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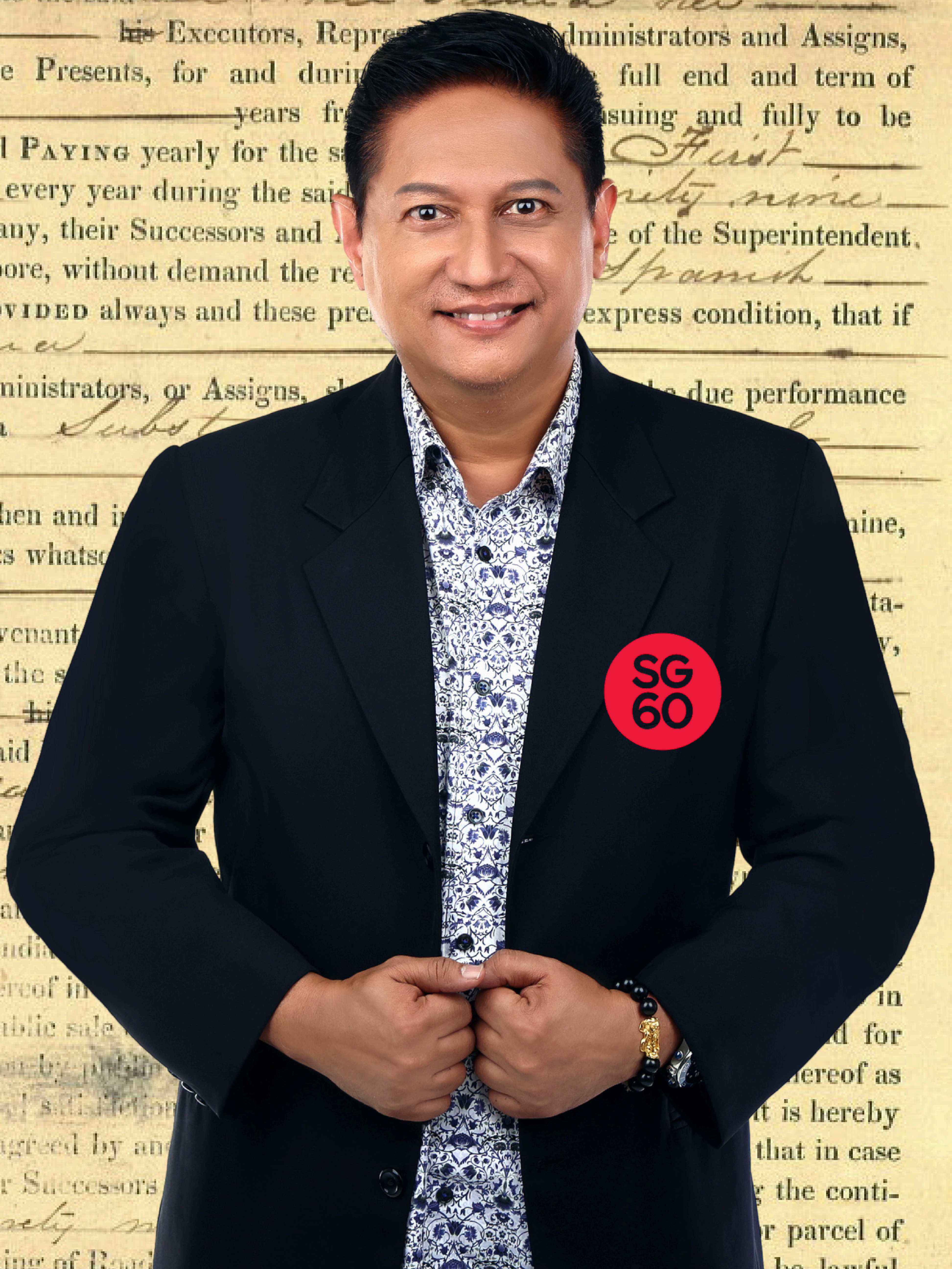


Simon MONTEIRO
WhatsApp business account

Simon Monteiro
List Sotheby's International Realty

The passion of a shophouse specialist

IT STARTED AS EARLY AS SEVEN YEARS OLD. My dad would bring me to the thieves market at Sungei Road, as we came from a poor family and he sold scrap metal part time to supplement the low pay he received as a watchman of a VITB school (Punggol Vocational Institute) – they gave us a small house to reside in, although today it would be regarded as a bungalow. I collected coins and stamps during my teens, and continued into adulthood, and the thieves market started me on this journey of collecting old things.

I got into real estate in 1994, and the first sale of my 30-year career was a shophouse at Spottiswoode Road – number 55. I remember the airwell was the standout feature of this 6,500 sqft beauty, with a sculptural fountain and water feature.

I haven't looked back since that sale. I subsequently worked for the noted shophouse investor, Bill Goei, and his son Alan, in the family's development business Goldhill & Guan Seng Kee. It was in these roles that my passion for heritage property truly took hold, and I developed a deep knowledge of the history and charm – as well as the challenges – of owning, renting and investing in these iconic Singaporean properties.

