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Benchmark of solidarity

“bench”, a design competition organised by creative practice FARM and jointly presented by the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Singapore Furniture Industries Council, gives new life to former Stadium seating planks by transforming them into new public benches.

The mood in the URA Centre atrium on 28 February 2013 was electric at the awards ceremony for “bench”, a design competition launched in September 2012 to remember the former National Stadium by creating public benches from its old seating planks. Spirits were high among the designers and their supporters, with strong camaraderie stemming from a shared recognition and reverence for a bygone era.

Built in 1973, the former National Stadium was an icon that witnessed countless concerts, football matches and National Day Parades. Singapore’s famous “Kallang Wave” had its roots at the Stadium. It was closed in 2007 to make way for the upcoming Singapore Sports Hub. The design competition was a special way of remembering this heritage landmark. Five winners were selected out of 130 public entries with another 25 designers, artists and architects invited to create unique bench designs. They included veteran architect Tang Guan Bee and famous photographer John Clang, to multi-disciplinary design firm, PHUNK studio and established furniture designers, Lanzavecchia + Wai.

*Skyline* talks to the winners and designers.
Inspiration

Explaining the ideas behind his design, winner Raymond Hon, an Industrial Design student at the National University of Singapore, said: “Wood from the National Stadium is very precious – it’s been weathered for 37 years and cannot be replicated in any way, so I’ve decided to keep this top surface as it is.” The humble and simple shape of his bench design reflects his idea of Singaporeans: “Small but strong, simple but sturdy.”

Acclaimed architect Chang Yong Ter from Chang Architects wanted to capture the people’s spirit as experienced at the stadium. “[My bench design is] a tribute to our fighting spirit. In the form of a circle, it symbolises the coming together of a community. The spiral symbolises the wood coming full circle – re-birthed from one bench to another.”

Peter Chen, an Assistant Professor at the School of Art, Design and Media at the Nanyang Technological University, took a different approach. “I wanted to pay homage to the roofline – it was the most distinctive element of the whole stadium, and that’s what people remember when they think about the architecture. In a way, it’s a very straightforward bench: it’s reminiscent of the galleries, the people who used to sit there to cheer on teams, and the memories we have.”

Romantic pragmatism was the order of the day for Studio Juju’s designers Timo and Priscilla. “The seating planks [at the National Stadium] were subjected to harsh weather conditions, and needed to be bolted down so that disintegrated pieces could be replaced easily,” says Priscilla. “The logic and beauty of the planks being bolted down struck us, and as you can see [in our design], the bolt holes which showcase a strong sense of history remains,” she continues.
Nostalgia and nationality

Sapp Cheng, the youngest winner at 24 years, is a product designer from Immortal the Design Station. Her experience with “bench” was different from many others: “I’m designing for an era that I haven’t been in. The rest might have taken a very personal approach, but I’m designing for the masses. Therefore, it shouldn’t be based on my own experiences. I try to understand my audience and reinterpret it.”

But for the rest, nostalgia fuelled their designs. The former National Stadium held many fond memories for Yong Ter – from National Day Parades, to thrilling soccer matches and the opening ceremony of the South East Asian Games. “Your hair stands when you enter the National Stadium,” he remembers.

Other Singaporeans remember the stadium most for the way it united the people. Priscilla says, “I really liked the idea that everyone was sitting beside one another in a continuous loop. This sense of sitting beside a stranger and being united regardless of race, religion or gender is really nice.”

Indeed it was. “The National Stadium is a vessel – it contains memories of many different people… I feel that it’s a very strong structure for us metaphorically – a place that can bring Singaporeans together; a part of our Singaporean identity,” says Raymond.
“Singapore has come very far and accomplished a lot in its 48 years, yet this progress is not without its sacrifices.”
The right balance?

Nostalgia has its danger – over-indulgence may prevent society from progressing, so intent on holding on to a bygone era we may be. Priscilla agrees, adding that “it’s all about balance. It’s about identifying the elements to retain so that there is a culture we can continue to build on. Otherwise, if everything is eroded, our culture and identity will be diluted.”

Singapore has come very far and accomplished a lot in its 48 years, yet this progress is not without its sacrifices. This inevitable process of change and renewal manifests itself most distinctly in its architecture. However, there will always be something else to take the place of what we have had to give up – it is a cycle that constantly renews itself into a new shared history for Singaporeans.

