

Good example of adaptive reuse

> FROM PAGE 1

Start of a long journey

Restoration efforts of the Kapitan Chung Thye Phin building, also known as Arlene House, began in 2012.

However, what Chan did not anticipate was the arduous amount of work that had to be done to restore the building – which is inspired by European architecture – to its former glory.

“We had to carry out substantial research and investigative work, interview people who had knowledge of the building, find descriptions of past activities, and so on.

“We had to analyse and study the damaged, destroyed or missing elements, fixtures and fittings, and design constructions. Those were some of the tedious, time-consuming and ad-hoc work to be performed before we could proceed with restoration efforts,” he said.

Chan and his wife combed through volumes of social history and built heritage books, publications and archives.

They visited heritage buildings, landmarks and sites to understand and learn about building preservation and conservation, and appreciate adaptive reuse activities.

They also took time to consult building conservation groups, heritage builders and conservation architects.

“Significant records of the com-



The Palladian-style windows are characterised by three elements – a central, round-arch opening and two smaller rectangular openings to the sides.

missioning of this building were found in the *Twentieth Century Impressions Of British Malaya: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries And Resources* published in 1908.

“From our research, we got to know that the building was commissioned in 1905 by Kapitan Chung Thye Phin, a prominent tin miner and the last Chinese Kapitan of Perak and Malaya. The building was his tin headquarters and trad-

ing house in Malaya.”

To properly restore the building, Chan felt they had to get to know Chung's life history to better appreciate the built heritage he had commissioned.

Born in Taiping in 1879, Chung was the fourth and most successful son of prominent Kapitan Chung Keng Quee. As he was from a wealthy family, Chung was

privileged to travel the world as a teenager. He was fascinated by the canals of Venice, as well as the enchanting ponds and lakes of China.

He was especially inspired by European architecture and design, notably the works of Andrea Palladio, one of the world's most influential Venetian architects. It was from there that Chung had a dream to own and build a European-style building in Malaya.

Hence, in 1905, he commissioned Scottish architectural firm Stark & McNeil to design a Victorian-Palladian Neoclassical building as his tin business headquarters in Ipoh.

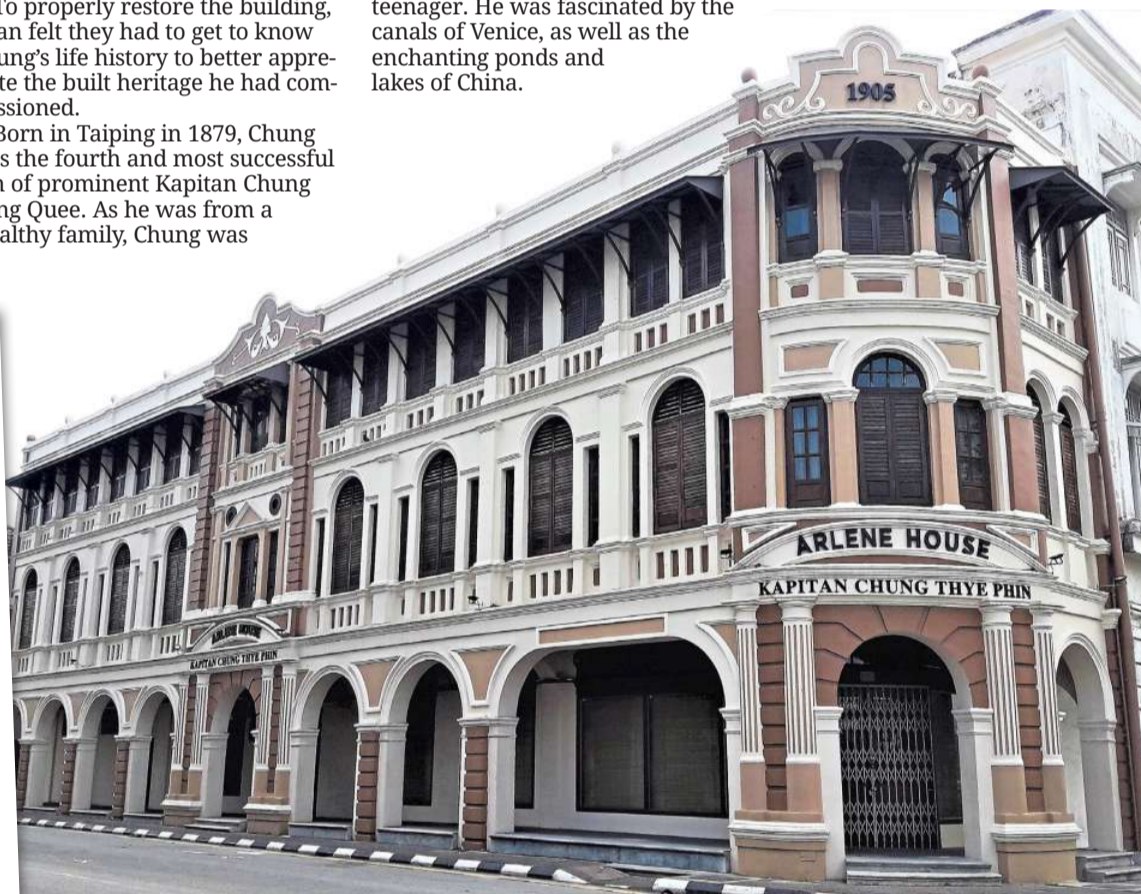
Chung named the building “Phin Kee Chan”, which translates to “Peace Remembrance Store”.

