St Joseph's Church

Victoria Street

Timelessness Recovered

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AWARDS
OUR HERITAGE Is In Our Hands

2024 AWARD
FOR CONSERVATION

Owner:
Roman Catholic Church of the Archdiocese of Singapore

Architect:
ONG&ONG Pte Ltd

Engineer:
FranzWood Associates

Conservation Specialist:
FranzWood Associates

Additional Team Members:
Squire Mech Pte Ltd (M&E Engineer)
Northcroft Lim Consultants Pte Ltd (Quantity Surveyor)
SHEVS IFT Consultants Pte Ltd (Fire Safety Consultant)
Lighting Planners Associates (S) Pte Ltd (Lighting Consultant)
Arup Singapore Pte Ltd (Acoustic and AV Consultant)
Carillon Technology (S) Pte Ltd (Bell Restorer)
Genesis Stained Glass Pte Ltd (Stained Glass Restorer)
Granda Art Workshops (Marble Altar Restorer)
Ms Filipa Machado (Artefacts Restorer)

Built in 1912 by the Portuguese Mission, St Joseph's Church was recognised for its historical and architectural significance and gazetted as a National Monument in 2005. Amidst new challenges encountered along the 6 years of restoration, the project team has succeeded in securing of the fabric of this Monument to continue as a timeless sanctuary for the community.



An important community landmark revealed

An Unexpected Challenge

Although the Church is still an impressive structure of brick, plaster, timber, tile and glass after a century's use, much wear and tear have appeared. These included tilted roof trusses and a sagging choir loft. Both of which needed urgent attention. However, as work progressed on these two areas, the restoration team encountered new challenges, such as structural cracks in the masonry walls, undulating floors, and severe rising damp. Undeterred, they bravely took on this expanded scope of responsibilities in restoring this beloved landmark to its former glory.

Heritage Informing Modern Requirements

The value of archival research is evident throughout this project. Pictorial documents from the early 1900s revealed a lost row of dormer windows. These dormer windows were reinstated, while ensuring they were also able to serve as a mitigation method for smoke hazard to meet present-day fire safety requirements. Ornamented vent panels were also sensitively enlarged for smoke escape.

Modern mechanical and electrical systems were discreetly integrated, with wiring concealed in architraves, cornices, and beside columns to maintain visual integrity. Air-conditioning vents were skilfully hidden, and a spiral escape stair was visually tucked away to preserve the function of the choir loft.

Meticulous Craftsmanship and Attention to Detail

A particularly noteworthy discovery during the restoration was the uncovering of a historic fleur-de-lis pattern in one of the internal staircases. This intricate mural was subsequently painstakingly restored and protected. It added another layer of historical richness to the Church's interior. Specialist craftsmen were also employed to restore various significant artefacts, including statues, azulejos (blue and white traditional Portuguese tiles), and the Stations of the Cross.

Detailed attention was given to the treatment of the historic floor – an area that is subject to great wear and tear, but often overlooked. The original colourful encaustic floor tiles were carefully mapped, cleaned, repaired, and replaced only where necessary, resulting in a high proportion of the tiles being reused. The correct paints, based on historically informed colour scheme, were also applied for the walls. Appropriate lighting further enhances the overall sense of visual and physical comfort. This attention to every detail of the Church's heritage being preserved is most commendable.

A Timeless Monument

The restoration of St Joseph's Church exemplifies a thoughtful balance of preservation, modernisation and sensitive innovation in a project that encountered unexpected challenges. This restoration project has also seen the community of the Church becoming deeply involved in the process. Many now volunteer as ambassadors sharing the rediscovered history and heritage of their spiritual landmark.

Beyond physical restoration, the team has also implemented a comprehensive post-restoration maintenance plan, ensuring the sustained structural and historical integrity remain. This holistic approach secures the future of the Church as an enduring and timeless Monument for both the congregation and the wider Singaporean society.



Long missing dormer windows reinstated, recovering the roof's historic profile and now serving as smoke exhaust



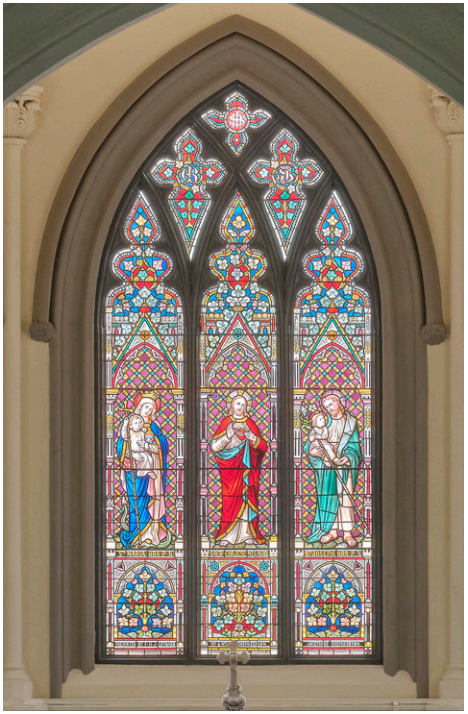
Sensitive restoration of materials and finishes has recovered a timeless quality



Historic fleur-de-lis motifs were restored after being discovered beneath layers of overpainting



More than 60% of the original encaustic floor tiles were retained



Stained-glass windows on all facades meticulously retained



Air-conditioning vents discreetly installed along the perimeter

ST JOSEPH'S CHURCH, VICTORIA STREET

2024 Award for Conservation

Through a thoughtful balance of meeting contemporary needs and safeguarding historic character, this iconic monument has been revitalised as a vibrant and enduring heart of the community. This project originally aimed at addressing structurally unsound roof trusses and choir loft. However, credit must be given to the team for adeptly navigating the many unforeseen challenges that surfaced such as structural cracks on the floors and walls.

Sensitive and creative solutions were demonstrated in the ingenious integration of ventilators in dormer windows which were carefully reinstated based on historical evidence from the early 1900s. This has successfully recovered a cherished element while meeting modern safety standards. Discreet installation of new M&E systems within the existing architraves and cornices achieved a seamless integration of contemporary equipment within the historic fabric.

Meticulous attention to details in the careful mapping, cleaning, repair, and judicious replacement of historic materials like the original encaustic tiles and the stunning stained-glass windows, demonstrated authentic best practices to celebrate historicity. Artisans and restoration experts have also aptly infused a sense of reverence into the restoration of the church bell and marble altar. Similar delicacy is showered on a historic fleur-de-lis mural uncovered on the interior staircase wall through painstaking paint analysis.

The post-restoration preventive maintenance plan with regular building monitoring is also exemplary. This holistic approach secures the future of the Church as an enduring monument and evokes a sense of timelessness.

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