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Refurbished Golden Mile Complex to feature architecture centre

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When Golden Mile Complex re-opens to the public after its refurbishment is completed in late 2029, visitors can expect to experience familiar "character-defining elements" like the building's large atriums once again.

Keeping the atriums is one of the reasons behind the decision to build a new 45-storey residential tower to complement the conserved complex, which has been renamed The Golden Mile, said its owners and architects working on the project.

On Dec 10, Far East Organization and Perennial Holdings - the lead developers of a consortium that bought the building in 2022 - unveiled their plans for The Golden Mile, ahead of the launch of its offices and medical suites for sale later in the month.

Golden Mile Complex is the first large-scale strata-titled building to be conserved in Singapore. Its conservation in 2021 came with a package of incentives unique to the complex, 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, modernist buildings can be conserved, rejuvenated, and potentially developed upon in a sensitive and profitable manner.

One notable incentive was bonus gross floor area resulting in a one-third increase over the site's original development intensity, which the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) previously said could lead to a 30-storey residential tower being built alongside the complex.

The consortium was also allowed 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 had initially cited - and approval to add 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 Aurea's 188 residential units set to be launched for sale in the first quarter of 2025.



Explaining Aurea's height in an interview with The Straits Times, Far East Organization executive director of property services Marc Boey said it is a confluence of several factors.

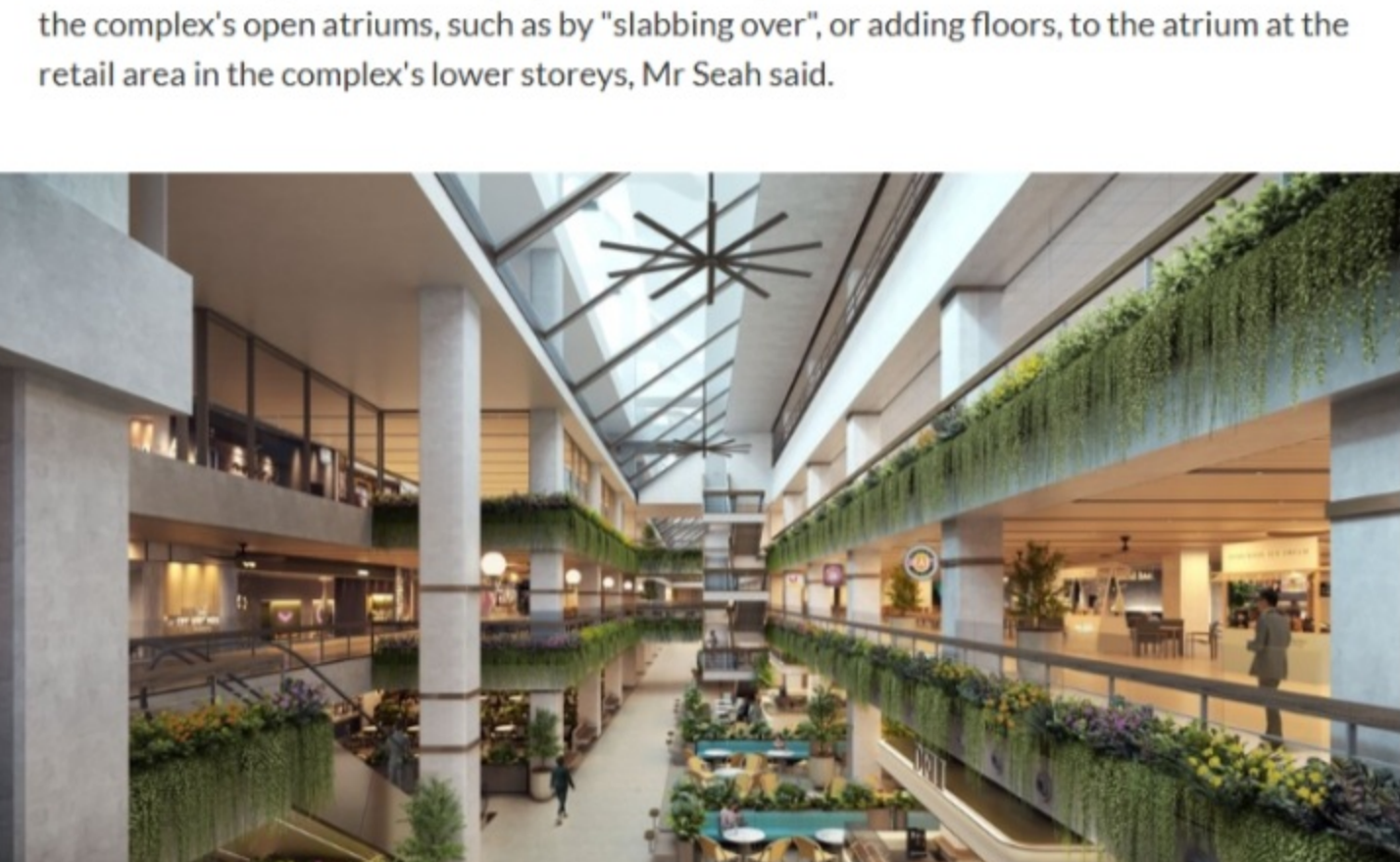
First, the developers purchased less state land than what was offered by URA. Without disclosing the details, Mr Boey said the land bought was "just what was needed to come up with a good development, and a good form and massing for architecture".

