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CELEBRATING 2012 BY THE BAY
By Nur Farhana

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COVER

ONE OF THE 30,000 WISHING SPHERES TO WELCOME THE NEW YEAR

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From New York to Sydney, millions around the world eagerly bade farewell to 2011 and hoped for a better future in 2012. Whether it is an infectious tradition, an event for bonding and contemplating or just an occasion to have fun, there is no mistaking the lure of New Year’s Eve celebrations worldwide.

More than 300,000 revellers ushered in 2012 at Singapore’s biggest New Year’s Eve celebration, the Marina Bay SINGAPORE Countdown. Jointly presented by the Esplanade — Theatres on the Bay and the Urban Redevelopment Authority, the Countdown is in its seventh year and is an iconic event that many look forward to every December at Marina Bay.
ROCKING OUT BY THE BAY

The festivities started off as early as 6.30 pm with Esplanade’s Celebrate December series and free concerts at The Promontory@Marina Bay where some of the island’s emerging talents such as SleeQ, Catalogue V, The Pinholes and Imran Ajmain were on hand to keep the party pumping.

Broadcast live on Mediacorp Channel 5, the entertainment line-up for the countdown show, “Celebrate 2012” over at the The Float@Marina Bay, kept the crowd entertained till the wee hours of the morning with a smorgasbord of sizzling performances by local and international celebrities from the likes of Sezairi Sezali and Sylvia Ratonel, Canada’s These Kids Wear Crowns and Malaysia’s Siti Nurhaliza.

URA Chief Executive Officer Ng Lang echoed this sentiment: “The Marina Bay Singapore Countdown has grown over the years such that it has become almost a tradition to usher in the New Year at this very special place. We are very happy to see the community embracing Marina Bay as their favourite spot to celebrate the year-end festive season. With the completion of all the key projects and opening of new public spaces around the Bay this year, we welcome everyone to come down and enjoy the array of programmes and activities lined up for them.”
ALL FIRED UP

Party revellers this year had a 360-degree view of the Marina Bay promenade and numerous vantage points from which to watch the show. In addition to ten other designated spots along the waterfront and the Padang where spectators can watch live performances and the fireworks display, two new vantage points — the Lawn@Marina Bay, located next to the recently opened Marina Bay Financial Centre; and the waterfront promenade at the ArtScience Museum — provided more standing room for partygoers. “Everyone will have a spectacular view, no matter where they are,” said Fun Siew Leng, URA’s Urban Planning and Design Group Director.

At the stroke of midnight, millions of revellers and viewers worldwide watched enthralled as an eight-minute-long stunning pyrotechnic showcase burst into life. Breathtaking fireworks, synchronised to specially commissioned music by Cultural Medallion winner Iskandar Ismail, exploded in a massive display of colours from octagonal-shaped pontoons moored in the waters.

Complementing the various formations of fireworks rocketing through the sky were low-level fireworks skipping over the surface of the bay, creating a thrilling up-close-and-personal experience to those seated nearby. More than 200 lights illuminated the bay area and painted nearby skyscrapers in a kaleidoscope of colours, perfectly framing the newly-completed city skyline and fuelling the festive splendour.
BRINGING CHEER TO THE COMMUNITY

Unlike other countdown events, the Marina Bay SINGAPORE Countdown 2012 is one with great heart as it provides a rallying point for Singaporeans to express their hopes and dreams through the wishing spheres project. As each year draws to a close, these pristine white spheres become a familiar sight as groups of volunteers take to the streets to invite the public to pen their wishes for the coming year.

Some 20,000 spheres were made available through 24 wishing stations set up island-wide — an increase from the 22 that were set up last year — to encourage increased participation. The public could also go online to pen their wishes on virtual wishing spheres and place them in the virtual bay. Organisations such as the National Library Board, People’s Association, and Singapore Soka Association rendered help by adopting the project. The Esplanade Youth Volunteers brought the spheres to ten Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) to collect wishes from over 600 people, including the elderly, physically disabled and children.

The spheres, bearing an estimated 500,000 written wishes from Singaporeans and visitors from all walks of life, were then launched into the bay on New Year’s Eve — forming a brilliant and colourful visual representation of the inspiring and contemplative nature of the countdown celebrations.

Special video dedications expressing heartfelt wishes from members of the community and the “Letters Home” segment where equally heartfelt messages written by Singaporean overseas were read out further evoked a sense of poignancy to the night’s proceedings.

