

ASIAN REVITALIZATION

ADAPTIVE REUSE
in
HONG KONG, SHANGHAI, and SINGAPORE

Edited by Katie Cummer and Lynne D. DiStefano

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Adaptive Reuse: Introduction

Lynne D. DiStefano

Introduction to the Book

Germination of an Idea

The idea for this publication, examining the adaptive reuse of heritage places in three Asian centers—Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore—has come from two directions. Ester van Steekelenburg (Urban Discovery) and Tiffany Tang (Urban Discovery), both contributors to this publication, mounted an exhibit on adaptive reuse projects in Hong Kong for a Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) conference in Hong Kong in 2015. The exhibit was well received, and the two hoped to extend their work together through a publication. During the same period (and up to the present), the Division of Architectural Conservation Programmes (ACP) in the Faculty of Architecture at The University of Hong Kong was conducting adaptive reuse field studies in Shanghai and Singapore for graduate students—and using examples of adaptive reuse in Hong Kong in its core courses for both undergraduate and graduate students. Not surprisingly, ACP staff and former graduate students are also contributors to the publication.

ACP's focus on adaptive reuse was (and remains) purposeful. Staff have long recognized that one of the best ways to protect heritage buildings and sites is to ensure their appropriate use, especially uses that have a myriad of cultural benefits—economic, environmental, and social. And although ACP is dedicated to the conservation of buildings and sites with recognized heritage values, staff emphasize the importance of considering such sites within a broader urban framework, what is now referred to as the Historic Urban Landscape.

With this approach, the differences between the recognized and the not (yet) recognized fade, and conservationists and planners, among others, can think in a more integrated way about the larger benefits of adaptive reuse—more specifically, about adaptive reuse options that help build livable communities. Encouraging such thinking is the fundamental purpose of this publication.

Focus on Three Asian Centers

There is much to learn from the practice of adaptive reuse in large Asian cities and particularly in such major centers as Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore, where adaptive reuse (or its equivalent) has been considered one of the accepted forms of conservation in the twenty-first century. For example, in Hong Kong, adaptive reuse

gained official recognition in 2008 under the government's Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme (Revitalisation Scheme).¹ Through this initiative, selected government-owned heritage buildings are adapted and repurposed for new public uses, such as Lui Seng Chun—a shophouse transformed into a community health center providing affordable Chinese medicine services. A similar situation exists in Shanghai and Singapore, where adaptive reuse is recognized as an appropriate way to adapt and repurpose government-owned heritage properties for economic and social benefit. Examples include Red Town in Shanghai (2007, now partially demolished), which adapted a range of buildings for new uses; and the National Gallery Singapore (2016), which adapts two preexisting institutional buildings and connects them through a dramatic entryway.

Adaptive reuse is not limited to government-owned heritage buildings. As illustrated in this publication, it is increasingly seen as a viable option in the marketplace. Examples abound of businesses, institutions, and private owners undertaking high-profile conversions, especially of distinctive heritage buildings. Private examples include Hong Kong's Asia Society Hong Kong Center, 1933 Shanghai, and Singapore's New Majestic Hotel.

Relevance

With an increasing number of projects being completed and opened to the public in these three cities, it is timely to examine adaptive reuse within such influential Asian centers—particularly in terms of economic, environmental, and social dimensions.² It is also important to examine such adaptive reuse projects in terms of the legal and policy frameworks that control the kind and degree of change, including place-specific constraints and opportunities.³

Objectives

Building on past publications, including government policy documents and extensive fieldwork, the objectives of this publication are to contextualize adaptive reuse in each city and to reveal the impetus behind a wide range of adaptive reuse projects from revitalization in Hong Kong to commercial development in Shanghai and tourism development in Singapore. A further objective is to stimulate discussion by evaluating the economic, environmental, and social benefits of projects, based on a number of generally accepted criteria.

Format

This introduction defines adaptive reuse within an international and Asian perspective. The first four essays address adaptive reuse and sustainability (the economic,

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1. Please note the British spelling of "Revitalisation" is intentional, as this is its proper name as used by the Hong Kong SAR government.
 2. Although four dimensions (cultural, economic, environmental, and social) have recently been put forward, the author prefers to think in terms of three dimensions (economic, environmental, and social) as overlapping components of culture. But, no matter the preference, either approach leads to more holistic thinking.
 3. More than twenty years ago, Florian Steinberg wrote an insightful article, "Conservation and Rehabilitation of Urban Heritage in Developing Countries," *Habitat International* 20 (1996): 463–75. His thinking informs this book, as does the work of the late Ron van Oers, who understood the underlying importance of responsible adaptive reuse in city building. See Ron van Oers, "Managing Cities and the Historic Urban Landscape Initiative—an Introduction," *World Heritage Papers: Managing Historic Cities* (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010), 7–17.

environmental, and social dimensions) within a broad urban context. Michael Turner addresses adaptive reuse in urban areas, Ester van Steekelenburg looks at adaptive reuse as part of urban sustainability, Donovan Rypkema demonstrates the economic value of retaining older building stock, and Lavina Ahuja outlines the increasing recognition of adaptive reuse projects by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. The subsequent three essays and associated timelines for each center (Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore) set out a clear framework for understanding the place-specific case studies that follow the essays. Such pairing of critical essays, timelines, and in-depth case studies provides a detailed understanding of each center's approach to adaptive reuse in the twenty-first century, which the conclusion brings together in a summary of the key salient points.

Selection of Case Studies

Representative projects (five distinctive typologies), publicly or privately funded or both, are presented as in-depth case studies, with each project fully described, contextualized, and evaluated based on three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social. (The number of case studies is fifteen, with an even distribution of five building typologies across all three centers.)

Introduction to Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive Reuse Defined

"Adaptive reuse" is generally understood to mean adapting or changing a place for a new use. In some jurisdictions the term "repurposing" is used, although this implies that the place itself is not changed, only its use. Other jurisdictions have seized on such terms as "revitalization," which projects a more spirited approach to the adaptive reuse process, or "rehabilitation," which connotes a more material-based approach.⁴ The former term suggests that a once-vibrant place has been rejuvenated, but technically, given the meaning of the term, the use could be the same. The latter term covers a wide range of interventions, and the use could be a continuing or new use. Looking at the varying terms used to describe adaptive reuse is an adventure in semantics. And in some instances, even semantics fail us—as there is no standard term for adaptive reuse in Chinese.⁵

The important thing to remember is that all of the terms relate to the use of a particular place. To help in this understanding, the following questions and answers are useful:

1. Is the proposed new use a continuation of—or similar to—the original use or the most recent use? In this case, "revitalization" seems appropriate as a descriptor, although the term has also been used in the context of change of use. "Rehabilitation" is also acceptable.
2. Is the proposed new use markedly different from the original use or most recent use? In this case, either "adaptive reuse" or "repurposing" are the correct

4. In North American conservation standards and guidelines—*Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings* (2017) and *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (2nd ed., 2010)—the term "rehabilitation" is used to describe physical change (repair, alterations, additions) within the context of continuing or compatible new use.

5. The term "adaptive reuse" is not defined in the *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China*, rev. ed. (Beijing: ICOMOS China, 2015). However, the term "appropriate use" is defined; its literal meaning in Chinese is "rational + use" (106).

terms, although, as already mentioned, “repurposing” does not necessarily mean physical change, only change of use. “Rehabilitation” is also acceptable.⁶

To summarize, the term “adaptive reuse” generally implies both change of use and change to the fabric of a place. When the place has considerable architectural value, the level of change to the building fabric is usually carefully controlled—or should be. When the place has less architectural value, the level of change to the building fabric can be greater, although this is not always the best approach. Generally, the level of intervention (change) and the level of architectural value should have an inverse relationship. Other cultural heritage values may or may not be affected by higher levels of intervention.

