

**A HOTEL WITH HISTORY** From Page ML-1



A cozy pool is tucked into an intimate orchid garden.

**MALATE, A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE**  
 The arrival of Malate was the Forbes Park of the pre-war era. In the wake of the Americanization of Old Manila, enterprising businessmen, like Henry Jones, saw immense potential in the swampy land south of Luneta. Jones quickly bought up most of Paco and Malate. Jones was the Ayala Land of his day and he made a fortune in spite of the fact that the asking price at the start was only one peso a square meter! Of course this did not last long as the lots had all the advantages of a quick tranvia ride to the city center and not far away were the idyllic beaches of Pasay.

These beaches were on the southern boundary of Malate defined by the street named Vito Cruz (after the rich benefactor who gave the land for the roadway). This road separates Malate and in fact the city of Manila from the then town of Pasay. The area also had the added amenity of a large open green area, Harrison Park. Harrison was the first of four large parks planned by Daniel Burnham but the only one ever to be established. (Luneta was meant to be a civic center not a central park; readers who've been following my column would probably be tired of this oft-repeated info — but I am working on more articles based on juicy untold stories behind the Luneta.)

Justice Villareal wanted a good architect for his house and decided on a brash young architect who had trained at the University of London. That architect was Pablo Antonio Sr. Antonio designed a two-story villa that showed his skill in residential design, an area of practice that he and a few others like Juan Arellano and Andres Luna de San Pedro (Juan Luna's son) excelled at for the rich and famous of jazz-age Manila.

**A MALATE MANSION**

The house was designed in a hybrid Art

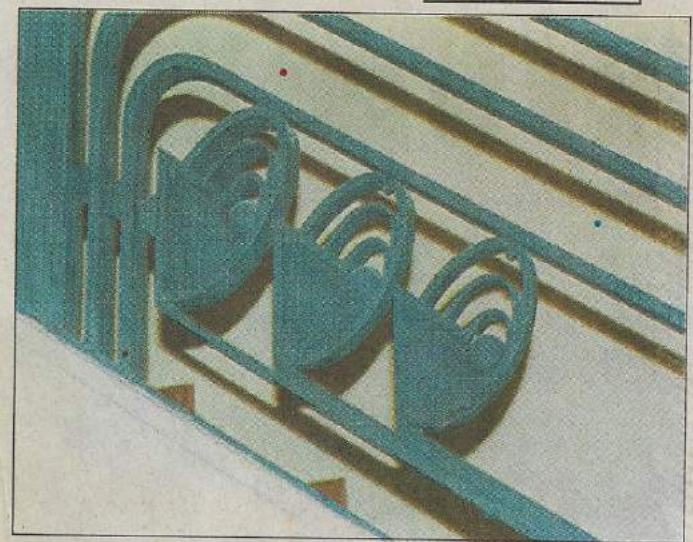
Deco and Italiannate style that typified residential design of that period. Antonio had come back from England armed with the new architecture of streamline moderne. He used this to great effect in his building projects like the FEU but the style did not suit itself well to houses, or maybe clients felt that a traditional, embellished style was more "homey." So emerged a mixed style incorporating elements from the established "Malacañang" style and the newer lines of the moderne.

The massing of the house has the requisite Italiannate looking tower on one side with tiled roofs accenting the building mass around it and over the entrance. The tower is accented by deco treatments in the grillwork of the balcony and the lower window. The shaft itself is almost like a deco pilaster ending in an open balcony on the third floor. The entry below is made dramatic by its cantilever supported by stylized reinforced concrete brackets.

The spaces inside the house were designed with the high ceilings typical of well-ventilated pre-war houses. The central staircase was emphasized and done in sensuous curvilinear deco with narra banisters and deco railings.

Window treatments are also in deco as are the detailing of the beams and moldings.

