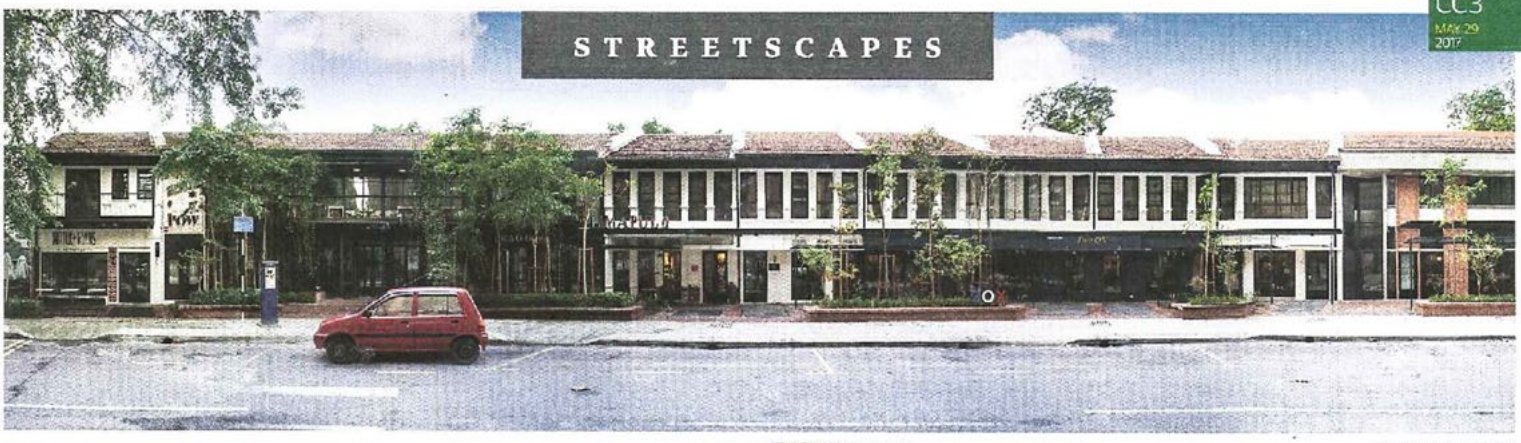

CHAI YEE HOONG/THE EDGE

PICTURES BY STUDIO BIKIN

CHAI YEE HOONG/THE EDGE

Revamping the Asian Heritage Row

BY **CHAI YEE HOONG**
city.country@bizedge.com

A turn off the busy Jalan Sultan Ismail in Kuala Lumpur, Jalan Doraisamy is looking a lot different from its heyday as the Asian Heritage Row, once a popular nightlife and entertainment area. The Heritage Row's pubs and nightclubs were closed when the place fell into disrepute due to the drunken brawls that frequently took place as well as a shooting or two and a murder.

Moving away from its notorious late nights, the street has been cleaned up, with new developments to draw in the day crowd and creative community. One project in this street is the revamp of the row of pre-war shophouses opposite Sheraton Imperial Hotel Kuala Lumpur, also known as The Row.

The ambitious project, undertaken by Urbanspace Sdn Bhd, entails converting the 22 pre-war properties into a 74,000 sq ft commercial development in two blocks — North and South — using an adaptive reuse approach rather than tearing the buildings down and building from scratch.

The North block is designed by home-grown architecture firm Studio Bikin in collaboration with Marc Architects.

The 1940s shophouses, as can be seen from the completed North block, have been stripped to an industrial-looking form with creeper plants hanging over the exterior of exposed bricks, black steel frames and large windows. In a nod to the old five-foot way, the shops front a tree-lined, landscaped street that stretches the length of the development.

Launched in May last year, The Row is now home to a community of independent businesses, including the Butter + Beans café, Wheel Love skate shop, French bistro and bar 2OX, nyonya restaurant Limapulo, Mojo restaurant and bar, live music bar Timbre, wine bar and tapas restaurant Bacchus, and a shop-café-bar called League of Captains. The development has offices, co-working and meeting spaces and a 3,300 sq ft event space called Slate. It is also home to Peter Hoe's café and boutique and Woods Bagot's offices.

The South block is fenced off by construction hoarding, anticipating a new future. Towards the end of this block, a tired-looking mamak restaurant is still open, with most tables in the small space occupied. The old man who handed me my change, says the shop has been here for over 10 years but will soon have to go.

The noise of construction can be heard in Jalan Doraisamy in the afternoon as work on UDA Holdings Bhd's Anggun Residences is underway, but it is business as usual for the many mamak restaurants dotting the street close to the prominent Heritage House, Bangunan KSK and a few Bollywood clubs. A short walk away is the venerable Ah Loke Tailor, which has been around for over 60 years; the popular Yut Kee Restaurant, which moved from its old premises in Jalan Dang Wangi to the current location in Jalan Kamunting; and YTL's new Hotel Stripes KL.

CBRE | WTW managing director Foo Gee Jen says pre-war properties in the area, with a land size of around 2,000 sq ft, are selling for RM4 million to RM6 million on average, or RM2,000 to RM2,500 psf en bloc.

"Properties in Jalan Doraisamy are owned by only a few individuals, so there has not been much activity. More transactions can be seen in the surrounding Jalan Yap Ah Shak and Jalan Kamunting," he adds.

Prices of pre-war properties in Jalan Yap Ah Shak and Jalan Kamunting are generally lower at around RM1,500 to RM1,700 psf, he says.

As for rents, Foo says they range from RM8,000 to RM15,000 a month. ■

Clockwise from top: The North block of The Row; the former Asian Heritage Row before it was revamped; The fenced off South block of The Row; and the tree-lined paved walkway that stretches the length of The Row