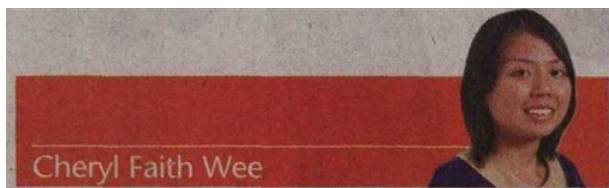


At play with monsters and fruits

Old-time playgrounds are in the news as people call for them to be retained. SundayLife! speaks to three people who designed them



The wrecker's ball will soon descend on four blocks of flats in Toa Payoh Lorong 6, but the iconic dragon playground in the middle of the Housing Board estate will remain – at least for now.

While blocks 28, 30, 32 and 33 will be torn down over the next few months, HDB said in an e-mail reply to SundayLife! that the playground will stay, pending future development plans for the area.

The news was first reported in Chinese-language daily Lianhe Zaobao earlier this month, and financial planner Kelvin Ang, 37, was relieved when he read the news online.

The father of three, who runs the parenting blog Cheekiemonkies, says: "Playgrounds such as the dragon one are a connection to my childhood. I grew up playing in the pelican-themed one in Dover Road.

"In 2012, I came across a graphic online that plotted the locations of old playgrounds and I took my children to visit five of them, including the dragon one."

Like several other Singaporeans, Mr Ang blogged about the experience.

In the past two to three years, there has been a buzz over old playgrounds built from the 1970s to 1990s. Besides being the subject of several blog posts and photograph series, they have also inspired trinkets shaped like them, such as pins.

The interest in playgrounds could be tied to the growing interest in heritage over the last three to five years, especially among those in their 30s to 50s, says Dr Lily Kong, a heritage expert from the department of

geography in the National University Of Singapore.

"They look back to the 1970s and 1980s with nostalgia about what characterised their experiences and the landscape of that particular period," she says.

From the 1970s to early 1990s, most playgrounds in public housing estates were designed and built by HDB's in-house designers. Since 2003, however, they have been designed mainly by consultants appointed by HDB.

SundayLife! understands that the playgrounds in public housing estates are usually managed and maintained by the town councils.

Modern playgrounds built after 2000 tend to look more modular, feature materials such as rubber flooring and plastic, and cater also to adults and the elderly.

For instance, there are fitness corners with gym equipment for adults and slides for children in another area.

Playgrounds built before 2000 featured different themes inspired by animals, fruits, Singapore's multi-racial heritage and also nursery rhymes. They were built with materials such as terrazzo and brightly coloured mosaic tiles.

In February 2010, freelance writer Justin Zhuang plotted the locations of 19 retro playgrounds left in Singapore. About a quarter of them have since been demolished or replaced. To date, the map has received about 81,000 views and Zhuang has updated the list to show 21 playgrounds.

Ms Antoinette Wong, 29, and Mr Stanley Tan, 33, who run The Little Drom Store, an indie retailer that sells knick-knacks, showed photographs of these old-school playgrounds in 2011 as part of the M1 Fringe Festival. The exhibition, named School Of Hard Knocks, was held in the Esplanade Tunnel.

They also started selling pins shaped like the colourful mosaic-tiled playgrounds of yesteryear.

The playground series was such a hit that they have since added magnets and pillows to the collection, which both cost \$22. At least 100 of such items have been sold

since 2011.

Mr Tan says: "It was our first series of locally inspired products and they did well."

In 2012, popular United-States culture blog Flavourwire.com named the dragon playground one of 15 amazing playgrounds in the world.

Local blogs such as Remember Singapore and parenting blog Sengkang Babies have also written lengthy posts about the old playgrounds.

Over several weekends in 2011, Mr Andy Lee, 39, a customer relationship management consultant, took his four children, now aged four to 10, to visit eight of the old playgrounds. He wrote about these visits in his blog, Sengkang Babies, and uploaded photographs of his children playing there.

Two of the places they visited, the pelican playground in Dover and the seal playground in Dakota, have since been demolished.

Mr Lee says: "I do not expect all of them to be retained in such a fast-paced society as Singapore. All I can do is document them in my blog and through photographs."

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