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a glimpse into Singapore's 1970s - '80s private apartments

Golden Mile Complex, People's Park Complex, Peach Garden,
Pandan Valley, Hillcrest Arcadia, Bedok Court, Palisades, Mandarin Gardens,
The Colonnade, Pepys Hill Condominium

Samantha Chia | Finbarr Fallon

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Foreword

This book seeks to answer the question of what it means to be *at home* in private high-rises built in immediate post-independence Singapore. It comprises photographs and in-depth interviews with residents of ten apartments from ten developments built from 1970s to 1980s: Golden Mile Complex, People's Park Complex, Peach Garden, Pandan Valley, Hillcrest Arcadia, Bedok Court, Palisades, Mandarin Gardens, The Colonnade, and Pepys Hill Condominium.

These apartments embody an era of transition. At the time, Singapore, a fledgling nation grappling with land scarcity, was seeking to shift its population away from landed and low-rise living into high-density housing. Private housing developments faced a significantly more acute challenge than public housing developments. Generally seeking to attract the middle and upper classes, they needed to address why more affluent homeowners would want to trade the exclusivity of living in landed property to living in proximity with strangers.

For many of us living in Singapore today, the apartment is perhaps the architectural typology that we are most familiar with. But the architects designing these private residential apartments in the 1970s and '80s had to grapple with questions that were new to the industry at the time. What should an attractive, high-rise, high-density development look like? How should its design respond to our local context, be it our climate or culture? And perhaps more esoterically, how would they reflect Singapore's ambitions as a modern nation and chart the path for generations of high-rise residences to come?

These private high-rises represent a key, but often overlooked feature of Singapore's development history, and whilst many of them have been photographed from the outside, we rarely get a glimpse of what the interiors, and living in them, is actually like. The time spent at home during the recent COVID-19 pandemic has only reinforced how much our apartment interiors set the stage for our everyday lives.

Through interviews held between end-2020 to 2022 with the residents of these ten apartments, the book offers a glimpse into the stories that play out behind the building facades, and documents how these spaces continue to function as the home today, some forty to fifty years after they were built.

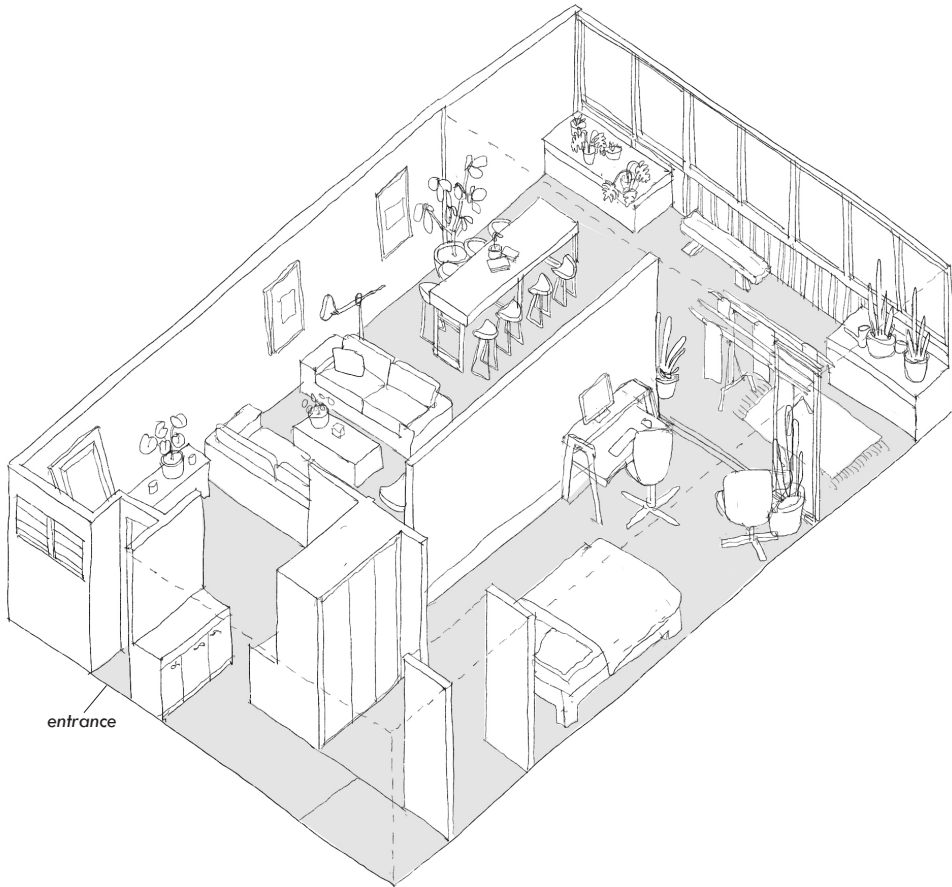


Golden Mile Complex

Completed: 1973; Architect: Design Partnership (now DP Architects);
Developer: Singapura Development Pte Ltd



Will & Fei



In 1967, the government embarked on its first land sales programme to garner private developers' participation in redeveloping the city centre. Golden Mile Complex was one of the 14 sites that were launched, and was originally envisioned by the government as four tower blocks of "luxury apartments". The site was eventually developed into the mixed-use complex that we see today. Responding to its proximity to the sea, it was Singapore's first building to utilise a stepped terrace design. This design strategy results in panoramic views for the offices and apartments housed within the terrace block, and cleverly utilises the floors above to shield the floors below from the afternoon sun.



Will and Fei's apartment is one of firsts. It's their first home, their first collection of furniture. Before this, the entrepreneurial couple (they currently run a company specialising in education) had always been on the move – from Sydney to Singapore, to Shanghai, then Dubai whilst travelling full time, and Singapore again. They've just returned after getting married in Sydney. "So you're essentially taking our wedding photo," Will jokes as we photograph the couple for this interview.

How did you come to live in Golden Mile Complex?

W: We moved here two and a half years ago. We missed the space that we had in Sydney. When we moved here, we told ourselves: we don't need the condo swimming pool, we don't need the bells and whistles, what we want is the space. We were really lucky that we had it when the pandemic hit.

F: We first moved to Singapore in 2014. We were here for almost three years, moved away for a while (to Shanghai then Dubai), and came back in 2019, just before the pandemic. We were definitely sold on the view though. We had been looking for a place for almost two months before we came here, and had developed a benchmark for what we were looking for. The moment the previous tenants opened the door, we were like: okay we'll take it (laughs).

You do have an amazing view. You must be getting direct sunlight in the mornings, streaming in early.

W: I love that we wake up to that. There're no buildings, just a lot of greenery. When you're at home for so long, you just want to look at the green. It helps you reset. We can also see the thunderstorms coming.

F: It's pretty scary during a thunderstorm. You can't see anything outside beyond a metre; it's just white. But it's also beautiful, how it







