

Harmony of Elements: The National Museum of Singapore- A Case Study in Museum Redevelopment for the 21st Century

Since opening in 1887 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Year, the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) had undergone many building extensions, name changes and altered missions. Originally, it was established as the Raffles Library and Museum to collect objects of historical value to Singapore and the surrounding region. In 1960, the library was moved and the name officially changed to the National Museum after Singapore achieved its independence in 1965. After extensive renovations during the 1980's, the National Museum was designated a heritage site- thus redefining all future building projects. In response to the government's cultural push to make Singapore a 'Renaissance' city, the National Heritage Board announced in 1993 that the museums under its auspices would be upgraded.

There were many challenges for the NMS, including updating the feel of the old museum without altering it, conservation and restoration of the old façade and dome, creating a contemporary response to the colonial architecture for the new extension and design galleries that tell the stories of 700 years of Singapore's history in an exciting and inventive way. The resulting building is a triumph of light and space, deceptively minimalistic and stimulating to the senses, as well as an innovative and educational use of new technology and fresh exhibition design. Basic to the successful and on-time delivery of this superior product was long-term planning, communication and excellent management of the multi-national team. Simultaneous consideration of the macro/microenvironments, concepts and goals has made the NMS an excellent model for redevelopment projects.

The millennium refurbishment and extension that doubled the size of the NMS to 18,375 sq metres was overseen by key museum players- Lee Chor Lin, the Director; Angelita Teo, the Assistant Project Director and Iskander Mydin, Senior Curator. Kenneth Ng was the External Project Manager, who oversaw 18 teams of consultants and contractors, including architects W Architects Pte Ltd, consultants CPG Consultants Pte Ltd and GSM Design Exhibits Inc. Project planning began in 1999, with funding approval from the Ministry of Finance coming through in April 2001. The Restoration of old Building began in January of 2003 and the Groundbreaking for the Extension was in Nov 2004. The new building was completed in April 2006 and after seven months of gallery installation, the Grand Opening was on December 7. With an approved budget of S\$117.9m, the four-year project went slightly beyond expectations, with the actual expenditure at S\$132.6m (NZ\$125m). For further information, visit their website at: www.nationalmuseum.sg. The Singapore National Heritage Board website, www.nhb.gov.sg, also provides excellent information about all the museums they manage.

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Figure 1. Front Facade of original National Museum of Singapore building



Figure 3. View of Dome from inside the Glass Passage

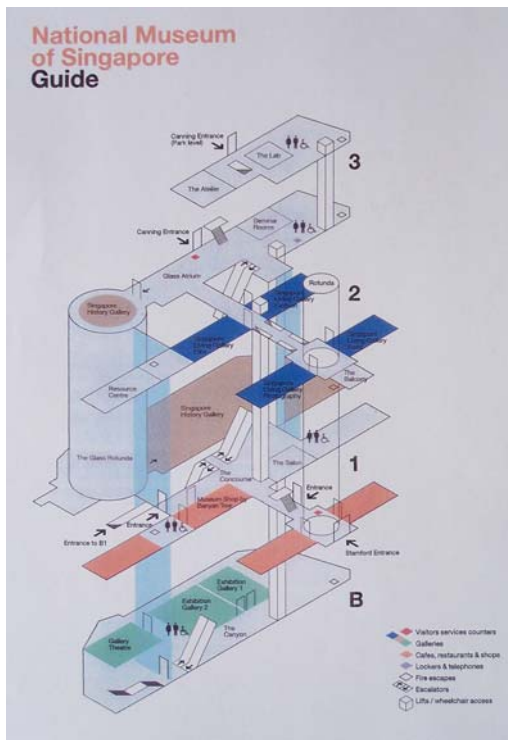


Figure 2. Floor Plan of National Museum of Singapore



Figure 4. View of Restored Rotunda and Stained Glass with banners for Chinese New Year