

The redevelopment process for Clarke Quay began in 1989. The URA gave the Quay heritage conservation status in July of that year. It was designated an area for a combination of adaptive reuses of its warehouses and shophouses. The URA allocated 'historically compatible' activities to each sub-zone. These uses included a hotel, and entertainment, retail and cultural facilities. The project was subjected to a tendering process under the URA's Sale of Sites programme in which the price offered for the land, the proposals and the economics were evaluated as a package.

The winning tender was submitted by DBS Land Ltd. Many designers were involved but their work was highly controlled by a central agency. The architectural and landscape architectural firms included ELS/Elbasani and Logan, RSP Singapore and EDAW from San Francisco. Thus the development team can be regarded as a public-private partnership between the URA, DBS Land, the designers and the Singapore River Business Association. Despite the various organizations involved, the renovation of Clarke Quay was carried out as a single project under one auspice.

The project ultimately consisted of the restoration of historic buildings, the insertion of new buildings and the pedestrianization of the whole site. The property market was allowed to dictate the specific uses. The requirement was that the façades and roof design of buildings be kept. As a result, although the Quay resembles what it was in the past, it has a completely different ambience. It is now an up-market, retail, food and beverage centre – a nightlife area – and a major destination for tourists and locals alike. The transformation cost \$186 million and was completed in 1993.

The historic buildings saved provide Singaporeans with a link to the past. In addition, one of the world's great river

waterfronts had an additional element added to it. DBS Land created a promenade, a 10- to 15-metre wide water-edge walkway lined by trees in accordance with the guidelines issued by the URA. The promenade connects a series of plazas, pocket-parks, performance zones and water features thus catering for adults and children, and providing a diverse set of attractions. Encroachments onto the walkway have narrowed the channel for walkers but have enlivened the scene. But not enough!

Places change. The flow of the high-spending European and Japanese tourists of the early 1990s slowed. By 2000 Clarke Quay had a worn-out look. Competition from air-conditioned shopping malls and other similar developments meant that Clarke Quay no longer had a secure niche in the marketplace. In addition, the Quay does not have the shiny new image of the Esplanade theatre complex (designed by Stirling and Wilford) or One Fullerton (the recent redevelopment of a neo-classical colonial building). The Quay's landlord, CapitaLand Commercial, was seeking tenants to draw people back again and hired a British firm headed by Wil Alsop to draft a 'new look' for the Quay. The tenants feared that the change will involve rental increases well beyond the \$13 to \$15 per square metre that they were paying.

Amongst the characteristics of a good design is that it can adapt to change. The future of Clarke Quay is uncertain, but it is likely to retain much of its present form with greater attention paid to the comfort level of people. The physiological and aesthetic predispositions of visitors have shifted, as Maslow would have predicted (see Chapter 2). A shinier, modernistic appearance would probably meet the expectations of tourists and locals alike better than its historic one. We shall soon find out.