Golden Mile Complex to feature architecture centre after upgrading is completed in Q3 2029

Tags: Golden Mile Complex | Commercial & Retail | Kallang

An artist's impression of The Golden Mile (left) with CO Jiemedia and The Oil Drama Factory (front) | PHOTO: ROBINSON, HOLDINGS AND ONE LUCY ORGANISATION

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SINGAPORE – When Golden Mile Complex reopens to the public after its refurbishment is completed in late 2029, visitors can expect to experience familiar "character-defining elements", such as its curved facade and its signature ramps.

Keeping the architecture is one of the reasons behind the decision to build a new art centre and residential tower in complement the conserved complex, which has been renamed The Golden Mile, and its owners and architects working on the project.

On Dec 20, Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization – the lead developers of a consortium that bought The Golden Mile Complex for $1.08 billion in May 2019 – and the chief executive of the launch of its offices and retail spaces for sale later in the month.

Golden Mile Complex is the first large-scale strata-titled building to be conserved in Singapore.

Re-conserved in 2013 under URA's package of incentives to encourage developers to support the commercial viability of reusing it following a collective sale.

The project has been closely watched by built environment professionals as a test case for how large, landmark buildings can be conserved, rejuvenated and potentially developed upon in a manner that is economically viable.

One such landmark decision was how green area relating to an one-third increase over the site's original development intensity, which the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) previously said would be used on a new residential tower being built alongside the complex.

Instead, the developers decided to purchase some adjoining state land to create a more regular site boundary for the tower.

In August, the URA gave the developers permission to build a 45-storey tower named Aurea – 15 more storeys than what the authority initially cited – and approved to sell four storeys to the conserved complex.

Aurea and The Golden Mile will be part of a mixed-use development known as Golden Mile Singapore, with hawker and residential units set to be launched for sale in the first quarter of 2023.

Golden Mile Complex's swimming pool (left) will make way for Aurea, a 45-storey residential tower. PHOTO: ST FILE

Explaining Aurea's height in an interview with The Straits Times, Far East Organization property services executive director Wan Hwee pointed to a confluence of several factors.

First, the developers purchased less state land than what was offered by the URA.

Without disturbing details, Mr Wan said the land bought was "just what was needed to come up with a good development, and a good form and massing for architecture".

Second, the developers had to maintain a setback to make an architecture centre in the conserved complex "visible from the Singapore River", which Aurea does not block under the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Urban Corridors Planning Guidelines.

Third, retaining the complex's open-air/semi-outdoor atmosphere could curb human gross floor area in either parts of the project, said Mr Seah Chee Huang, chief executive of DP Architects – the firm working on Golden Mile Singapore.

An artist's impression of The Golden Mile's retail atrium, which developers and architects describe as a safe haven for... PHOTO: ROBINSON, HOLDINGS AND ONE LUCY ORGANISATION

Based on the URA's guidelines and projections, bonus gross floor area could have been added to the conserved complex to make it "economically viable for use", or adding floors to the atrium at the retail area in the complex's lower storeys, Mr Seah said.

But doing so would have affected the atrium, which, he said, as an "character-defining" spatial element of the building that previous users cherish.

Mr Ng Weng Hoe – founding partner of architectural conservation consultancy Studio Lapis, which is not involved in the project – said that the conservation of Golden Mile Complex's "internal streets, which are indeed, will allow them to be naturally ventilated and lit ... something Golden Mile Complex's architects had intended.

While mega-structures similar to the complex originated in temperate areas such as Britain and Japan, Golden Mile Complex – a "tropical megastructure" – was designed with the local climate in mind, and its open-air/semi-outdoor atmosphere could be naturally ventilated when, which is suitable for hot and humid Singapore, said Mr Ng.

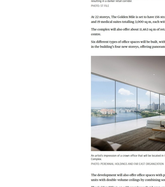
Allowing an and light into the atrium will restore the atmosphere of a traditional commercial street in the retail area, he added.

The retail atrium will not have issues to be naturally ventilated and lit, was created at some point in the buildings history, according to conservation architects. PHOTO: ST FILE

At 15 storeys, The Golden Mile is set to have 116 strata-titled office units across about 153,600 sq m and 19 medical suites totalling 2,900 sq m, each with an en-suite toilet.

The complex will also offer about 21,461 sq m of retail space, and have a 2,322 sq m architecture centre.

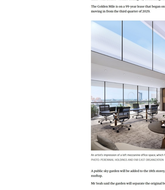
Its different types of office spaces will be built, with some, such as the corner offices, to be housed in the building's four new towers, offering panoramic views of the Kallang Basin.



An artist's impression of a corner office that will be located in the four-storey addition to the conserved Golden Mile Complex. PHOTO: ROBINSON, HOLDINGS AND ONE LUCY ORGANISATION

The development will also offer office spaces with private lift lobbies and full-succession office units with double-volume ceilings by combining some of the complex's former residential units.

The Golden Mile is on a 99-year lease that began on Nov 16, and its tenants are slated to start moving in from the third quarter of 2029.



An artist's impression of a loft-succession office space, which has double-volume ceiling, in The Golden Mile. PHOTO: ROBINSON, HOLDINGS AND ONE LUCY ORGANISATION

A public sky garden will be added to the 18th storey, which was previously the conserved complex's rooftop.

Mr Seah said the garden will express the original building and the additional four storeys.

