



# mansion with a mission

TAN CHIN TUAN MANSION, 42 CAIRNHILL ROAD SINGAPORE

# Memories

live on in old houses. New houses, on the other hand, are empty and boast no history. Most start on a blank slate, anticipating the lives that will grow into them. One notable exception is the Tan Chin Tuan Mansion, a residential building at 42 Cairnhill Road that embarked on a second life with a wealth of history, thanks to an outstanding conservation effort that marries modern engineering with sensitive restoration.

Tan Chin Tuan Mansion is a redevelopment of the family home of the late Singaporean banker and philanthropist, Tan Chin Tuan. The complex comprises a new 20-storey apartment tower and an 80-year old two-storey bungalow that serves as a tribute to Mr Tan's social and business achievements. It is also the headquarters of the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, a charitable foundation founded by Mr Tan. The owners of the site, Cairnhill Rock Pte Ltd, sought to adapt the property to a modern urban context while achieving a balanced composition of the old and new elements within a physically constrained location close to the heart of the city.





As the new apartments could not occupy this foreground space without overshadowing the old mansion, the architects built the new tower block right over the house, which serves to highlight the distinctiveness of the mansion and giving it a new backdrop.

The original bungalow sat at the centre of a triangular plot of land with a large foreground. The white house is an eclectic blend of Peranakan and colonial influences, and was used by the Tan family as a private residence for decades.

As the new apartments could not occupy this foreground space without overshadowing the old mansion, the architects built the new tower block right over the house, which serves to highlight the distinctiveness of the mansion and giving it a new backdrop. The design team abided by strict conservation guidelines, keeping a minimum height clearance over the old house and integrating a large transfer beam which prevented any new columns from penetrating the old structure.

#### MAKING IT AS GOOD AS OLD

Before the project commenced, it was discovered that a mansard roof found in the archive plans of the building had not actually been built. The building underwent major renovation in 1969, in which new rooms were added on the top floor and a wall was knocked down to extend the living area on the first storey. These alterations were reversed and the building's true flat roof was retained. Badly damaged Peranakan tiles of the interior flooring were replaced by similar ones

sourced from Malaysia. Original solid timber strips on the upper floor were also reused.

The team took great care to ensure that the foundation and structure of the mansion remained uncompromised during the construction of the new tower. An old timber staircase at the centre of the mansion was replaced by a new double-volume space that channels natural light from an added skylight. A new light, spiral staircase now provide access to the second storey. The centre of the original mansion was reconfigured to fit in the lift core of the residential tower.

For this resplendent restoration of the bungalow as a memorial to its late owner as well as careful integration of the old and the new, the Tan Chin Tuan Mansion was given an Architectural Heritage Award (AHA) by the Urban Development Authority in 2008. The award was in the AHA Category B, which recognises outstanding restoration projects for integrated old and new conservation buildings in the residential history districts.

*All photographs by Mr. Tim Nolan of Architects 61 Pte Ltd. This article was adapted from an article by Architects 61 Pte Ltd.*