SPECIAL MOMENTS OF MARINA BAY

A signature element of the countdown event — the yearly photography competition held in conjunction with the Marina Bay SINGAPORE Countdown 2012 garnered more than 500 entries this year. With new public spaces and more vantage points along the bay, enthusiastic shutterbugs were able to snap multi-faceted shots of Marina Bay. Themed “Special Moments”, the winning entries of the photography competition reflected the new city skyline in Marina Bay and we hope you have enjoyed viewing them in Skyline.

More winning entries can be viewed at www.marina-bay.sg/countdown
NEW YEAR, NEW HOPES

The countdown event presented a unique opportunity for Singaporeans to bid farewell to the tough times of the past year and express their hopes for a better future even in the face of uncertain times ahead. The specially choreographed music for the fireworks display, "Celebration of Life" provided a fitting and inspiring tribute to these collective hopes.
Where can you immerse yourselves in rich flora and fauna, come close to some of the last remaining mangroves on the mainland, take in mesmerising coastal views, check out historic bungalows, and hop straight to eating hotspots or back to the city?

Welcome to the newly completed Labrador Nature and Coastal Walk recently opened in January 2012. More than just a green connection, the 2.1 km new trail by URA offers an off-the-beaten track for Singaporeans to savour and appreciate another side of Singapore. It costs $10 million and took one and a half years to build, adding to the series of recreational options that URA has developed in recent years, such as the Southern Ridges, Changi Boardwalk, Woodlands Waterfront and the Punggol Promenade.

The Labrador Nature and Coastal Walk seamlessly connects the Southern Ridges to the Labrador Nature Reserve and the Southern Waterfront. It runs along Alexandra Road from Depot Road to Telok Blangah Road, through the Berlayer Creek mangrove area and skirts the foothills of Bukit Chermin. The Walk has three distinct segments.
ALEXANDRA GARDEN TRAIL
Walk or cycle in lush greenery through an 830 metre-long park connector along Alexandra Road across from Labrador Park MRT station. From this trail, you can visit nearby attractions like Alexandra Arch, Forest Walk and the future Gillman Village’s arts cluster. Over 50 species of flowering plants and foliage were planted, which includes more than ten species of butterfly-attracting and scented-flowering plants. (Figure 01)

BERLAYER CREEK
Experience one of the last few remaining mangroves on mainland Singapore that was previously inaccessible to the public. A raised boardwalk gives you an elevated view of the mangrove creek. Another 30 species of mangrove plants have been added to enrich the creek’s biodiversity. (Figures 02-05)

BUKIT CHERMIN BOARDWALK
Take in magnificent views of the Keppel Harbour and Sentosa along a 330 metre-long seaside walkway. During low tides, there are sightings of rich ecosystems of crustaceans, seagrass and corals on the rocky shoreline. At a distance, one can see the grandest and largest of four conserved bungalows at Bukit Chermin. (Figures 06-07)

RESPECTING THE ENVIRONMENT
URA took extra care to retain and enhance the natural environment when designing the Walk. Plants, shrubs and trees were added to enrich the existing bio-diversity at each of the three segments. Designated footpaths and bicycle paths intertwine around mature rain trees, effortlessly weaving flora and fauna into the urban landscape.

Construction works were also carefully planned to respect the natural environment. For example, lighting along the Walk is sensitively designed to ease the movement of animals at night.
Residents can expect a new civic centre to be built at the former Malay Village site in Geylang Serai by 2016. The centre will stand out as a contemporary building, yet culturally distinct in terms of design and architecture. Improvements to the neighbourhood will include a widened walkway and enhanced street infrastructure along Geylang Road.
A new civic centre with a working name “Wisma Geylang Serai” will become a key attraction for nearby residents and visitors. Sited next to the Geylang Serai Market, the civic centre will house the Geylang Serai Community Club, the South East Community Development Council, a Malay Heritage Gallery and Malay arts groups that will engage the Malay community, as well as other races in Singapore. To provide a vibrant staging ground for both cultural and community events, there will be a 2,000 sqm civic plaza in front of the civic centre.

VISION FOR GEYLANG SERAI PRECINCT

Under the Master Plan 2008, URA identified Paya Lebar Central, which Geylang Serai Precinct is located within, as one of three new growth areas to be developed into a lively commercial centre with a distinct cultural identity. The area will be a pedestrian-friendly hub with offices, retail, hotels as well as attractive public spaces.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong first announced the redevelopment plans for Geylang Serai during his National Day Rally Speech in August last year and had appointed Dr Maliki Osman, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (National Development) and Mayor (South East District) to oversee this initiative.

