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PAM AWARDS 2008

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MENTION

Category 6
Conservation
Buildings

54 Muntri Street

ARCHITECT Architect T Y Au

BUILDER Hockim Construction Sdn Bhd

CLIENT Ong Lay Kiong, Chris

Project Description

The brief to the architect was simple - 54 Muntri Street was to become a *home*; capital costs had to be kept to a minimum but modern amenities had to blend into the existing framework. The owner also wanted the character of the house to be retained especially with regards to the timber floor structure at the first floor, and the ground floor finishes, with its Stoke-on-Trent tiles still intact, was also to be maintained. With that, the architects were presented with an opportunity to intervene sensitively in the project.

The house was in a dilapidated condition when it was purchased: with floorboards missing, one of the timber staircases rotted away, plaster on the walls fallen apart and no proper sanitary facilities intact that would meet modern expectations. The back portion of the house was also destroyed during World War 2 by bombs.

The main objective was to preserve and restore as much of the original fabric of the building as possible for use as a residential home without incurring a high capital cost. Modern plumbing amenities such as en-suite

bathrooms along with air conditioning and electrical fittings also had to be incorporated in the project. New plumbing and electrical works were the only modern additions to the main building during the project.

In line with the brief, minimal intervention was made at the ground floor save for the creation of a powder room and a studio annex terminating the linear circulation towards the rear of the house. The floor of the annex was retiled with replica terracotta tiles imported from Vietnam. Antique timber windows and doors were sourced, cleaned and stained for the annex to complement the main building. Decorative heritage tiles applied at the base of the windows complete this transformation.

A garden and koi pond which separates the annex from the main building provides a calming atmosphere for the occupants of the house. Granite slabs salvaged from other demolished traditional houses were used to pave the pathway leading to the annex. The air well in the house was retained to allow natural ventilation and light up the house. A



set of antique tiles sourced by the owner become a framed art piece at the air well wall. The original Stoke-on-Trent floor tiles were polished by a specialist to its glory days. No sealant was applied to the floor surfaces allowing moisture to ventilate naturally.

Antique folding screen walls, also known as 'piens', that separate the formal living room from the informal private 'living' spaces were purchased and gilded with gold leaf. Local Cantonese carpenters were brought in to repair the timber works. Elaborate timber carvings, paneled doors, louvered windows, balusters and ceilings were refurbished, along with decorative works on furniture and ceilings.

At the first floor, previous wooden partitions were discarded in order to carve out two pairs of rooms, each with their own separate access and modern amenities. Skylights were created above the staircases to allow more natural light

to punch through and lit up the spaces. A slight extension made to accommodate the room which faces the garden, provides a shaded space for casual dining area next to the kitchen on the ground floor. Floorboards were replaced with natural hardwood timber and missing balusters of the staircase, replaced to match the original.

The restoration was also a process of discovery. During construction, it was discovered that rainwater gutters were shared between the neighbouring units. From discussion with the immediate neighbour, the architects learned that the granite and floor that was truncated near the first staircase and air well was due to the impact of Japanese bombs during World War 2.

Jury's Citation

A worthy effort in conservation showcasing notable but varied sensitivity to the building being conserved with its new insertion.

