

30B PHILLIP STREET

Shrines of Stories



Owner:

The Ngee Ann Kongsi

Architect:

Raymond Woo & Associates Architects

Conservation Consultant:

Laborans

Engineer:

Chong & Lee Consultants

Specialist Contractor:

Shantou Ji Chuanying Ancient Construction and Decoration Designing Co. Ltd.

Well known for its richly ornamented roof, vibrant wall reliefs and frescoes outside and within its walls, the Yueh Hai Ching temple built in the 1820s has been faithfully restored to articulate detail showing deep respect for the monument's architectural roots. At every turn, this stunning restoration demonstrates thoughtful choices informed by extensive archival research and technical consultation with local and overseas architectural experts and temple craftsmen.



Mid 19th Century Teochew-Style Chinese temple meticulously restored

Faithful From The Start

The methodology for restoration was clearly well thought through and executed. After a thorough search in Guangzhou, China, a Class 1 contractor with a team of master craftsmen seasoned in a wide range of trades, from ceramics to timber structures, timber carvings, frescoes and gold gilding, was engaged. Sketches, measured drawings and photographs were compiled to document the existing architecture.

The project team stayed faithful to the 3R principle from start to finish. Adopting the “Top-Down” approach, a temporary roof was erected over the temple to protect it during the restoration works. Great care and attention to details were demonstrated in the repair of the beams and structures, and the retention of the granite floor slabs at the front courtyard.

Past renovations which obscured the original character of the temple were removed. Using authentic materials, traditional techniques and sensitive construction method, every part of the temple were faithfully and painstakingly restored. Laudable examples include the reconstruction of the boundary walls based on archival photographs, the repainting of life-

size door gods in true multi-chromatic colours, and the reinstatement of the colourful dragon and tiger sculptural wall relief panels within the temple.

For The Love Of Lore

Of outstanding excellence is the exquisite detailing which revitalises the intricate 3-dimensional ceramic ornamentations on the spectacularly adorned roof and, internal and external walls. Once again, the dioramas which depict Chinese folklore and classical stories come alive in this most densely decorated

Chinese temple in Singapore. These captivating works of arts have been meticulously recreated, piece-by-piece, in the experienced hands of professional artisans.

The traditional ‘bao hu’ mixture of hydraulic lime was used on the roof, while ash from burning shells was used as the bonding substance on the decorative porcelain. The team applied a chemical protective layer to the relief paintings on the upper panels of the front façade before painting to ensure that the original paint layer can be recovered should the new paint layer be removed in the future. The plaster relief on the lower panels was beautifully reinstated.

Sanctuary In The City

The restoration of the Yueh Hai Ching temple has successfully brought back to life many rare and refined features typical of the building's Teochew architectural heritage. More than an institution of great significance to the devotees and visitors, it stands as an important and delightful specimen of Teochew cultural legacy.



Front view of twin temple recovered and revitalised, complete with railings of original design and material



Intricate brackets and granite columns



Exquisite 3-dimensional ceramic ornaments on spectacular roof



Gold-gilded carved timber brackets with animal motif



Roof decorations composed with broken porcelain pieces



Life-size door gods in multi-chromatic colours



Restored entrance gate and reinstated boundary wall



Decorative wall panels and dioramas at side walls

1 HISTORY OF THE BUILDING CONTEXT

Yueh Hai Ching Temple (Wak Hai Cheng Bio)

In the 1820s, many from the Chaoshan (Teochew and Swatow) region of Guangdong Province in China travelled to Southeast Asia by sea. To express gratitude for their safe journey, seafarers and merchants set up a shrine dedicated to the deity Mazu or the Goddess of the Sea and the Ban See Soon Kongsì was established to manage this first Mazu Temple of the Teochews in Singapore. Subsequently, the Lao Ye Temple (Lau Ya Keng), dedicated to Xuan Tian Shang Di, the ancestral deity of the Teochews and which is known commonly as Lao Ye, was set up. The two temples were believed to have been merged in 1826 and this twin temple was named Yueh Hai Ching Temple (Wak Hai Cheng Bio). On the right is Shang Di Gong, the temple of Xuan Tian Shang Di and on the left is Tian Hou Gong, the temple of Mazu. The Yueh Hai Ching Temple has been managed by The Ngee Ann Kongsì since 1845 and it was said to have undergone expansion from 1852 to 1855 as well as several rounds of renovation and reconstruction between 1859 and 1896, to what it is today.

Many years have passed and the condition of the weather-beaten Temple prompted the Committee of Management members of The Ngee Ann Kongsì to embark on a restoration of the Temple. Restoration works began on 1st November 1994 and the Temple was subsequently gazetted as a National Monument by the Preservation of Monuments Board. A ceremony to mark the completion of the works was officiated by Minister for National Development and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Lim Hng Kiang on 9th April 1997.

However, the effects of weathering and termite infestation once again took its toll. A ground-breaking ceremony was officiated by The Ngee Ann Kongsì on 11th September 2011 and restoration works commenced on 8th February 2012. In an effort to restore the Temple to its former glory, local consultants and craftsmen from the Chaoshan region in China were brought in to work on the restoration of the roof, boundary wall, murals, timber carvings, ceramic ornamentations, dragon and tiger walls, amongst others. A grand ceremony to mark the completion of the restoration was officiated by Minister for Trade & Industry, Mr Lim Hng Kiang on 31st March 2014.

2 PAST & PRESENT PHOTOS



Boundary Wall – 1994. Balustrades at the twin temple.



Boundary Wall – 2012. Balustrades were removed in the 1996 renovation.