“Even though Singapore keeps changing, it still feels like home for me. Changes are for us to accept and adapt to. The essence of Singapore is the people. We create the memories, and what we do in the present will create the history for our descendants to commemorate the past,” Raymond muses.

“bench” is the perfect example to showcase how we can creatively retain a part of our heritage in a unique way and add a new sparkle and buzz to public spaces when all 30 benches are placed in various parts of the city in future.

An exhibition showing all bench designs and public entries ran at The URA Centre till 18 June 2013, including all of the physical benches. For more information, visit www.bench.sg

By Daphne Boey

This article was first published in Going Places Singapore, an online magazine about appreciating our city anew. Visit www.goingplacesingapore.sg for more stories.
Falling in love with sailing

An ex-Olympian spills the thrills of sailing in the heart of Marina Bay.

It is 9 am, and a peaceful morning in Marina Bay. Conditions do not get any better than this. The azure sky is dotted with clouds so fluffy you start hungering for cotton candy. Bright sunshine dabbles the water, and a crisp breeze flutters the sails of the small keelboat we will soon be learning to master. How fast is the wind exactly, we ask Tan Wearn Haw. “About 10 to 12 knots,” he answers, without even needing to lick his finger and stick it in the air.

If anyone would know about sailing conditions, it is Wearn Haw. The man exudes a love of water, having sailed for Singapore in the 2000 Olympics, the 2002 Asian Games (where he won a bronze medal), and for China in the America’s Cup of 2007. In 2011, at the age of 31, he became the youngest person ever to lead a sports association in Singapore. As the CEO of the Singapore Sailing Federation, Wearn Haw’s goal is to get the country to fall in love with sailing as much as he has.

Central Boating District

Not bad for a guy who, until not that long ago, was studying for a Masters in Aeronautical Engineering. Quite a
change, Skyline suggests, from such a scientific arena to world-class sailor and finally an administrator of the entire sport. “Why not!” he says with the boyish enthusiasm that infuses most of his sentences. “Sailing has given me so much in life, it is only right that I come back to contribute. And in doing so, hopefully we create a virtuous cycle in the long run, and ensure that generations can have the same opportunities through sailing.”

As we stand at the dock next to the Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands, Wearn Haw gamely poses for several shots. But you can tell that like any true sailor, he is itching to hit the water. As soon as we cast off, it is clear he is in his element. And the point of this sailing programme in Marina Bay is that it can be anyone’s element, he explains. While he does not get on the water as much as he would like to nowadays, Wearn Haw says that his job now is to get other people sailing, here in the middle of the Central Business District.

“There’re not many places you can do something like this, except maybe in Sydney Harbour.” He praises the “surreal experience” of sailing right in the heart of a city: “You’re sort of in the middle of it all, but yet out of it. You can hear the traffic and city sounds reverberating between the buildings, and you know you are in the city physically, but gliding along effortlessly with a soft breeze on your face transports you to a different place.” It is poetic stuff, but he ends with a cheeky salesman’s flourish – “you have to try it for yourself to feel it!”

And people are trying it, he explains, from fathers looking to bond with their children to singles hoping for a “love boat” experience, where romance might bloom between the waves. The boats, smiles Wearn Haw, bring a real life and sense of atmosphere to the Bay. “People see them, their sails flapping, and it adds a touch point where they say they would like to try it.”

Many a stressed CEO has made use of the “step on, step off” ease of the programme. They can get out on the water without any hassle for a quick, detoxing sail during their lunch break – much to the envy of their colleagues in the skyscrapers above. Wearn Haw explains, “People will often look down from the buildings here and get messages from someone sailing in the Bay at that moment: ‘Sucks to be you, stuck at the office!’” He chuckles and looks up at one of the skyscrapers, thinking, probably rightly, about the many office workers wishing they were on the water right now.
Handbags, hangovers and heritage

As Skyline clumsily tugs at various ropes under Wearn Haw’s patient tutelage (“Maybe pull that one a little bit tighter,” he advises, as we flail like a kitten batting haplessly at a string), we discuss what the growth of watersports culture can mean to Singapore. “We’re really starting to get more popular,” he says happily. “[The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore] saw the value of using sailing to unlock the potential of Marina Bay.”