The Golden Mile's 18th storey sky terrace, which will have views of the Kallang Basin and city. PHOTO: ROBINSON, HOLDINGS AND ONE LUCY ORGANISATION

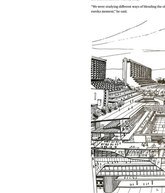
DP Architects decided to it "create something that is clearly 'new' versus old' rather than augment Golden Mile Complex in a way that makes it unrecognisable to the public" he said.

The design of the additional four storeys was inspired by a sketch by the Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group (Spurg), he added.

Spurg was an urban planning think-tank active in the 1960s and 1970s, and counted pioneer architects William Lim, Tay Kheng Soon and Koh Seow Chuan among its members. The three co-founded Design Partnership, which is today DP Architects, and were part of the design teams for Golden Mile Complex and Pan Pacific Singapore.

The new sketch, which shows a series of angle-density megastructures that resemble Golden Mile Complex in form, decorates a wall in DP Architects' office on Marina Square – one that Mr Seah said the firm's architects walk by daily.

"We were studying different ways of blending the old and the new, and when we saw it, it was a eureka moment," he said.



A sketch published by the Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group in the 1970s, which inspired the team working on Golden Mile Complex's redevelopment. PHOTO: DP ARCHITECTS

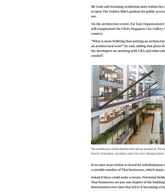
The buildings' iconic ramps flank, which was formerly used by residents as a recreational space, will be turned into a publicly accessible sky terrace.

The conserved buildings' north-east flank, which will be turned into a publicly accessible sky terrace. ST FILE PHOTO

Mr Seah said retaining residential units within the conserved complex will mean each one is about the same The Golden Mile's gardens for public access, as those would have to be kept for residents' use.

On the architecture centre, Far East Organization's Mr Beey said the developers envision that it will complement the URA's Singapore City Gallery, which showcases urban planning in the country.

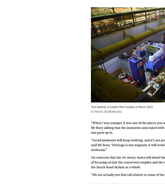
"What is a better befitting than putting an architecture centre within a conserved building that is also an architectural icon?" he said, adding that plans for the centre are still in their infancy, and that the developers are working with URA and other authorities "to conceive how the centre should be created".



The architecture centre (bottom left) will be located at The Golden Mile's first look, facing the complex's open atrium PHOTO: ROBINSON, HOLDINGS AND ONE LUCY ORGANISATION

In its later years before it closed for refurbishment in May 2013, Golden Mile Complex had housed a sizeable number of Thai businesses, which many came to associate with the building.

Asked if these could make a return, Perennial Holdings chief executive Tha Seok Guan said the Thai businesses are just one chapter of the building's history, adding that it was the building's determination over time that led to it becoming a key destination for Thai and a Thai enclave.



Karaoke at Golden Mile Complex in March 2009. ST PHOTO: ZK GOH MIC

"What I can assure is that one of the places you would visit to watch a movie," said Mr Tha, with Mr Beey adding that the amenities associated with the building's proposed co-rental hour period can grow up too.

"Social enterprises will keep evolving, and it's not possible to freeze-time and go back to something," said Mr Beey. "Heritage is not a museum, it will evolve over time, as it also was on the day it was completed."

On concerns that the 45-storey Aurea will dwarf the conserved complex, Mr Beey said that instead of focusing on just the conserved complex and the residential tower, more would be done to activate the Beach Road skyline as a whole.

"We are actually not that inclined to raise of the buildings along the road," he said of Aurea.

Golden Mile Complex (right) was amongst many buildings such as Golden Mile Tower (left) and City Gate (rear). PHOTO: ST FILE

Mr Beey added that Aurea will have three sky parks, with one matching the height of the Golden Mile Complex's podium and another at the height of the conserved complex's interior roof – where the level 18 garden will be built – to create symmetry between the two buildings.

Reflecting on their experiences of purchasing and planning for the redevelopment of Singapore's first large- scale, strata-titled building to be conserved, Mr Beey and Mr Tha said the journey has been challenging but rewarding.

Mr Tha said it took about two years for the developers to get approval for their plans after purchasing the complex, and that they had to engage "many, many stakeholders" in accompanies with the authorities before the final design parameters were agreed upon.

He noted that it was not easy to meet conservation guidelines, which have added extra scrutiny on plans for Golden Mile Singapore.

"The two years are peanuts in terms of cents, with high interest rates," said Mr Beey, who added that the developers had to consider the fact that they had committed to $1.08 billion on Hong Leong, but also deal with policy changes such as property cooling measures.

PHOTO: ROBINSON, HOLDINGS AND ONE LUCY ORGANISATION

Moving forward, it will require developers who are passionate about conservation work to take on the intricacies of initial projects, and that they can be capital and renovation costs, Mr Tha said.

These costs could be higher than those of developing a new building, he said, adding that the cost of addition and alterations works to Golden Mile Complex is more than double that of a recent refurbishment of its basement – the former PCD building.

Golden Mile Complex was bought by Perennial in 2019, had cost about $140 million. Perennial has since fully sold its stake in the property.

"By retaining the Golden Mile Complex's shaping facade and structure, and reintending key office and retail uses, I think it's a big achievement," said Mr Tha. "It will bring life to Beach Road, and in the future even help to redefine the Kampong Glam precinct."

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