To begin with, I focused on the Tanjong Pagar enclave, Clive Street and Kim Yam Road, and I leased and managed numerous properties for the Goei family for four years.

I then left the developer to embark on a journey as an independent real estate agent, specialising in the sale and lease of heritage buildings – both residential and commercial. And who would have imagined how quickly 30 years have gone by!

Looking back over this time, the many properties I've transacted include five boutique hotels and no fewer than 128 shophouses and heritage buildings, with a value exceeding $1 billion.

I have serviced some of the most significant investors in the market, helping to build portfolios comprising dozens of heritage properties. A particular focus has been helping family offices to understand these

“

Over the last 30 years I’ve transacted five boutique hotels and 128 heritage buildings.

”

legacy investments, and supporting those with great passion for shophouses to purchase trophy heritage properties for future generations.

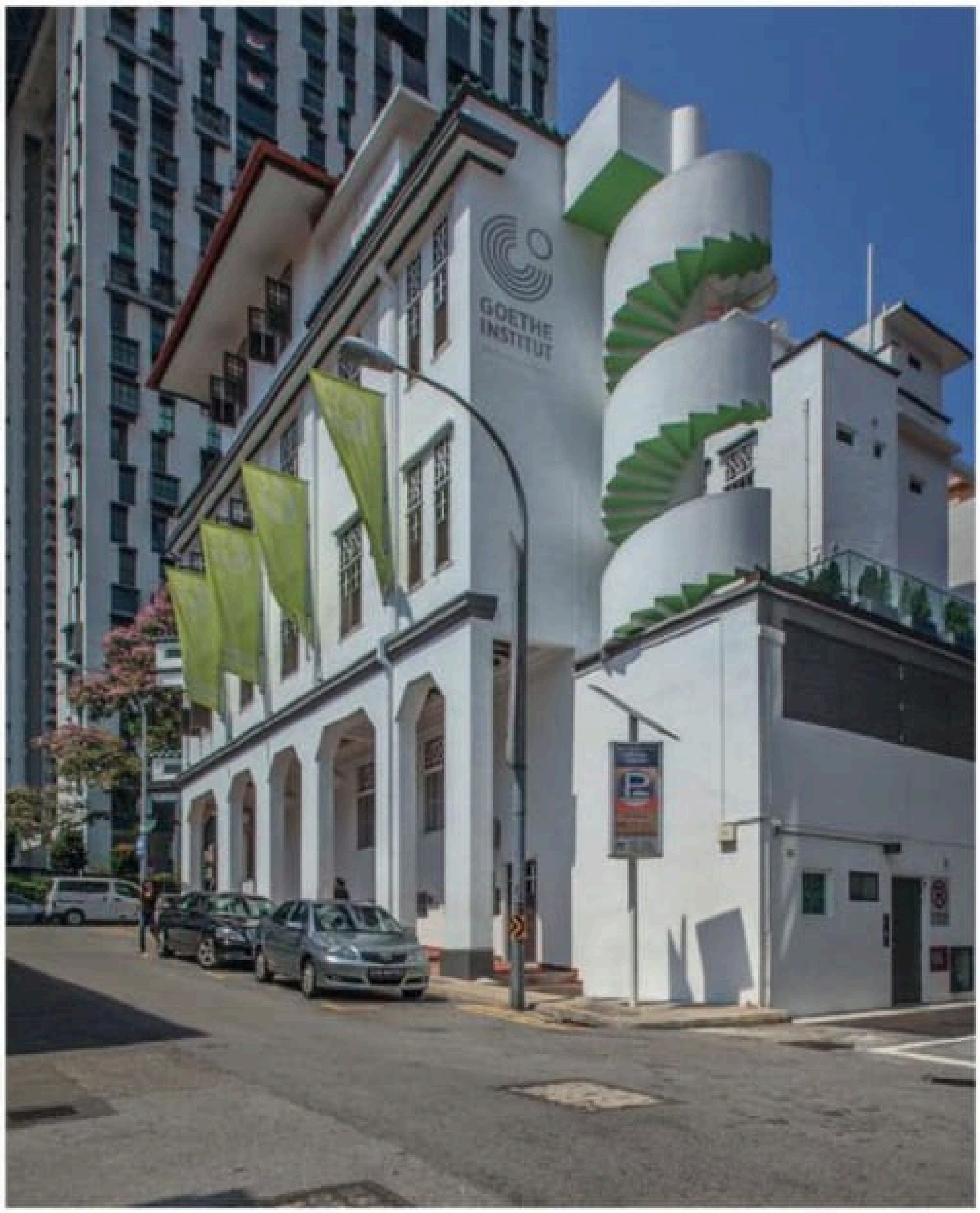
Most of the 128 shophouses I have sold were trophy conservation assets that the URA has gazetted as Primary and Secondary Shophouses. Almost all of my transactions have been on commercial properties – alongside residences on Blair Road, Oxley Road and Tembeling Road – and the majority of my clients are not from Singapore by birth.