Literature Review

Since at least the 1970s, adaptive reuse, as a conservation approach, has been recognized as a beneficial use of redundant properties in the West.⁷ The continuing popularity of adaptive reuse as well as revitalization and repurposing is seen in the more recent release of a number of publications intended for practitioners overseas, including *Adaptive Reuse: Preserving Our Past, Building Our Future* (2004) by the Australian government, Department of the Environment and Heritage;⁸ *Constructive Conservation in Practice* (2008) and *Constructive Conservation: Sustainable Growth for Historic Places* (2013), both by Historic England. To date, there have been no similar publications for the great urban centers of Asia, with the notable exception of those produced by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) in Singapore.

Asian publications on the topic tend to be more oriented to a general readership or are academic publications focusing on individual buildings or a building cluster. For example, the adaptive reuse of Penang’s Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (now a heritage hotel called the Blue Mansion) has been recorded in a well-written and lavishly illustrated publication intended for wide distribution.⁹ The adaptive reuse of Shanghai’s The China Merchants Steam Navigation Company Building, one of the celebrated buildings on the Bund, is also well documented in at least one of Chang Qing’s publications on mainland China’s heritage buildings. As well, there have been articles in professional journals on aspects of adaptive reuse in Asia, including those that look at the conversion of industrial buildings into incubator spaces for the creative industry.

The programs and publications of UNESCO Bangkok are a notable exception. Since 2000, as a way to influence conservation practice in Asia, UNESCO Bangkok holds the yearly Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. Projects receive Awards of Excellence, Distinction, Merit, or Honourable Mention and are showcased in publications—three to date: *Asia Conserved: Lessons Learned from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation*, Volumes I (2000–2004), II (2005–2009), and III (2010–2014), with a fourth under preparation. Submissions are judged using eleven criteria, one of which is “appropriate use or

6. William Chapman, “Determining Appropriate Use,” in *Asia Conserved: Lessons Learned from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation (2000–2004)* (Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok, 2007), 13–20. Chapman distinguishes between continuity of use, return to original use, minimal change of use, and completely new use.

7. Harold Kalman, *Heritage Planning: Principles and Process* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 240.

8. It can be argued that this is an Asian publication, but it seems to have had considerable influence worldwide and, hence, is included here. Of course, the same argument can be made for *The Burra Charter*, which is discussed later in the Introduction.

9. Lin Lee Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion: The Story of Mandarin Splendour Reborn* (Penang: Areca Books, 2012).

adaptation of the structure.”¹⁰ “The ongoing socio-economic viability and relevance of the project, and provision for its future use and maintenance” are also considered.¹¹ Both criteria speak to the importance of how places are used, especially within their communities.

In *Streetwise Asia: A Practical Guide for the Conservation and Revitalisation of Heritage Cities and Towns in Asia*, another exception, Elizabeth Vines positions adaptive reuse within the broader framework of revitalization. The book is less about conservation per se and more about helping communities formulate realistic heritage strategies.¹² In talking about adaptive reuse within the framework of the conservation and maintenance of individual buildings, Vines advises:

Find a new use for your building—Old buildings are best maintained by using them. The active use of an old building with sensitive alterations is more desirable than having a perfectly intact building that is not used. Promote compatible functions within the old building so that its life is restored. This may mean some degree of change, but this can be a better option than creating a non-viable historic building. Such alterations should, if possible, be reversible.¹³

Although intended for a local audience, in 1993, the Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB) (now National Heritage Board, NHB) published a concise book, *Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and Conservation*.¹⁴ In this early publication, adaptive reuse is defined as “modifying a place to suit it to a compatible use which involves the less [*sic*] possible loss of national, historical or cultural significance.” Significantly, the importance of maintaining the interior is recognized under the category of maintaining the essential character of the building: “If a building is adapted for new uses, the original quality of the interior spaces should be retained.”¹⁵ More recently (December 2017), the Singapore URA has produced updated *Conservation Guidelines*¹⁶ for conservation areas and specific typologies, such as the shophouse and bungalow. The guidelines also list incompatible uses for both building typologies and conservation areas.

Adaptive Reuse in Relevant Conservation Documents

Informing and supporting such publications are a number of regional and international documents that include aspects of adaptive reuse. Internationally, the early *Athens Charter* (1931) and the influential *Venice Charter* (1964) mention appropriate use. The former “recommends the occupation of buildings, which ensures the

10. The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation was launched in 2000 by Richard A. Engelhardt, then UNESCO regional advisor for culture in Asia and the Pacific for UNESCO Bangkok. Laurence Loh, one of the continuing judges for the yearly awards, developed the awards criteria, which fall into three categories (Understanding the Place, Technical Achievement, and Social and Policy Impact). Richard A. Engelhardt, ed., *Asia Conserved: Lessons Learned from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation (2000–2004)* (Bangkok: UNESCO, 2007), 2.

11. Richard A. Engelhardt, ed., *Asia Conserved Volume (2000–2004)*, 3.

12. Elizabeth Vines, *Streetwise Asia: A Practical Guide for the Conservation and Revitalisation of Heritage Cities and Towns in Asia* (Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok, 2005).

13. Vines, *Streetwise Asia*, 12.

14. Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, *Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and Conservation* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, August 1993), 46.

15. Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, *Objectives, Principles and Standards*, 24. This is one of the few times where a more general reference to adaptive reuse includes a specific admonition regarding the treatment of the interior.

16. Urban Redevelopment Authority, *Conservation Guidelines* (Singapore: URA Singapore, December 2017), accessed May 19, 2020, <https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Guidelines/Conservation/~media/3A0DEC0B334141F6967686AD53776C37.ashx>.

continuity of their life, . . . but . . . they should be used for a purpose which respects their historic or artistic character,”¹⁷ while the latter asserts that “the conservation of *monuments* is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose.”¹⁸

In 1979, the first version of the Australian *Burra Charter* does not include a definition of adaptive reuse per se but uses (there’s that word “use”) and defines the simpler term “adaptation”: “Adaptation means modifying a place to suit new functions without destroying its cultural significance.”¹⁹ Three articles are associated with the definition and reveal the recognized complexity of adaptation or adaptive reuse:

Article 20. Adaptation is acceptable where the conservation of the place cannot otherwise be achieved, and where the adaptation does not substantially detract from its cultural significance.

Article 21. Adaptation must be limited to that which is essential to a use for the place determined in accordance with Articles 6 and 7. . . .²⁰

Article 22. Significant material unavoidably removed in the process of adaptation must be securely preserved to enable the future restoration of the place.²¹

In the 1981 edition of the *Burra Charter*, there is an important change in the definition of adaptation: “*Adaptation* means modifying a *place* to suit proposed compatible uses.”²² And “compatible use means a use which involves no change to the culturally significant fabric, changes which are substantially reversible, or changes which require a minimal impact.”²³

There are no relevant changes in the 1988 edition of the *Burra Charter*, but there are significant and telling changes in the 1999 edition. Here, “adaptation” is defined more loosely as “*Adaptation* means modifying a *place* to suit the existing use or a proposed use.” “Use” is defined as “the functions of a place, as well as the activities and practices that may occur at the place.” And “compatible use” is defined as “a use which respects the *cultural significance* of a *place*. Such a use involves no, or minimal, impact on cultural significance.”²⁴ This is the first time that the *Burra Charter* has mentioned aspects of social value as part of adaptation—or adaptive reuse—considerations.

