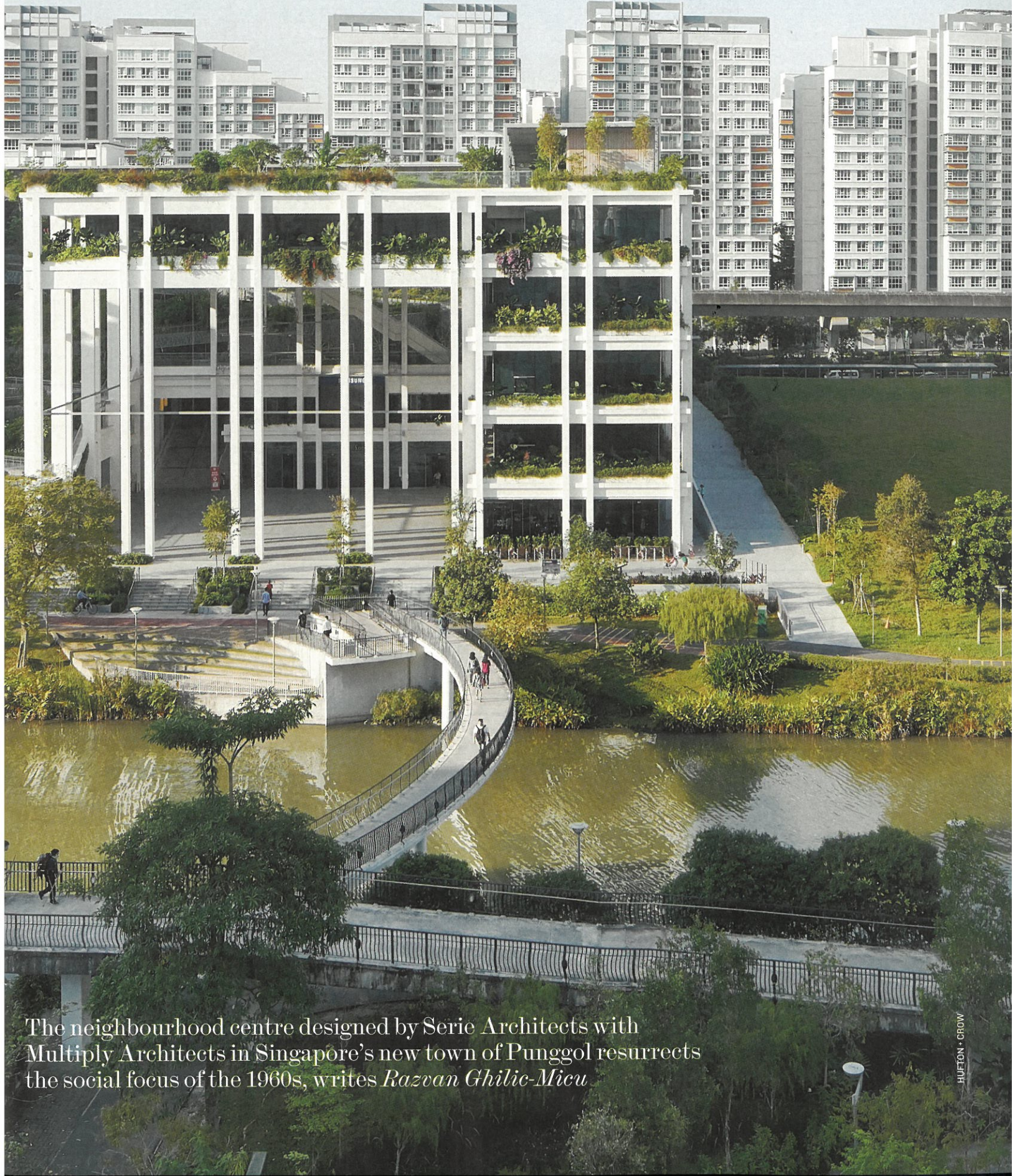


Oasis Terraces

AR Public shortlist
Commended



The neighbourhood centre designed by Serie Architects with Multiply Architects in Singapore's new town of Punggol resurrects the social focus of the 1960s, writes *Razvan Ghilie-Micu*



THIS SPREAD: HUFTON + CROW

Singapore's Housing & Development Board (HDB) was set up in February 1960, charged with solving the country's housing crisis. In its first three years, it built 21,000 new flats, followed by another 54,000 over the next two years, eventually delivering adequate housing for all Singaporeans by the end of the decade. This progressive nation-building agenda, providing privately owned flats on leasehold state land, was paired with an ambitious urbanisation process.