Apart from my work as one of the leading real estate agents specialising in heritage properties, I have also spent decades pursuing my passion for the space through historic manuscripts, book, maps and master plans. I have founded two museums dedicated to the subject, and collected more than 200 documents detailing the extraordinary history of Singapore’s most significant properties – along with the leading individuals who owned them.

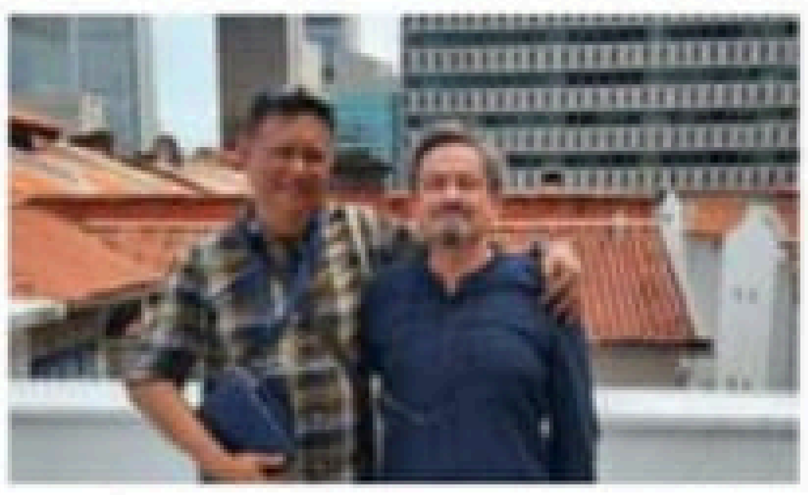
Much of these collections date back to the 1800s, including a masterplan that has pride of place in my office. For decades, the only means of understanding real estate and its opportunities was to go to the URA Centre and flip the masterplan to find and research opportunities.

My property business, Straits Shophouse Pte Ltd, is a partnership with Dr Julian Davison, a leading expert in Singaporean architecture and local history, and author of *Singapore Shophouse* and *Black and White,* who frequently lends his expertise to the URA and SLA. Dr Davison often consults on properties I represent to elucidate their history and significance for potential buyers.

Together with our architectural consultant Alvan Ng, we have a unique approach to the heritage property market that provides expertise across both the historic significance and development potential of these wonderful buildings.



PRESERVING SINGAPORE'S HISTORICAL SHOPHOUSES



Two individuals who dedicate their lives to preserving part of Singapore's history

By Joe Lim
Pictures courtesy of Tellus Architects

From shophouses to black and white houses, two experts share their views about conserving historical buildings in Singapore; and the importance of preserving heritage and educating the next generation. PALACE magazine found time to dig into their minds about the importance of conservation.

How did your passion for history and Singapore's built heritage come about?

Simon Monteiro (SM): I have lived by the mantra "Life is lived forward but understood backward". My journey collecting historic artifacts began when I was just eight years old and I would join my dad every weekend to visit "Sungei Road Thieves Market", Singapore's largest flea market in the 1960s.

I loved uncovering rare gems of Singapore's history from stamps to coins, antiques, watches, and historical letters. Also, I started collecting manuscripts and letters, before also, buying indentures that led me to create my first museum — The Singapore Land Museum.

I am lucky to have found a mentor in Dr Julian Davison, who shares my passion for history. Together, we have bought over 400 letters and manuscripts to document the history of Singapore's land development. I now own some of the rare documents on Real Estate Land Indenture and Property Wills that date to 1795.

Dr Julian Davison (DJD): My love of history came from my mother. She wasn't an intellectual in any sense, but she was interested in the world around her. When she first came to Singapore in the late 1950s the very first thing she did was to find out as much as she could about her new home. Before long she knew the names of all the plants and trees in the garden and the birds that perched in their branches. She read voraciously and indiscriminately — not just natural history, but history too. And she also got to know something about people she rubbed shoulders with on her expeditions downtown. Chinese and Malays, of course, but also Javanese and Singhalese, Arabs and Punjabis, Tamils, Bengalis, and all the other ethnicities that make up Singapore's plural society. A Romantic at heart, she fell in love with her new home — what I call "old school

Singapore" — and in time she passed her enthusiasm on to me; before I became an architectural historian, I was an anthropologist.

As for architecture, well that came from my father who was an architect. In the 1950s he worked for the Singapore Improvement Trust, the forerunner of today's HDB during the British era — I live in one of the buildings he designed back then. Subsequently, he went into private practice as one of the founding partners of Raglan Squire & Partners (RSP) in Singapore, today's RSP. My father also started a practice in Kuala Lumpur, which is where I spent most of my childhood. Naturally, architecture was part and parcel of everyday life, the stuff of conversations around the dinner table, and so on. Often, when he went on-site visits on a Saturday morning, he took me with him, so I knew how buildings were put together from an early age — the smells of sawdust and freshly-load concrete are very evocative of my childhood!