Second, Mr Boey said the developers decided to include an architecture centre in the conserved complex, which Golden Mile Singapore received additional bonus gross floor area for, under the URA's Community/Sports Facilities Scheme.



Third, retaining the complex's open atriums meant that the developers could shift bonus gross floor area to other parts of the project, said Mr Seah Chee Huang, chief executive of DP Architects - the firm working on Golden Mile Singapore.

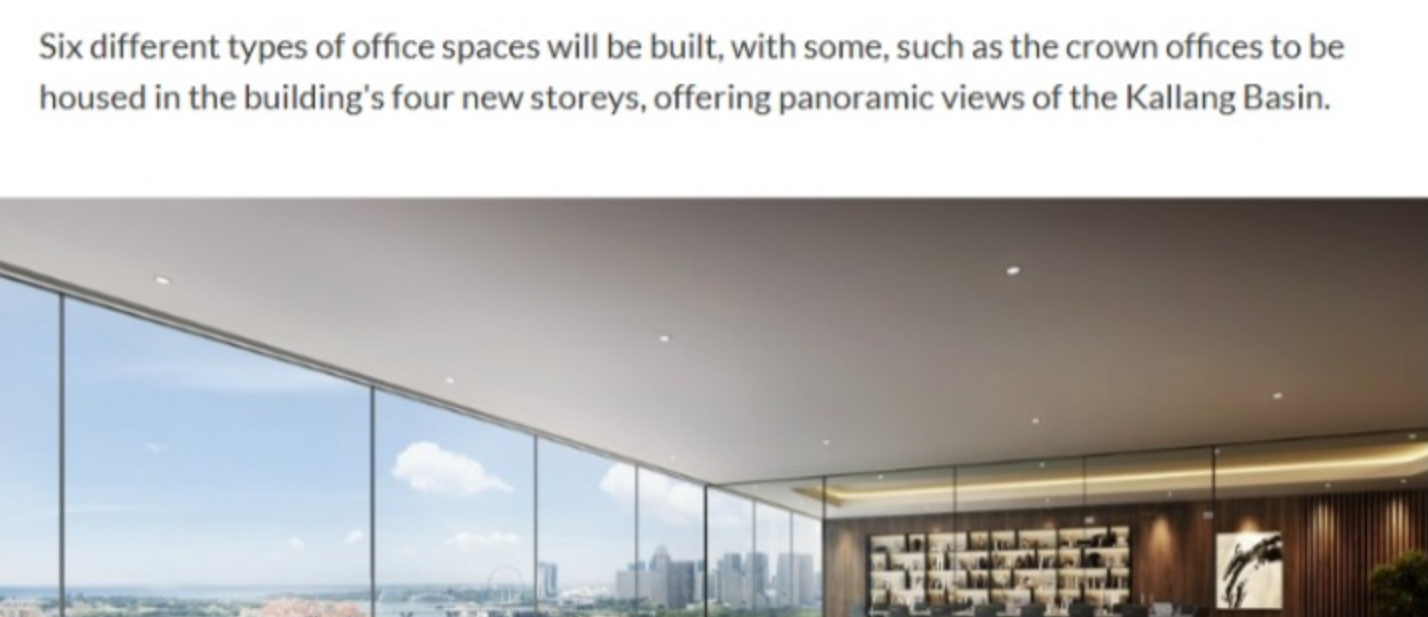
Based on URA's guidelines and projections, bonus gross floor area could have been added to the complex's open atriums, such as by "slabbing over", or adding floors, to the atrium at the retail area in the complex's lower storeys, Mr Seah said.



