

Timely and timeless tomes



STOREYS DESIGNED TO INSPIRE

Coffee-table books on Singapore design, architecture and heritage can be thoughtful, visually appealing gifts



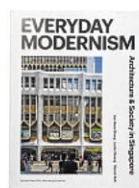
Chantal Sajan
Senior Correspondent

For those looking for a last-minute present for Christmas or planning to give something special for the New Year party, look no further than a well-stocked bookstore for a book gift that ticks all the boxes.

Whether it is a new release hot off the presses or a classic worthy of reading and re-reading, design and architectural history books have a long shelf life as they not only give valuable insights into the built environment, but are also inspirational for those in the creative field who need resources to dream up new and original works.

The Straits Times lines up eight timely as well as timeless books that are a must for any home library.

chantal@sph.com.sg



1 *Everyday Modernism* by Chang Jiat-Hwee, Justin Zhuang and Darren Soh

Everyday Modernism, launched by publisher National University of Singapore (NUS) Press in November, not only traces how Modernism has become a part of everyday life in Singapore, but also how these structures have radically changed the nation.

From the 1960s, Singapore was transformed into a city with one of the world's highest percentage of Modernist buildings, through urban renewal in the city centre and the building of public housing estates and infrastructure throughout the rest of the island.

The book sheds light on the "social lives" of these buildings, adopting a biography approach to document how buildings live, change, age and eventually die through different uses, maintenance, retrofitting and demolition.

The 352-page book is co-authored by Associate Professor Chang Jiat-Hwee from the Asia Research Institute and the Department of Architecture at NUS; and design writer Justin Zhuang. Its 33 essays feature more than 200 archival images and

are also illustrated by home-grown architectural and landscape photographer Darren Soh.

Prof Chang says he wanted something more than an academic book after his 2016 debut, *A Genealogy Of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature And Technology*, a 318-page volume which explored Singapore's architecture in the broader context of British colonialism involving mainly European architects, engineers and planners.

"I wanted a more-than-academic book that would appeal to the general reader, so I roped in Justin, who was trained as a journalist and has written extensively on the various aspects of design in Singapore; and Darren, a renowned local photographer," says Prof Chang, 49, who adds that Modernism's greatest impact on Singaporeans is how it has structured and shaped everyday lives.

The stories of these buildings cannot be told separately from social lives and histories, especially Singapore's post-Independence history.

"Justin and Darren are central to making the book readable, interesting and beautifully illustrated. As the post-1970s generation that grew up surrounded by the Modernist built environment, Jus-

tin, Darren and I decided to write a book about these ordinary but impactful buildings around us.

"The 'heroic Modernist' buildings such as Golden Mile Complex, Pearl Bank Apartments and Jurong Town Hall have been extensively written about. The other less iconic but no less socially important buildings such as the Subordinate Courts building and the Housing Board flats at Block 32 New Market Road have been ignored."

Director of NUS Press Peter Schoppert says people tend to take their physical surroundings for granted, but the book gives easy access into the history and socio-architectural context of the buildings and structures around them.

"A bridge you walk on every day now has context it never had before," he adds. "The book is also beautifully illustrated and designed, just a lot of fun to browse through."

Mr Soh, who provided more than 100 contemporary photographs for the book, says he has a visceral connection to images of Singapore's modern buildings.

"The fact that many of these modern buildings and spaces hold memories for real people intrigues me," says the 46-year-old, a sociologist by training and a founding member of the Singapore chapter of Docomomo, a non-profit global

organisation dedicated to the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the modern movement.

"These are memories that are often in danger of physical erasure because of the rate of redevelopment in Singapore. So, one way I can help people and myself remember is to capture images of these spaces."

Zhuang, 38, jumped on board immediately when Prof Chang invited him to work on the book, saying it was an exciting opportunity to work with an architectural historian and architectural photographer – both renowned in their fields.

He says that when Singaporeans think of "home", they dream of high-rise apartments.

"We study in public schools that are mass-produced concrete buildings and go to work in skyscrapers or flatted factories, while travelling along expressways or via transport interchanges," he adds.

"We eat in hawker centres and hang out in air-conditioned shopping centres. Even when we die, most of us will be in crematoriums and then maybe housed in columbariums. Our entire lives happen within these modern buildings and structures that shape how we live – and die – in Singapore."