In the latest edition of the charter (2013), now formally referred to as *The Burra Charter: The Australian ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, “adaptation” now means “changing a *place*” rather than “modifying a *place*” in the context of suiting “the existing *use* or a proposed *use*.” And the definition of use has been expanded to include not only “activities and practices that may occur at the place” but “activities and traditional and customary practices that may occur at the place or are dependent on the place.”²⁵ The use of the word “change” (rather than “modify”) is

17. ICOMOS, *The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments (The Athens Charter)* (Athens: First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, 1931).

18. ICOMOS, *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter)* (Venice: Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, 1964), emphasis original.

19. Australia ICOMOS, *Burra Charter* (Burra: Australia ICOMOS, August 1979).

20. Article 6: “The conservation options appropriate to a place or a part of a place must first be determined by an understanding of its cultural significance and its physical condition.” Article 7: “The conservation options chosen will determine which uses are compatible. Compatible uses are those involving no change, changes which are substantially reversible, or changes which have a minimal impact on the cultural significant fabric.” Australia ICOMOS, *Burra Charter*, 1979.

21. Australia ICOMOS, *Burra Charter*, 1979.

22. Australia ICOMOS, *Burra Charter* (Burra: Australia ICOMOS, 1981), emphasis original.

23. Australia ICOMOS, *Burra Charter*, 1981.

24. Australia ICOMOS, *Burra Charter: The Australian ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* (Burra: Australia ICOMOS, 1999), emphasis original.

25. Australia ICOMOS, *The Burra Charter: The Australian ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* (Burra: Australia ICOMOS, 2013).

more dramatic in its meaning and leads us to the challenge of how to maintain the integrity of a heritage place—in all of its tangible and intangible complexity—within the developing or redeveloping urban environment, in particular.

To return to charters and documents as indicators of current thinking on adaptive reuse, it is important to consider two Asian documents: the second edition of the *China Principles* (2015),²⁶ which guides the mainland Chinese approach to conservation, including adaptive reuse; and the *Hoi An Protocols* (2009),²⁷ created to guide conservation in Asia, including adaptive reuse, within the specific context of authenticity. In the recent version of the *China Principles*, Tong Mingkang, as the president of ICOMOS China and deputy director-general of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, China, contributes a foreword, in which he acknowledges that one of the major challenges facing China's cultural heritage is improving the appropriate use of sites:

There is a section (Chapter 5) dedicated to appropriate use which looks at this issue from the perspective of maintaining existing use through to adaptive re-use. This section also spells out the principles and methodology for appropriate use. It emphasizes that retaining the original function of a site or adapting it for modern use must take into consideration its values, attributes, state of conservation, and setting, as well as research and presentation, with emphasis on public benefits and sustainability. . . . This is in itself an important advance in the conservation of China's cultural heritage.²⁸

Several articles (6, 40, 44, and 45) are devoted to appropriate use. Article 44, Retaining Historic Function, has particular relevance to current adaptive reuse challenges in Asia:

Sites that retain their historic function, particularly those where the traditional way of life has become an integral part of the site's values should be encouraged to continue that function.²⁹

Part of the accompanying commentary includes a cautionary note:

Ensuring continuing historic function is a means of conserving the values of this heritage. When managing such a site, special effort should be made to protect the original function. Changes to the use should only be considered after careful consideration. Special attention should be given to avoid the transformation of a residential precinct into a commercial district, as this seriously diminishes its values and authenticity.³⁰

The cautionary note leads us directly to the other Asian document of particular importance, the *Hoi An Protocols*, which focuses on “assuring and preserving” the authenticity of heritage places. Use is one of the eight aspects of authenticity, and adaptive reuse has the potential to undermine this aspect.³¹

Wherever possible, existing historic building stock should be conserved, upgraded and reused in sympathetic ways. The focus should be on assisting residents of properties to continue residential use. Continued residential use may not always be feasible or desirable, and former housing stock may need to be adapted for

26. ICOMOS China, *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China*, rev. ed. (Beijing: ICOMOS China, 2015).

27. UNESCO, *The Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia: Professional Guidelines for Assuring and Preserving the Authenticity of Heritage Sites in the Context of the Cultures of Asia* (Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok, 2009).

28. ICOMOS China, *China Principles*, 57.

29. ICOMOS China, *China Principles*, 103.

30. ICOMOS China, *China Principles*, 103.

31. UNESCO, *Hoi An Protocols*.

Adaptive Reuse in the Greater Context of Adaptation

Michael Turner, one of the contributors to this book, notes that adaptive reuse is part of the larger conversation about “survival of the fittest,” the phrase used by Herbert Spencer and adopted by Charles Darwin to better describe natural selection. The phrase remains relevant, although its exact meaning has evolved since the late nineteenth century.³⁵ Expanding on this theme, Atul Gawande, an American surgeon and regular contributor to the *New Yorker* has observed in a recent article:

Medicine is a complex adaptive system: it is made up of many interconnected, multilayered parts, and it is meant to evolve with time and changing conditions. . . . Adaptation requires two things: mutation and selection. Mutation produces variety and deviation; selection kills off the least functional mutations.³⁶

If we substitute “medicine” with “buildings,” the relevance and importance of appropriate or compatible adaptive reuse becomes clearer. And to take the analogy further, buildings can be designed in anticipation of probable change. Sheila Conejos, in an award-winning PhD thesis, “Designing for Future Building Adaptive Reuse,” has proposed seven design criteria for new buildings that could facilitate future adaptive reuse: long life (physical), location (economic), loose fit (functional), low energy (technological), sense of place (social), quality standard (legal), and context (political).³⁷

Widening our understanding of adaptive reuse allows us to make more informed decisions about what to keep (and why) and, in anticipation of the future, what to build (and why). This publication offers an instructive way forward for decision makers and the myriad of people who care about the places in which they live and work. Perhaps it can be viewed as a “call to responsible action.”

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35. Michael Turner, “Essay for Proposed Book on Adaptive Reuse,” e-mail to editor (Katie Cumber), January 17, 2019.

36. Atul Gawande, “The Upgrade—Why Doctors Hate Their Computers,” *New Yorker*, November 18, 2018, 67.

37. Sheila Conejos, “Designing for Future Building Adaptive Reuse” (PhD thesis, Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia, 2013). I am grateful to Rowenna Wood, an associate at Purcell (UK), for this reference and to Michael Morrison, a partner at Purcell (UK), for putting us in touch.

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New Lease of Life: The Evolution of Adaptive Reuse in Hong Kong

Katie Cumber, Ho Yin Lee, and Lynne D. DiStefano

Introduction

This chapter explores the development and evolution of adaptive reuse in Hong Kong. To effectively understand the approach locally, a quick overview of the city's conservation field is given, followed by a discussion of early adaptive reuse examples and how the practice has developed and evolved since then. Challenges of the local approach are addressed, with concluding remarks on the future of adaptive reuse in Hong Kong.

Overview: Hong Kong's Approach to Conservation

Hong Kong's first, and thus far only, conservation-related legislation was passed following the economic boom that took place during the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in an increased consideration of Hong Kong's identity and heritage resources.¹ As was the international trend at the time, this was in relation to "Antiquities" and "Monuments."² Indeed, UNESCO's 1972 World Heritage Convention provided the basis for Hong Kong's 1976 Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53), and the enforcing agency of the law was the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO), established in the same year as the ordinance, which was tasked with the responsibility of protecting and preserving Hong Kong's "antiquities," namely, archaeological sites and historic monuments. Referencing the methodology of archaeology and artifact restoration, built heritage sites were either preserved in their current state or, when necessary, restored to their original.