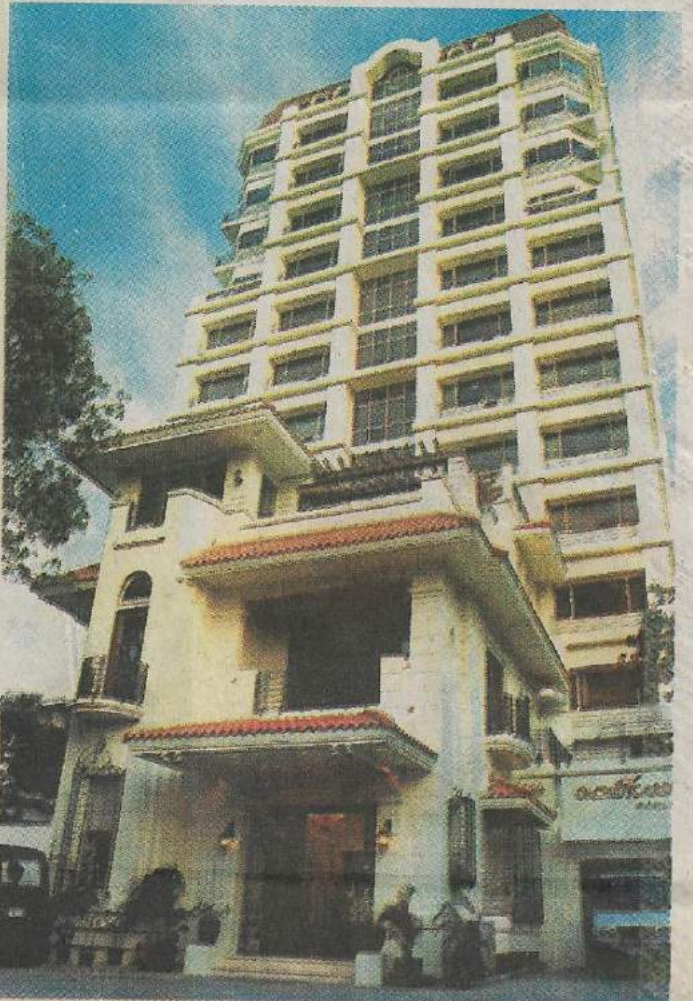
The house survived the war, bellbottoms and a dictator, but Manila has had more difficulty coping. The park in front of the house has mutated into a mall and Jai Alai fronton. There is the Rizal Memorial Complex also in Art Deco but showing signs of neglect. Despite this the Villareal, now the Roces House (the good Justice's daughter Alicia married a Roces) stood proud along with the several other villas beside it. The owners of these villas wanted to hold on to these masterpieces of architecture so each has taken to find compatible uses. A



Art Deco grillwork embellish the building inside and out.



Great views from the original roof terrace, Note the trellis design.



Moderne and Post-Modern blend into an elegant boutique hotel.

floor and the Tutso Bar (named after one of the Roceses), a quirky little watering hole. This opens into a surprisingly large terrace, where one can still enjoy a glimpse of the famous Manila sunset.

The hotel boasts a swimming pool snugly tucked into a corner of the orchid garden (hence the name). This forms the view from the cafe, delightful in the overall intimacy of scale that is so off-putting in commercial hotels. All in all, the ambience is very Roman or French in a stoutly colonial way; but in a tropical, distinctly Malate-esque way.

The owners and their architects should be commended for their sensitive handling of the design. The conservation of this architectural piece of National Artist in Architecture Pablo Antonio is successful aesthetically and functionally, as well as in terms of being a viable business.

**CONSERVING HERITAGE, HOPING FOR CHANGE**

One would hope that all property owners were this sensitive with the heritage buildings that they hold. We must remember that these buildings, as heritage, are held in trust for everyone, not just the people holding the deeds of ownership. Ownership of these manifestations of our culture is both a right and responsibility. The owners of this hotel have taken their responsibility to heart.

One would also hope that the government, creates the framework within which conservation projects like the Orchid Garden Suites can see fruition. In most progressive Southeast Asian cities like Hong Kong and Singapore, conservation districts are delineated, incentives are given to owners, infrastructure for tourism and access is prioritized, and strict guidelines are enforced so the total effect is an integrated and sustained effort. Vito Cruz and the whole Harrison District of Malate could use a good urban design masterplan. It has such potential going to waste.

Concrete efforts in conservation, urban design and better landscape architecture could lead to preserving what we still have left of the architecture and landscape of an older and more refined era. It was an era when people were gracious to each other and to their environment. It was also an era where we didn't have to rely on approval surveys to know that the quality of our lives was not threatened! All we had to do in those days was to look outside our window, from a villa or a modest house, to enjoy the sight of green parks, blazing sunsets and the whiff of tropical flora from our well-tended gardens.

Feedback is welcome. Please contact the writer at [citysensephilstar@hotmail.com](mailto:citysensephilstar@hotmail.com).

