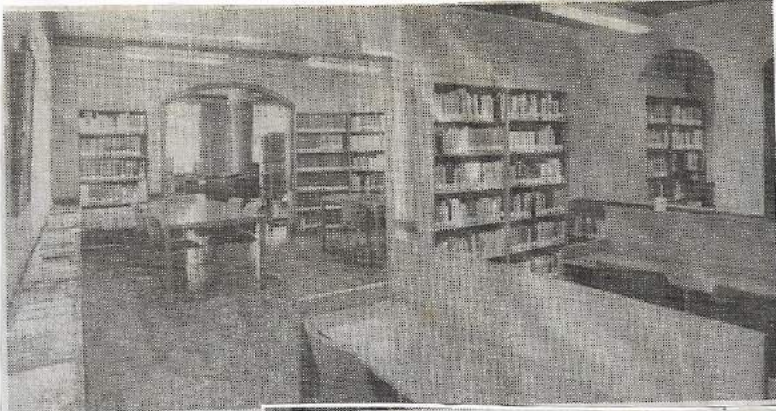


Instituto Cervantes and Orchid Garden Suites



THE RENOVATION gave more room for the impressive collection of books of the Cervantes library.

Two good examples

Here are two examples of people who cared enough to reuse old buildings for something new. Although in other countries, old buildings are routinely recycled for new uses, the idea is not too routine yet in the Philippines where old buildings are seen as incompatible for new uses.

Instituto Cervantes: Antonio Martinez Luciano, the director of the Instituto Cervantes until 1998, carried out his vision to restore the circa 1930s Art Deco apartment building at the corner of Leon Guinto and Estrada in Singalong.

It was a return to familiar surroundings for the Spanish, since the structure housed their Embassy in the 1960s. The white Art Deco building has a rounded façade that sweeps around the corner. More of the curves that streamline the façade penetrate the lobby, swirl up the curved *narra* stair from the ground floor all the way to the top, adding a visual flourish to the interior detailing of the building.

The former apartment building (called the Mayflower Apartments) preserved the exterior in its original form. The interior went through massive renovation. The residential apartments in three out of its four floors were converted into the auditorium and exhibition halls of the Spanish Cultural Center. Space was made over to house the impressive collection of books of the Instituto Cervantes library. Other apartments were made over to become the comfortable classrooms and laboratories of the language school.

Behind the building, the lush tropical plants in its large, landscaped garden with fully-grown trees soak up the pollution in the air. Under this blanket of green, a series of concerts and movies, and riotous Spanish events like flamenco dancing while *paellas* cook over coals (the yearly Paella Festival) are now held outdoors in the improbable shadow of Taft Avenue.

The Instituto Cervantes received the Cultural Heritage Award given by Design and Architecture Magazine in 1996.

Orchid Garden

Orchid Garden Hotel: Time was when Manila Bay was at the end of Vito Cruz and there was an open park instead of Harrison Plaza. Opposite the park's Vito Cruz boundary emerged an elegant streetscape of stately Art Deco houses all built in the 1930s.

Even if the commercial development on Harrison Plaza now dwarfs the old houses, the vista of the Vito Cruz houses stretching all the way to the Art Deco Rizal Memorial Complex on the corner of Taft Avenue is one of Manila's unappreciated landmark streetscapes that struggles to survive.

One of the stately pre-World War II houses which line Vito Cruz has survived by revitalizing itself as the Orchid Garden Suites. The original house, designed by National Artist Pablo Antonio in the 1930s, has been spared from demolition.

The streamlined detailing of the façade continues in the interior, picked up by the Art Deco ceiling, the planks on the floor, and the glass-and-wood doors and windows covered with the massive geometric iron grillwork evocative of the prewar era.

SPACED Out continues its series on "Conservation Success Stories," to prove that not all is being lost in Manila and that there is some heritage that is being conserved well.

Any conversation about historic Manila inevitably follows the same disastrous script. The conversation eventually turns to:

- Manila isn't Manila any more;
- Manila has become an urban and cultural wasteland;
- Heritage buildings are coming down at such an alarming rate;
- Will anything historic remain in the city;
- The level of awareness for heritage conservation is so low among Pinoy;
- Does anybody care; and finally,
- Who cares?

SPACED OUT



Augusto F. Villalon

Real charm

Go up to the second floor to experience real charm. Here the original stair still remains (the flight from the ground to second floor was insensitively removed to enclose the area for air-conditioning). Burnished tones of varnished *narra* and black Art Deco grillwork frame the stairwell.

Café Alicia is the centerpiece of the hotel. The former master bedroom, large enough to be converted into a modest café, frames a magnificent view of Vito Cruz through the trees seen from the French doors opening to its balconies. Above the café, Tutso Bar is a glass-enclosed third-floor hideaway, now a bar that offers an even more expansive view that skirts around the taller Vito Cruz buildings to reveal glimpses of Manila Bay.

Instituto Cervantes and Orchid Garden Suites are open to the public. There are lessons to be learned from seeing them. They are examples of how they have turned old buildings into something new.

The bottom line is that they are both extremely pleasant places to be in. The view of Vito Cruz from Café Alicia on the second floor of the Orchid Garden Hotel is without parallel, but is surpassed by the rooftop view from the Tutso Bar above it. Views like those from the Orchid Garden Suites remind that Manila could actually look beautiful.

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