Add to this the various programmes for dragonboating and kayaking found on the island’s other waterways, and more people than ever are hitting the waves and learning port from starboard. (A helpful hint to remember the two: “port” has the same number of letters as “left”, which means that starboard must be right.)

We glide swiftly near the Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands (“I’m waiting for someone to sail into Louis Vuitton one day and flood the Bay with handbags,” he winks), as Wearn Haw explains that in getting more people into sailing, he is actually helping them connect with their past. All this, he says, pointing at the various boats currently whipping around, is not really new.

“They used to have a New Year’s Regatta every January, which started back in the early 1900s until the ’60s or ’70s,” the sailor explains. Local teams would race around in sampan-like boats, competing with foreigners, and there were also swimming races and other events. “So we’re just trying to bring back our heritage, to remind the next generation that this is where it all started.”

So while things are going swimmingly on all fronts for his projects, Wearn Haw admits that this might be one of his dream projects, what he cheekily calls a “hangover race for January.” And as sailing becomes ever more popular, he hopes that the sport will become such a regular activity that people here take matters into their own hands. “In Singapore, we tend to be too clinical; I like a bit of chaos. We want people to take ownership, to do their own thing. That’s when the water really comes alive.”

As we slip out of our lifejacket and bid goodbye, Wearn Haw shows how much he loves his chosen element. “If you want to go out again, give me a call anytime. I’m always looking for an excuse to head out onto the water,” he smiles. With a cheery wave, he dashes off to his next meeting across the Bay. And how does he get there? By boat, of course.

The Singapore Sailing Federation is running the Marina Bay Sailing project to promote sailing as a healthy community activity. The development of sailing in Marina Bay contributes to the vision of Marina Bay as a live-work-play destination and a “People’s Bay.”

By Daniel Seifert

This article was first published in Going Places Singapore, an online magazine about appreciating our city anew. Part of the article was also featured in the Marina Bay Fun Finder e-magazine. Visit www.goingplacesingapore.sg for more stories.

“\nIn Singapore, we tend to be too clinical; I like a bit of chaos. We want people to take ownership, to do their own thing. That’s when the water really comes alive.\n”
New guidelines to promote better quality shopping developments

To promote better quality shopping developments, URA has introduced guidelines on average size of retail units and minimum corridor width for retail areas in commercial and mixed-use developments.

Under the new guidelines, which took effect from 27 March 2013, the average size of a retail unit should be at least 50 sqm. Corridors with shops on both sides should generally have a width of 3.0 m while those with shops on one side should generally have a width of 2.4 m. However, in areas where pedestrian flow is not expected to be high, narrower widths of 2.4 m and 2.0 m for the two types of corridors respectively can be considered.

The new guidelines, which were implemented after consulting industry stakeholders such as the Real Estate Developers’ Association of Singapore and the Singapore Institute of Architects, continue to give developers and architects flexibility in planning and designing their retail spaces to meet the needs of businesses.

Shoebox retail units on the rise

URA had received an increasing number of development applications for commercial and mixed use developments with a large number of small retail units ranging from 9 sqm to 25 sqm.

Just to give readers a sense of what is at stake here, a 9 sqm space is even smaller than a car park lot. Some of the redevelopment proposals would result in having 10 times the number of retail units compared to the original shopping centre.

While small retail units cater to certain trades that do not require much space, such as money changers and mobile phone accessory shops, there is a wide range of retail uses that have different space needs. Having predominantly small retail units in a single development would limit the type of retailers and businesses that can operate there, and hence limit the variety of products and services provided to serve the public. Having a large number of small retail units could also cause traffic and car parking problems, especially if the development is located in or near residential estates.

Narrow corridor widths

URA had also observed that the corridors of shopping developments are getting narrower with some less than 1.5 m in width. Narrow corridors are inadequate in handling high pedestrian flows in a typical shopping mall during peak hours such as meal times. Wider corridors will ensure that there is enough space for the movement of shoppers, especially those with strollers and wheelchair users.

With the new guidelines, both shoppers and retailers will benefit from the improved layout and design of retail developments.

