

DESIGN

Life in iconic apartments

An upcoming book chronicles the history of well-known buildings through the stories of people who live there. BY TAY SUAN CHIANG

AT the height of the pandemic in 2020, most people stuck at home picked up new hobbies like baking and cooking, or started paying attention to their health with new fitness routines.

For urban planner Samantha Chia and architectural photographer and artist Finbarr Fallon, the days of being confined to their apartments led to conversations about what makes a home and what it means to be at home.

From these conversations came the idea of putting together a book, featuring homes in 10 iconic private residences in Singapore. *UNIT: a glimpse into Singapore's 1970s - '80s private apartments* will be available at the end of July.

The pair, who have a background in architecture and are interested in documenting Singapore's built environment, chose to focus on apartments built in the 70s and 80s.

They picked well-known buildings, such as Golden Mile Complex, Pandan Valley, Hillcrest Arcadia and Mandarin Gardens.

"Living in a high-rise (home) was not such a common experience as it is today. Architects back then were trying to define what attractive high-rise living should look like, and to some extent, how they would represent Singapore's ambitions to be a modern nation," says Chia.

Many of these buildings have been photographed from the outside, but seldom is there an opportunity to see their interiors.

"We thought that understanding these buildings - considered innovative at the time - from the perspective of their residents would give us insight into how they trans-



Above: The bedroom of an apartment in People's Park Complex. Right: Palisades condominium is built on a hill and has a funicular lift. PHOTOS: FINBARR FALLON

late to the experience of the home and whether the ideas the architects had in the past still resonate today," says Fallon.

Finding the residents was a challenge for the pair, who didn't know anyone living in any of these buildings. Through cold-calling and asking friends for help, they eventually found 10 families who shared their stories.

Some residents have been living in their apartments for decades, others moved in recently. "Each of the homes is a personal means of expression, and they give us a perspective on what the home means

to them and how they have adapted their respective apartments to suit their lifestyles," says Chia.

One resident had been living in his apartment for over 40 years, with some furniture dating back to his childhood. While the apartment has largely stayed the same, the view has changed dramatically.

"The resident described his experience living in the apartment as being able to bear witness to Singapore's development from a familiar viewpoint. To us, that's a fascinating perspective and a very Singaporean experience," says Fallon. Of the 10 buildings, he found

The Colonnade in Grange Road most fascinating for its "architecturally interesting form." "The geometry looks complex, but it's actually the same 'module' repeated and alternated across the floors."

For Chia, it was Palisades condominium at Pasir Panjang that caught her attention. The apartments were designed to terrace down the slope of the hill, so they are not visible from the road.

"It made the experience of visiting the apartment and taking the funicular lift more intriguing. We always do a bit of research beforehand, but sometimes it's difficult



Samantha Chia and Finbarr Fallon. PHOTO: CLAIRE GOH



to imagine what experiencing the building and the apartment is like until we actually get there," she says.

Besides photos of the facade and the insides of the apartments and their interviews with the residents, the book also carries short write-ups about the building design and the urban planning considerations of the architects.

The duo also included the floor plan for each apartment. They say the drawings are important for the reader to understand how the spaces are laid out and to be able to

match them with the photographs and the resident's stories.

They are confident that architects will appreciate the book, given that they often do not get to see how people use the space once the building is completed. "We want the book to be a point of reflection, to ask whether the spaces in the apartment are being used as they were designed to be, how this may have changed over time, and whether the ideas of high-rise living at the time still hold true today," says Fallon.

The public would find the book interesting as well. "There's a part of it that is about raising awareness on the significance of Singapore's post-independence buildings. A greater part of it is about wanting to give people a sense of how design translates into and shapes their everyday experience," says Chia.

UNIT: a glimpse into Singapore's 1970s - '80s private apartments, S\$40, is available for pre-order at finbarrfallon.com/unit.

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Singapore creativity on display at Milan Design Week

The annual showcase saw local designers and their latest collections. BY TAY SUAN CHIANG

WITH more international borders now open, this year's Milan Design Week saw an increase in the number of overseas visitors, and the excitement is slowly but surely returning to pre-Covid times.

The annual showcase of international design took place this year from Jun 7 to 12.

