

No. 1 FULLERTON SQUARE

The Best of Old and New



Owner:

Far East Organization/Sino Land Company Limited

Architect:

Architects 61 Pte Ltd

Engineer:

Oscar Faber Consultants Pte Ltd

Contractor:

Dragages Singapore Pte Ltd

This project involved the restoration and conversion of the Fullerton Building, now The Fullerton Hotel, from an office building into a deluxe hotel.

Completed in 1928, this eight-storey Neo-Classical building was purpose-built as the General Post Office (GPO) Building by Keys and Dowdeswell.

Prior to restoration, archival documents and historical photographs were extensively researched to determine previous changes to the building and to guide the interior design efforts. A measured building survey was also commissioned to accurately and comprehensively record the architectural details of the building. This facilitated the necessary repair and replacement works. The existing foundations were carefully shored up in areas where deep excavation was necessary to create new hotel facilities like the ballroom and service driveways. Extra precautions were also taken to protect the Cavenagh Bridge foundations which were partly within this site.



Restored Neo-Classical building transformed to a "deluxe hotel"

The building's Shanghai plaster panels were meticulously checked, cleaned, repaired and replaced where needed. All the traditional timber fenestration, complete with timber window shutters were

retained and restored. The metallic framed windows in "double square" patterns found at the solid corners of the building were similarly retained and restored. The four original airwells were reconfigured into an active and covered but sky-lit atrium. The ornate vaulted ceiling at the 4th storey was retained and restored, as was the double volume 1st storey GPO Hall with its high coffered ceilings and full height windows. The former GPO entrance was also sensitively converted into a public lobby leading to and from the pedestrian underpass.

The final product is a harmonious blend that brings out the best of both old and new.



Exterior facade in Singapore plaster finish with grand Doric columns



Lightscape, a unique feature of the building



Hotel entrance with glass and steel canopy



Clever use of plaster for air conditioning ductwork while retaining character of the building



Double-height which doubles as the hotel lobby



Double level recessed ceiling and wall-mounted lights



Landscape exterior



Double-height veranda with city view



High ceiling and double volume space retained

The site on which Fullerton Building now stands has an interesting history of its own. On this triangle of land at the mouth of the Singapore River was situated the infant Settlement of Singapore followed by a redoubt built at Sandy Point in 1819 marking the beginnings of Fort Fullerton. The foundation of the Post Office, described by Joseph Conrad as "The most important Post Office in the East", was also laid on this site in 1874 which was subsequently demolished to make way for the present Fullerton Building in 1924.

Keys and Dowdeswell was a Shanghai firm of architects who came to Singapore after winning an open architectural competition for the new General Post Office Building. In 1920, the architect Major P H Keys was appointed and building plans were drawn. Tender for the construction of the building was called in November 1923 and finally awarded to Perry & Company (Overseas Ltd) on 6 February 1924, for a contract sum of \$4,098,808.

In an effort to control cost, ten firms were invited to submit proposals for structural design. The design of Messrs. Colignet for a hollow raft foundation, which was most economical in terms of steel and concrete quantities, was ultimately accepted.

The new General Post Office was completed in 1928 at a cost of \$4.75 million. It housed the Exchange, the Chamber of Commerce, the historic Singapore Club, the other Government Departments besides the General Post Office which occupied 3 floors and a total area of 112,826 square feet. During the official opening ceremony held on 27 June 1928, Sir Hugh Clifford recommended that the building be named after the first Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Robert Fullerton (1824-1830).

The main Post Office entrance was opposite Johnston's Pier supplemented by two other entrances from Fullerton Road. The entrance to the Singapore Club faced Battery Road. Whilst the exterior was clad in granolithic plaster to simulate grey Aberdeen granite, the interior was more warmly finished with coloured ceramic tiles, wood paneled counter tops and illuminated through high plate-glass windows set in steel casements. The

300-foot long post office counter was reputed to be the longest in the world then.

The basement was used as a mail sorting area, the process facilitated by a conveyor belt until the 1950's when the belt began to give problems. Additionally, a tunnel (subway) was provided to convey mail from the GPO directly to ships in harbour and vice-versa.

In 1942, Governor Sir Shenton Thomas and Lady Thomas moved out of the Government House into the Singapore Club at the top floor of the Fullerton Building which they acknowledged was "safer, quieter and cooler". During the last days before British Surrender, the entire building was converted into a make-shift hospital for British soldiers.

It was only in 1973 that the GPO underwent major renovations where half the post office counter area was given up to the then Department of Trade. Quarry and mosaic replaced the original tiles in the public areas, plywood and veneer covered over moulded timber and to complete this 'modernization' exercise, a lowered false ceiling was constructed to accommodate air-conditioning. Further internal alterations were commissioned by the Public Works Department for GPO in 1985.

The Fullerton Building was retained as the GPO for historical reasons whilst the bulk of the office space was occupied by the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore until 1996.

