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NUS Yusof Ishak House reopens as environmentally friendly hub for students to gather and collaborate

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The National University of Singapore's (NUS) Yusof Ishak House has been refreshed to become an environmentally friendly hub for students, after a three-year renovation.

Much of its original 1977 structure, including staircases and arched roofs, has been retained to preserve the building's heritage, as well as to reduce the environmental costs and construction waste that would result from a full rebuild.

The university aims for it to be a net-zero energy building that better serves students' needs, with multipurpose study spaces and new food options.

It reopened on Oct 15, with Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan, alumnus of NUS Medicine and a former president of the NUS Students' Union (Nussu), officiating the ceremony.

As a net-zero energy targeted building, Yusof Ishak House uses hybrid cooling systems comprising a mix of air-conditioning and ceiling fans. This provides 100 per cent fresh air while keeping indoor temperatures comfortable at around 26.5 deg C. Rooftop solar panels help supply energy.

With these sustainability features, the building's annual energy use is expected to drop by more than 1 gigawatt-hour (GWh), from 2.2GWh before the renovations.

"This is an ongoing journey to optimise energy use through the collective efforts of staff, students and tenants to manage energy consumption and reduce waste," said NUS.

The rejuvenation of the building is part of NUSOne, the university's refreshed education philosophy launched in 2024, to encourage self-discovery and holistic development among students, said NUS.

There are four levels of open spaces for students, including a roof terrace; quiet corners and multipurpose rooms for study; and areas for group work or events.

Apart from study areas, there are five music and dance studios, a dedicated rest space with electronic games, relaxation areas and on-site peer and professional support for students who need emotional support.

Students also have more food and drink options, with six food stalls in the canteen and other options like Wild Skew bistro and a Chagee beverage outlet, as well as a 24-hour convenience store and vending machines.

Much of Yusof Ishak House's original 1977 structure, including staircases and arched roofs, has been retained to preserve its heritage, as well as to reduce the environmental costs and construction waste from a full rebuild. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Addressing students, faculty, alumni and staff, Dr Balakrishnan told students to enjoy their university years, learn beyond the classroom and cherish the friendships made while at NUS.

"This (building) is where I spent most of my waking hours in campus, this was the fun place," he said in his opening remarks at the event, adding that this is where he met his wife.

"I wouldn't have had the journey in life that I have enjoyed, and a fulfilling journey, without the lessons that I learnt here in Yusof Ishak House, in the union and in student activities."

For Year 4 student Gio You, president of NUS e-sports, the building now provides him and his club a proper place to game, conduct training for the varsity team and host recreational sessions for players of different skill levels.

The club previously did not have a fixed venue, said the 24-year-old project and facilities management student. "With this new space, we know for a fact that this is our home from now on, and we can confidently run our activities," he said.

Mr You hopes to attract more talented varsity players with this new space, and reach a wider community of people interested in e-sports.

Dr Kuan Yee Han, a former Nussu president, said the building brought back fond memories for him.

"The best memories here were the times spent with my executive committee, really going through thick and thin together," said the senior lecturer at NUS and assistant dean of students, who teaches interdisciplinary courses on ageing, technology and negotiation through experiential and authentic learning.

Dr Kuan, who served as Nussu president in 2008, said he hopes the new building will become a hub for student interaction and collaboration, and that students will have the same opportunities there to have meaningful experiences that he did during his time.

"This is really not just a building," he said. "It's a place where like-minded individuals come together, people who want to make a difference in the community, and turn their ideas into reality."

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CONSERVING ENERGY

This is an ongoing journey to optimise energy use through the collective efforts of staff, students and tenants to manage energy consumption and reduce waste.

NUS, on the sustainability features of the revamped Yusof Ishak House. The building uses hybrid cooling systems and has rooftop solar panels installed to supply energy.

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