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Singapore Indesign Intimate
09-10 July 2015

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RETHINKING THE NURSING HOME

JADE CIRCLE, A COLLABORATIVELY DESIGNED DEMENTIA-CARE RESIDENCE, EMBODIES A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF CARE FOR SENIORS IN SINGAPORE.

TEXT
IMAGES

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A picture of the current living experience in a standard elderly nursing home in Singapore reads like this: seniors sleep in an eight-bed room (not unlike a C-class hospital ward) and adhere to a structured schedule under which they are told when to eat, shower and sleep on a daily basis. The team behind Jade Circle, a new nursing home scheduled to open in the third quarter of 2016, aims to revise the current design and modus operandi to improve the living quality of the ageing population.

Jade Circle emerges from the combined efforts of the Lien Foundation, the Khoo Chwee Neo Foundation and The Salvation Army's Peacehaven Nursing Home. The aim is to embody a new philosophy of care – to put more 'heart' and 'home' into what is typically a shunned institute. The design of this upcoming seniors' home, which was presented to the media in February, draws lessons from the success of Hope Resident Living Area (a collaboration between Peacehaven Nursing Home and the Lien Foundation, which opened in 2006) as well as America's Green House model of long-term care. It aims to serve patients living with dementia, the number of whom has been projected to more than double in Singapore to 103,000 by 2030.*

One of the measures taken for the Jade Circle scheme is to restore freedom in the resident's

choice of activities. An array of facilities will echo the comfort of residential estates: fitness gym, outdoor exercise corner, garden, hair salon and grocery store. "The facade has been designed to complement the existing look of Peacehaven, with added interplays of balconies and large windows to allow for bed-level views to the exterior," says Chua Seow Ann, Director at S A Chua Architects, who was appointed to design the Jade Circle building. The 4,000-square-metre property will offer 60 beds: 24 single rooms and 18 twin rooms (for siblings or couples) with ensuite bathrooms for privacy. Elders or family members will be able to personalise the rooms with their possessions to create a sense of belonging.

The interior design of Jade Circle has been helmed by award-winning designer Peter Tay, who sought to change the unpleasant ambience that currently defines many nursing homes. He explains his long-term intent: "The idea is to change the notion [of current nursing homes], so that this new identity becomes a benchmark adopted by future old-age homes in Singapore. It's about changing the way people live in these spaces."

Tay intends to humanise the environment by instilling a sense of tranquility within the rooms through a consistent use of wood and landscape

imagery that blurs the boundary between interior and exterior spaces. While Tay's renderings appear lush, the designer, who has taken on this project on a pro bono basis, has imposed a challenge upon himself to source for low-cost materials to achieve the desired outcome. This will ensure that Jade Circle remains accessible, with an estimated monthly fee ranging from \$2,800 to \$3,500 (before means testing).

Family living is at the heart of Jade Circle, where walls are broken down to encourage the getting together of seniors, carers and family members. The ideal scenario is, as described by Tay, that "the kitchen is no longer behind a wall, where one is required to open a door to enter; it becomes an area where people can be seen cooking, and where people can join in or eat over the counter. Similarly, a corridor does not just bring one from point A to B; it becomes a space where there is interaction and where people can stop, sit down and talk to a friend. It is about creating quality living," he affirms, "where one starts to feel the air and light coming in."

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*Estimate presented in *Dementia in the Asia Pacific Region*, published by Alzheimer's Disease International (UK, 2014).

Left: The café is but one of the planned facilities that will offer new choices of activity for residents of Jade Circle

Right: A depiction of a single room, with cohesive material treatment and a green aspect