Given the restrictions associated with this conservation approach, only sixty-five Declared Monuments were designated between 1976 and the last day of colonial rule on June 30, 1997. Those declared consisted mostly of government and institutional buildings in the urban areas as well as communally owned village buildings in the rural areas.³ During this twenty-one-year period, numerous private and public buildings of considerable merit were demolished with minimal public outcry, as there

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1. Tracey L. D. Lu, "Heritage Conservation in Post-colonial Hong Kong," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 15, nos. 2–3 (March–May 2009): 259.
 2. Esther H. K. Yung and Edwin H. W. Chan, "Problem Issues of Public Participation in Built-Heritage Conservation: Two Controversial Cases in Hong Kong," *Habitat International* 35 (2011): 459.
 3. Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO), "Declared Monuments in Hong Kong," accessed July 9, 2016, <http://www.amo.gov.hk/en/monuments.php>.

was a greater emphasis, citywide, placed on new development.⁴ Poignant examples of such lost architectural heritage are the Victorian-period Hong Kong Club Building (completed in 1897, demolished in 1981), the Edwardian-period General Post Office (completed in 1911, demolished in 1976), and the Art Deco-period Chinese Methodist Church (completed in 1936, demolished in 1994), among many others.

A lack of focus on heritage conservation persisted in the city following the handover in July 1997 and was exacerbated by a problematic governmental department framework. During this period, there was minimal integration of conservation initiatives within the government.⁵ “An organizational chart of the time shows that at least fifteen departments across five bureaus were charged with specific tasks related to the conservation of heritage resources. Coordination and especially “ownership” of a project were frequently problematic.”⁶

A major problem was that, from July 1997 to July 2007, the AMO was the only government agency with statutory authority to carry out heritage conservation, and it was a very small office. It ranked lowest in the government hierarchy, and it was organized under the Home Affairs Bureau, which had no technical expertise in building-related work. At the time, the AMO was staffed by museum curators trained in archaeology, history, and the fine arts, and for them to carry out built heritage conservation work, they had to borrow building-work professionals from the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) under a different bureau (the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau) that had expertise in carrying out building works. One can easily imagine the red tape involved for an office-level bureaucracy to solicit the cooperation of a more senior department-level bureaucracy, both of which answered to different bureau secretaries.

Adding to the problem was the establishment of an independent quasi-governmental agency, known as the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), in 2000. As part of its mandate to carry out the “4 Rs” (Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, Revitalization and pReservation) under its urban renewal agenda, the URA had (and still has) independent authority over conservation projects within areas designated for urban renewal. A constant struggle for the URA was (and continues to be) balancing its heritage conservation mandate with the land-use issues and developmental pressures facing Hong Kong.

All in all, there were too many varied branches handling aspects of conservation-related work, resulting in inefficiency and fragmented project ownership. The problem was only partially alleviated in July 2007 when a new bureau, the Development Bureau (DevB), was formed. This brought together under one roof the government departments responsible for architectural services, buildings, civil engineering, lands, planning, and other related services. The AMO and URA were then required to answer to the new secretary for development as well.

The impetus for the formation of this new bureau was a series of crises that catapulted the case for conservation forward. These included the protests over the demolition of the Central Star Ferry Pier in 2006 (Fig. 6.1) and the adjacent Queen’s Pier in 2007.⁷ Despite the immense and drawn-out public protest to save the Star Ferry Pier, it was still demolished in 2006; and the Queen’s Pier was dismantled and

4. Lu, “Heritage Conservation in Post-colonial Hong Kong,” 260.

5. Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather and Chun Shing Chow, “Identity and Place: The Testament of Designated Heritage in Hong Kong,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 113.

6. Lynne D. DiStefano, Ho Yin Lee, and Katie Cummer, “Hong Kong Style Urban Conservation” (paper presented at the 17th ICOMOS General Assembly and Scientific Symposium, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, November 27 to December 2, 2011): 30.

7. Yung and Chan, “Problem Issues of Public Participation in Built-Heritage Conservation.”

Figure 6.8: The Former Marine Police Headquarters, built in 1884, is today a mixed-use boutique hotel and high-end shopping destination known as Heritage 1881. (Source: Ho Yin Lee.)



In retrospect, the two main issues for these early attempts at adaptive reuse of heritage buildings in Hong Kong relied on top-down decision-making and prioritized financial considerations over social ones. This, in particular, upset an increasingly vocal public who saw such decision making as lacking connection with and relevance to the local communities. Given the social context of Hong Kong, the valuable lessons learned from these early projects is that the adaptive reuse of government-owned properties has to be based on a public-private partnership model and not be outsourced to nongovernmental entities. It is this understanding that has been applied to the projects under the Revitalisation Scheme, discussed in greater detail below. Fortunately, the government has recognized these problems and set about to change them. The change came in the form of the 2007 conservation policy, which placed greater emphasis on more careful and considered adaptive reuse of heritage buildings citywide.

Adaptive Reuse in Hong Kong after the 2007 Conservation Policy

The new conservation policy attempted to meet public demand for conservation using a two-pronged approach that tackles the government's role from within and the community's expectations from without. For the government, the new built heritage policy entailed a reorganization of the government's administrative structure to form the new Development Bureau (DevB). Led by the secretary for development, the new bureau would become the primary agency responsible for built heritage conservation in the city. As stated in the policy address:

In the next five years, the Government will step up our work on heritage conservation. A Commissioner for Heritage's Office, to be set up in the Development Bureau, will provide a focal point for public participation and the Government's heritage conservation work. This shows that heritage conservation will be a long-term commitment of the Government.³⁰

The second part of the two-pronged approach targeted the community. As Chief Executive Tsang also announced in his policy address:

30. Office of the Chief Executive, "2007–08 Policy Address," para. 55.

At present, quite a number of historic buildings are owned by the Government. I will seek to revitalise them by introducing a new scheme which will allow non-governmental organisations to apply for adaptive re-use of these historic buildings. As a start, six to eight buildings will be offered under the scheme. We hope they can be transformed creatively into unique cultural landmarks. The *modus operandi* of social enterprise under commercial management will be adopted to achieve a win-win situation.³¹

This is the policy statement that ushered in the Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme (Revitalisation Scheme). Under this scheme, government-owned non-statutorily protected (but graded) heritage buildings are open to application by nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations for social enterprise operations. One of the criteria for assessing the applicants' proposals is "how the community would be benefited" at both the district and local community level.³² This socially oriented approach to the implementation of Hong Kong's built heritage conservation policy is explained more clearly in the Legislative Council paper (2009), "Background Brief on Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme":

The Administration has adopted the social enterprise (SE) approach whereby non-profit-making non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were invited to submit proposals on a competitive basis to revitalise the historic buildings and the proposed usage should take the form of a SE. Non-profit-making organizations (NPOs) that have acquired charitable status under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance are eligible to submit proposals.³³

The inclusion of NGOs and NPOs operating in a public-private partnership in the Revitalisation Scheme is a revision of the previous policy of exclusive government involvement in conservation projects. However, the government's partnership involvement is crucial to this socially oriented conservation approach, as the high capital cost of these projects has to be borne by the government to make the scheme feasible. In this regard, it is notable that the scheme is funded by the government's well-endowed Capital Works Reserve Fund, where all land premiums have been deposited since the early 1980s.³⁴ The scheme received HK\$1 billion of initial funding in 2007 for the first batch of buildings,³⁵ and it was expanded to five batches of buildings in 2016, with a cumulative fund of almost three times the initial investment.³⁶

As a pilot scheme to demonstrate the viability of adaptive reuse, the Revitalisation Scheme is expansive in scope, involving government-owned buildings that had functioned for educational, health-care, law, market, military, police, religious, residential, and social welfare purposes, amounting to five batches of twenty-one buildings.³⁷ The new uses focusing on "how the community would be benefited"³⁸ provides compel-

31. Office of the Chief Executive, "2007–08 Policy Address," para. 53.

32. Legislative Council, HKSAR, "Background Brief on Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme," Legislative Council Paper No. CB(1)816/08-09(04) (February 24, 2009): item 6(c), accessed July 9, 2016, <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/dev/papers/dev0224cb1-816-4-e.pdf>.

