

neighbOURhoods

**WE** ♥  
**TIONG  
BAHRU**

Urban Sketchers Singapore



**WE**   
**TIONG**  
**BAHRU**

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## The Beauty of Tiong Bahru

My first memory of Tiong Bahru is rooted in 1997, when I enrolled in Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Business. The faculty occupied a vacated secondary school building along Lower Delta Road—it is now the Tiong Bahru Examinations Centre—while an integrated campus was being built in Yio Chu Kang. I spent two years exploring accountancy... and the neighbourhood.

Fast-forward to the present day. I have returned to the estate, this time as the owner of an independent bookstore on Yong Siak Street. Tiong Bahru has seen many changes in the past few years. From the sleepy district that I remember, it has assumed a stylish persona as new shops and residences have sprung up, replacing some of the older ones, even as some other areas have been assigned conservation status. More young families are moving in and calling this place home. The current atmosphere suggests to me what the early days here must have been like, when the estate was newly built in the 1930s and our country was inching towards independence.

*We Love Tiong Bahru* is timely as it comes at a juncture of transitions. The lovely drawings in this book not only 'archive' the current views of the neighbourhood but they also remind us to do our part in ensuring that the beauty of Tiong Bahru continues to exist for generations to come.

**Kenny Leck**  
Owner, BooksActually



"The 'lor' (sauce) is very tasty and they give lots of crispy crunchy stuff, which is sublime when the noodles have a few minutes to soak up the gravy. I also really like their crispy meat fritters, very 'pang' (savoury). This is how lor mee should be like: crispy fried stuff drowned in a gooey, tasty 'lor'."

- Dr Leslie Tay, author, *Only the Best! The I Eat-I Shoot- I Post Guide To Singapore's Shiokest Hawker Food*



"I really like the texture of this chwee kueh. It is soft to the bite and you can eat it even if you remove both upper and lower dentures. (No, I don't wear dentures!) The texture sets it apart from all the other chwee kuehs I have eaten. It's no wonder as they still mill their own rice to make the rice flour for the chwee kueh."

- Dr Leslie Tay





"Our name was conceived from the days of bazaar bookselling at NUS. We'd display books across two or three tables, but students would sometimes come up to ask what we were selling. We'd always deadpan, 'Books, actually!'"

- Kenny Leck, owner, BooksActually

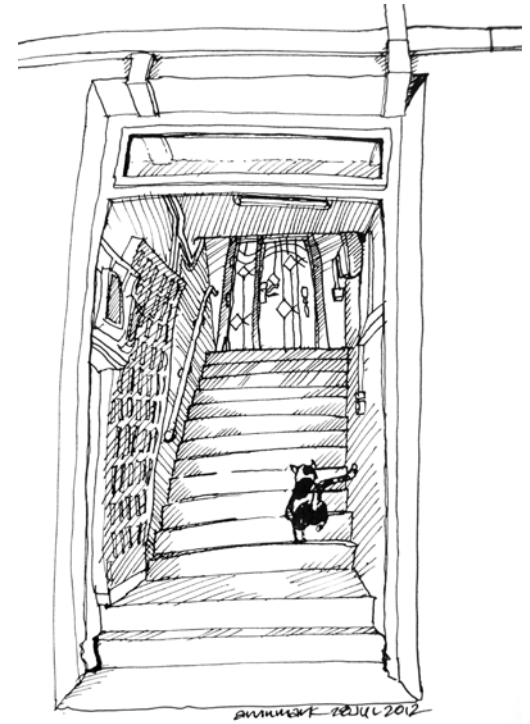




"Forty Hands serves excellent coffee and some of the best cappuccinos in Singapore. It's why we make the trip to Tiong Bahru."

- Jan Uhde and Yvonne Ng Uhde, authors of  
*Latent Images: Film in Singapore*





"I lived in Block 78 for 12 years. Two afternoons a week, my foreign students came for their Chinese lesson. The one-hour sessions frequently led to further discussions over afternoon tea amidst the tranquillity of the neighbourhood. In the late evening, I'd walk to the little Seng Poh Garden for my daily Taiji practice. Strolling back afterwards, I'd often see that happy old lady at the car park, feeding the stray cats. When I got home, I'd remind my two cats how lucky they were. While the ginger cat would simply ignore me, my black cat always replied, 'Meow.'"