But doing so would have affected the atriums, which he said are "character-defining" spatial elements of the building that previous users cherish.

At 22 storeys, The Golden Mile is set to have 156 strata-titled office units across about 37,600 sq m and 19 medical suites totalling 3,000 sq m - each with an ensuite toilet. The complex will also offer about 11,463 sq m of retail space, and have a 2,322 sq m architecture centre.

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



The development will also offer office spaces with private lift lobbies, and loft mezzanine 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 18, and its tenants are slated to start moving in from the third quarter of 2029.

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

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



DP Architects decided to "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.

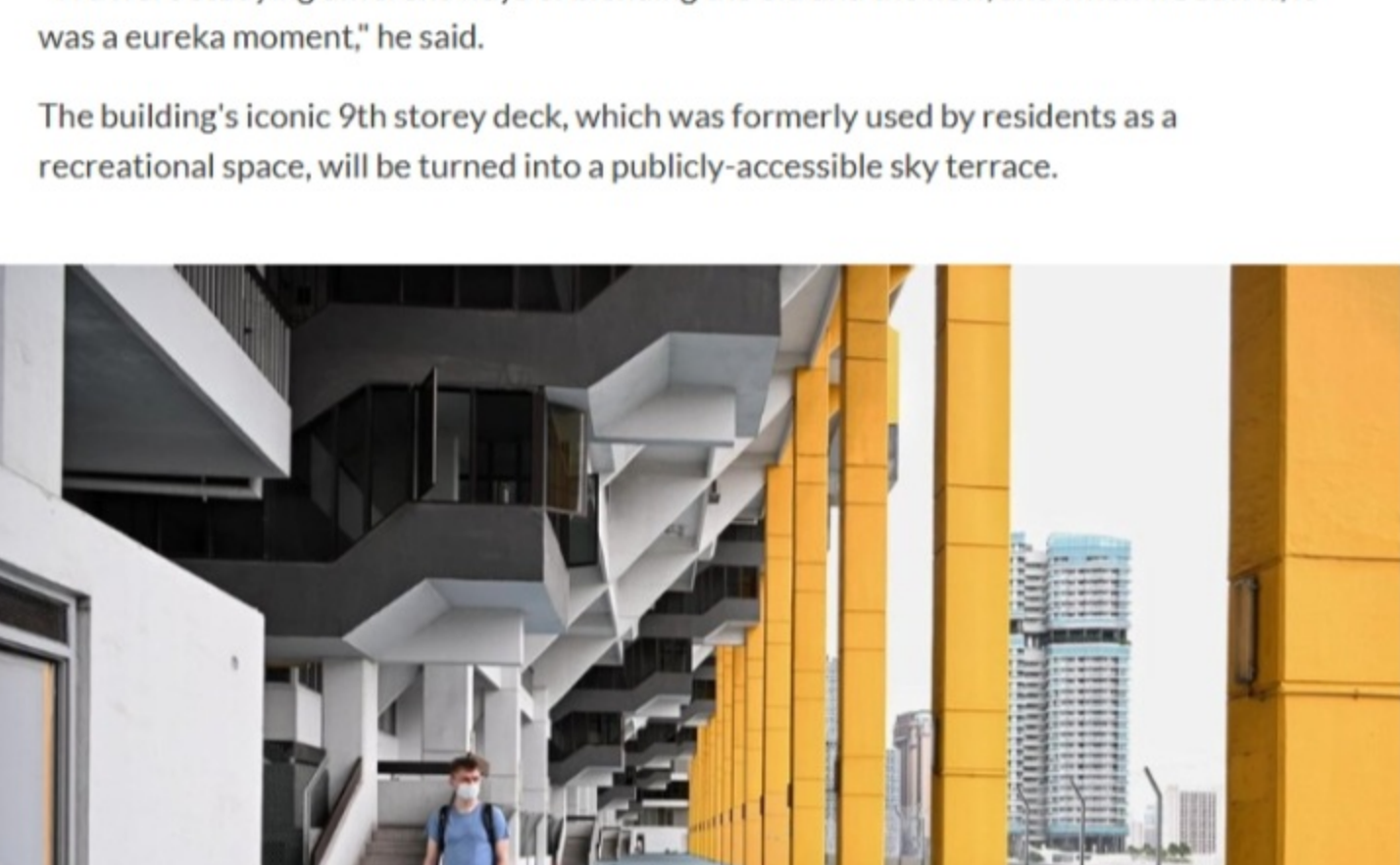
The design of the additional four storeys was inspired by a sketch by the Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group (Spur), he added.