Dr Maliki chairs the Geylang Serai Main Workgroup to spearhead the redevelopment of Geylang Serai Precinct. He also chairs the civic centre sub-group that will look into the design of the new civic centre. In addition, there is the programming sub-group led by the Malay Heritage Foundation, as well as the connectivity and urban design sub-group chaired by URA. The latter will seek ideas on how to apply appropriate architecture and design touches to the area, and ways to improve connectivity between buildings.

MORE SPACE, FACILITIES FOR FESTIVE BAZAARS

When the Geylang Serai Precinct is developed, residents and visitors can look forward to a new pedestrian mall with outdoor cafes and dining areas along Geylang Road which will help to connect Paya Lebar MRT station with the Geylang Serai Market. During the Hari Raya festive period, the pedestrian mall will also serve as a gathering space for festive bazaars and community events.

Part of the outdoor pedestrian mall along Geylang Road will be ready very soon as URA has already commenced the street improvement works within the road reserve. When completed in June 2012, there will be a continuous three metre-wide walkway and SMART-POLEs with electrical sockets to support the festivities during the annual Hari Raya bazaar. SMART-POLEs combine and refine street infrastructure onto one single system, making the area a much more pleasant environment for pedestrians, businesses and motorists.

Members of the public can visit www.facebook.com/WismaGeylangSerai to share your ideas on the development plans for the area. Meanwhile, we await the results of the civic centre naming competition that was organised between November and December 2011. About 380 creative names were submitted to the organiser, the South East Community Development Council, and the top ten names were put up for public voting.
Marilyn Taylor on Transforming Cities
A city’s liveability starts from citizens themselves. Professor Marilyn Taylor, a new member of the Nominating Committee for the prestigious Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize talks about how citizens can change their living environments, memorable projects in Singapore and what fuels her passion in transforming cities.

Professor Marilyn Taylor is a distinguished planner and thinker in the fields of architecture, planning and construction. Since 2008, she has been the Dean of the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania. Before this, she was a Partner in charge of the Urban Design and Planning Practice at Skidmore Owings & Merrill LLP, and the first woman to serve as the Chairperson.

1. **What does it mean to be a sustainable and liveable city?**
   It is when residents start taking pride and ownership in how they want their current cities to be like and take on a keen interest in shaping the future of their city. It is also about people believing that a better life is possible for themselves and for others.

2. **What challenges should cities be addressing?**
   There is a growing urbanisation that many cities are facing with increasing populations and pressing demands on cities’ infrastructures. This should not be seen as a problem but more as an opportunity for transformation. Cities need to address the challenge of increasing densities of cities with more people living within compact spaces. There needs to be more efficient use of resources. The human scale needs to be brought in as well. Another challenge is a universal one — more opportunities need to be created for better advancement of all, with greater distribution of wealth.

3. **How can communities get more involved in shaping their environments?**
   People themselves have to first believe that they can make a real difference to their living environments. They have to believe that they can influence and shape it and not just accept what is dictated to them. Sufficient information should also be shared for people to make better and informed choices. It is really about facilitating and encouraging two-way conversations and interactions. Social media is one channel that we can leverage on to help bring people together.
4. What are your impressions of Singapore?
I’ve been coming to Singapore for about 27 years now. I’ve seen its transformation. It is efficient. People are well cared for. It is enriched by its conservation strategies. It is very green in its policies. What stands out is its multiculturalism and diversity. And there is an evolving sophistication, with Singapore becoming a magnet to the world.

5. What memorable projects have you have worked on in Singapore?
One of my first projects in Singapore was the very first rail line built here by the Land Transport Authority. I was involved in the master planning and design of the first rail line in 1984. I was a young architect then and it was very exciting to be part of such an important transport project for Singapore. Another project that I found very satisfying was the design of Changi Airport Terminal 3. That was part of a design competition. The challenge was how to make the airport experience enjoyable and pleasant for everyone. We constantly pushed new limits when designing the terminal. One of the key features of the design was letting daylight in throughout the day. This was challenging to pull off as there was a need to let in the right amount of light, whether it is day or night. Ultimately, it made commuters feel very comfortable and has resulted in significant cost savings for the airport.

I was also involved in the master planning for the 3.5 km promenade around Marina Bay and it is so rewarding to see it become reality today. But the single most memorable aspect about working in Singapore is making very good friends in the process. I now come back to Singapore each time to a place that is very familiar and dear to me.

6. What is one area Singapore should focus on for greater sustainability?
One challenge for Singapore is the need for continuous adaptability and reusability. It is easy to build new, fresh and contemporary buildings. But Singaporeans will have to contend with living in a city where many buildings have been built in the past. Planners, owners, architects and stakeholders should think about not only the current use of buildings but anticipate their future uses in the planning, design and build phases. This helps sustain the life of buildings beyond its specific, current uses and ensures that they can be adapted for future uses easily.