- Nicholas Ang, Taiji and Chinese-language teacher



"As a small boy, I lived in a walk-up apartment behind this old post office. Among other childhood activities, I loved going to the nearby community centre on Chinese festive occasions, as they'd have open-air TV screenings of Chinese legends, like Nezha or Monkey God."

- Zhixuan, designer

old mailboxes beside Tiong Bahru Post Office

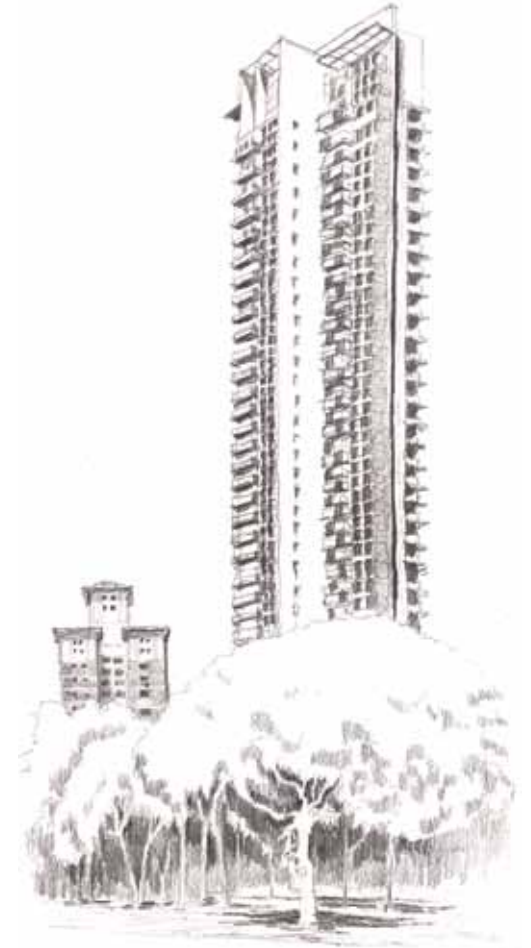


I like to call this one  
"the Devil's mailbox"



"I chose to sketch the Regency Suites because I used to visit friends who lived there. I like the contrast with the smaller building on the left and the lush greenery in front."

- Rafael Bernar, oil trader



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TIONG BAHRU) NEAR MARKET  
WENT THERE WANTED TO HAVE COFFEE  
BUT THE AMERICANO STALE, I HAD JUST  
GIVE COFFEE TO DRINK THIS STREET  
BUT I HAD A GREAT TIME.

## About the series

*Our Neighbourhoods* is a series of sketchbooks dedicated to neighbourhoods in Singapore. Each book features drawings from the group of artists called Urban Sketchers Singapore, coupled with the recollections of people who live or work in the community. The books are unique in capturing a 'time capsule' of the place. *We Love Tiong Bahru* is the second book in the series. The first, *We Love Toa Payoh*, was published in 2012. Look for forthcoming titles on [www.epigrambooks.sg](http://www.epigrambooks.sg).

## About Urban Sketchers Singapore

Urban Sketchers Singapore is an informal group of artists who draw the places they visit, capturing what they see from direct observation on location. See [urbansketchers-singapore.blogspot.sg](http://urbansketchers-singapore.blogspot.sg) for more details of their sketching sojourns.



Tiong Bahru is Singapore's first public housing estate. Built in the 1930s by the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), the original 784 flats, 54 tenements and 33 shops housed over 6,000 people. Its name is uniquely Singaporean— 'tong' is Hokkien for cemetery and 'bahru' is Malay for 'new'—a reference to the presence of a burial ground in the area before the SIT development.

The neighbourhood was known as a 'den of beauties' in its early years, reputedly because the rich housed their mistresses here. Some of the old remains: the characteristic balconies and staircases of the buildings; its neighbourly spirit; its smallness, which means everything is within walking distance. The return of trendy eateries and modish lifestyle stores has also restored somewhat the allure of its early glamour years.



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