



Canadian
Heritage

Patrimoine
canadien

SINGAPORE: An Architecture and Interior Design Overview

Prepared by Laura Miotto

February 2005

**The Department of Canadian Heritage,
Trade Routes program, commissioned
this Report. The opinions expressed
are those of the author and do not
necessarily reflect the view of the
Department of Canadian Heritage.**

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of
Canada, 2005

Cat. No.: CH4-110/2-2006E-PDF

ISBN 0-662-42813-7

Canada

Report prepared by Laura Miotto, Architect, GSM Design (Singapore) for
Anne Malépart
Commercial Division,
Canadian High Commission
80 Anson Road, 14-00
Fuji Xerox Towers, Singapore 079907
Fax: 011 - (65) 6325-3294
E-mail: sporetd@international.gc.ca

Context

SINGAPORE bio-data

Location:	Tip of the Malaya Peninsula, Southeast Asia
Population:	4.1852 million (2003)
Ethnic mix:	76.2% Chinese, 13.8% Malay, 8.3% Indian, 1.7% other
Religion:	42.5% Buddhist (Chinese), 8.5% Tao, 14.9% Islam, 14.6% Christian, 4.1% Hindu, 0.6% other, 14.8% no religion
Average temperature:	26°C (79°F) to 31°C (84°F)
Average humidity:	84%
Annual rainfall:	2,345mm with increased rainfall from Nov to Jan

Sources: www.singaporemirror.com.sg and www.sg

Located in the tropical belt of South East Asia, Singapore has its historical origins as a trade colonial port serving the Straits between the Indian and the Chinese South Sea. In the last 40 years a successful free trade policy has led the city-state to an extraordinary rise in the standard of living and economic growth, with a population expansion of 4 million people.

Singapore is today one of the busiest ports in the world, one of the major oil refining and distribution centres, a main supplier of electronic components and a key financial centre in Asia.

It is a modern, progressive and well-off island city-state where change and redevelopment of the built environment is unavoidable as it evolves its national strategy to cope with the new global challenges.

Since the island became an independent Republic in 1965 innovative measures were adopted to overcome the natural limitation and the geographical constraints (680 square kilometers island, absence of natural resources). The Urban Redevelopment Authority, a government body created for the island expansion, is responsible for planning and constructing on the greater part of Singapore's land. As a result Singapore presents a dense ever-changing urban texture with a mix of tropical and high-tech landscape.

One of the principal issues of designing in the Tropics is the discovery of a design Language of line, edge, mesh and shade rather than an architecture of plane, volume, solid and void. An unlearning process is involved, given the dominance of European architecture, which forms the substance of the training of architects over the past 200 years

Tay Kheng Soon, architect 1997

Architecture in Singapore

Today, a new generation of local architects and international architects are shaping the island for the 21st Century with deep pockets and wide powers to acquire and redevelop land on a large scale. A clearly recognizable design trend is the desire to create a new architectural Asian identity and in some cases a Western and Asian fusion that leads to a new idiom and aesthetics.

Local architectural firms often work on large and prestigious commissions in conjunction with foreign architects that continue to be widely employed as design consultants by both government and private clients. The Camden Medical Center by Richard Mayer and the 'Esplanade Theatres on the Bay' by Michael Wilford and Partners both realized in association with the local firm DP Architects are two recent examples of this kind of collaboration.

Foreign architectural firms look at Singapore as an emergent strategic location for their business in Asia. The London based Foster and Partners in one of the most important foreign firms to start a local branch in Singapore.

The theme of 'import/export', recurrent in Singapore's history, seems to be a current trend in today's architecture in Singapore. Increasing numbers of Singapore registered architects are exporting their services. Singapore seems to be the stepping-stone for many designers, gaining expertise in their field. Pudong condominium in China completed by CPG is a classic example of the highly exportable Singaporean brand.

Raymond Ang, 2005

Key Up-coming Architectural Projects

As part of a ten-year plan, an array of high profile developments have begun to raise from the ground and once again change the skyline of Singapore. A new vision gives great emphasis to education, culture and art with the determination to transform Singapore into a cultural center.