By Heng Chan Yong
The AHA Assessment Committee was impressed with the submission for 58 Emerald Hill and gave the project a special mention at the award ceremony. The project team was recognised for its good effort and sensitivity in recovering the original architectural character of the building and the street, and adapting the interior to meet the needs of a family home.

Based on archival record, 58 Emerald Hill was originally built as part of a series of three identical units. It was however rebuilt in reinforced concrete and to a new design in the 1960s. The current owners bought the house sometime in 2005 and wanted RichardHO Architects to renovate the existing house into a home befitting its address in Emerald Hill Road.

In this residential project which took about 14 months to complete, the existing reinforced concrete building was completely rebuilt in order to reinstate the original pitched clay tile roof and timber floor of the terrace house. Although it did not entail any restoration per se, the project team deserves a special mention for having painstakingly put back a building that hails back to the original building design and structure, and the old streetscape. The interior spaces and layout are sensitive interpretations of a traditional terrace house in a delightful and contemporary way while meeting the needs of a modern family home.

Mr Richard Ho, principal architect and founder of RichardHO Architects, is very pleased with the final work. “Not only me, but the owners too, are very pleased with how the house turned out – a careful reconstruction effort that is faithful to its original construction yet it is contemporary in its feel… We are very proud that it was given a Special Mention at the 2012 URA Architectural Heritage Awards.”

Owner: Mr & Mrs Ben Lim
Architect: RichardHO Architects
Engineer: JS TAN & Associates
Contractor: U.Sage Contracts Pte Ltd
Creating a small slice of pedestrian haven

Pedestrians took centre stage during the weekends at Haji Lane, Club Street and Ann Siang Road when some roads were temporarily closed off to cars in a pilot initiative.

Singapore’s urban planning approach places importance in making our city people-friendly by providing public spaces for social activities, recreation and respite. Promoting walkable, active streets and public spaces fall in this realm, and URA is always on the look-out for opportunities to do more.

Today, some streets in Singapore, such as the stretch of Boon Tat Street next to Lau Pat Sat are temporarily closed to traffic in the evenings. Haji Lane was also temporarily closed to vehicular traffic on one weekend in February 2013 for an event organised by the community. These have helped to create a more conducive environment for pedestrians and have injected more vibrancy into the city.

Walkable and active streets

Club Street and Ann Siang Road are two very popular streets for dining, boutique shops and community uses. Nestled in an enclave of beautiful conserved shophouses, the streets are flanked by shops, restaurants, pubs, associations and clubs. The area draws large crowds which sometimes spill onto the streets and pedestrians have to fight for the same space with vehicular traffic.

Having temporary weekend road closures would convert roads into public space, allowing people to enjoy themselves in a car-free environment.

URA took the lead to organise a series of dialogues with the business community and residents in Club
Street and Ann Siang Road. We sought their feedback and refined the proposal to ensure that the impact on business operations and residents was minimised.

The temporary road closure at Club Street and Ann Siang Road commenced on 26 April 2013 and will be on trial for three months. The area is closed to cars on Fridays and Saturdays from 7.00 pm to 1.00 am.

As for Haji Lane in Kampong Glam, it already enjoys a vibrant street life in a Historic District rich in heritage and culture, with many visitors walking along the lane.

The stakeholders of Haji Lane have also been very proactive in organising themselves and working with the government to temporarily close the street. Temporary road closures at Haji Lane began on 3 May 2013, with the street confined to just pedestrians from 8.30 pm to 2.00 am on Fridays and Saturdays. On Sundays, the street is closed to vehicles from 2.00 pm to 2.00 am.

All these were made possible with the hard work and cooperation from other government agencies such as the Land Transport Authority, Traffic Police, Singapore Civil Defence Force and the National Environment Agency.

Our community, our spaces

During the trial period, stakeholders and the public are encouraged to give their feedback on the project. If more see the benefits of such car-free locations, we will consider closing the roads on a regular basis or extending the pilot to other locations in the city. That will allow more to enjoy and take advantage of car-free or pedestrians-only environments.

Key to the success of such initiatives however, is the community. As with all new initiatives, we expect there will be concerns and implementation details to be sorted out. We will continue to work with the local community to work out these details. It is important that the community discuss and collectively shape the character of heritage areas because we believe the local community and those passionate about their precincts are best placed to determine what works best.

