

Pre-war hostel has been restored and is now a medical school campus

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Once home to medical students and nurses, the former Straits Settlements Mandalay Road Hostel has been given a new lease of life.

Nestled between Tan Tock Seng Hospital and the Communicable Disease Centre, the three-storey building off Moulmein Road, which was gazetted for conservation last year, has been restored after 15 months.

Now known as the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine Headquarters, it is one of the two campuses that the new medical school uses.

The school, which welcomed its pioneer batch of 54 students last year, is a partnership between Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Imperial College London. Students shuttle between NTU's campus in Boon Lay and the Mandalay Road site for lessons.

Mr Chan Wei Chuen, senior director of corporate services for the school, says of the 90-year-old building: "Its history has always been medical-related. The building looks old from the outside, but there are amenities put in so new batches of students can enjoy the premises."

Built in 1924, the pre-war building was home to senior medical students. When the Japanese invaded Singapore in 1942, the medical school was closed for the duration of the war and the hostel was used for nursing staff from Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Two years after the war ended in 1945, the building was used again by local medical students as a hostel, after the school reopened. But as the hospital grew in capacity, the hostel was converted into nurses' quarters in 1955.

The building, which was surrounded by green, open spaces and a multi-functional single-storey annexe, was used for staff recreational activities for the next 30 years. As Tan Tock Seng Hospital underwent restructuring in 1992, the nurses' hostel was closed and converted into an interim nursing administration and human resource office from 1995.

From 1999, it stood unoccupied until conservation work started 12 years later to restore it for the new medical school.

Mr Chan says: "It was in a dilapidated state when we got it. Some parts of the ceiling were gone and the roof was leaking. It wasn't a building that you would want to step into and have lessons."

Home-grown architecture firm Look Architects preserved and restored 19 key



In the pink again

architectural features in the Palladian building. The architecture, such as the plain exterior, symmetrical layout and square Roman columns, is a European style inspired by the works of Venetian architect Andrea Palladio.

The restoration and rebuilding works included replacing the metal roof with Marseille red clay tiles. To give them an aged look, they were spray-painted lightly in black.

The Newel posts – supporting pillars of staircases – were polished, while the window lattices were fitted with glass so the building could be air-conditioned. It used to be naturally ventilated, with the slats angled downwards to keep out rain and direct sunlight.

Termite-infested wood lattices were also replaced and their design replicated.

The biggest change was to the annexe.

It was torn down and rebuilt into a three-storey building linked to the main headquarters. The annexe, with a distinctive glass facade, was named after philanthropist Toh Kian Chui, a businessman who owned a road construction com-



Glass panes (above) help to keep in the air-conditioning of the building, which is linked to a new annexe (top). ST PHOTOS: MATTHIAS HO

pany. It has a 188-seat auditorium, a 66-seat seminar room, a boardroom and a medical library.

Mr Chan says: "The mirrored glass was chosen because the reflection shows off the old building. In a way, you notice the older building in the day but once the sun sets, the new annexe glows like a lantern because of the lights inside."

The headquarters and annexe are the first buildings to be completed for the school's Novena campus.

In 2016, a 20-storey Clinical Sciences Building, designed by local firm DP Architects, will come up next to these buildings. It will house more facilities for the students. A notable feature of the building, which will have research laboratories and clinical skills facilities, is a three-storey-high lobby. It was designed such that visitors at its drop-off point will be able to see the conserved headquarters and annexe.

Mr Chan says: "We hope to create an open campus where the community can use the spaces and enjoy the buildings while the doctors can practise within."

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Restoration works included retaining and polishing the Newel posts (above), the supporting pillars of staircases. Recreational amenities (right) as well as a library and a 188-seat auditorium have been added to the new campus.

