

New lease of life for George Town's heritage properties

UNESCO-LISTED CORE ZONE: Property developer 1919 Global set to rejuvenate other properties in the city

MARINA EMMANUEL
GEORGE TOWN
marinae@nsta.com.my

THE Unesco-listed George Town inner city is set to see further rejuvenation with several projects to be carried out over the next two years by premium boutique property development and management company, 1919 Global Sdn Bhd.

The company which has just completed the RM2 million restoration of the 83-year-old Loke Thve Kee building, is now set to rejuvenate its other properties in the city.

"Over the next 24 months, we are looking to restore 17 shophouses and a cinema in the Unesco-listed core zone here," building owner Jonathan Foo told Business Times.

The said buildings are the former Majestic Theatre which was built in 1926, a row of 12 shophouses along Jalan Phee Choon, and five heritage shophouses on Jalan Penang.

The 'Penang Road Heritage Row' project, according to the company's website, is described as a "unique cluster of five two-storey heritage shophouses, offering high profile commercial shopfronts on the first floor and a collection of boutique homestay suites on the second floor."

Meanwhile, the row of 12 two-storey shophouses, which are currently tagged as 'Phee Choon Place' are expected to house a collection of well-designed commercial and entertainment businesses on its ground floor, while the upper floor will offer luxury homestay units, featuring rooftop patios and other five-star amenities.

Foo, who is a Singaporean, did not



The restored Loke Thve Kee building. Inset: Food People's Ong Ban Sean (left) and Loke Thve Kee building owner Jonathan Foo. Pic by Mohd Kamil Rahim

Movie Theatre.'

It was the first cinema in Penang to screen Chinese talkies, and the building offers 14,000 sq ft of double-height column-free space, with a distinctive and grand colonial facade.

"Currently in the submission phase and once restored, the Majestic Theatre promises to be the prestigious venue for any commercial or corporate venture," Foo added.

"As a company owning properties in the Unesco heritage area, we share the same goals as others in wanting to bring back life into George Town's inner city but we need to balance this with projects which are economically viable and businesses which are sustainable."

indicate a budget for the proposed restoration of the properties, but said that the next project the company will embark on would be the five shophouses on Jalan Penang, once approval has been obtained from the local authorities.

On the company's plans for the former Majestic Theatre, Foo said all efforts will continue to maintain its heritage attributes as 1919 Global sets about restoring it into a commercial space.

The Majestic Theatre was originally built by the philanthropic land proprietor the late Khoo Sian Ewe and the building was known among the Chinese as the 'Shanghai Sound

Historic building to be city's catalyst

MARINA EMMANUEL

GEORGE TOWN: A newly-restored building in the centre of the city is going to be used as a catalyst to infuse new life and activity after dark into George Town.

Food People Sdn Bhd which has just inked a six-year lease to manage and operate the historic Loke Thve Kee Restaurant building at the key junction of Jalan Penang and Jalan Burmah, wants to restore the building's former iconic status and leverage on its heritage attributes to draw quality tenants to the three-storey building.

The company's two shareholders — DRB-HICOM's chairman Datuk Sved Mohamad Aidid Sved Mustaza and businessman Ong Ban Sean — are keen to promote events and activities which will draw its patrons, especially the young, into the city.

"We are in the process of identifying potential tenants who will help us make this area a must-stop destination for all food food synonymous with Penang," Food People's managing director Ong told Business Times.

"We hope to house a 24-hour food outlet and perhaps a retail outlet on the ground floor, a restaurant on the first floor and the top level which also serves as a roof-garden can become an exclusive lounge or be available for private functions," Ong added.

He said the restaurant is most likely to offer Malay or Hainanese cuisine which can be enjoyed by all Malaysians.

The Loke Thve Kee building which is ship-shaped, was originally owned and built in 1929 by one of Penang's influential community leaders at the time, Khoo Sian Ewe.

Loke Thve Kee which means "House of Happiness" in Hokkien Chinese, once housed a restaurant serving Hainanese food for almost 70 years until 1996, and was considered a premium venue for birthdays and weddings.

The building also served as the preferred site for matchmakers who would bring potential brides and groomsmen for their first meeting.

Of the RM2 million spent by the building's owners to restore the building, some RM130,000 came from Khazanah Nasional Bhd's subsidiary Think City Sdn Bhd.

Think City operates a public grants fund — the George Town Grants Programme — which is utilized for civil society and the private sector to engage on capacity building and capability development for the protection and development of living heritage, culture and architecture, and to provide support for the regeneration of the area.