7. How do you feel about joining the Nominating Committee for the 2012 Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize?
It is such an honour to be part of the Nominating Committee. I am learning so much from the other Nominating Committee members. I am also gaining new insights from the efforts made by a wide range of cities for greater liveability and sustainability. The potential of the Prize is immense, with its recognition of truly outstanding, regenerative and inclusive cities whose innovations lead the way to better urban life in cities around the world.

It is apt that Singapore is giving out the Prize because Singapore itself has undergone dramatic transformation in such a short time and is committed to keep on learning and improving. It is commendable that now it is helping to recognise others who have inspiring transformation stories to share.

8. What keeps you awake at night?
It is the burden of making decisions today that will have a significant impact on generations of tomorrow. We are often creating problems that future generations will have to address and overcome. We need to try and do everything we can to make it easier for our children and their children. We need to equip ourselves with the right tools, confidence and a certain amount of curiosity.

9. What keeps you going in your passion to transform places and cities?
I’ve always been passionate about cities. I grew up in a small town which had 1,000 people. Contrast that with my first city experience of Chicago which had one million people then. What I find most fascinating is the central role cities can play in giving people a better life.

My motivation comes from seeing people respond positively to the projects I am involved in. It is rewarding when you see how people find new pleasure and ownership in spaces, places and buildings; when you make people feel more comfortable in their environments; when you help people see something for the first time or in a different light. The look of surprise or enlightenment is priceless.

ABOUT THE PRIZE
The Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize honours outstanding contributions towards the creation of vibrant, liveable and sustainable urban communities around the world. This biennial prestigious Prize is named after Singapore’s first Prime Minister who has been instrumental in transforming Singapore within a few decades. Bilbao City Hall was named the inaugural Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize Laureate in 2010. The 2012 Prize Laureate has been awarded to New York City and the Laureate will be sharing the city’s experiences at the World Cities Summit in July 2012.

Check out the revamped Prize website with new videos and features on the Laureate and Special Mentions at www.leekuanyewworldcityprize.com.sg
A LOVE AFFAIR WITH BALESTIER

By Arti Mulchand & Pooja Makhijani

Balestier has historic roots, multifarious cultural connections and boasts some of the best food on the island. And its eclectic mix of old and new yields stories with every step.
Photographer Ian Tan glanced at The New Paper one day in 1999 and saw his uncle’s photo staring back. Arsonists had struck his childhood shophouse home at 233A Balestier Road. He resisted brooding until 2005 when bulldozers began to bury his past. Only then did the memories come flooding back. “You don’t miss it till it’s gone,” he says.

Ian Tan, now 35, who had spent the better part of the 1970s and 1980s in a zinc-covered shophouse, documented his “love affair” with Balestier on his blog, Empty Vessel (iantan.org). He recalled fondly the disused opera house adjoining his childhood shophouse, and a martial arts school on the other side, where local television stunt doubles trained. On many nights, Ian can be found gawking at temple mediums poking their cheeks with skewers at the nearby temple, Tai Ji Ya. These days, the Microsoft marketing manager and his family traipse back to Balestier at least twice a month to fulfill their cravings for tau sar piah and bak kut teh, and quite simply, for a whiff of nostalgia that is hard to find elsewhere.

**UNIQUE BALESTIER**

That, perhaps, is what makes Balestier so unique — it is where the past and present, and young and old intermingle. Gaze upwards on either side as you walk down Balestier Road and you will get an appreciation of the area’s eclectic mix of architectural styles. And then there are the scores of stalls that dish out delicious local food at all hours, including Founders Bak Kut Teh, Teo Seng Teochew Porridge and Loong Fatt Eating House & Confectionary.

A veritable cottage industry also thrives, points out Ms Shaman M, 48, a programme director with a conference company. She moved into her flat, just off Balestier Road in 1993. “Balestier is the ‘light street’. People have been coming here for lighting accessories and fixtures as well as home décor solutions for years and it is still where they come.” Said Tan: “The neighbourhood offers a real mix of personalities. You have the old residents and stallholders, such as the durian sellers near the temple, and modern cosmopolitan people who have come in... As a neighbourhood, it has softened a lot but you can still find pockets of its past if you know where to look.”
BALESTIER HERITAGE TRAIL

Check out some of the key highlights of the revamped Balestier Heritage Trail by URA and the National Heritage Board:

- **Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (12 Tai Gin Road)**
  Originally called Bin Chang House, this icon was built around the 1880s. Today, it is a museum exhibiting artifacts belonging to Dr Sun Yat Sen, China’s founding father. The Hall was gazetted as a National Monument on 28 October 1994.