Here are the most important up-coming projects:

- **Biopolis** with master plan by Zaha Hadid covers 200ha and comprises three major centers of activity for biomedical sciences, media, education industries and financial businesses. The goal is to be an iconic technopreneurial development for biomedical science research, development, manufacturing and health. Mixture of residential units, commercial hubs, tertiary and research institutes, sports facilities and green spaces, envisioned as a new creative environment that is conducive for innovation and experimentation.
- **Singapore Management University city campus** by KNTA Architects and Edward Cullinan Architects and **SMU Administration building** by DEG Architects and Cox Raynor are located in the heart of the historic civic district in Singapore, with an overall budget of S\$400m.
- **National Library** by Ken Yeung is designed to house the expanded National Library Board (NLB) collections and to efficiently support international information resources. The site is located at the edge of a planned entertainment district in the center of the city.
- **La Salle SIA Campus** by RSP Architects, under the lead of Liu Thai Ker, is the result of an Architectural Competition for the design of a new city campus. Targeted for completion in 2006 at a cost of S\$85m it will consist of six irregular shaped towers housing the two faculties of performing and visual arts and the six composite schools of music, dance, drama, fine arts, multi-media and design.
- **Supreme Court** by Norman Foster located in the heart of the city with the aim to knit into the city fabric will be opening soon.
- **Singapore Flyer** by Kisho Kurokawa Architects and Associates (KKAA) will be the world's highest observation platform at 170 m high. Built at an estimated cost of \$200m, it will utilize the most advanced engineering and design techniques. The accompanying structure that surrounds the flyer, a 3-storey building sitting facing the ocean, nestled in a manmade façade of green, will house retail outlets and restaurants.
- **Duxton Plains** by Arc 10 Studio Architecture and Urbanism is a 2-phase development, to be completed in 2008, featuring 1848 units of dwellings on a site of only 2.5 hectare.

Interior Design in Singapore

Commercial and institutional projects represent the leading sector for interior design firms.

Although the interior design industry consists of enterprises of small and medium size (from free lance design firms to larger architectural offices) the most lucrative commissions are offered by economically wealthy clients in the areas of shopping centers

and retail chains; hospitality and luxury condominiums developments; corporate offices and major public buildings.

Key players that have left their mark on Singapore are Kerry Hill, W architects, Minktan Architects, Wallflower Architecture and Design, Eco-id and Whiz Concepts.

The Asian Civilization Museum and the Fullerton Hotel are among the most important government projects completed in the recent years.

Recently interior design works started to be prized for excellence through the launch of public competitions and awards. The best interior works by Singapore-based design firms are awarded in the Singapore Furniture Industries Award context under the categories of home, workplace, leisure and services. Another relevant prize is awarded by Nippon Paint to celebrate the creative application of color and to acknowledge the level of skill required to complete quality work.

To find out more about the design sector in Singapore:

Design Organisations	
Singapore Institute of Architects http://www.sia.org.sg	The Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA) is the national organization representing architects in Singapore.
Society of Interior Designers (Singapore) www.sids.org.sg	The Society of Interior Designers Singapore or SID(S) represents professional practicing interior designers and professionals in related disciplines such as education.
Interior Design Confederation (Singapore) http://www.idcs.org.sg	The Interior Design Confederation is an industry association for interior designers in Singapore. Its President is Mr. Derek Mackenzie.
Designers Association Singapore www.sony.com.sg/asianit/design/das.html	Designers Association Singapore (DAS) is a voluntary, non-profit organization established in 1985 to advance the cause of design in Singapore and to represent the interests of designers in Singapore.
Singapore Furniture Industries Council http://www.singaporefurniture.com	The Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC) was incorporated in 1981 as the official representative body for Singapore's furniture industry. SFIC's objective is to promote the interests of its members and to sustain and spearhead the growth of the Singapore furniture industry.
Singapore Institute of Landscape Architects (SILA) http://www.sila.org.sg	SILA, founded in 1985, is the representative body of Landscape Architects in the Republic of Singapore.
Singapore Institute of Planners (SIP)	The Singapore Institute of Planners is a

<http://www.sip.org.sg>

professional body representing urban and regional planners and allied professionals in environmental planning, transportation planning, urban design and community planning.