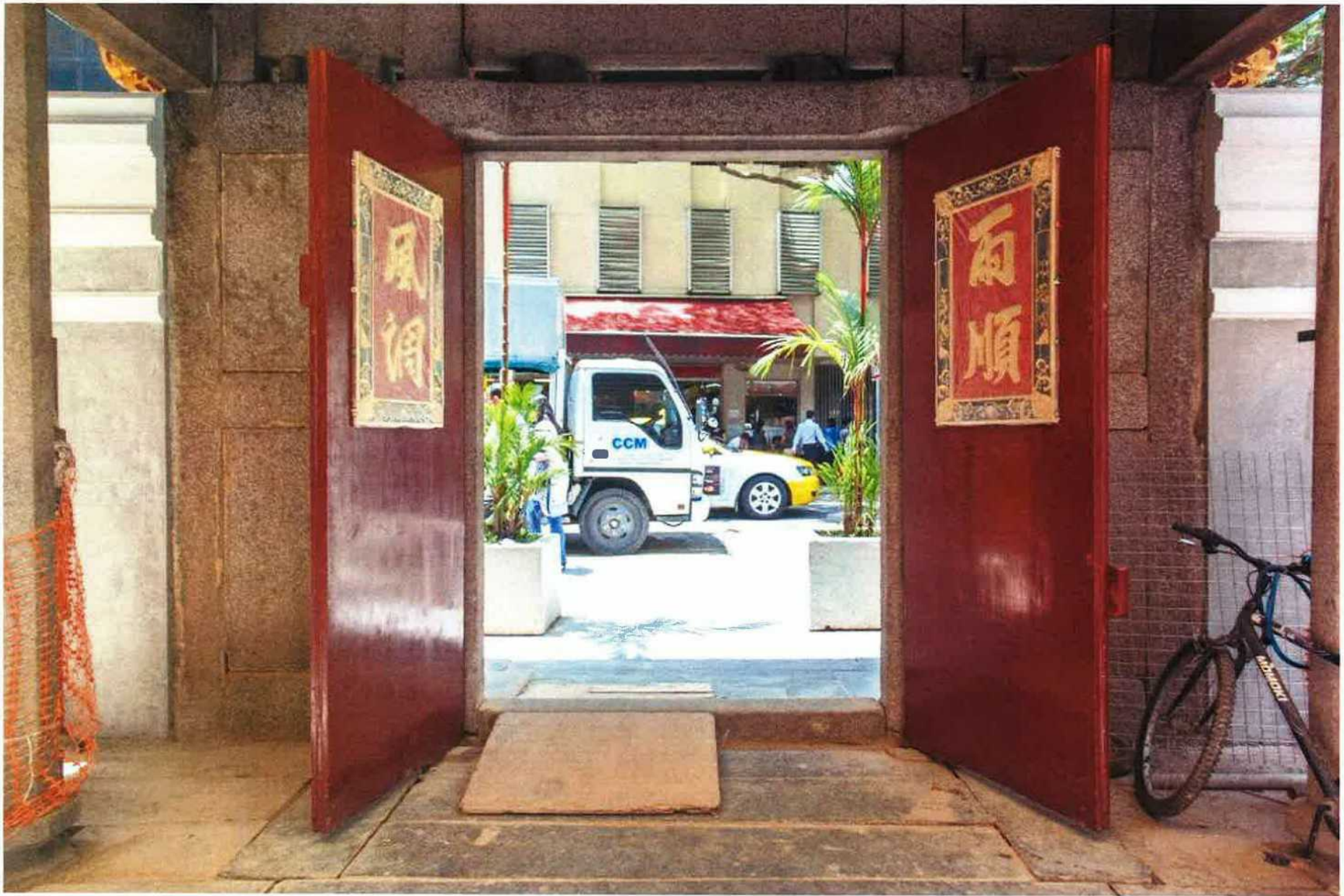
Boundary wall – 2014



Main entrance - 2012



Twin temple – 2012



Main entrance – 2013



Twin temple - 2014



Roof - 2010



Roof - 2013



Back - 2010



Back - 2014



Back gate – 2011



Back gate - 2014



Door Gods – 2010

Door Gods – 2014



Miniature figurines - 2012



Miniature figurines - 2014



1



2

Technical know-how of figurines on roofs:

1. Figurines are ceramic ornamentation which have weathered and also insensitively repaired over the years. (1990s)
2. Documentation of the roof figurines prior to the commencement of actual conservation works. Measurements were taken and transferred into detailed drawings together with photographic documentation.
3. Craftsman from Chaoshan region in China were brought in to work on the restoration of the figurines. Using selected shells from Teochew Prefecture which are then burnt to ash and mixed with glass and paper fabrics to become strong adhesive that bonds permanently. This form the base for the coloured pigments to the fugurines.
4. Ceramic ornamentalations have been reinstated using traditional techniques and Natural Hydraulic Lime as a sealant.



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4 Technical know-how of Timber Truss

1. Due to rainwater penetration, timber rafters and purlins suffer from wet rot. Distortion and cracks have been observed. Besides that, some of the beams has been changed to Suzhou style (painted in black and red) in the 1990s.
2. All replaced timber components (insect infested or wet rot) are disposed off immediately after documentation to prevent other timber from being infested, with termites. Special attention to the joints of new and old timber are allowed for thermal expansion to prevent the timber from warping.
3. Teochew black lacquer and gold gilding have been reinstated on the main beams based on archival photographs. The 22k gold leaf colour tone are matched to existing ones.
4. All new structural timber components without carvings have been fabricated out of Chengal wood. The remaining new timber components are fabricated out of Teak wood. All timber for structural component have been aired or kiln dried to not more than 20% moisture content to ensure a longer life-span.

