus an additional new 5% which is non-remittable.⁶⁴

Proposed development applications for private leasehold/ strata-titled properties which are premised upon conservation-rehabilitation should be given a more relaxed timeframe for statutory completion and properties sales, for example, 1.5 times longer than the current 5-year limit (after obtaining planning approval). This would take into account the additional time required for detailed survey, documentation, and investigation of the existing building condition; design feasibility studies; and the rehabilitation-construction process.

62 Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act (Chapter 30C, 2008 Revised Edition), para. 38, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/BMSMA2004>.

63 Ministry of Law, 'Waiver of Building Premium', 1 Sep 2008, Annex A (c), <https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/news/press-releases/waiver-of-building-premium.html>.

64 Stamp Duties Act (Chapter 312) Stamp Duties (Housing Developers) (Remission of ABSD) Rules 2013, para. 3, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL/SDA1929-S362-2013>.

C. MORE PLANNING INCENTIVES TO FACILITATE REHABILITATION-CONSERVATION BY DEVELOPERS/ OWNERS

Through a whole-of-government approach bringing together different agencies, bolder planning incentives should be explored to facilitate and encourage developers/ owners to conserve and rehabilitate their aging properties of high heritage significance. Some possible incentives are:

- re-zoning, e.g. to allow a change from residential to mixed-use;
- offering a higher quantum of bonus GFA, over the current 15% bonus GFA (10% GFA restricted for balcony use; 5% unrestricted use) given as an incentive for voluntary conservation by private owners;
- alienating and offering adjacent empty or underdeveloped sites for sale for a new, intensified building, not unlike many URA sales site that repackage conserved buildings with neighbouring plots.

D. INTRODUCTION OF PERFORMANCE-BASED BUILDING CODES

Dispensation from prescriptive, conventional “blanket rule” building regulations (eg BCA, FSSD, Greenmark) should be facilitated, in favour of performance-based building codes. This will enable new and innovative design solutions to be explored to achieve a good balance between environmental, public safety and health requirements, as well as conservation prerogatives. For example, in the United Kingdom, listed buildings have a separate set of Energy Efficiency guidelines.

E. LOWERING OF PERCENTAGE APPROVAL REQUIRED FOR REDISTRIBUTION OF STRATA TITLE OWNERSHIP SHARES

For private, strata-titled properties of high heritage significance, voluntary conservation schemes involving the redistribution of strata title ownership shares should be given selective dispensation from the 100 per cent concurrence currently required. Permission should be given when 80 per cent concurrence is met, on par with the percentage required for en bloc sale of buildings over ten years old. This was the technical issue that prevented the approval of Pearl Bank Apartment’s application for voluntary conservation in 2015. Such changes have a precedent: a similar change was effected to permit en bloc sale in 1999, when s 84A(1) of the Land Titles (Strata) Act was amended to reduce the unanimous consent requirement to majority consent, due to the near impossibility of obtaining unanimous consent in freehold and 999-year leasehold strata developments.⁶⁵

There are precedents and parallels for these recommendations, which underscore their feasibility. Nevertheless, it requires initiative and action to revise existing standard procedures. These iconic landmarks demand more careful consideration as they are Singapore’s modernist icons which bear grand testimony to our nation-building years and continue to be recognised as architectural masterpieces. It is of critical urgency that we make the effort to give them the new lease of life they deserve.

⁶⁵ Ter Kah Leng, ‘En Bloc sales in Singapore: Critical developments in the law’, *Singapore Academy of Law Journal*, Vol. 21 (2009), p. 487.

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