Investing in Design

In 2001, against the backdrop of an economic slowdown that significantly changed regional and world environment, the Government set up an Economic Review Committee (ERC) to review existing policies and formulate strategies to transform and revitalize the economy.

In the ERC review, the creative industries, namely the arts and culture, media and the design industries, were identified to be one of the three new and promising growth services. The Government has since 2001 set aside more than S\$200 million over the next five years to nurture and grow the creative industries. The aim is to add a new dimension to the Singapore economy and convert the city into a vibrant New Asian creative hub to capitalize on S\$1b of arts infrastructure that has been invested since the 1990s.

As part of the Creative Industries Development Strategy, the Government has formed the DesignSingapore Council, a national body to steer and coordinate the overall development of the design industries as an integrated cluster, to promote a pervasive design culture in Singapore, enhance creativity and raise awareness of Singapore design internationally.

Between 2004 and 2005 DesignSingapore has supported Singapore designers' participation at Venice Biennale of architecture, Tokyo Designers Block, International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York, Paris Fashion Week and at World Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan.

This year S\$26 million has been set aside for three initiatives aimed at promoting the development of the Creative Industries: "Media 21", "DesignSingapore" and "Creative Town Initiative".

To find out more on government initiatives related to architecture and interior design:

Government Involvement in Design	
Design Singapore Council http://www.nac.gov.sg	The DesignSingapore Council involves leaders and individuals from the various industry stakeholders, the design community and government. It serves as a common platform to steer the national design agenda and coordinate the implementation of the initiative.
Urban Redevelopment Authority http://www.ura.gov.sg	The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) is Singapore's national land use planning authority.
Housing Development Board http://www.hdb.gov.sg	Set up in 1960 HDB's mission is to build affordable homes in integrated environments that meet modern lifestyle needs. Today 84 percent of the population of Singapore lives in public housing towns.
International Enterprise Singapore http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg	Formerly known as the Singapore Trade Development Board (TDB), International Enterprise Singapore - or IE Singapore for short - is the lead agency spearheading Singapore's efforts to develop its external economic wing
Association of Small & Medium Enterprises http://www.asme.org.sg	Since 1986, the Association of Small & Medium Enterprises has been supporting Singapore's pro-enterprise spirit.
Economic Development Board (EDB) Singapore http://www.sedb.com/edbcorp/sg/en_uk/index.html	The Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB), set up in 1961, is the lead agency that plans and executes strategies to sustain Singapore as a compelling global hub for business and investment.
National Art Council http://www.nac.gov.sg	Established in 1991, the National Arts Council (NAC) is a statutory board under the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. The NAC's mission is to nurture the arts and make it an integral part of life in Singapore.
Board of Architects http://www.boa.gov.sg	The Board of Architects is the statutory authority established to administer the Architects Act in Singapore. The Architects Act 1991 sets out provisions to provide for the registration of architects, the regulation of architectural qualifications, the practice of architecture by registered individuals and the supply of architectural services by corporations.

DESIGN SCHOOLS	
NUS School of Architecture, Design and Environment http://www.sde.nus.edu.sg	Bachelor of Arts in ARCHITECTURE (Hons) Bachelor of Arts in INDUSTRIAL DESIGN (Hons)
Temasek Polytechnic http://www-des.tp.edu.sg	Apparel Design & Merchandising Diploma Interior Architecture & Design Diploma Product & Industrial Design Diploma
Singapore Polytechnic http://www.sp.edu.sg	Dip. Landscape Architecture Dip. Architecture Dip. Interior Design
The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) http://www.nafa.edu.sg	NAFA, founded in 1938, currently operates four schools: Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Fashion Studies and Young Talents. Together, they offer a comprehensive range of full-time Diploma and part-time Certificate courses to over 3,000 students.
LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts http://www.lasallesia.edu.sg/secondary.html	Founded in 1984, LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts is, today, Asia Pacific's leading arts institution, producing award-winning artists in design, fine arts and performing arts each year.
LCE School of Arts & Design http://skinair.com.hosting.domaindirect.com/LCE	Career areas: Interior Design, Visual Communication, Graphic Design, Computer Graphics, Web Design
Raffles Design Institute Singapore http://www.raffles-design-institute.edu.sg	Raffles Design Institute, established in 1990, has built up a reputation for producing some of the most talented young designers in the region.