Spur 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 trio co-founded Design Partnership, which is today DP Architects, and were part of the design team for Golden Mile Complex, which was completed in 1973.

The Spur sketch, which shows a series of high-density megastructures that resemble Golden Mile Complex in form, decorates a wall in DP Architects' office in 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.

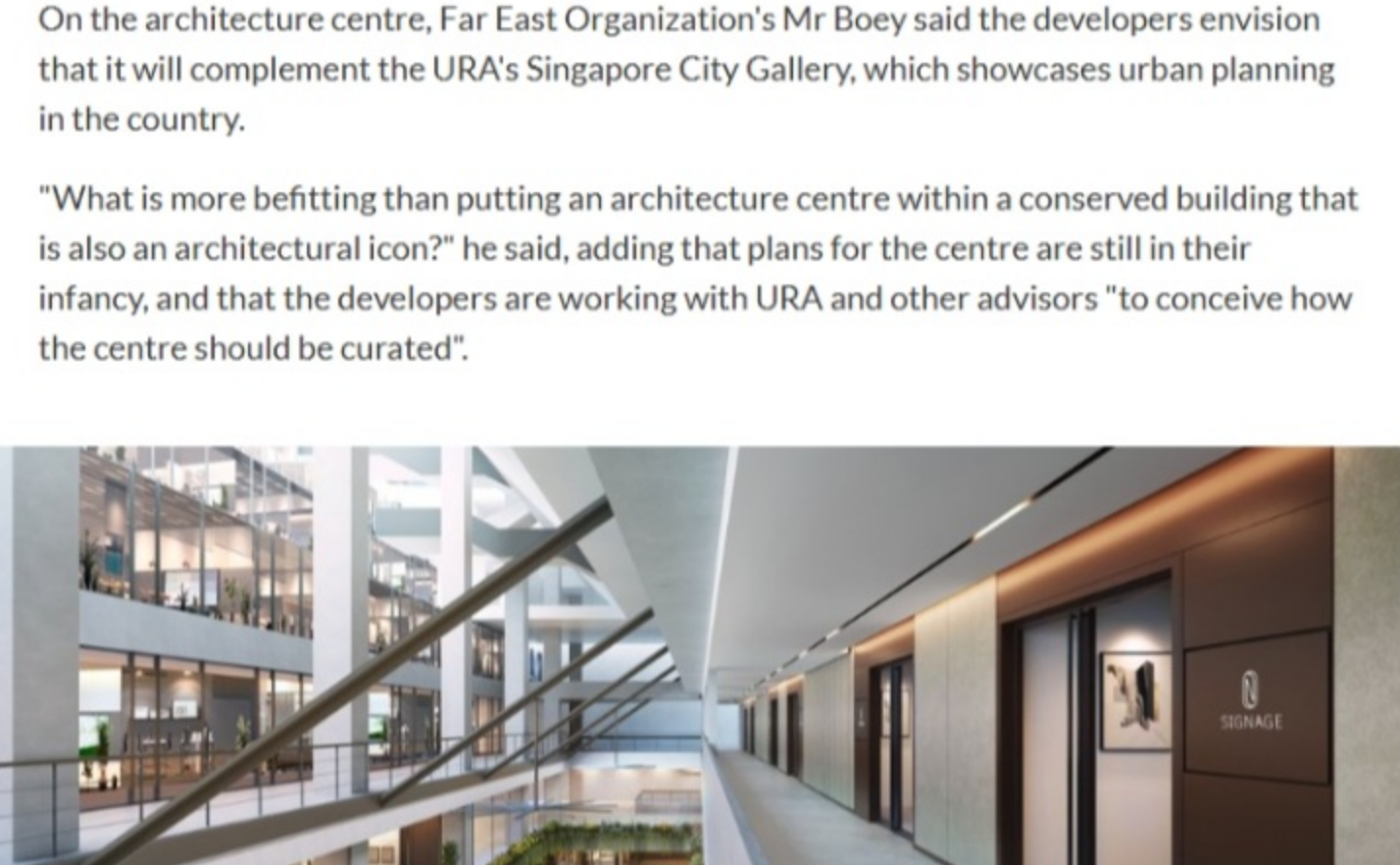
The building's iconic 9th storey deck, which was formerly used by residents as a recreational space, will be turned into a publicly-accessible sky terrace.



Mr Seah said retaining residential units within the conserved complex would have made it difficult to open The Golden Mile's gardens for public access, as these would have to be kept for residents' use.

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

"What is more 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 advisors "to conceive how the centre should be curated".



In its latter years before Golden Mile Complex closed for refurbishment in May 2023, 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 Pua Seck Guan said the Thai businesses are just one chapter of the building's history, adding that there were multiple rounds of negotiations with the authorities before the final design parameters were agreed upon.

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

Moving forward, it will take developers who are passionate about renovation work to take on the intricacies of similar projects, as well as bear its significant renovation costs, Mr Pua said. These costs could be higher than developing a new building, he added.

"By retaining the building's sloping facade and structure, and reintroducing office and retail uses, I think it's a big achievement," said Mr Pua. "It will bring life to Beach Road, and in the future even help to enliven the Kampong Glam precinct."



"When I was younger, it was one of the places you would visit to watch a movie," said Mr Pua, with Mr Boey adding that memories associated with the building depends on which time period one grew up in.

"Social memories will keep evolving, and it's not possible to freeze time and go back to something," said Mr Boey. "Heritage is not stagnant, it will evolve over time or it may run the risk of becoming irrelevant."

On concerns that the 45-storey Aurea will dwarf the conserved complex, Mr Boey said that instead of focusing on just the conserved complex and the residential tower, most would instead observe the Beach Road skyline as a whole.

"We are actually not that tall relative to some of the buildings along the road," he said of Aurea.



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

Mr Pua said it took about two years for the developers to get approval for their plan after purchasing Golden Mile Complex in 2022, adding that there were multiple rounds of negotiations with the authorities before the final design parameters were agreed upon.

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Ng Keng Gene for The Straits Times

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