Why didn't I become an architect myself? I remember very clearly my father saying to me one day: "Julian, if you like architecture, don't make it your profession. I'm 90 per cent businessman these days. All I do is go around shaking hands and making deals — I hardly design a thing! If you love architecture, keep it for a hobby."

Can you share with us your joint collection of historical documents?
DJD: Simon's the collector and I am the archivist. The bulk of the collection comprises land deeds and I like finding out about the people whose names appear in these documents and the buildings that are being bought and sold. Some of them are very interesting indeed. For example, Simon once purchased a land indenture relating to a plot of land that was being sold by Sultan Ali, the second Sultan of Singapore. The history behind that yellowing piece of paper was quite fantastic! It went all the way back to Raffles' original treaty with Sultan Hussein (Singapore's first sultan) and the royal entitlement of Kampong Glam that was part of that deal.

Simon, you have shared that Shophouses are like "Time Capsules of Singapore". Could you elaborate on this?
SM: The architectural features of shophouses showcase the many cultural influences across different eras, and these buildings have a storied past that provides us with a narrative of Singapore's history where life and work intersected.

Are there examples of interesting stories behind specific shophouses in Singapore? Do you mind sharing some of these stories?
DJD:
Not every shophouse has an interesting story behind it, but then again, a great many of them do! One story that I remember finding quite intriguing was the "Six wives of Mr Choo Eng Choon". Choon lived at No. 88 Amoy Street, in a townhouse that was designed for him by the architectural practice Almeida & Kassim, who specialised in designing Chinese-style homes for rich towkays at the turn of the last century. Choo was a very wealthy individual — he is described in the newspapers as a "landed proprietor" and a "millionaire" in an age when the latter term really meant something. Singapore-born, he had made his fortune in Saigon but returned to Singapore to live out the last years of his life in the land of his birth. Choo, however, is one of those men who are, perhaps, more famous in death than in life, his name forever being associated with the celebrated "six-widows" legal case, which dragged on for many years after his demise.

Were there times when a shophouse's history sealed the deal for the buyer? What part of its history piqued the interest of the buyer?
SM: In 2011, I sold a pair of adjoining conservation shophouses on Neil Road in Bukit Pasoh to a prominent European family office. They were particularly keen to know about the building's historical origins, where it was one of Singapore's oldest architectural firms Swan & Maclaren earliest works, known for other notable historical buildings like Raffles Hotel and Stamford House. The provenance of the shophouse ultimately sealed the deal for our client's purchase. Subsequently, the building is now recognised as a historic landmark, where Goethe-Institut Singapore has been a long-time tenant.

Why do you think Singapore's built heritage matters for HNWIs (High Net Worth Individuals)?
SM: HNWIs want to own a piece of Singapore's history, an asset class that is coveted by many and hence has the prestige of ownership akin to valuable fine art and luxury watches. Many investors see the importance of owning conservation shophouses for wealth preservation, with plans to pass them down to the younger generations.

For anyone looking to invest in a shophouse — what considerations should they keep in mind?
SM: Like all real estate investments, location is key, but the opportunities for adaptive reuse should be taken into consideration. Shophouses capture the depth of Singapore's history and roots and the exponential rise of prices in the last decade is a testament to their investment value.

I usually encourage my clients to buy at least a pair of adjoining shophouses, where there is more flexibility to work on redesigning the interiors. There are three different types of conservation shophouses – commercial, residential, and mixed commercial–residential shophouses. Commercial shophouses are the most highly coveted of the three, as there are no restrictions for foreigners to buy these, whereas, for the other two, there are specific limitations, and extra additional taxes to consider for residential properties. Additionally, for conservation shophouses, investors need to understand that when it comes to renovation and restoration works, there are specific approvals that need to be sought, where building facades and structural elements also come into consideration.

Simon Monteiro, Associate Vice President, List Sotheby's International Realty, and Dr Julian Davison, author of Singapore Shophouse, and heritage archivist for Shophouse Club both share a kindred spirit for preserving historical buildings in Singapore. Davison is an architectural historian and author of books such as Singapore Shophouse and Black & White — The Singapore House 1898-1941. ♚

Passion for shophouses

| BY CECILIA CHOW |

Tucked away amid the supersized Good Class Bungalows of Ridout Road is a little clearing with two blocks of low-rise flats fronting a lawn. These blocks of flats were built by the Singapore Improvement Trust to house the young British professional architects and others who worked for SIT, recounts Julian Davison, anthropologist, architectural historian and former Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow.

SIT, the predecessor of HDB, was set up in 1927 by the British colonial government in Singapore to solve overcrowding in shophouses and squatter settlements. This led to the advent of affordable public housing for the mainstream population in Singapore.