Singapore as a hub

Singapore is frequently voted Asia's top business destination, and is regarded as one of the finest venues for international conferences, conventions and exhibitions, with a fast-growing market for incentive travel.

To find out more about events and fairs:

Events and Trade Fairs	
International Furniture Fair Singapore http://www.singaporefurniture.com	1/5 March 2005 EXPO Promoted by the Singapore Furniture Industries Council
Batimat Asia International Building Exhibition http://www.batimatasia.com	Building networks across Asia Organized by SIA and Reed Exhibition

International Design Forum http://www.intldesignforum.com/main.htm	Organized by IE Singapore and Reed Exhibition IDF 2003: 2 Oct - 4 Oct 2003
Singapore Season 2005 in London http://www.singaporeseason.com	The Singapore Season was presented in March 2005 by the National Arts Council to showcase Singapore's cultural capital in key cultural venues in London.

Below is the list of Singapore's design magazines:

Design Magazines	
Singapore Architect http://www.sia.org.sg/magazine	Magazine published by the Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA).
ISH http://www.pageonegroup.com	Singapore-based regional design magazine that has articles on visual artists as part of its presentation.
d+a: design and architecture Asia http://www.key-editions.com	
Space http://www.sunbusinessnetwork.com/singapore/print/index.asp	Space is the magazine on architecture and interior design. It features the best and the latest that the architectural industry has to offer.
Home and décor Singapore www.sph.com.sg	Started 20 years ago, this monthly features the latest international trends and practical tips on different aspects of a home, including interior design, renovation, kitchen, bathroom, the finishing touch and more.
Business Times Asia http://business-times.asia1.com.sg	
The Strait Times http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg	The Strait Times is Singapore's major daily newspaper that has a "Life!" section focusing on the arts and the design scene in Singapore.

Other useful links:

AECasia http://www.aecasia.com	AECasia encourages interactivity between architects, designers, engineers and contractors in Asia. AECasia aims to provide a comprehensive resource for the design and construction industry with easy to use multimedia information for industry professionals in Asia.
BCI Asia http://www.bciasia.com	Founded in 1998, BCI Asia is the leading group of construction information services in Asia and Australia.
Contact Singapore	Contact Singapore is a global network that offers

http://www.contactsingapore.org.sg	professional advisory services and networking channels to global talent, overseas Singaporeans and students interested in exciting career and educational opportunities in Singapore.
Alliance Française de Singapour http://www.alliancefrancaise.org.sg/	Organized various events promoting exchange of design culture between France and Singapore.
British Council Singapore http://www.britishcouncil.org.sg/	Organized various events promoting exchange of design culture between the U.K. and Singapore; an example of such initiatives is the Singapore Season in London 2005. (www.singaporeseason.com)

Business Opportunities and Competition

To access opportunities in the field of architecture and commercial interior design (such as those mentioned above), foreign design firms normally team-up with local firms or decide to open a Singapore-based branch. More and more foreign companies, including foreign design companies, choose Singapore to set-up their Asia Pacific offices.

Canadian designers interested in working in Singapore compete against Australian, American, European, Malaysian and Chinese (i.e. Hong Kong) designers, more or less in that order.

References

Robert Powell & Architect Tenggara, *Line, edge & shade - Tay Kheng Soon & Akitek Tenggara*, Singapore, 1997, page 1.

Singapore Architect, No 225, February 2005.

Singapore Mirror: www.singaporemirror.com.sg

Portal to Singapore: www.sg