

Designing spaces for both dead and living

Architecture competition sees funeral facilities incorporated into everyday spaces

Timothy Goh

Picture cafes, a flower market and event spaces, all housed around columbaria with modern exteriors on grounds that are open to the public – even those not there to attend a funeral.

Architecture students incorporated these ideas into 52 designs of funeral facilities for a competition organised by the Ang Chin Moh Foundation and the National University of Singapore's Department of Architecture.

Fourth-year student John Kevin Chandra, 24, took the top prize with his design of a columbarium in Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park.

Yesterday, his design and 13 others that made it to the finals of the contest went on display at the Mount Vernon Sanctuary as part of an open house. The event is on until Sunday.

The thrust of the design competition was to address the issue of integrating funeral facilities into public spaces. There is a demand for such facilities given Singapore's ageing population, said Ms Wong Chiu Ying, director of facilities planning and development at the National Environment Agency, at a panel discussion yesterday. She said these fa-

cilities have to be designed well to help communities accept them.

Mr Ang Ziqian, founder of the Ang Chin Moh Foundation, said the competition was organised to show that the "best use of land in Singapore is to use it for both the dead and the living".

But locating such facilities so close to where people live, work and play may cause some discomfort. For instance, when it emerged that a new burial facility would be built along the shoreline in Tanah Merah next year, some members of the public expressed concerns that the scattering of ashes would be done close to where recreational activities, such as sailing, are held.

In January 2015, would-be-residents of Build-To-Order (BTO) flats in Fernvale Lea were unhappy when they learnt of plans to build a Chinese temple with a columbarium next to their blocks.

Mr Ang said architectural designs which allow funeral facilities to sit discreetly, and yet be close to housing areas, may help to dispel myths and taboos surrounding death, and to achieve buy-in with residents.

On the financial side, a funeral facility located next to a housing estate may not impact its value, said Ms Jacqueline Sng, founder of Poise Real Estate Group.

Ms Sng, 31, noted that estates such as Bidadari, which is located

next to a columbarium, are highly sought after. Mount Vernon Sanctuary will make way for the estate at the end of this month.

Sales exercises for BTO flats in Bidadari, which come with higher price tags than at other locations, have consistently drawn more applicants than units available.

Ms Sng said in her 14 years in the real estate business, she has found that customers are also unafraid to purchase property during the seventh lunar month, typically regarded as a taboo period for buying homes.

Referring to the winning entry of the design competition which featured a proposed columbarium

built inside Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, Ms Sng said: "If I'm a resident and I know the park has all the facilities, I'd be happy not to have to travel all the way to Mandai or Choa Chu Kang (for funeral facilities)."

Bishan resident Nicholas Makoto, 25, who lives within walking distance of Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, said: "The concept of a columbarium in a park is a bit unusual, but I think it's okay given the space constraints in Singapore."

He added, however, that there is a need to be mindful of others who may be more sensitive to such taboos.

timgoh@sph.com.sg



National University of Singapore architecture undergraduate John Kevin Chandra (in white), explaining his design that won the first prize in the Land For The Living – Space For The Dead design challenge yesterday. His design featured a proposed columbarium built inside Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

A SPACE FOR EVERYONE

Through (this) competition, we want to show that the best use of land in Singapore is to use it for both the dead and the living.



MR ANG ZIQIAN, founder of the Ang Chin Moh Foundation.