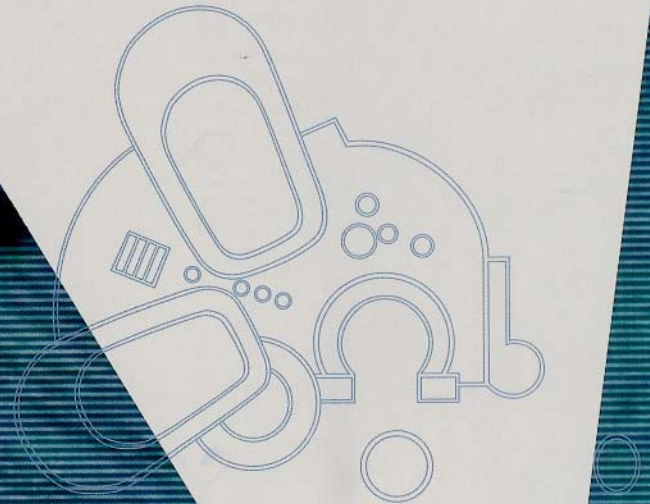


# esplanade

## theatres on the bay

by ming chua



Come October 12, Singapore will be heralding a grand launch of the Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay.

The child of an idea that was first conceived during the 1970's, the Esplanade's strength is its ability to provoke a reaction and indeed, reactions are plenty.

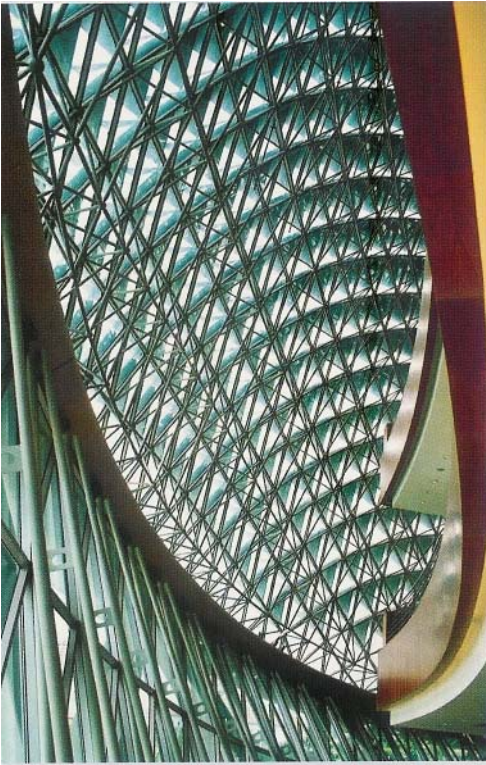
In fact, a common response from the general public would be the frequent teases on the spiky cladding of its unusually designed domes. Numerous nicknames have been given to this structure - bug eyes, sliced microphones, steel porcupines, the pineapple, a giant golf ball and even Princess Leia's cinnamon buns.

The fact is, I had to use the term 'Durian Shells' so that the cabbie knew I wanted to head towards the

Esplanade. However, rather than looking at the trend as demeaning to the pristine art center, I take such allusions as the society's impish ways of integrating the steel infrastructure into something more localized and a little more 'theirs'. The Esplanade should be so lucky.

Its unique architectural form and visual prominence within the city's skyline certainly have made it an icon of the Singaporean quest to realize its cultural transmutation to a global city of arts - equalling those of Glasgow first, and (hopefully) joining the ranks of London and New York later on. For now, the attention will be focused on what is done within the metal shell of the Esplanade.

Boasting of a 1,600-seat concert hall, a 2,000-seat theatre, 2 smaller studios for dance and recital and



outdoor performing spaces along its 300 meter long Waterfront Promenade, the twin-domed complex wishes to be the space where artistic interests converge and is embraced.

We've visited the 'jendela' (a Malay term for window) – the Esplanade's space for displaying a range of artworks. According to Michelle Tan, the Programming Officer for the Esplanade, there are plans for other display areas to be peppered along the hallways and corridors within the complex.

Don't forget the shopping gala that is always associated with the island. There is a 3-tiered shopping mall within the Esplanade spanning over 8,600 square meters; complete with a diverse retail, food and beverage

on offer to everyone

A remarkable showpiece, but will its form suggest its meaning? For now, the attention will be focused on what is done within the metal shell of the Esplanade. According to Mr Benson Puah, the CEO of the

Esplanade Co., "The success of *Esplanade* hinges on her ability to stay relevant to the community, to be a place where people converge to interact, to be encouraged to pursue their artistic interests, and embrace the arts as an *intrinsic* part of their daily lives."

So, what should we anticipate for the inauguration day?

Early evening celebrations aptly termed Fiesta!, a series of outdoor events will kick off the launch followed by a sunset official opening ceremony by President S.R. Nathan. There will be a specially commissioned 30m high bamboo installation, upon which acrobats would perform their gravity-defying stunts and other performances by artists from around the world on the Esplanade's waterfront promenade.

Even as choreographer Boi Sakti's *'Reminiscing the Moon'* by the Singapore Dance Theatre opens the Festival in the Theatre, the carnival will go into a full swing eventually to reach a climax with a fantastic display of *'Harbour Spectacular'*, a 30-minute show created specially to unite the elements of land, water and sky.

There won't be time to take a breather after the opening evening. The subsequent three months will see the result of S\$12.9M program line up; that does much to substantiate the Esplanade's credo, which is to ensure a balance that will cater to all segments of the community. You will be able to check out the Esplanade calendar and agenda at their website.

Will the Esplanade successfully pull off what it sets out to do? Well, time will tell. So far, it looks set to go far.

#### General information

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