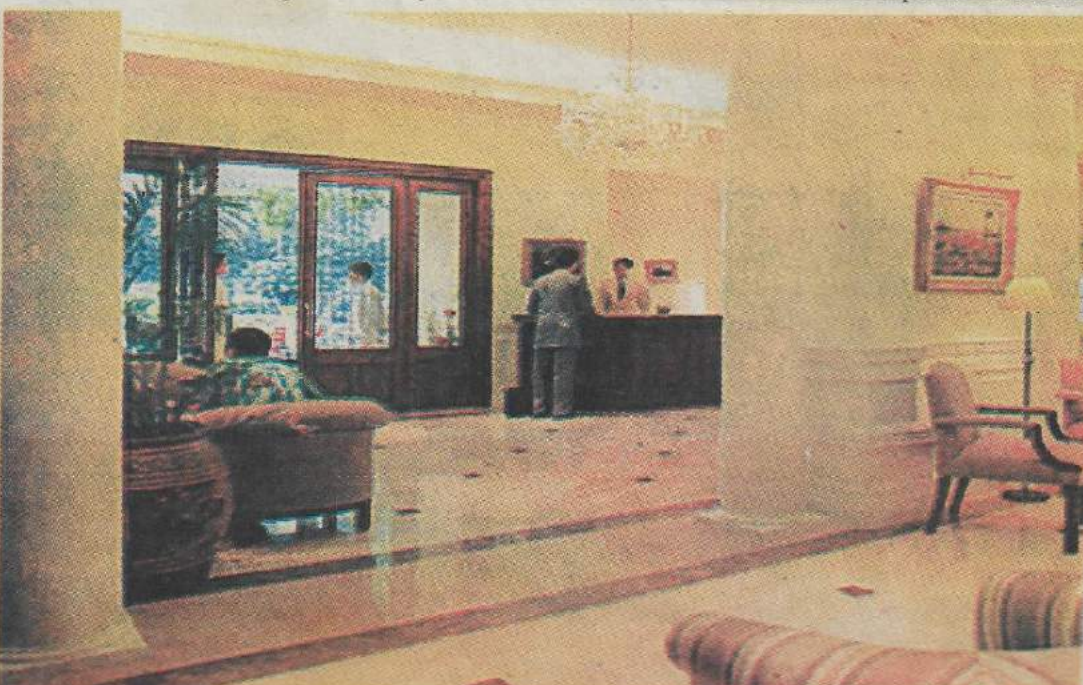
*The Orchid Garden Suites on Vito Cruz, originally designed by National Artist Pablo Antonio as a residence, is a great little hotel, the best example of architectural conservation in Manila*

number have been rented out to Embassies like the Vietnamese consulate. Others down the road turned commercial as offices for advertising firms. The Roces wanted a use that carried on the function of a villa without compromising the architecture. They decided to turn it into a boutique hotel.

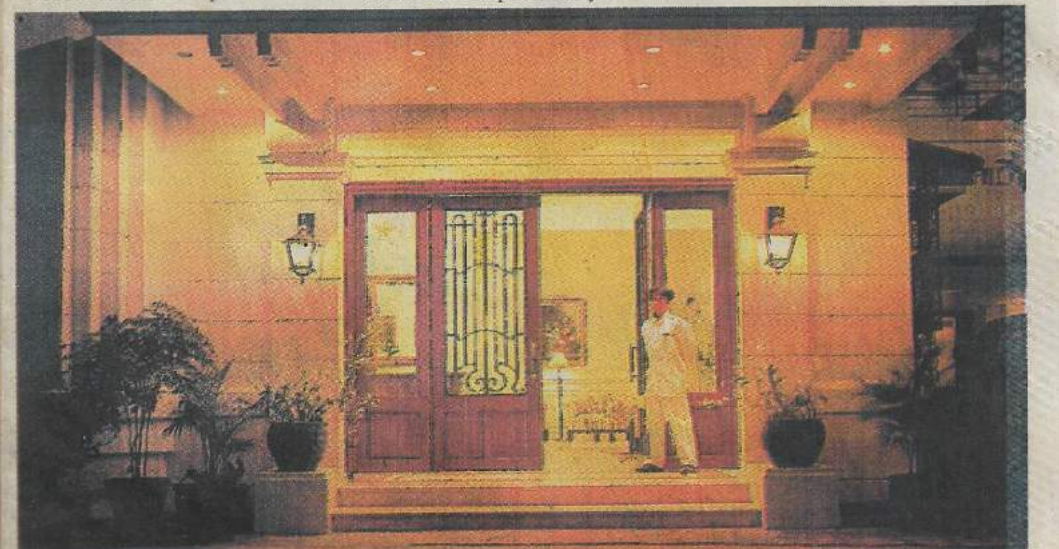
**A HOTEL IS BORN**

The process took over five years. The owners wanted to make sure that the structure was not damaged and that the design would conserve as much of the original layout as possible. The Orchid Garden Suites opened in 1997. The requirement of number of rooms is accommodated in a medium-rise block built behind the main house. This kept the main mass of the original building free of intervention. The front elevation of the house is true to Antonio's original design with the driveway and garden elements intact from the pre-war years (parking is on the side and at the back).

The interiors are handled well with the living room now functioning as the lobby. The restaurant sits in a slightly expanded back portion where the dining room and kitchen used to be. The services of the hotel are fitted into the base of the 12-story rear building. The staircase is still intact leading up to function rooms on the second floor and further up to the third



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Few hotels in Manila exude this warmth, day or night.