

Vibrant the City

Coloring Historic City of Singapore, Malacca & Kali Besar
By Fransiska Prihadi , architect living in Jakarta, 2003

Generally people might not notice that there are appealing buildings that they're passing every day of their lives. The sense of ignorance to places simply just melts those engaging historic buildings with the color of roads mixed with sometimes traffic jam and eventually they are left unnoticed.



Athena-yellow colored- as an attempt to infill new color in Jakarta Kota's famed Kali Besar warehouse area.

(Photo by. Fransiska)

It had become public knowledge that Kali Besar- Jakarta is a neglected precious historic buildings area. It's ashamed that we have done so little of what is so big valued historical downtown of Jakarta. Some of the fortunate preserved historic buildings façade were leave as it was by color and material. Few –though we can't called it unfortunate- were painted with new colors based on perhaps the personal preference of the owner regardless the total entity of Kali Besar strip. While the rest of it suffered gradual destruction caused by both humans and nature. Wrecked walls and windows leaves dramatic sight of the untold but blatant failure of preserving heritage buildings in the Jakarta Kota area.

Recently a work committee was set up to revitalize one of the old neglected buildings from the 1800s standing at a corner of Kali Besar street. Planned to be named 'KOTA BAWAH', the committee drive an optimistic dream to make it a center for Art and Culture, Heritage and Education. They carried out a revitalization plan to leave the trace of history untouched as much as possible.

What if one decided to put new different pulsating colors to these sometimes-forgettable historical buildings? Would it suddenly shimmers out of the blue and makes a better thing?

Singapore is doing a lot to vibrant their city in this distinctive idea. There is a lingering pause when one walks the Rochor Road and sees the new backside of Bugis Village. Conveniently located opposite the Bugis MRT, Bugis Village is a microcosm of the shopping life in Singapore. Clothes, CDs, Food, watches and all sorts of accessories can be found there at affordable prices.

Bugis Village has been carefully restored to retain its Straits Chinese-style architectural design. Today, these three-storey shop houses (which are home to a mixture of offices and retail outlets) are painted in cheerful candy-like color.



Backside of buildings, Bugis Village- Singapore
(Photo by. Fransiska)

In an almost 1 kilometer span, the journey feels extraordinarily joyful than the usual backside of buildings where it typically full of air conditioner outlet and Grey painted walls.

Clever uses of playful colors extend the age of old buildings. They make it young again and kept them safe from being abandoned because they're now so obvious to be staring at.

Singapore seems not to be the only country that realize how they could preserves and commercialize those historic buildings at once. Malaysia is one of the countries that are aware of the importance to keep the old city alive. The issue of conservation is not merely just the matter of a physical and programmatic function of historic buildings, however looks do matter.

Stadhuys-Malacca, were originally built in around 1640 as the official residence of Dutch Governors and their officers. The edifice is a fine example of Dutch architecture still standing there. Preserved in its original structure and form, it now houses the History Museum and Ethnography Museum. What fascinated one the most when seeing the building for the very first time is the daring all red color covering its façade. It's not the only buildings that were all covered with a newly red painted façade. Stadhuys is actually the highlight of a historic preserved River Side strip of Malacca where all the buildings and concrete blocks road are now red-colored. Surely makes one wonder what's the original color of those historical buildings were.



Stadhuys-Malacca, built between 1641-1660
The Malacca municipal Council painted the historic buildings all Red though is not the original color historically.
(Photo by. Fransiska)

The extreme candy-coloring scheme, for whatever reason, did highlight a desire to keep the old historic buildings save from being past and forgotten. The idea of painting them with totally new color is a fresh architectural and urban experiment to fix problems unique to Countries that realize the valuable heritage buildings.