Constructed by the best Shanghaiese, European and local builders, craftsmen and artisans at that time, the building was one of the most photographed landmarks of Ipoh during its golden years.

Place-making venture

Finding the right contractors and materials needed for the restoration work was no easy feat.

“The building was constructed



The Kapitan Chung Thye Phin building, also known as Arlene House, exhibits a Victorian-Palladian Neoclassical architectural style. – Photos: Arlene House



Currently, Arlene House is being used as a gallery-museum called Made In Ipoh.

All about Palladian architecture and more

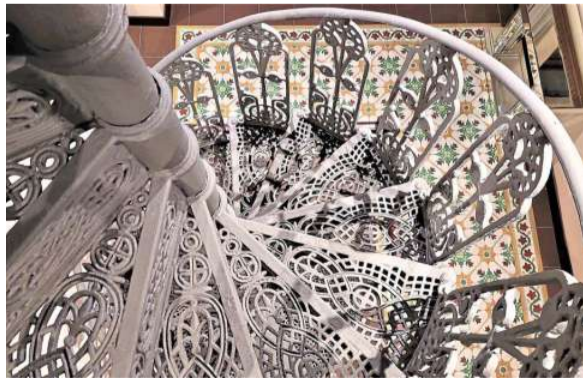
ACCORDING to nationaltrust.org.uk, Palladianism was an approach to architecture influenced by famous 16th century architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580).

The Venetian architect was responsible for a series of churches in Venice, public buildings in Vicenza and villas in Veneto, all in Italy.

Palladio's work was strongly based on the symmetry, perspective and values of the formal classical temple architecture of ancient Greeks and Romans.

The exteriors of Palladian buildings were often austere, but inside, elaborate decoration, gilding and ornamentation were the order of the day.

The Kapitan Chung Thye Phin building incorporates a Victorian-Palladian Neoclassical architectural style.



The ornate, cast iron spiral staircase at the Arlene House bears the stylised Fleur de Lis design.

“This building has decorative and ornamental elements of Neoclassical architecture, characterised by grandeur of scale, simplicity of geometric forms, Greek –

especially Doric and Roman – details, and dramatic use of columns,” said Michael Chan, the owner of the building.

Its three-storey imposing facade,

brick masonry exterior, asymmetrical shapes and decorative trims also reflect Victorian architectural styles.

A trademark design of the build-

ing is the decorative stylised Fleur de Lis (French Lily) design on its parapet wall.

What's also unique is the Victorian-style cast iron spiral staircase specially commissioned from Walter Macfarlane & Co, Chung's favourite shopping place for European decorative ironworks back then.

Also known as the Saracen Foundry, it was the most important manufacturer of ornamental ironwork in Scotland at that time.

All the components of the staircase were shipped from its foundry in Glasgow to Ipoh and built on-site by a team of Scottish installers and engineers.

The ornate spiral staircase was also crafted with the stylised Fleur de Lis design, and is believed to be the tallest of such design in Malaysia.



The spiral staircase is believed to be the tallest Fleur de Lis design in Malaysia.