Incidentally, Davison is a resident of one of these flats on Ridout Road, which are now owned by the Singapore Land Authority (SLA) and available only for lease. It holds nostalgic memories for him, as his father, who worked for SIT as a young architect between 1952 and 1954, had lived in one of these flats too.

"In the early 1950s, there were no trees here and you had a panoramic view of the whole downtown. The guys who lived in these flats could walk to Queenstown [Singapore's first satellite new town], which was being built then," says Davison. "Otherwise, Swettenham-Ridout Road was a rich area with black-and-white bungalows in those days, and not for junior people working in SIT like my father then."

His father, Richard Davison, went on to become a founding partner of architectural practice Raglan Square & Partners in 1956. The international architectural firm is now known as RSP Architects Engineers & Planners.

Did Davison ever aspire to follow in his father's footsteps and become an architect? "I've always loved architecture and buildings, and my father knew that. But he resolutely didn't push me, and he never said, 'Why don't you become an architect?' But he did say to me that, if I liked architecture, to keep it as a hobby. As an architect, he said he was a '95% businessman' who went around shaking hands and was in meetings the whole time. It was the young architects who had the pleasure of designing the buildings."

Davison: In the early 1950s, there were no trees here and you had a panoramic view of the whole downtown

Davison pursued anthropology and is a recognised architectural historian. He is also author of books such as *Singapore Shophouse* and *Black & White — The Singapore House 1898-1941*, based on the architecture of the bungalows built during the colonial era. He is completing a history of Singapore's oldest architectural practice, Swan & Maclaren, whose origins date back to the late 1880s, with the book scheduled to be published in the last quarter of 2017.

The next book in the pipeline is the history of Singapore told through its architecture. It is not just about the buildings, but who built them and why they were built then. "If you look at the way the city grows, it's always in response to some major historical event," says Davison, who hopes to complete the book by 2019, which coincides with the 200th anniversary of the founding of Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles.

'Sea of shophouses'

Davison says "Singapore was a sea of shophouses" in the 1950s. Even in the early 1900s, the representation of Singapore was through its shophouses. "Given the ubiquity of the shophouses, it's not surprising that it has become a Singapore icon."

The shophouses were gazetted by URA for conservation in areas such as Boat Quay, Chinatown and Little India. The shophouses in Chinatown, particularly in of the CBD area such Street, Telok Ayer, Ann and Duxton Hill, have d the attention of overors — hedge funds, pri firms and family over the past 12 years, n Monteiro, associate director of heritage buildings at Savills (Singapor e). "It's about wealth preserv ation," he says. "Giv en the global mark et uncertainty elsewhere, Singapor e looks attractive by comparison. They want to put their wealth in assets that will hold their value and they can pass on to the next generation."

Prices in these areas have soared, as there are restrictions in buying such assets, he adds. Of the 8,900 conservation shophouses in Singapore, only 3,000 to 3,500 units are zoned for full commercial use. Foreigners are allowed to buy only such shophouses , notes Monteir o. "Foreign investors and corporate en-

Monteiro: This group of ultra-rich foreign investors are interested in conservation shophouses because to them, it's like... buying a piece of history

View of the CBD and Chinatown shophouses in Singapore, which are sought after by the foreign rich tities are not allowed to buy shophouses zoned for commercial use on the first level and residential use on the upper floors, or those that are zoned for residential use."

More than just a building

Monteiro has been a specialist in marketing conservation shophouses and heritage buildings for more than 20 years. In that time, he has transacted more than $1 billion worth of shophouses. He still remembers his first deal. "It was a conservation shophouse unit at Spottiswoode Park in 1994, and it was sold for $1.6 million."

In 2011, Monteiro sold a pair of adjoining shophouses on Neil Road in Bukit Pasoh to Luca Padulli for $17.5 million. Scion of a prominent Milan family and reportedly one of Britain's richest, Padulli is known to be very private, but is famous for his art collection and real estate investments. He is also a co-founder of Camomile hedge fund and asset management firm.

Padulli had stated that he would finalise the purchase of the shophouses only if the provenance of the buildings on Neil Road were determined and documented by a historian, says Monteiro. That was when he engaged Davison's service to establish the historical origins of the building. According to Davison, the building was once a biscuit factory owned by a once-upon-a-time 'Biscuit King'.

Once the provenance of the buildings on Neil Road was established and the deal was completed, Monteiro engaged Tellus Architects to renovate the buildings before it was tenanted to Goethe-Institut Singapore, the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany, which moved in in March 2014.

The trailblazers that led the way for foreign wealth into Singapore's conservation shophouses included Ed Peter, who bought three shophouses on Duxton Hill in the Tanjong Pagar conservation area 12 years ago. Monteiro had represented him in those purchases. Peter is chairman of Duxton Asset Management, which he co-founded in 2009. Before that, he was head of Deutsche Asset Management in Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa. "Since then, you could see the tide of ultra-rich foreigners snapping up shophouses," says Monteiro.