Info: Priced at about \$69 at Books Kinokuniya and major bookstores

(Above from left) Architectural photographer Darren Soh, Associate Professor Chang Jiat-Hwee and design writer Justin Zhuang at Block 32 New Market Road, which is featured in their architectural book, *Everyday Modernism*. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

MORE STORIES
on C2

Timely and timeless tomes

Book gifts that celebrate design and architecture



2 Singapore Sketchbook by Graham Byfield and Gretchen Liu

British watercolour artist Graham Byfield's *Singapore Sketchbook: An Island Observed* is a classic that has endured on the shelves of local bookstores since 1995 when it was first released by Editions Didier Millet, a global book publisher with headquarters in Paris.

The first book was reprinted five times from its launch in 1995 till 2000. In 2001, a revised edition featuring new paintings was also snapped up, followed by seven reprints until 2019.

Byfield's paintings capture the spirit of Singapore's colonial-era buildings through delicate brush strokes and watercolours that seem to trap the sunlight on facades, tropical greenery and ornamented shophouses.

These include evocative vignettes such as shophouses along Mohamed Sultan Road, black-and-white bungalows in Alexandra Park and national monuments such as the National Museum of Singapore.

Each sheet of the 96-page hardcover art book is printed on Modigliani Neve, which is a thick, textured matt paper that artists often use for charcoal sketches.

Byfield collaborated with writer Gretchen Liu for the text of the book, which is rendered entirely in handwritten script. Liu has penned several seminal books on Singapore architecture, including *Pastel Portraits* in 1984.

Byfield lives in Menorca in Spain and has seven other titles in his *Sketchbook* series, including *Bali Sketchbook*, available on e-commerce platform Amazon.com.

Info: Priced at about \$48 at Books Kinokuniya. For the full list of the *Sketchbook* series, go to amazon.com



Mr Victor Lim (left, in a May 2021 photo) runs Peranakan Tiles Gallery (Aster by Kyra). His new book, *Peranakan Tiles Singapore*, is co-authored with freelance writer Anne Pinto-Rodrigues. PHOTO: ST FILE



3 Peranakan Tiles Singapore by Anne Pinto-Rodrigues and Victor Lim

Collector of Peranakan tiles Victor Lim has co-authored one of the most definitive coffee-table books on the tiles in the region with Netherlands-based freelance writer Anne Pinto-Rodrigues.

The 190-page hardcover book

traces the origins of ceramic tiles more than 5,000 years back to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) and Persia (Iran).

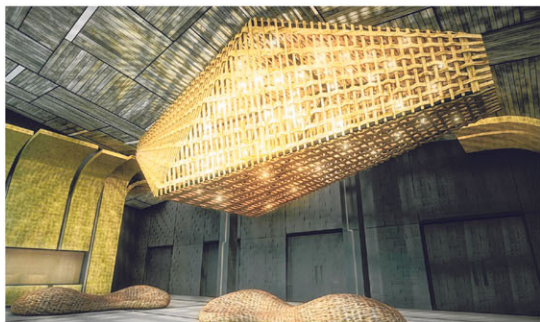
Later, in the 19th century, majolica (pronounced "mayorlica") earthenware tiles with a white tin glaze and painted in vibrant colours were produced in Italy and Spain. These are also called Peranakan tiles which have raised or "relief" designs, which feature mainly floral motifs.

Decorative tiles first came to Singapore in the 1890s, during coloni-

al rule from the famous tile-manufacturing town of Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire in Britain. The early 1900s also saw the appearance of European and Japanese-made tiles in Singapore.

The tiles were not only used in the homes of the Peranakans, but also on their ornate tombs in places such as Bukit Brown cemetery.

Info: Priced at \$59.90, available only at Peranakan Tiles Gallery (Aster by Kyra) at 37 Pagoda Street. Go to asterbykyra.sg



One of Keat Ong's interior design ideas featured in the book, *Injecting Architecture*. PHOTO: KEAT ONG



4 Injecting Architecture by Keat Ong

A Singaporean who is one of the biggest names in interior design in Asia, Professor Keat Ong has distilled more than two decades of experience into his second book titled *Injecting Architecture* (Injarc).

His first book, *Not A Story* (2009), is a monograph of conceptual and completed projects in architecture and interior design.

His 400-page book, packaged in a black box sleeve, seeks to break down complex projects using a set of methodologies under the Injarc concept – a portmanteau of "Injecting" and "Architecture". This approach helps readers understand space, which is represented by a given terrain, and how to inject archi-

itecture, which is three-dimensional, in order to transform the landscape.

Prof Ong, who is the founder of multidisciplinary design firms Keat Ong Design and SCKD, is also an adjunct professor to several universities in Asia, including the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, China, and Taylor's University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

His book serves as a handy resource for designers and students of architecture and interior design, with detailed project floor plans accompanied by photos and illustrations that help explain complex concepts using simpler components, so readers can understand how to develop an impressive interior design proposal using the Injarc approach.

