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Chan did not immediately make any offer to acquire the shophouse, however, as they had just started conservation work on Arlene House, aka the Kapitan Chung Thye Phin Building across the street, another heritage building with a rich architectural history and past.

“By chance, it was only after a year had passed, in 2013, while walking along the verandahs again during lunch, that we found out the shophouse was being boarded up in preparation to be torn down!

“Having been charmed by its built heritage over a year ago, we made a quick acquisition offer to the owner to save it despite not having the chance to inspect it again.

“We were successful after some counter-offer negotiations, thus saving it from being demolished and losing its rich historical heritage legacy,” said Chan, adding that by that time, a bigger portion of the roof had fallen down.

The intermediate double-storey shophouse was built circa 1890s, and featured a dual-frontage design with an open-air courtyard built into the mid-section of the shophouse.

“Most surprisingly, it had two postal addresses! 16, Market Street and 4, Market Lane for the front and back premises respectively, a unique town and building planning legacy from the British Administration era,” said Chan.

The building had a large footprint, measuring 21ft (6.4m) wide by 120ft (36.5m) long, and a total built-up area of approximately 4,800sq ft (445sq m).

Its layout was divided into three distinct sections – the front portion was for business activities, the mid-section with its open-air courtyard encompassed the work area and daily living facilities such as kitchen, toilet and bath, and water well, while the back section was for storage and daily activities, together with the upper floor space.

“When we found it, there were no partition walls or rooms. They were probably dismantled some time back. What’s visible were four open-space halls. Two larger halls were situated at the front premises and two smaller halls at the back section’s ground and upper floors,” Chan added.

From their first visit, they were surprised but glad to see that most of the original fixtures and fittings were still intact.

“We were confident that the shophouse’s built elements could be preserved and conserved. What needed to be done was to evaluate, study and investigate the extent of



The Arlene Terrace repurposed into the Funtasy House Trick Art 3D Museum. — Photos: Made In Ipoh

## All for adaptive reuse

wear and tear, and identify the weakened and damaged sections for restoration and reconstruction.”

### Labour of love

The couple eventually named the shophouse “Arlene Terrace” and the hard work of researching and restoring the place – and finding the right people to do it – began, a process that took two years, in 2014 and 2015.

“By the time we acquired the shophouse, we had already com-

menced building conservation work on Arlene House. We had also visited heritage buildings to appreciate, learn and gain knowledge of their construction methods, techniques and building materials.

“With advice and guidance from conservation architect friends, we were confident in undertaking the necessary conservation-restoration work with our team of builders and contractors.

“Our priority was to restore the roof and its structures, the façade walls and elements, and installing

an I-beam to restore the load bearing wall. That was the only steel work applied.

“We restored the place using traditional building materials, methods and techniques to the best of our efforts, resources and availability due to time constraints,” said Chan.

However, there were some difficulties, including the application and sourcing of the required and appropriate building materials.

There were also time-consuming methods, techniques and detailing craftwork that required patience to



The facade of the Arlene Terrace before restoration work began.

execute by skilled and experienced plasterers, crafters and installers, added Chan.

The most challenging part, he explained, was restoring the roof structures, load-bearing walls, façade profile elements and vintage air vents.

In terms of timber work, the challenge included sourcing and procuring used hardwood, mainly cengal and merbau, to the required length, dimension and quantity from timber yards.

### Passion for preservation

Both Arlene House and Arlene Terrace (which used to be the Chop Heng Woh Shoemaker and Tailor Shophouse) have been listed in the Ipoh Heritage Trail maps of the Ipoh City Council and Tourism Perak (45 Interesting Landmarks – History of Ipoh).

After the restoration of Arlene Terrace was completed, Chan then embarked on an adaptive reuse project, turning the space into the current Funtasy House Trick Art 3D Museum.

“Having preserved this inspiring Straits Eclectic built heritage, we were mindful of finding suitable adaptive reuse activities which did not harm or damage its built heritage and architectural designs.

“We founded the Made In Ipoh organisation in 2015 with the vision and mission to encourage, support and promote the preservation, conservation and restoration of built heritage, and the research, documentation, education and sharing of the rich history, heritage, arts and



(Left) The original cengal staircase and balusters at Arlene Terrace.



(Right) One of the two carefully restored cengal staircase.



The Arlene Terrace used to house the famous Chop Heng Woh Shoe Maker & Tailor founded circa 1910-20s by Ho Kwok Lim (4th from right), seen here with his wife, children, brother and sister-in-law. — JOHN HO



The *Daily Mail* newsprint from Manchester (Britain) dated July 20, 1906, was found affixed under the plastered walls before restoration work began. — Photos: Made In Ipoh

## Unearthing the building’s history

CONSERVING and restoring the over 120-year-old Arlene Terrace in Ipoh, Perak, was a long, arduous journey.

“You need to have commitment, patience and perseverance. It was a tedious, time-consuming and painstaking conservation-restoration journey over two years (January 2014 to November 2015).

“The intent of saving, preserving and restoring it to give it a new life was just the beginning of a chapter,” Michael Chan, the owner of the building, said.

In the process, Chan and his wife, Arlene, discovered a story and a past that was intriguing, that formed a precious part of the mining town’s rich history.

“During the conservation process, we discovered and appreciated more of the shophouse’s historical activities, its occupants and life-

styles of yesteryears based on its design and layout, and our research.

“For example, we found a pair of charming ladies’ vintage shoes, secret compartments amongst its three-brick-thick walls, a *Daily Mail* newsprint from Manchester (Britain) dated July 20, 1906, affixed under its plastered walls, and many other smaller finds.

“We had opportunities to also save and preserve fixtures and fittings from other colonial shophouses that were destined for the scrap metal or timber yards, such as the vintage collapsible ‘X-channel’ cast-iron gates, which we named the Anderson Gates, as well as some timber staircase structures, doors and joists from the heritage shophouses along Jalan Raja Muda Aziz (formerly known as Anderson Road) prior to

the entire heritage row’s demolition in 2014.

“These built-heritage fixtures and fittings were given a new lease of life and home through the restoration of the (Arlene Terrace) shophouse,” shared Chan.

Through extensive research, Chan also found that it was no ordinary shoplot back in the day, but housed a well-known leather shoe maker.

“It was famously known as the Chop Heng Woh Shoe Maker & Tailor, one of the oldest, leather shoe and accessories maker in Ipoh founded circa 1910-20s by an enterprising Chinese immigrant family comprising husband and wife Ho Kwok Lim and Chow Kheng Sin.

“Their eldest of 10 children, Captain Winkie Ho Weng Toh, grew up in the shophouse and