

CASE STUDY

Clarke Quay, Singapore: an abandoned warehouse area (1989–93: 2003+)

Singapore is a city-state with a democratically elected government that is very much involved in planning and development matters. Responsibility for planning and design lies with the country's cabinet. It delegates authority to the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) which is the de facto planning department. It has the degree of cooperation between various agencies charged with urban development that many other cities envy. There is thus a high degree of consensus about what schemes should be carried out and how they should be developed amongst the various ministries and agencies of the government. The government strives to keep a balance between private developers' ideas and the overall efficiency of the city.

After independence from colonial rule, the government did not actively work on conservation because of other priorities. Three factors changed this situation:

- 1 the economic downturn in the late 1970s,
- 2 the return from graduate education of young architects who had studied preservation projects abroad,
- 3 the presentations at a conference on heritage tourism held in Singapore in 1983 that convinced the authorities in Singapore of the economic benefits of preservation.

Clarke Quay is an example of the result.

Clarke Quay is a five-block precinct of 23,000 square metres (246,100 square feet) located on the Singapore River about a kilometre from the city-state's central business district. It consisted of nineteenth

century godowns and shophouses, the Merchants' Court, the Cannery and the Whampoa Icehouse (demolished in 1981 for road widening). The Cannery had been erected in 1901 to house a British engineering firm and had later been converted into a pineapple-processing factory. The rows of shophouses and warehouses gave the site its physical character (Figure 7.15).

The traditional southern China terraced shophouses were two or three stories in height and housed working class families on the upper floors and shops facing the street on the ground floor. In Singapore the type had been partially adapted to the tropical climate with high ceilings and a 5-foot wide shaded arcade (a requirement established in the early nineteenth century by Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of Singapore). Second storey jack-roofs allowed hot air to escape from interiors. The long-narrow form of the godowns and shophouses make conversion comparatively easy. Sixty godowns at Clarke Quay have been converted into more than 200 shops, restaurants, bars, etc. as part of the process of revitalizing the Singapore River front. Clarke Quay has also recently been connected by a new station to Singapore's Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system (see Chapter 10).

Prior to the development of Clarke Quay, the URA had already embarked on a 10-year programme to clean up the highly polluted Singapore River. This clean-up was made possible because, the waterway's traditional commercial role as a transshipment centre had been lost as the result of the development of new shipping technologies.