Soaring prices

As foreigners could buy only shophouses with commercial zoning, Monteiro has seen prices of these shophouses soar over the past 12 years. In 2005, 99-year leasehold shophouses at Duxton Hill ranged from $1.5 million to $1.7 million each. In 2013, the same shophouses were sold for $7 million to $7.2 million apiece, according to URA Realis.

Today, prices of 99-year leasehold two-storey conservation shophouses in the CBD range from $2,000 to $2,500 psf; those that have a 999-year leasehold or freehold tenure are commanding prices of $2,800 to $3,000 psf. Prices of highly sought-after corner units are at least $200 to $300 psf higher estimates Monteiro.

"This group of ultra-rich foreign investors are interested in conservation shophouses because, to them, it's like collecting art — buying a piece of history — and they appreciate the architecture and the story behind it," says Monteiro.

As such, he is collaborating with Davison who — given his knowledge of shophouses in Singapore and his wealth of research — will be instrumental in helping to establish the provenance of these heritage buildings. "With this record of ownership, they can pass it along with the asset to the next generation or the next buyer," says Monteiro. "It's like the provenance for a collector of an expensive piece of art or antique."

Davison agrees. "The second and third generations of owners will appreciate the stories behind it, the characters that were once associated with the property."

Glen Chan, CEO and managing director of Pacific Star Development, with Hussain Sajwani, chairman of DAMAC International

Pacific Star Development teams up with Dubai developer

| BY ANGELA TEO |

Singapore-listed Pacific Star Development has announced that it is teaming up with Dubai developer DAMAC International to jointly develop luxury properties in key Asean cities. Primary markets will be Malaysia and Thailand, followed by Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam. Pacific Star Development and DAMAC International will jointly identify prime locations in key gateway cities.

The partnership will involve the development of not just residential projects, but hospitality and retail projects as well. "We are looking at a broad spectrum of development opportunities that will capitalise on Southeast Asia's rising urbanisation, favourable demographics and increasing tourism," says Glen Chan, CEO and managing director of Pacific Star Development.

Chan is confident in the collaboration as both partners' goals in Southeast Asia are aligned. "We can leverage on each other's strengths to bring innovative, high-end real estate products to new markets in the region," he adds.

DAMAC International is part of DAMAC Group, which has collaborated with global brands such as The Trump Organization, Versace Home, Fendi Casa and Bugatti to deliver signature properties over the past 15 years, according to Pacific Star Development. DAMAC Group has delivered over 19,000 homes in the Middle East, with more than 44,000 units — including 13,000 hospitality units — in the pipeline, according to Pacific Star.

One of DAMAC's key projects that was launched in early 2016 was the AYKON City in Dubai, which is an entire city overlooking Dubai Canal. DAMAC launched a new phase of residential units at the development for sale in April this year. Positioned as a luxurious four-tower development comprising residences, hotel apartments, a hotel and office space, the project sits on a prime site along Sheikh Zayed Road.

Residential units launched in April include studios as well as one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments. Two-bedroom units went for AED1.3 million ($481,630) and above.

While this collaboration with Pacific Star Development marks DAMAC International's maiden foray into Southeast Asia, Pacific Star Development has always been Asean-focused, with projects such as the 562-unit The Address Sathorn Bangkok and the 223-unit Panorama Kuala Lumpur. In Iskandar Malaysia, Pacific Star's freehold Puteri Cove Residences and Quayside mixed-use project comprises two 32-storey condominium blocks, SOHO lofts, Pan Pacific serviced suites and a lifestyle retail centre overlooking a marina managed under the One°15 brand by SUTL Enterprise, a subsidiary of Singapore-based conglomerate SUTL Corp.

Separately, Pacific Star Development inked a memorandum of understanding on Sept 26 with Indonesian developer PT Kukuh Mandiri Lestari to jointly build mixed-use high-rise developments on 10ha of seafront land within the Pantai Indah Kapuk 2 (PIK 2) project, a new city in northern Jakarta. "We envisage PIK 2 to be a landmark international project on the Jakarta Coastline," says Chan.

When new residential units at DAMAC International's Dubai project, AYKON City, were launched in April, two-bedroom units went for AED1.3 million ($481,630) and above

Relic hunter with property on the side

BY CECILIA CHOW |

Simon Monteiro is a real estate broker, but his passion lies in collecting pieces of history: original property deeds, old photographs of buildings, autographed manuscripts and even entire editions of old newspapers dating back to the early 19th century. Not surprisingly, the 48-year-old's hobby complements his profession as a specialist in marketing conservation shophouses.

Both Monteiro and his business partner, Cedric Pinto, are avid collectors. They founded Historical Land eight years ago, establishing it in a three-storey conservation shophouse on Blair Road. It has become a private art gallery and museum, with managing director Pinto's art collection gracing the walls and Monteiro's documents and title deeds displayed in specially made glass cases.

