

Singapore Sketchbook

By Siobhán Cool

Over the years, many cultures and peoples have shaped modern Singapore and its buildings, with the colonial era leaving prominent heritage markers. This architecture, born largely from British traditions, also adopted the mixed features of Malay and Indian buildings, a fusion which ensured that the unique structures would sit comfortably in Singapore's tropical climate. Long may these treasures grace the landscape as historical legacies and as inspiration for adaptability, while functioning for the purpose they were intended – to nurture love and life in Singapore.

Clubhouses



The site of cricket matches since 1837, it was no wonder that the Singapore Cricket Club (founded in 1852 and the second oldest sporting club after the Singapore Turf Club) would take pride of place at the Padang, Singapore's colonial heart. The current clubhouse, built in 1884 and thrice extended, has been the backdrop to many social, sporting and political triumphs and disasters in Singapore's history. The club's quiet façade belies its passionate members who play bowls, cricket, rugby, hockey and soccer under the weekend midday sun.

In 1886, officers of the King's Own Regiment, 1st Battalion, formed the Singapore Polo Club. They galloped their ponies through chukkas (playing periods) in the centre of the original Singapore Race Course at Farrer Park, which space they shared with colonial-era golfers. Relocated to Mt Pleasant in 1941, its still rustic clubhouse nestles in the foothills and the open verandas never fail to evoke a bygone era with languid jungle breezes wafting through as members sip long cool gins in the deep leather lounges.



Far from the madding crowds, the Swiss Club at Bukit Tinggi is a veritable Singapore oasis, but was not always so for four-legged or winged creatures. Established in 1871 as the Swiss Rifle Shooting Club of Singapore, members purchased this property in 1902 and maintained a shooting range on the premises up until the 1980s. The picturesque clubhouse, built in 1925 and reminiscent of an alpine chalet, now watches over playful children and cavorting wildlife.



Black and White Houses



Woodbirds at Atbara, Gallop Road Singapore's Oldest Surviving BW.

Lovely, lonely, vulnerable - Atbara was first built as the home of a barrister's family in 1898. 114 years later, when I pulled off the beaten track of Gallop Road to sketch, its elegance was undeniable despite tragic neglect. This day, for a moment, it felt as if both the house and I were holding our collective breaths, hoping for it to have a new lease of life and human occupation as the shadows of noon birds flitted across the hot, dry grass.

On a quiet weekday, in this thriving metropolis, very close by, yet far in spirit from the noise of Bukit Timah Road and the Central Expressway, a small community of Black and White semi-detached and terrace houses rests prettily in a gentle street called Hooper Road. As I sketch, cats emerge from drains to challenge my intrusion.



Barbary Woodpecker, 1888 Atbara Estate Road

Walking down a long, cool, green, suburban avenue in Watten Estate, the houses taper down to a shady cul-de-sac where I found a small enclave of Black and White houses. I noticed movement on a graceful lawn and saw a gardener squatting down to weed whilst step-ladders lined the house during the quiet interlude of a tenancy handover.

Siobhán Cool has lived in Singapore for nine years, creating her sketchbooks as mementos of her two sons' first home.