33. Legislative Council, HKSAR, "Background Brief on Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme," item 4.

34. Stan Hok-wui Wong, "Real Estate Elite, Economic Development and Political Conflicts in Postcolonial Hong Kong," *China Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 8, accessed July 9, 2016, http://www.researchgate.net/publication/275856601_Real_Estate_Elite_Economic_Development_and_Political_Conflicts_in_Postcolonial_Hong_Kong.

35. Office of the Chief Executive, "2007–08 Policy Address," para 53.

36. Commissioner for Heritage's Office, private communication with the authors, November 2018.

37. Although a total of twenty-seven buildings are listed in five batches, some have been withdrawn from the scheme or relisted in other batches. For details, see individual batches under "Revitalisation Scheme" at <https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/rhbt/about.htm>.

38. Legislative Council, HKSAR, "Background Brief on Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme," item 6(c).

ling demonstration to the public of the social benefits derived from such projects. It appears that adaptive reuse in Hong Kong has progressed from the pre-2008 focus on museums and cultural facilities to the post-2008 community-oriented new uses that serve a social agenda. This has resulted in a growing public acceptance and appreciation of such projects.

Growing Public Acceptance of Revitalization Projects Citywide

While some remain critical and skeptical of the approach and projects, overall, there has been a growing acceptance of adaptive reuse as an appropriate conservation approach for Hong Kong. As stated in an article in the property section of the *South China Morning Post*, entitled “Preserving the Past in New Buildings Is Back in Fashion,” the reporter writes:

Using architectural innovation to make an existing structure viable again seems preferable on many levels: it retains some linkage to the past, saves construction waste and, sometimes, can even be more cost-effective than starting from scratch. Architects call this “adaptive reuse.” And if it has not yet come to a neighbourhood near you, chances are it is not far away.³⁹

The Hong Kong public has become more accepting of adaptive reuse as a way of conserving Hong Kong’s heritage buildings, largely because of increased exposure. Greater awareness of this approach has come from numerous projects earning local and international recognition. For example, five of the projects to date (as of 2019) under the Revitalisation Scheme have earned international recognition by winning the prestigious UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. These include the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Hong Kong, adapted from a district courthouse (completed in 2010); the Tai O Heritage Hotel (Fig. 6.9), adapted from a police station (completed in 2012); the YHA Mei Ho

Figure 6.9: The Old Tai O Police Station, built in 1902, was revitalized as the Tai O Heritage Hotel in 2012. (Source: Hong Kong Heritage Conservation Foundation Limited.)



39. Peta Tomlinson, “Preserving the past in new buildings is back in fashion,” *South China Morning Post* (July 9, 2014), accessed July 9, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/property/hong-kong-china/article/1549716/preserving-past-new-buildings-back-fashion>.

House Youth Hostel (Fig. 6.10), adapted from a public housing block (completed in 2013); The Green Hub, adapted from the Old Tai Po Police Station into a center for sustainable living (completed in 2015); and, more recently (2017), the grassroots social housing project of the Blue House Cluster, adapted from a collection of early twentieth-century working-class shophouses into mixed residential and social enterprise use (completed in stages through the early 2010s). Both SCAD and the Blue House Cluster are addressed in greater detail as two of the Hong Kong case studies of this book.



Figure 6.10: Mei Ho House, formerly part of the Shek Kip Mei Housing Estate, pre-revitalization in 2009. The revitalized site, the Mei Ho House Youth Hostel, was opened in 2013. (Source: Ho Yin Lee.)

Other projects, although they have not necessarily won awards (at least not yet), have gained public acceptance through socially oriented new uses that have benefitted their immediate communities. A case in point is Lui Seng Chun, a 1931 shophouse that was among the first batch of buildings listed under the Revitalisation Scheme. Since 2012, the building has been transformed into a community health-care center operated by the Hong Kong Baptist University's School of Chinese Medicine. In its new role, the building serves the needs of the aging population of the Sham Shui Po District, which has a preference for traditional Chinese medicine. During his 2013 visit to Hong Kong, Director of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) Li Xiaojie singled out Lui Seng Chun as an exemplary adaptive reuse project "for all of the public to enjoy, not for the benefit of a select few."⁴⁰

Beyond the government, the Revitalisation Scheme has opened new grounds for built heritage conservation in Hong Kong by demonstrating not only the social benefit of adaptive reuse but also new possibilities in financing such projects. The scheme has attracted the interest of property developers in considering the option of financing adaptive reuse projects that would serve both conservation and commercial interests. A project known as The Camphora has demonstrated this viability. Formerly known as Parmanand House, this is a HK\$30 million adaptive reuse project entirely funded by a local developer, who converted the 1963 composite building (mixed commercial

40. Adrian Wan, "Hong Kong's Architectural Heritage Conservation Is Praised," *South China Morning Post*, July 24, 2013, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1289433/hong-kongs-heritage-methods-praised>.



Figure 6.12: Rehabilitated row of 1930s shophouses along Prince Edward Road West. (Source: Ian Babbitt.)

Concluding Remarks: The Future of Adaptive Reuse in Hong Kong

Understandably, adaptive reuse projects in Hong Kong have faced a range of challenges; however, as the number of completed projects has grown, so, too, has the number of “successful” and inspirational projects. With each passing year, subsequent adaptive reuse projects build off of and learn from the process and results of those that came before it. That being said, the government’s hallmark program, the Revitalisation Scheme, is not beyond criticism. For a metropolis the size of Hong Kong, its scale and scope are relatively small, although one could argue that it is a step in the right direction as more and more projects, both public and private, are embarked upon citywide. Concerns have been raised by the professional community over the scheme, in particular, the lack of public and professional involvement in the selection of buildings and the high application costs for the applying non-profit-making organizations (NPOs). The application costs for unsuccessful applicants are especially problematic. Unfortunately, while the complaints are justified, there can be only one successful applicant, and the work that goes into the proposals helps to produce the best possible results for these historic places.

Despite the criticisms, the 2008 Revitalisation Scheme is one of the most significant initiatives for implementing Hong Kong’s conservation policy and for encouraging the growth of adaptive reuse projects throughout the city. Under this scheme, government-owned heritage buildings that are not Declared Monuments have been successfully “revitalized” and adapted for new uses. Echoing English Heritage’s statement on constructive conservation, the Commissioner for Heritage’s Office, the government agency overseeing the execution of the scheme, states, “We are committed to put our historic buildings to good adaptive re-use.”⁴³ Whether it be adaptive reuse, constructive conservation, or revitalization, the definitions amount to the same emphasis on permitting alterations and changes for the purpose of giving heritage buildings “a new lease of life for the enjoyment of the public” (the slogan for the government’s Revitalisation Scheme) through culturally and socially relevant new uses.⁴⁴

43. Commissioner for Heritage’s Office (CHO), “About the Scheme: Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme,” *Development Bureau, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*, last modified July 13, 2017, <http://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/rhbt/about.htm>.

