

From Kampung to High-Rise

By Siobhan Cool

Change is nothing new to Singapore as the city state has forged ahead for almost two centuries, solving problems and adapting to the challenges of its climate, its multi-ethnic population's various cultures and also its economy. During the last 50 years, Singapore's landscape has experienced the shifting sands of increased urbanisation, improved standards of health, a modern infrastructure and a fast-paced lifestyle. Although social change in the 21st century is more pronounced and high-speed than ever before, Singaporeans are lucky, for now, to live amidst their past, present and future.



Off Yio Chu Kang Road, I travelled the winding length of Gerald Drive until I reached Singapore's last kampung at Lorong Buangkok. Since 1956, Singaporeans of Chinese and Malay heritage have lived in this traditional village despite the modern city's shadow. This morning, passing showers left puddles that drain-cats and a kampung pup had to pick around. I saw no chickens, but heard them clucking behind corrugated tin fencing that one intrepid cat was noisily scaling.

During the last half of the 20th century, Singapore's residential buildings mushroomed with private dwellings and public housing developing at a quickening pace and differing style. Many new suburbs were established, far from the traditional town centres, with rows of terrace houses lining the streets, maintaining an ordered landscape for generations to come. Years later, I watch in amazement as demolition teams literally carve a niche in the row and build three and four-storey glass and chrome monoliths wedged between the rustic terraces.



For block after block, the high-rise boom at the East Coast continues unhindered as 100-year-old bungalows are sold for profit by unsentimental great-grandchildren who probably never knew the joy of the once-sprawling, breezy oceanfront gardens where the old grande-dame houses once nestled.

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