"I even bought some new special racks, like the ones they use at [Aristophil, a museum of letters and manuscripts] in Paris," says Monteiro, who is also director of Historical Land. "I am trying to create a small library. I've collected more than 200 books on Singapore."

He decided to put his collection into a company, and recently co-founded Heritage Trust with Julian Davidson, a renowned historian, academic and author of a series of books such as *Black and White: The Singapore House 1891-1941* and *The Singapore Shophouse*. The collaboration has led to the launch of the Museum of Real Estate Letters & Manuscripts, located in Monteiro's office.

Monteiro: Conservation property is not your typical real estate. You have to be able to appreciate its history.

PICTURES: SAMUEL ISAAC CHUA/THE EDGE SINGAPORE

also currently marketing a row of shophouses at one end of Amoy Street, which he reckons "would make a great hotel".

Boutique hotels

In fact, 2013 saw Monteiro involved in several significant boutique hotel deals located in

prising five adjacent conservation shophouses, the hotel is jointly owned by Singapore Exchange-listed beauty, wellness and spa operator Mary Chia Holdings and Jason Lee Boon Leng, a private investor and businessman who also owns the K-Box karaoke chain and the Suki Group of Restaurants. The hotel is managed

'Colourful life'

Monteiro , who has a 24-year-old son and 20-year-old daughter, says he has had "a very colourful life". Originally from Negeri Sembilan, Monteiro says he has never met his biological parents. "I was one of those unwanted babies who were put in the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus [now CHIJMES]," he says. "But the Monteiro family took me in."

According to Monteiro, his father was a distant cousin of Dr Ernest Steven Monteiro, a famous doctor who became the first ambassador of Singapore to Cambodia (1966 to 1968) and was also an ambassador to the US (1969 to 1976).

Monteiro's grandmother, whose maiden name was Cashin, is said to be a descendant of the famous Joseph William Cashin, an Irish lawyer who moved to Singapore and invested in opium farms and real estate in the late 1800s.

The wealthy Cashin family was one of the oldest to have settled in Singapore. Matilda House was built in 1902 as a weekend resort for the family, and was once a grand single-storey bungalow with six bedrooms, servant's quarters, a tennis court and the beach just 200m away. It was given conservation status by URA and will now get a new lease of life as a condominium

SINCE 1845

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2013

THE COLLECTORS' SERIES

Nicholas Yong

Real estate agent Simon Monteiro is the proverbial bundle of energy as he paces around his tastefully decorated Tanjong Pagar shophouse office.

It is where his collection of about 150 historical documents is stored in showcases and folders. These consist of deeds of indentures, title deeds, letters and entire editions of old newspapers dating back to the 19th century, many of them related to Singapore and the pioneers who founded it.

Mr Monteiro breathlessly rattles off facts and figures related to the collection, which he started almost a decade ago. The father of two reckons he has spent $200,000 on his paper chase, buying them online from dealers in the United States, Britain and Singapore.

"I like to have history in my hands. These documents are primary sources and tell you the real story," says the self-confessed history buff.

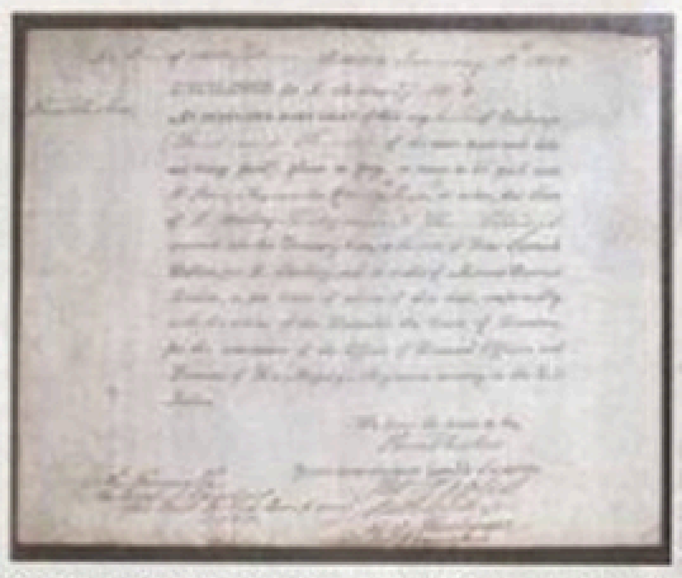
Here, the 46-year-old points to the original documents relating to the 1884 purchase of a plot of land in the Claymore district by lawyer John Burkinshaw, called Mount Burkinshaw. It was later renamed Mount Elizabeth.

In another showcase is what might be called his "road name" collection. It has documents signed by the likes of Dr Thomas Oxley, the last Viceroy of India Louis Mountbatten and former Resident General of the Federated Malay States Frank Swettenham – public figures who have had roads here named after them.