By Serene Tan
Does high-density mean the end of liveability?
Some say that high density spells the end of liveability for a city. Yet Singapore has performed well in many global liveability rankings. What has Singapore done right? The Centre for Liveable Cities and the Urban Land Institute initiated a study to find out. The findings are published in a book called: “10 Principles for Liveable High-Density Cities: Lessons from Singapore”. An edited excerpt is published here.
Plan for long-term growth and renewal

Continuous efforts to optimise land use can help dense cities overcome the constraints posed by past developments. Through land value creation, regulations, rights of use and limited lease tenures, Singapore’s land policies, including a regular five-year review of its Master Plan, encourage the best use of land and optimal development cycles. Another strategy is the designation of White sites that allow developers to propose their preferred land-use, provided a minimum quantum mix is achieved, so as to meet market demands, encourage a range of investment strategies and boost urban growth.

Through systematic upgrading programmes, older public housing flats are enlarged, while new lifts, covered walkways and better landscaping improve the public areas. This maintains good living standards for all, despite the age of homes and neighbourhoods. To optimise land use, the Selective En Bloc Redevelopment Scheme lets the government demolish some older apartment blocks and rebuild them to a higher density while affected residents relocate to nearby flats. This scheme facilitates renewal and growth without dispersing established communities.

Embrace diversity, foster inclusiveness

People from diverse regions often live next to each other in dense cities, which can be a source of tension. But demographic diversity can culturally enrich a city and boost its competitiveness. Singapore’s urban conservation districts of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam let people easily enjoy varied environments and lifestyles. Amidst diversity, inclusiveness is needed to maintain social harmony. Among Singapore’s most powerful tools in this regard is its public housing. In particular, the Ethnic Integration Policy defines quotas that guide housing allocation so that different groups share the same neighbourhoods. Density supports interaction through shared activities. Proximity, convenience and the need to share scarce land, encourage people to engage in communal hobbies, like community gardening or soccer. Well-designed local spaces can also foster a sense of inclusiveness and community by omitting walls and other barriers to movement and interaction.

Density is often blamed for accentuating problems like overcrowding, crime, disease, pollution, poverty and high living costs. In its 2012 Global Liveability Survey, the Economist Intelligence Unit observed that the top-ranked cities tended to have a relatively low density.

Although considered a high-density city with over 7,000 persons per square kilometre, Singapore has clinched top positions in liveability rankings. It is an outlier that combines high density with high liveability. This suggests the intriguing possibility that high density need not compromise people’s quality of life. Based on the findings from a series of expert workshops, this essay distils 10 principles from Singapore’s experience. We argue that, with thoughtful planning and effective governance, a city can mitigate the negative externalities of high-density living, while exploiting special opportunities to improve liveability, competitiveness and sustainability.
Draw nature closer to people

Greenery softens a densely built-up city and makes it more liveable. Satellite photographs show that, despite sustained urbanisation from 1986 to 2007, Singapore’s green cover grew from 36 per cent to 47 per cent. Tree-lined roads, parks and nature areas are the foundations of Singapore’s Garden City reputation. Incentives also encourage building owners to invest in greenery, producing vertical green walls, sky gardens, and lushly landscaped atriums and plazas.

Under the Active Beautiful Clean Waters programme, Singapore is transforming its functional concrete drains and canals into naturalised and biodiverse streams, rivers and reservoirs that are open to public recreation. These new landscapes have drawn people closer to water and improved their quality of life.

Develop affordable mixed-use neighbourhoods

One of the advantages of high urban density is that it supports the provision of varied commercial, civic and transport amenities in convenient proximity to homes. Singapore’s suburban public housing towns are seen as good quality residential environments, with amenities planned within easy reach of most homes. Facilities that require larger catchment populations, such as cineplexes and shopping malls, are clustered in town centres, while more localised amenities, like convenience stores, coffeeshops, playgrounds and kindergartens, are closer to homes, in smaller neighbourhoods and precincts.

