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TATTOO HOUSE (VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA)
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as good as old

BY T Y AU | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SENSE DREAMWORK STUDIO

Muntri Street in Penang is seeing a revival of heritage interests as more shophouses, such as this one, are lovingly restored in the spirit of conservation.

Passion is perhaps most apt a word to describe the efforts that the owner, architect and builder undertook to complete this restoration project in Penang. The owner (who wished not be named) stumbled upon the house that was up for sale when he revisited Muntri Street, a street that he grew up in and had a lot of fond memories. The streetscape is fairly intact but only a handful of houses remain as residential, a far cry compared to what the owner recalled of his younger days. A catalyst was desperately needed for the area to return to its halcyon days.

The house itself was in a dilapidated condition when it was purchased – missing floor boards, a rotted timber staircase, fallen plaster from the walls, and no sanitary facilities intact that would meet modern expectations. In short, they were conditions that would put off many investors. But not this gentleman. He had garnered a 2007 UNESCO Asia Pacific Heritage Award for his (and a partner's) brilliant conservation efforts with the Galle Fort Hotel in Sri Lanka, founded in 2003.

Ever resourceful, the owner is very passionate in conservation and adaptive reuse. For this Muntri Street house, he personally undertook the tasks of searching for antique doors, furniture, tiles for use in the restoration work and other such heritage materials, by visiting various antique shops and markets in Penang and Malacca.

The team at Architect T Y Au had previously worked on several adaptive reuse projects in Georgetown, Penang. As they are a boutique practice, their projects are concentrated mainly within the state of Penang. Nevertheless, the firm is recognized within the local construction fraternity to be hands-on and dedicated in producing works of quality. Through an introduction from a mutual acquaintance and a subsequent site visit, they shared the same view as the owner's for the project's potential.

The brief to the architect was simple – the house was to become a home; capital costs had to be kept to a minimum but modern amenities had to be blended into the existing framework. The owner also wanted the character of the house to be retained, especially that of the timber-floor structure at the first floor. With that, the architects were presented with an opportunity to intervene sensitively in the project.

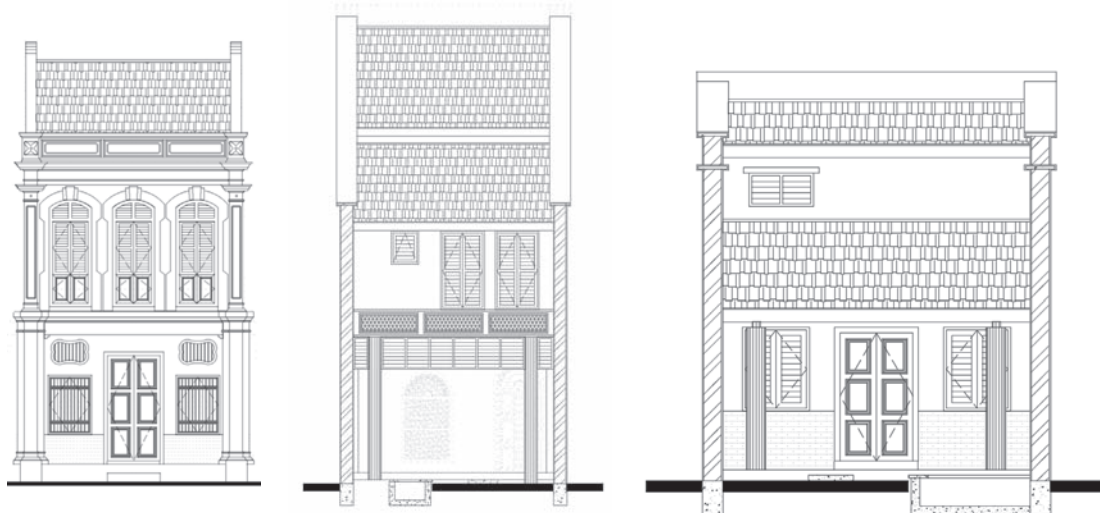
Minimal intervention was made at the ground floor, save for the creation of a powder room. A studio annex terminates the linear circulation leading towards the end of the house. Antique timber windows and doors were sourced, cleaned and stained for the annex to complement the main building. Decorative heritage tiles applied at the base of the windows complete this transformation.

A garden and koi pond that separate the annex from the main building provide a calming atmosphere for the occupants of the house. The airwell was retained to allow natural ventilation and light into the house. A set of antique tiles skillfully sourced by the owner becomes a framed art-piece on the airwell wall. The original Stoke-On-Trent floor tiles were polished by a specialist to its glory days.



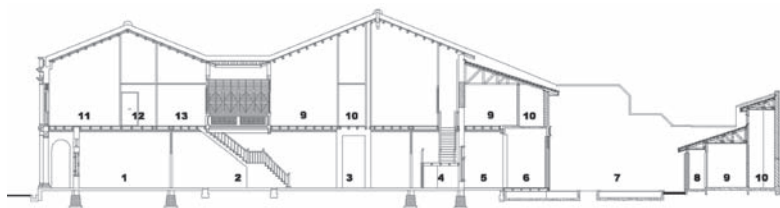






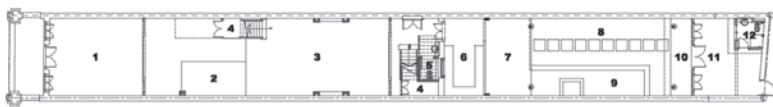
MUNTRI STREET SHOPHOUSE

ARCHITECT T Y AU
 MAIN CONTRACTOR HOCKIM CONSTRUCTION SDN BHD
 INTERIORS REFURBISHMENT CLIENT
 SOFT FURNISHINGS XIE DESIGN SDN BHD
 LANDSCAPE CLIENT



SECTION

- 1 LIVING AREA
- 2 KITCHEN
- 3 DINING AREA
- 4 STAIRS
- 5 PORCH
- 6 TERRACE
- 7 GARDEN
- 8 TERRACE
- 9 PORCH
- 10 TERRACE
- 11 TERRACE
- 12 TERRACE
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GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- 1 LIVING AREA
- 2 KITCHEN
- 3 DINING AREA
- 4 STAIRS
- 5 PORCH
- 6 TERRACE
- 7 GARDEN
- 8 TERRACE
- 9 PORCH
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN

- 13 MASTER BEDROOM
- 14 BEDROOM
- 15 MASTER BEDROOM
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The *piece de resistance* on the ground floor are obviously the 'piens' – antique folding screen walls that separate the formal living room from the informal private 'living' spaces – that were purchased and restored by the owner.

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 light up the spaces. A slight extension made to accommodate the room that faces the garden, provides a shaded space for the 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.

A recent visitor to the house remarked on how fortunate the owner is, thinking that all that was done to it was just a bit of repainting and plastering! Since the completion of the restoration of this Muntri Street house, several along the road are also in the process of being similarly renovated, although the extent and success of those projects have yet to be determined.

The Penang State Government has recently made an application for the city of Georgetown to be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Obviously, the local authorities have put in place guidelines and rules for owners to follow in maintaining or renovating their homes in view of achieving this listing. However, it is only individual effort, dedication and gestures similar to what the team at Muntri Street achieved that will ensure the fabric of living history in Penang remains for the future. +