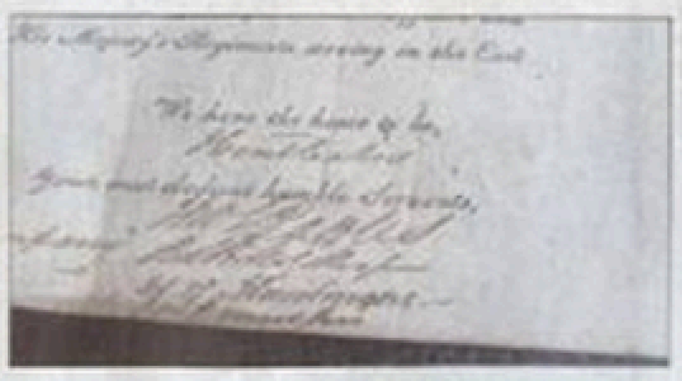
He recalls: "Since I'm a real estate agent, I thought, why not focus on the history of land in Singapore? So I went for recognisable road names here."

Mr Monteiro, who is fascinated by old-fashioned handwriting, also owns letters by other historical figures such as former US president Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Moses Taylor, one-time richest man in New York.

But the prized item is an 1813 letter signed by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles himself, written when he was governor of Java. It is addressed to the family of a deceased East India Company employee.



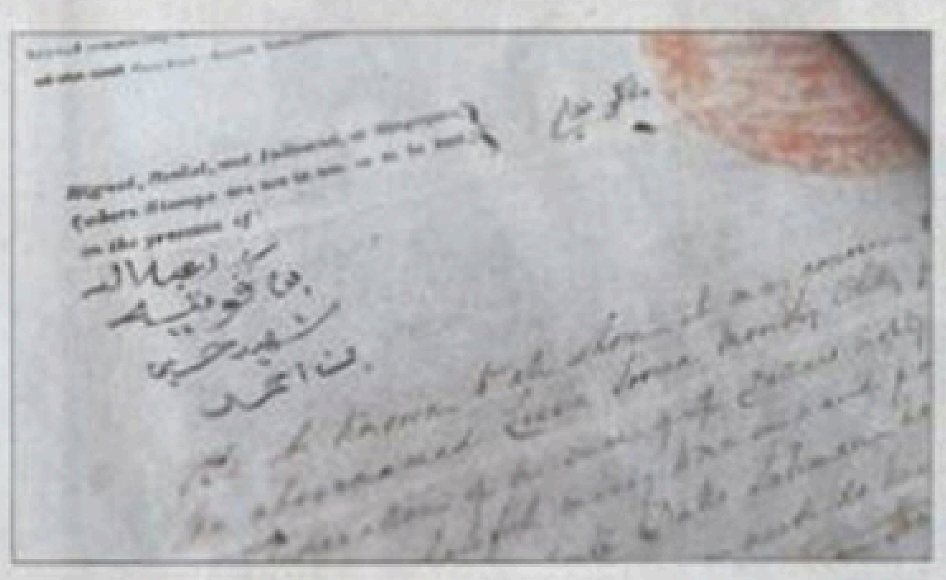
Costing $10,000, this 1813 letter (above and below) was written by Singapore founder Thomas Stamford Raffles, when he was governor of Java.
ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN



This was one of my Striats Times article. For 11 Years I was hunting round the world for interesting Singapore Letters & Indentures. Last year decided to sell all to Santinder Garcha for his display at the hotel - Six Senses Murray

Thrill of an old paper chase

Collector Simon Monteiro has forked out about $200,000 on old documents related to Singapore



This is an 1845 indenture (left) pertaining to land sold by Sultan Iskandar Shah in Singapore's Kampong Glam. It was Sultan Iskandar's father Sultan Hussein who ceded the island to the British.

"This is a military letter written in his capacity as a commander and I was very happy to get it. I find people who held positions of power very interesting, partly because of my military background," says the former Air Force regular.

He admits ruefully that neither his two adult children nor his wife Kim Cheng, 47, share his passion: "She doesn't encourage me because it's a very expen-

company specialising in historical properties. His love of old documents is such that he even invites anyone interested in viewing the collection to contact him via www.historicalland.com.

His passion for the subject was first fired up when he stumbled upon an old deed of indenture from 1887 for a plot of land in Toa Payoh while shopping around in Sungei Road, often a treasure trove of

and at the Singapore Land Authority. He has also given out his name card to shops in Sungei Road, asking shopowners to contact him if they come across any suitable documents.

To ensure the authenticity of the documents, he usually buys from reputable dealers. He also examines features such as the stamp, watermark and signature. And, thanks to his research, he is able to compare the documents with photocopies in the land authority's archives.

He says: "Sometimes, you have to take

famous names like Da Vinci."

Nevertheless, he did get scammed once. "I bought a Straits Settlements directive in Jonker Street in Malacca for $250. But when I got home, I realised that the guy who was supposed to have signed it was already dead by that time."

He also sees his collection as a "retirement investment". "In five to 10 years' time, I will sell off the collection and start a new one. My next focus will be documents from China."

nicy@sph.com.sg

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WARREN BUFFETT

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