Make public spaces work harder

Land is scarce in dense cities, and this calls for innovative solutions to make spaces work harder and produce synergies. Singapore transformed slivers of underused land, along roads and canals or under elevated railway tracks, into ‘Park Connectors’ – landscaped jogging and cycling tracks that link parks and let people exercise, socialise, commute and enjoy nature closer to home. The islandwide Park Connector Network is a comprehensive matrix of green spaces that promotes a healthy lifestyle, social interaction, sustainable transport and even biodiversity.
Prioritise green transport and building options

Dense cities are better able to support public transport. Singapore invested in an extensive, integrated and affordable public transport network which offers good connectivity to most of the island. High-density transit-oriented development has resulted in the proximity of many homes to public transport. Covered walkways, Park Connectors and intra-town cycling networks also make walking and cycling viable low-energy transport options.

To mitigate the urban heat island effect and reduce energy consumption, Singapore promotes green buildings through its Green Mark Incentive Scheme. All new developments in Marina Bay now need to meet higher Platinum or Gold Green Mark standards, and must provide skyrise greenery and communal landscaped areas equivalent to their site areas.

Relieve density with variety and add green boundaries

In Singapore, the “checkerboard” urban planning principle mixes high and low-rise developments to create variety and physical relief. Even though the city’s overall density is high, the spatial quality of specific places is not unpleasant or overwhelming. Such distinctions and attention to design at the local scale also helps create place identities. For instance, Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, which separates Bishan and Ang Mo Kio towns, supplies a recreational amenity to residents in both towns and provides a breather from their high-rise environments.
Activate spaces for greater safety

Dense cities are sometimes seen as less safe. This can be mitigated by “activating” spaces and encouraging people to linger and participate in activities at playgrounds or seniors’ corners, and not just move through these spaces. Having activities at different times, with the presence of the community on the ground level, keeps these spaces safe.

Promote innovative and non-conventional solutions

Dense, resource-scarce cities need to foster innovations so as to overcome constraints and improve their liveability and competitiveness. Singapore has turned its shortcomings to its advantage through a culture of systematic innovation. In one-north, people can work, live, learn or play in a 200-hectare development designed to nurture research and innovation. Singapore has also relied on innovations to overcome its water scarcity and develop a sustainable water supply. Water reclamation was made possible by adopting relevant technologies. NEWater, the product of this reclamation, is now pure enough to be used for wafer fabrication factories and drinking.

Forge 3P partnerships

New developments often force dense cities to make tough land use trade-offs. Consulting and collaborating across groups can improve development strategies and even produce win-win solutions that enjoy smoother implementation. Singapore River One began as a project to get stakeholders to champion place management at the Singapore River. It is now becoming instrumental in the successful development of leisure and commercial spaces there.

The Orchard Road mall enhancement initiative is driven by an inter-agency taskforce led by the Singapore Tourism Board, along with the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Land Transport Authority and National Parks Board. These agencies worked with private design consultants and consulted Orchard Road stakeholders to implement improvements. Planning incentives encouraged landlords to improve their façades, which also contributed to a more vibrant street.

The United Nations projects the world’s urban population will grow to five billion by 2030, and it seems inevitable that most cities will grow larger and denser. These 10 principles can be a starting point for planners, developers and citizens to think about how cities can support more people without sacrificing quality of life. Creating a highly dense yet liveable city is not easy, but we hope our report shows it is possible — and that it has been done successfully before.

Limin Hee is an Associate Director at the Centre for Liveable Cities, where she oversees research.

Scott Dunn is the Vice President at AECOM in Southeast Asia, and the Urban Land Institute Singapore Council Chair.


This article was adapted from a longer version in CLC’s “Urban Solutions” magazine at http://www.clc.gov.sg/documents/UrbanSolutionsIssue2.pdf
Youths dream up big ideas for the Rail Corridor

Since the return of the former railway land to Singapore in July 2011, the Rail Corridor has sparked widespread public interest. 420 youths from 24 schools have dreamed up fresh and bold ideas throughout 2012 with imaginative and interesting proposals on the future use of the land.

Spanning the length of the country from Woodlands in the north to Tanjong Pagar in the south, this 25 km strip has the potential to become a signature public space that integrates the greenery and heritage structures with new developments.