Among those from Singapore who visited was designer Nathan Yong, who launched a new collection of tables with Spanish brand, Sancal.

"There were a lot of positive vibes and I feel that things are slowly returning to normal," says Yong. He noted that unlike previous years, the renowned Italian brands were not yet participating in the main Salone Internazionale de Mobile, the highlight of the week, but chose instead to host their own launches in the city.

"Perhaps they might be feeling conservative knowing that the Chinese buyers aren't able to visit yet, but overall, there are signs of hope," he says.

Mauro Bonizzoni, project manager and partner at Lanzavecchia + Wai, says "the crowd is almost back to what it was during the pre-Covid days". Design firm Lanzavecchia + Wai is founded by Italian Francesca Lanzavecchia and Hunn Wai, a Singaporean.

Here's what the Singaporean designers showed.

Faces by Nathan Yong

Forget conventional side tables that come with 4 legs and a table-top. For Spanish brand Sancal, Yong has created Faces, giving a playful touch to furniture design.

Faces is a collection of anthropomorphic tables that allow them to go from being a piece of furniture to an abstract art work.

Made from oak, each piece is sturdy enough to support not only



Above: Koyabari console. PHOTO: ARIAKE, OROGRAFIE

books and coffee cups, but also plants and lamps.

Breathing Batik by Supermama

A lacquerware collection with batik-inspired prints, Breathing Batik features the works of Singaporean artists with disabilities.

The artists are makers from Im-able Collective, an initiative by SG Enable to develop a viable market for quality merchandise made by persons with disabilities.

"Through the partnership with local label Supermama, these artists now have an international platform to showcase their talents and the social service agencies have built their capabilities in creating a commercially viable product that carries a unique Singaporean identity," says SG Enable's CEO, Ku Geok Boon.

Merlion Mambo by Supermama

The Merlion is well-known around the world, but let's face it, its look hasn't changed in decades.

To give it a refreshed look, Supermama's founder Edwin Low called on 5 local illustrators to give their



Breathing Batik lacquerware collection. PHOTO: SUPERMAMA



Above: Merlion drinking glasses. Far right: The Weaver's Collection stools. Right: Nena stools. PHOTOS: SUPERMAMA, ORIGIN MADE, ZANOTTA

perspective on the Merlion.

The results are Merlions with more updated and fun looks. These are printed on a collection of Japanese glassware.

Koyabari console by Gabriel Tan

Gabriel Tan, who runs his epony-

mous design firm, is also the creative director for Japanese furniture brand Ariake. This is the first time that Ariake is showing at Milan Design Week.

For the show, Tan has created the Koyabari collection, which includes a dining table and console.



Koyabari means roof beam in Japanese and Tan was inspired by Japanese roof joinery techniques. The pieces have a thick beam that is close to the ground for stability, and the beam also prevents the feet from touching when two users sit opposite each other.

The Weaver's Collection by Gabriel Tan

Besides running his own design firm, Tan is also the founder and creative director for furniture label Origin Made.

The Weaver's Collection is a col-



Above: Faces is a collection of side tables. Below: Segni, an unconventional chair. PHOTOS: SANCAL, OROGRAFIE



lection of stools and benches that came about when Tan met Maria Adelina, a weaver in her sixties and the last known one in Pacos Ferreira, a furniture-producing town in Portugal.

Inspired by Adelina's passion for her craft, Tan designed the pieces with wood frames and woven paper chords for their surfaces.

Nena Stools by Lanzavecchia + Wai

For Italian brand Zanotta, designers Francesca Lanzavecchia from Italy and Singaporean Hunn Wai designed the Nena Stools, great for kitchen islands.

The stool is a combination of aesthetics and comfort. It comes with a tapered tubular steel frame for a slim look, with an upholstered seat. The backrest is also upholstered and curved to envelop the user.

Segni by Lanzavecchia + Wai

With Segni, everyone should throw out conventional ideas of how a sofa should look. Designed for Italian label Orografic, Segni comes in 5 pieces and can be positioned to be a lounge or arm chair. The smaller pieces can double as stools or foot rests.

"Segni wants to be a hymn to individual comfort, freeing the user from predetermined spaces and postures, supporting new ergonomic needs for work, study, relaxation, physical activity and leisure," its designers say.

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