44. Commissioner for Heritage’s Office (CHO), “About the Scheme.”

Through the diversity and growing number of both government and private adaptive reuse ventures, a critical mass of completed revitalized projects demonstrates the validity and value of adaptive reuse in Hong Kong and beyond. With new projects recognized and awarded regularly, the case for conservation and revitalization is being made on an impressive scale, particularly for a single city. In fact, of the near-twenty years' worth of UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation, Hong Kong has received 8 percent of the awards (as of 2019).⁴⁵ Considering the fact that it is in competition with entire countries, such as Australia, China, India, Japan, and Malaysia, among many others, Hong Kong should be proud of what it has accomplished and inspired to continue. With the results to date in mind, it is hoped that such practice can be further encouraged and promoted both locally and in the region, to better protect valuable heritage resources with creative new uses for future generations to enjoy.

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45. UNESCO Bangkok, "Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards: Winning Projects," last modified October 14, 2019, <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/winning-projects>.

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The Warehouse Hotel, Singapore

Debbie Wong

Project Information

Table 15.1: Basic details of The Warehouse Hotel.

Address	320 Havelock Road, Robertson Quay, Singapore 169628
Old use	Industrial (warehouse complex)
New use	Commercial (hotel)
Heritage status	Conservation building
Area	1,536.2 square meters
Project cost estimate	Undisclosed
Operator	Lo & Behold Group
Developed/Funded by	I Associated Company (owner)
Architect	Zarch Collaboratives (restoration), Asylum Studio (interior design consultants)
Contractor	Towner Construction Pte. Ltd.
Start and completion date	2013–2017

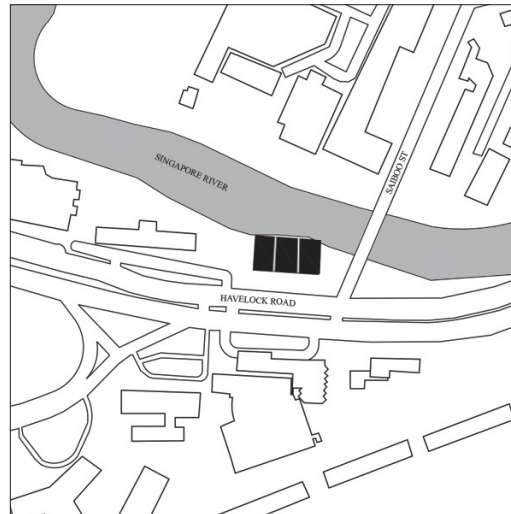


Figure 15.1: Exterior view of The Warehouse Hotel. (Source: Lo & Behold Group.)

Vision

To transform a historic warehouse complex (composed of three structures) into a thirty-seven-room boutique hotel focusing on heritage and local culture.

Figure 15.2: Site plan of The Warehouse Hotel. (Drawn by Lavina Ahuja based on Google Earth.)



Site History

The Warehouse Hotel, which consists of three conserved warehouse buildings originally built in 1895, reflects Singapore's trading history. Located along the Singapore River as part of the Straits of Malacca trade route, it was positioned in the heart of the red-light district, known for various liquor distilleries, secret societies, underground activities, and vices.

Originally built as warehouses (called "godowns" in East Asia), the site later housed the Warehouse Disco, the biggest disco in Singapore when it opened in 1986.¹ It closed down in 1995, and the site was put to intermittent uses until the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) released the site for sale under the Reserve List² of the Government Land Sales (GLS) program.³ In 2015, Lo & Behold Group was selected to develop the warehouse complex as a boutique hotel.⁴

1. STProperty, "Former Warehouse to be Transformed into Hotel," last modified July 1, 2013, <https://www.stproperty.sg/articles-property/financial-guide/former-warehouse-disco-to-be-transformed-into-hotel/a/125354>.
2. STProperty, "Former Warehouse to be Transformed into Hotel."
3. Government Land Sales (GLS) Programme releases state land for development by private developers. The GLS Programme is an important mechanism for achieving key planning objectives in the long-term development of Singapore. GLS Programmes are planned and announced every six months. The GLS comprises sites on the Confirmed List and Reserve List. See: "FAQ" Urban Redevelopment Authority, accessed May 30, 2019, https://www.ifa.gov.sg/URA/apps/Fcd_faqlmain.aspx#FAQ_122407.
4. Melissa Mok, "Warehouse Hotel at Heritage Site," *Straits Times*, June 21, 2015, <http://www.straits-times.com/lifestyle/food/warehouse-hotel-at-heritage-site>.

Table 15.2: Timeline of The Warehouse Hotel.

1895	Warehouse complex is built and used as a godown
1950s	Premise is used to produce soaps
1986	Site is converted into the Warehouse Disco
1995	Warehouse Disco closes down
2013	Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) releases the site for sale under the Reserve List of the Government Land Sales (GLS) program
2015	Lo & Behold Group takes charge of its redevelopment
2017	The Warehouse Hotel opens

Revitalization Concept

- Endorsing the 3R Principle—maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration, and careful Repair—to turn the derelict warehouse buildings into a boutique hotel.
- Demonstrating the area's historic past and the original industrial nature of the buildings through the conserved physical fabric.
- Reinforcing the area as a popular dining, entertainment, and social district through the establishment of the hospitality project.



Figure 15.3: Interior view of The Warehouse Hotel showing the entrance and double-height lobby space. (Source: Lo & Behold Group.)

Process and Partnership

The property was acquired by I Associated Company and is operated by Lo & Behold Group, a leading hospitality specialist in Singapore. It is the first hotel venture by Lo & Behold, and together with Asylum Studio, which led the interior design, new meaning has been given to the warehouse repurposed as a hotel.

Inspired by the lineage of locals who built the warehouse and their entrepreneurial endeavors, The Warehouse Hotel highlights Singapore's local culture and heritage through thoughtful collaboration with Singapore designers and home-grown companies, and maintains that heritage by ensuring the hotel is operated and owned by Singaporeans. For example, in-room crockery was commissioned to Mud Rock, a local ceramic studio.⁵

5. "A Look Inside the Warehouse Hotel Singapore," *Urdesignmag*, last modified January 26, 2017, <http://www.urdesignmag.com/architecture/2017/01/26/warehouse-hotel-singapore/>.

Development Environment

The site was released for sale under the Reserve List of the Government Land Sales (GLS) program and cannot be subdivided or strata subdivided, and the individual warehouses are not to be demolished. The site has a sixty-year tenure compared to the usual ninety-nine years. The conservation status of the warehouses also meant that the project needed to comply with existing building specifications within a stipulated budget.

Commercial Sustainability

The commercial sustainability of the project is dependent on the occupancy rates for the thirty-seven rooms and income generated from the food and beverage outlets, partnerships with and marketing of local designers and products and space rental for events.

Key Success Factors

- Famous for creating unique food and beverage experiences, the operator, Lo & Behold Group, has ensured an enriched hotel experience through creative interpretation of the historic warehouse buildings.
- Relevance of conservation has been conveyed through a tailored experience for a contemporary audience.
- Determination creating an authentic Singapore experience in The Warehouse Hotel through partnerships with local designers has reinforced Singapore's cultural identity.