The land was previously used by Malaysia’s Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) railway. All ideas from the public, including those from the youths, will add to the rich pool of proposals and suggestions that URA has received to date on how the Rail Corridor can be developed to meet the aspirations of a wide segment of our population. A selection of the youth ideas was exhibited at The URA Centre from 16 April to 15 May 2013. URA will study the ideas and concepts and distil from them suitable design principles and parameters that can serve as an inspiration for the design scope for the next phase of development.

ProjecTRIP

Ten Secondary Schools from around the Rail Corridor and the North Zone participated in hands-on, interactive workshops between May and July 2012. These workshops were part of the ProjecTRIP programme initiated by URA which aimed to engage Secondary School students on the Rail Corridor. The students focused on the northern part of the Rail Corridor, near the Mandai mangroves or the former Bukit Timah Railway Station. Facilitated by Singapore Polytechnic and Singapore Institute of Planners, 100 students used the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and design thinking methodologies to generate fresh ideas for the Rail Corridor.

CUBE

120 Junior College and Polytechnic students raced against time to develop big ideas for the former Tanjong Pagar Railway Station and the old railway yard in November 2012. This was the focus for the annual Challenge for the Urban & Built Environment (CUBE). In its fourth year, CUBE is a four-day workshop-cum-competition that gives students a chance to be planners, delving into the intricacies of planning and urban design work.

A group of experienced practitioners – URA architects and planners, experts from the National University of Singapore (NUS), the Singapore University of Technology and Design, Friends of the Rail Corridor, Singapore Heritage Society and the main sponsor, CPG Consultants – helped equip the students with real insights into what it means to plan for and design a space for the people.

To find out what happened at the CUBE workshop, go to http://www.vimeo.com/audeonline/cube2012

Rail ideas

Beyond CUBE and ProjecTRIP, the NUS Department of Architecture initiated a year of design explorations for the Rail Corridor since August 2011. Architecture students visited and studied the Rail Corridor, documenting the different aspects of the corridor in a series of mappings – greenery, heritage sites, accessibility and nearby communal facilities. Street surveys were done at locations near to the Rail Corridor to get a sense of what people want. Students then came up with a master plan with ideas for certain locations along...
the corridor. Civic groups were also invited to give feedback on the students’ work-in-progress. These works, together with works of landscape architecture students, were first presented in the exhibition “Re-imagining the Rail Corridor”, by the Friends of the Rail Corridor and the Nature Society of Singapore. Supported by URA, the exhibition ran from October to December 2011 and travelled to various venues from January to March 2012.

These mappings and projects by NUS will be documented in an upcoming book, “Rail Ideas: Visions for the Rail Corridor”.

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By Ashton Chong and Serene Tng

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**Winners for CUBE 2012**

**Top Prizes**

Top Prize – Dunman High School (team B)
Second Prize – Republic Polytechnic
Third Prize – Singapore Polytechnic

**Merit Awards**

Hwa Chong Institution
Ngee Ann Polytechnic
Temasek Junior College (team B)

**Certificates of Participation**

Anderson Junior College
Anglo-Chinese Junior College
Dunman High School (team A)
Jurong Junior College
Nanyang Polytechnic (team A)
Nanyang Polytechnic (team B)
National Junior College
Temasek Junior College (team A)
Temasek Polytechnic
Victoria Junior College
The Telok Ayer (Chinatown) Conservation Area provides the perfect panacea if you are on the lookout for a new neighbourhood hangout. Bounded by South Bridge Road, Cross Street, Boon Tat Street, Stanley Street, McCallum Street, Amoy Street, Ann Siang Road and Erskine Road, this part of Chinatown invokes a charming old-meets-new feel.

A stroll around this part of the neighbourhood will see beautifully restored shophouses with a multitude of modern uses sitting cheek to jowl with many of Singapore’s oldest landmarks. Enjoy a gourmet cuppa at one of many hip coffee joints or tuck into a mouth-watering meal at any of the up-and-coming restaurants before feasting your eyes on pre-war architecture at Thian Hock Keng Temple and the Al-Abrar mosque. Heritage buffs can also pop by clan houses such as the Ying Fo Kun Hakka Association Hall – the first Hakka clan association in Singapore – to learn more about its unique culture.

Pedestrians can also explore Club Street and Ann Siang Hill with greater ease thanks to a project that aims to make these streets more accessible during the weekends. Check out page 12 for more details.