

Restored to its former glory

An eight-year labour of love has successfully preserved a 116-year-old building that houses a rich history and represents a priceless built heritage.



Photo: Arlene House

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TO put it simply, the state of dilapidation was palpable – peeling paint, mouldy patches and cracked masonry, with plants peeking out of parapets and exterior cornices.

It was no better inside, with rickety floorboards, damaged roof trusses, musty walls and stained floors.

Located at 18, Station Road in Ipoh, Perak, the Kapitan Chung Thye Phin building is situated in an

area once known as the “European District” of Ipoh (due to the many businesses from the continent) that thrived there.

The building’s current owners, Michael Chan and his wife Arlene Loke, had passed by the three-storey structure many times but never really took notice of it until one day when they happened to look at it properly from a road opposite the building.

“We realised then that it was indeed an imposing corner building that stood majestically tall, with

parapet walls and covered arched verandahs. Its architectural design, masonry work and intriguing decorative and ornamental elements unfolded when we scrutinised the façade,” recalled Chan, a chartered accountant by profession.

After finding out that the building, which has a 669sq m build-up, was for sale, the couple arranged for a viewing the same day.

Due to the unfavourable conditions inside, they could not access certain sections.

However, what they found in the

locked bay area of the building blew them away.

“It was there that we discovered an ornate Victorian-style cast iron spiral staircase. It was love at first sight – an exquisite fitting of the building, locked up and hidden from the public eye for over a century. It was the impetus telling us that we ought to own this building,” shared Chan, who acquired the building, last occupied by a pharmacy, in 2011.

“We did not know of its rich history nor legacy prior to acquiring

the building. We have always admired the beautiful colonial buildings and shophouses of Ipoh, attracted to and inspired by their nostalgic charm, built heritage and historical value.

“Given the opportunity, we would like to preserve, restore and save them from being torn down for redevelopment,” said Chan, currently a corporate adviser to private and public-listed companies.

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