Key Challenges

- As Lo & Behold Group's first hotel project, in comparison to their extensive experience in operating restaurants, the adaptive reuse project was a much longer process. Unlike the usual six-month lead time for restaurants, The Warehouse Hotel took two years.
- Aside from the challenge to comply with numerous regulations related to the restoration of the warehouses, there was also a need to redefine "industrial heritage" and to articulate the approach to protecting the heritage and ambience of the space while changing its use.⁶

Keeping Heritage Alive

The new use as a boutique hotel combined the three warehouses internally as one seamless space with double-height ceilings and pitched roofs. The space allowed for thirty-seven luxurious rooms, each with a unique theme. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) was actively involved in determining the configuration of the rooms and their spatial quality. The distinctive symmetrical façade, jacked roofs, and original character-defining elements, such as the cornices, doors, louvered windows, and moldings, were carefully restored. Additional effort was made to find the records

6. Daven Wu, "Wee Teng Wen Shares His Vision for New Venture, The Warehouse Hotel," *Peak Magazine* (January 9, 2017), <http://thepeakmagazine.com.sg/interviews/interview-wee-teng-wen-shares-his-vision-for-newly-launched-the-warehouse-hotel-2/?slide=7-07--Eating-In-Its-restaurant-Po--features-a-moder>.

for the original floor construction methods that enabled the floor structure/layout to be retained “as is.” An unobstructed view and access to the Singapore River remained per the original design. The URA recommended reinstating the original plasterwork of the buildings and in the process discovered the original “Ho Hong Oil Factory Building” (和豐油較有限公司) signage on the left gable, which was conserved and is now a prominent part of the main façade. A new extension features an elevated infinity pool with riverbank views, strengthening the visual connection with the waterfront.⁷

The former industrial nature of the place was referenced by featuring its original architectural features, such as exposed ceiling trusses, masonry walls, and midcentury-style furniture. Artwork, in-room minibars, uniforms, and other items used on the premises were all locally sourced to provide an authentic Singapore experience.



Figure 15.4: River view suite of The Warehouse Hotel. (Source: Lo & Behold Group.)

Value Creation

Cultural: The adaptive reuse project retells the history of the Singapore River as a significant part of the Malacca Straits trade route. The Warehouse Hotel illustrates the industrial heritage of the former warehouse complex and includes interpretation about the district’s intriguing past—with all its secret societies and vices.

Economic: The partnerships showcasing goods by local designers help to nurture Singapore’s cultural identity and also provide opportunities for marketing and business development for home-grown talents and brands.

Social and Environmental: The Warehouse Hotel further contributes to the already vibrant entertainment and social scene of Robertson Quay.

7. Zarch, “The Warehouse Hotel,” accessed June 20, 2017, <http://zarch.com.sg/portfolio/the-warehouse-hotel/>.

Our focus has been to protect the property's legacy, while creating a fresh perspective on the term industrial.⁸

—Chris Lee, Head Designer and Founder of Asylum Studio

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- Zarch. "The Warehouse Hotel." Accessed June 20, 2017. <http://zarch.com.sg/portfolio/the-warehouse-hotel/>.

8. "A Look Inside the Warehouse Hotel Singapore," *Urdesignmag*.

Blue House Cluster, Hong Kong

Tiffany Tang

Project Information

Table 29.1: Basic details of the Blue House Cluster.

Address	Stone Nullah Lane, Wan Chai, Hong Kong
Old use	Residential and commercial (shophouses)
New use	Residential and multifunctional service complex (housing, shops, and food and beverage outlets)
Heritage status	Blue House (72–74A Stone Nullah Lane): Grade 1 Historic Building; Yellow House (2–8 Hing Wan Street): Grade 3 Historic Building; Orange House (8 King Sing Street): Not graded
Area	2,369 square meters
Project cost estimate	US\$10.7 million (HK\$83.6 million) ⁱ
Operator	St. James' Settlement (SJS)
Developed/Funded by	Community Cultural Concern, Heritage Hong Kong Foundation, Development Bureau (DevB), Hong Kong SAR government
Architect	LWK & Partners (HK) Ltd.
Contractor	Milestone Builder Engineering Limited
Start and completion date	2012–2016 (Yellow House and Orange House); 2012–2017 (Blue House)

i. The Hong Kong dollar is pegged to the US dollar at about US\$1=HK\$7.8.

Figure 29.1: External view of Blue House from Stone Nullah Lane. (Source: Ho Yin Lee.)



Table 29.2: Timeline of the Blue House Cluster.

1922	Yellow House (2–8 Hing Wan Street) is built
1923	Blue House (72–74A Stone Nullah Lane) is built (accommodating the shrine of Wah To, ⁱ Kang Ham Free School, Yat Chong College, and the Trade Association for Fishmongers)
1956	Orange House (8 King Sing Street) is built
1950s–1960s	Ground floor of 72 Stone Nullah Lane (Blue House) operates as a bonesetter's clinic and a martial arts school
1978	Ownership of Blue House is transferred to the government
2006	Urban Renewal Authority (URA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) announce a revitalization-cum-preservation project for the Blue House Cluster
2009	Development Bureau (DevB) includes the Blue House Cluster in Batch II of the Revitalisation Scheme
2010	St. James' Settlement's (SJS) project, "Viva Blue House," is chosen to revitalize the Blue House Cluster as a multifunctional service complex
2017	Conservation of the Blue House Cluster is completed and the project receives the Award of Excellence at the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation

- i. Prior to the construction of the Blue House, a building stood on the site of 72–74A Stone Nullah Lane and functioned as the Wah To Hospital. In 1886, the hospital ceased operation, however, the building retained a shrine serving the Deity of Chinese medicine, Wah To. (See: LWK & Partners (HK) Ltd., *Conservation Management Plan for Viva Blue House, Blue House Cluster Revitalization Scheme* [Hong Kong: Antiquities and Monuments Office Hong Kong SAR Government, October 2011], <https://www.amo.gov.hk/form/Blue%20House%20Cluster-HIA.pdf>.)

Revitalization Concept

- Revitalization based on a “community-led, bottom-up and participatory heritage conservation model [which] integrates culture and heritage into development and pioneers community revitalisation”¹ allowing original residents to remain in the complex while their living conditions are improved.
- Upgrading of housing conditions and improvement of structural safety through appropriate conservation and installation of new services and facilities.
- Establishing educational services (the Livelihood Museum and a Confucian school), “mom-and-pop” stores to promote local cultural knowledge, and social enterprises (a dessert house and vegetarian restaurant serving traditional treats).

1. Batch II of Revitalisation Scheme, Hong Kong SAR Government, “Viva Blue House: The Blue House Cluster,” last modified May 21, 2018, accessed August 8, 2019, https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/rhbt/ProgressResult2_Blue_House_Cluster.htm.

rent from tenants (both commercial and residential) as well as contributions from the Friends of Blue House Association, in addition to funds raised from special events, guided tours, and museum visits.

Although the rental yield is at a below-market rate for this location, it is expected that the project will break even by its third year of operation (2020). Out of a total of twenty residential units, eight accommodate preexisting tenants, and twelve are rented out through the Good Neighbour Scheme³ at rents ranging from HK\$11,500 to HK\$31,000 for unit areas of 361 square feet to 880 square feet. Ground-floor spaces are rented out as exhibition and recreational areas, offices, restaurants, and shops.

Key Success Factors

- ✦ Participatory bottom-up approach to revitalization championed by a non-governmental organization (NGO) trusted by the local community.
- ✦ Unique collaboration of the district council, an NGO, and passionate academics to work closely with local residents and the neighborhood throughout the revitalization project.
- ✦ Delicate balance in design—minimum intervention to the architectural features of the building, while allowing for modifications to introduce modern services and fixtures.
- ✦ Commitment to upgrade and revive a dilapidated building, while maintaining its architecture, original functions, and residents.
- ✦ Promotion of sustainable rental policy and careful tenant selection process to identify “good neighbors” who can contribute to the human capital of the cluster.
- ✦ Personalized renovation works for preexisting tenants according to their needs.