- **Old Balestier Market**
  Also called Or Kio, or “black bridge” market, it was built in the 1920s to cater to farmers who needed to sell their produce. It served as a food-rationing centre during World War II.

- **(Former) Shaw’s Malay Film Studio (8 Jalan Ampas)**
  Built in 1947, this studio served as a workplace to the prolific director, singer, and songwriter Tan Sri P. Ramlee.

- **“Singapore Eclectic” shophouses (292-310 Balestier Road)**
  Built at the height of the Malayan rubber boom in 1926, these houses feature pastel-coloured walls and fanciful tiles from France, Belgium, and Japan.

- **Art Deco Shophouses (230 and 246 Balestier Road)**
  These shophouses draw on art deco in their design. The Hoover Hotel and Restaurant, both built in the 1950s, share the namesake of the old Hoover Theatre, which once stood where Shaw Plaza is today.
COLOURFUL PAST

Balestier Road was named after Joseph Balestier, the first United States Consul of Singapore. He first developed the area in 1834, when he leased 1,000 acres of land for a sugarcane plantation, and named the area Balestier Plain. But the business struggled, and then in the 1840s, he lost his son and wife. Defeated, he sold his property, and left Singapore. A mark had been made though.

Historically, Balestier had been a swampy area infested with tigers and malarial mosquitoes. In a bid to ward off these dangers, Chinese Hokkien immigrants built the Goh Chor Tua Pek Kong temple in 1847, asking deity Tua Pek Kong for protection. Years later, Tan Boon Liat, grandson of philanthropist Tan Tock Seng, funded the creation of a free-standing wayang (theatrical performance) stage in 1906. It is Singapore’s only such stage that remains today.

As the area developed, some bigger villas were built, including the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (formerly called Sun Yat Sen Villa or Wan Qing Yuan) in the late 19th century. The colonial Victorian-style villa was named in honour of Dr Sun, and it served as the home for the Singapore branch of the Tong Meng Hui, or the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance. Housing developments in nearby Kim Keat and Whampoa blossomed between the 1920s and 1950s. Today, some unique traces of the past remain — Jalan Bahagia, for instance, is one of few places you can actually see HDB terrace houses, built in the Singapore Improvement Trust (now known as the Housing Development Board) days.
CHARM RETAINED

Balestier also brims with other heritage icons, like Maha Sasana Ramsi Burmese Buddhist Temple on Tai Gin Road, the only Buddhist temple outside of Myanmar built in traditional Burmese architectural style, complete with eye-catching golden spire. And at the junction of Boon Teck Road sits what is possibly Singapore’s last free water kiosk, a legacy of the early days, when clean water was a luxury. It is still manned by a volunteer from Thong Teck Sian Tong Lian Sia Temple.

Another little-known nugget: Balestier Plain, which today refers to the playing fields bounded by Balestier Road, Tessenoohn Road and Moulmein Road, was where the first-ever airplane with a paying passenger landed in Singapore. In 1927, newspaper tycoon W Van Lear Black touched down there in a single-engine monoplane chartered from KLM Royal Dutch Airlines in Europe.

It all makes for an evocative neighbourhood with endless opportunities for discovery, something recognised by URA. Since 2002, when it released its Identity Plan, it has gazetted over 150 shophouses for conservation. In October 2011, the Balestier Heritage Trail was revised with new storyboards and heritage markers, and pedestrian walkways were enhanced, making it easier to get around.

The Sun Yat Sen Memorial Hall reopened after a year of redevelopment, featuring five new galleries, original artefacts and displays that tell the story of Singapore and Nanyang’s roles in the 1911 Revolution. At the same time, Zhongshan Park was also developed. The park is part of URA’s plans to further enhance Balestier. To Shaman, all these add up to a neighbourhood she loves. “As the years go by, Balestier has constantly improved in terms of connectivity and facilities, without losing its charm.”
Conservation is an issue that is very close to our hearts. In fact, all of us have a favourite place associated with our childhood. Schools, in particular, are cornerstones of local history and evoke fond memories across generations. Schools are sites of shared memories and they leave both tangible and intangible imprints on our journey in life.

In this issue, *Skyline* comes bound with a complimentary copy of “Heritage Schools”. While it is not practical to conserve every old school in Singapore, URA has selectively conserved some which are historically and architecturally significant, to enhance our physical landscape. Take a walk down memory lane as you learn about our built heritage and discover little-known facts about conserved school buildings such as the former Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus and Hong Wen School.