Info: The book is priced at \$59.90 and is available at Basheer Graphics Book or online at basheergraphic.com



5 The Singapore Mall Generation: History, Imagination, Community by Liew Kai Khiun

Western culture and influence have had a profound effect on Singaporeans of the 1960s and 1970s, a generation that saw the first modern shopping centres or "arcades in the air" appearing first in the city area and later throughout the Housing Board heartland.

Dr Liew Kai Khiun's collection of essays – which includes contributions from experts – sheds light on how the country's early urban malls started and how these retail wonderlands changed the lifestyles and aspirations of Singaporeans.

During colonial times, there were standalone, upmarket department stores such as Robinsons in Raffles Place, which opened in 1858, as well as stores along High Street selling very "English" imported goods such as hats and leather shoes.

In the 1960s came the first air-conditioned shopping centres and, later in the 1970s, with the advent of escalators, the retail experience became a bigger draw as more tiers were added to easily move crowds from one floor to another.

The 304-page softcover book also delves into the stories behind some of the biggest names in retail such as Japanese supermarket chain Yaohan, which attracted one million shoppers in its first week of operations in 1974.

Info: Priced at about \$34 at Books Kinokuniya and major bookstores



6 Woha: New Forms Of Sustainable Architecture by Patrick Bingham-Hall, Nirmal Kishnani and Timothy Beatley

Singapore-based Woha is one of the most prolific architectural firms in the region with projects in Singapore, Bangladesh, China and Australia.

Its new book – published by London-based Thames & Hudson – gives an overview of the firm's pioneering work in green architecture since 1994, when founders Wong Mun Summ and Richard Hassell started the home-grown outfit.

Woha is known globally for delivering innovative and sustainable design solutions to fight the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and rapid urbanisation.

Titled *Woha: New Forms Of Sustainable Architecture*, the book is by writer and architectural photographer Patrick Bingham-Hall, and also features essays by Professors Nirmal Kishnani and Timothy Beatley.

To get an idea of how Woha's team thinks, one needs to look no further than one of its award-winning projects featured in the book, Kampong Admiralty. It is conceived as Singapore's first integrated complex that not only brings together a mix of public facilities and services under one roof, but also creates living spaces for Singapore's seniors to age in place in a "kampung" that includes the larger community.

Info: Priced at about \$85 at Books Kinokuniya and major bookstores



7 The Penang House: Rise Of The Malaysian Architect 1887-2017 by Jon Sun Hock Lim

Malaysian scholar and architectural historian Jon Lim's second book on Penang architecture is a timely tome that helps to define the identity of the built environment via the body of work of Malaysia's architects.

It is a companion to his 2015 book, *The Penang House And The Straits Architect 1887-1941*, which looked at the contributions of European architects since 1786, when Captain Francis Light of the British East India Company made a pact with the Sultan of Kedah to acquire the island.

The 272-page *The Penang House: Rise Of The Malaysian Architect 1887-2017* was released in May and explores the designs of Malayan draughtsmen who initially worked for European firms, but later succeeded in obtaining registration under the Architects Ordinance of 1926 and subsequently the Malaysian Ordinance of 1967.

Local architects such as Lim Soo Loon and Chew Eng Eam were among the first generation of Malaysians mentored by the colonial architects. They developed their own styles of domestic architecture, building prolifically in Penang.

This book also charts the contributions of contemporary architects who have shaped the Penang house with cutting-edge designs.

Info: Priced at about \$72, available at Books Kinokuniya and major bookstores



8 Seven Hundred Years: A History Of Singapore by Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Tan Tai Yong and Peter Borschberg

Four of Singapore's top historians came together in 2019 to release a definitive version of the country's history from an Asian perspective. It was one that challenged European accounts which were centred on the founding of Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, who was said to have come to "save" the island, described as nothing more than a fishing village plagued by marauding pirates.

The 314-page softcover book titled *Seven Hundred Years: A History Of Singapore* by Professors Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Peter Borschberg and Tan Tai Yong opened up a whole new world that existed since the 14th century.

Parts of the book were published in an earlier account in 2009 titled *Singapore: A 700-Year History* by Profs Kwa, Heng and Tan.

Richly illustrated with more than 200 artefacts, as well as photographs, maps, artwork and ephemera, *Seven Hundred Years* helped to widen the historical lens of Singapore history by asserting a new perspective about the true origins of the island once called Temasek.

Info: Priced at about \$37, available at major bookstores