Key Challenges

- ✦ To avoid temporary relocation of residents, a phased work approach was adopted.
- ✦ Rents were waived as compensation for tenants who had to relocate to other units during work.⁴
- ✦ With the objective of changing as little as possible, meeting building ordinance requirements and complying with other standard requirements and regulations was demanding and time consuming.
- ✦ Adherence to best practice in conservation was demonstrated by retaining original floor tiles and windows wherever possible.
- ✦ The tenant-selection process—according to the Good Neighbour Scheme³—was experimental.

Keeping Heritage Alive

The residents and people in the immediate neighborhood have embraced the Blue House Cluster as a center for community activities. All events are self-initiated and community driven, such as the art jamming, celebrations for the Mid-autumn Festival, kid’s classes, movie screenings, music nights, and an open market. The dessert house

3. The Good Neighbour Scheme is an initiative to retain the Blue House Cluster’s traditional *tong lau* lifestyle (emphasizing community living), where only eleven flats of the entire cluster are made available for rent. Tenants are selected based on unusual criteria: experienced in organizing community activities, outgoing, and willing to contribute to the neighborhood.

4. Suki Chau (team leader of Cultural Preservation and Community Engagement, St. James’ Settlement), in discussion with Dr. Ho Yin Lee (one of the authors), August 22, 2019.

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Concluding Discussion on Adaptive Reuse in the Asian Context

Katie Cummer

Introduction

This concluding chapter briefly summarizes the tradition of adapting old buildings for new uses and the increasing modern trend toward adaptive reuse projects in the spirit of sustainable development. Notes and key takeaways from the experience of the Asian urban centers of Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore are addressed as a means to articulate adaptive reuse as a conservation practice particularly suitable for rapidly developing Asian cities. Areas for further research are discussed, with brief concluding remarks on the future direction of adaptive reuse in Asia and other areas of the globe.

Adaptive Reuse Trends

As noted throughout this book, adaptive reuse is not a new approach. For centuries societies have been repurposing old buildings for new uses.¹ As mentioned previously, the Pantheon in Rome is the perfect case in point. Originally a pagan temple (believed to have been constructed in 27 BC), it was converted to a church in the seventh century AD. The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul is a similar such example and another equally famous one. Originally built as a Christian basilica (in the sixth century AD), it was converted into an Ottoman mosque in the fifteenth century and ultimately became a museum in the mid-twentieth century, with debates being held today in the twenty-first century about converting it back to a mosque.² There are numerous other examples throughout the world of historical adaptive reuse projects; they are simply not referred to in such terms.

The practice and approach in Asia dates back many years as well, even if it was not categorized or referred to as adaptive reuse. Whether repurposing institutional buildings in Hong Kong, industrial buildings in Shanghai, or military sites in Singapore,

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1. Candace Richards, "Reinventing Heritage Buildings Isn't New at All—the Ancients Did It Too," *Conversation*, January 2, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/reinventing-heritage-buildings-isnt-new-at-all-the-ancients-did-it-too-70053>.
 2. Umar Farooq, "Voices Grow Louder in Turkey to Convert Hagia Sophia from a Museum Back to Mosque," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-turkey-hagia-sophia-20170615-story.html>. In fact, in July 2020, it was converted back into a mosque when Turkey's President "announced the decision after a court annulled the site's museum status." Orla Guerin, "Hagia Sophia: Turkey Turns Iconic Istanbul Museum into Mosque," *BBC News*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53366307>.

the re-use of a heritage site can play an important role in bringing it back into public favor, negotiating multiple agendas, and providing amenity for neighbors and visitors as well as the owners.”⁸

However, as revealed through the various essays in this book and the experience of these different Asian centers, it takes time to build momentum and faith in the adaptive reuse process. A common thread for these three cities is the interconnection between government-led and privately led projects. Although each jurisdiction has its own timing and sequencing, there is an interesting interplay between government-led projects influencing private projects and vice versa. In Hong Kong, the boom in adaptive reuse projects has largely been encouraged by the government, in particular through its Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme.⁹ After more than a decade of government-owned buildings being revitalized, more and more private developers are embarking on such initiatives as well. Meanwhile, in Shanghai, it was a series of privately owned projects that encouraged the government and other private developers to pursue such conservation projects. Lastly, in Singapore, there was a parallel path of the government exploring adaptive reuse, particularly in relation to area conservation, while smaller-scale private projects were also embarked upon. As also mentioned throughout this book (the individual city essays and the broader Heritage Awards chapter as well), the increasing recognition and appreciation of adaptive reuse projects in the region has also further galvanized additional revitalization projects, a trend that will hopefully continue.

As illustrated in the essays and the case studies of this book, the results of these adaptive reuse projects are varied and complex, with a range of benefits for a range of stakeholders. There are economic, environmental, and social impacts, often both positive and negative, on the surrounding community. As addressed above, to have adaptive reuse as a viable and successful conservation approach for a city or nation, there is a need for government buy-in paired with community interest and grass-roots initiatives. It seems that for this to be a sustainable and sustained conservation approach, these two factors are needed. It is also important to remember that in comparing these various projects from various jurisdictions, every project is different. There is no formula of “one size fits all” when it comes to adaptive reuse, as each individual building given a new lease of life is its own unique place, with its own unique history and its own unique story to tell. However, in examining these projects, and comparing and contrasting the experience of these different jurisdictions, it can help to inform, guide, and inspire subsequent projects, encouraging innovation and continued renewal throughout the region.

Areas for Further Research

The intent of this publication is to highlight some of the challenges and triumphs of adaptive reuse. As is the case with any publication, there are always additional areas to explore. As outlined in the Introduction’s literature review, although scholars have examined adaptive reuse generally and specifically for certain parts of the globe, there is a need for additional research, particularly in the Asian context. Adaptive reuse projects are increasing in most Asian cities and nations; however, there has not been as much scholarly study or documentation of these initiatives. It would be of particular interest to carry out more in-depth studies on the longer-term results of adaptive reuse projects, looking at the specific metrics outlined in the third essay of this book.

8. Heritage Council, “Better Placed,” 36.

9. Please note the British spelling of “Revitalisation” is intentional, as this is its proper name as used by the Hong Kong SAR government.

As more projects are completed and with multiple years of operation, there is greater insight to be garnered and analysis to be done. Beyond this more detailed analysis, other areas of additional possible research include examination of other jurisdictions in Asia. Rapidly developing regions, such as Myanmar and other places in China, would be worthwhile areas of possible further study. It is hoped that this publication, and perhaps others like it, can help to inform and encourage others to embark on adaptive reuse projects, hopefully learning from some of the challenges and pitfalls others have encountered.

Concluding Remarks: The Future of Adaptive Reuse in Asia

Although there are growing numbers of completed adaptive reuse projects in Asia, generally, and in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore, specifically, there are many more opportunities for additional projects and innovative approaches to revitalization in the future. As mentioned above, a major benefit at this juncture is that there are more completed projects with statistics three, five, and in some cases, more than ten years postcompletion, which can help to show and support the benefits and opportunities that adaptive reuse projects can hold. As mentioned throughout this book, it is in the best interest of communities around the globe to explore and encourage adaptive reuse as part of their sustainable development. For, as eloquently outlined in the *Australian Design Guide for Heritage*, “Heritage places create the setting for contemporary life connecting communities to the past, and helping to shape futures.”¹⁰

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