The Urban Renewal Unit (URU) was set up within the HDB in the early 1960s, and was tasked with envisioning the island's central area as a vibrant urban fabric, blending commercial centres with housing and industrial spaces. Restructured as the Urban Renewal Department in 1966, and eventually granted independent agency status in 1973 as the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), the URU laid the foundation for the planning of new towns – the basic DNA of



modern Singapore as we know it.

The first residents moved into the HDB's first satellite new town – Toa Payoh – in 1966, experiencing a new urban ecosystem complete with shops, sport complexes, schools, a park and a neighbourhood centre. Early neighbourhood centres were outdoor typologies aggregating community facilities and offering an informal nexus for community cohesion – a social platform for social identity and integration. But as new towns emerged over the following decades, the HDB also allowed private developers to build neighbourhood centres. Driven by rental yield and commercial returns, this procurement model skewed the development appetite in favour of mature, well-populated townships, and the typology of the neighbourhood centre towards an air-conditioned suburban mall trope.

The progressive development of Punggol as a new town, in the north-east of Singapore, marked a welcome return to this

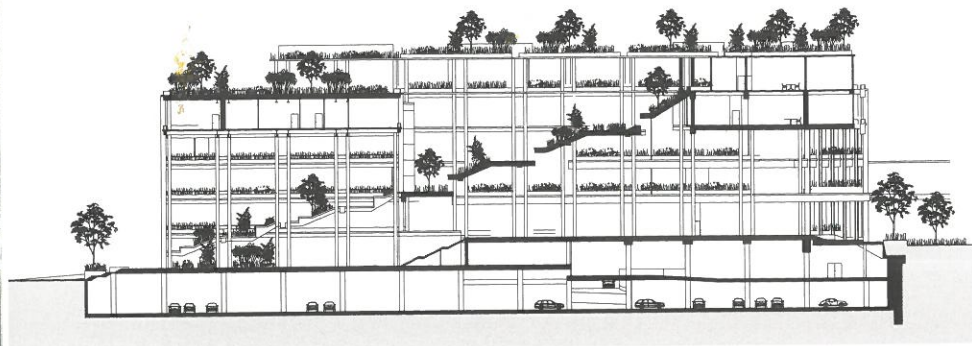


First proposed in 1996 but delayed until 2007, Punggol New Town is projected to include nearly 100,000 apartments.

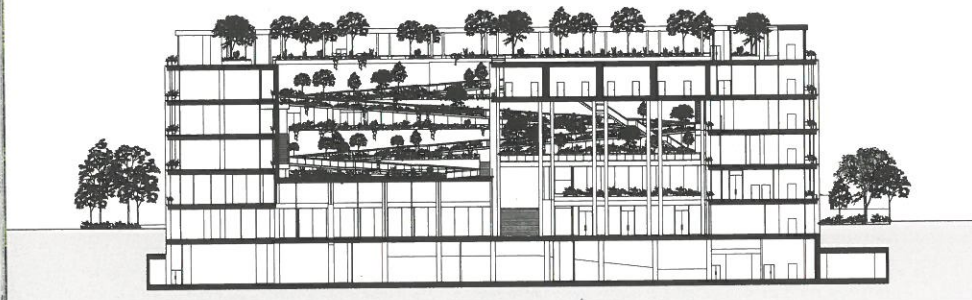
Located in this new piece of city, the neighbourhood centre designed by Serie Architects with Multiply Architects is nestled among towers of Housing & Development Board (HDB) social housing (opening spread).

The centre, which was commissioned by the HDB with the Ministry of Health, includes a series of lushly vegetated ramps at its core (this spread)

The shelter
four-store
plaza carv
building (c
is a reinca
of the HBI
a commun
found at th
level of m
housing bl
for leisure
by residen
local peop



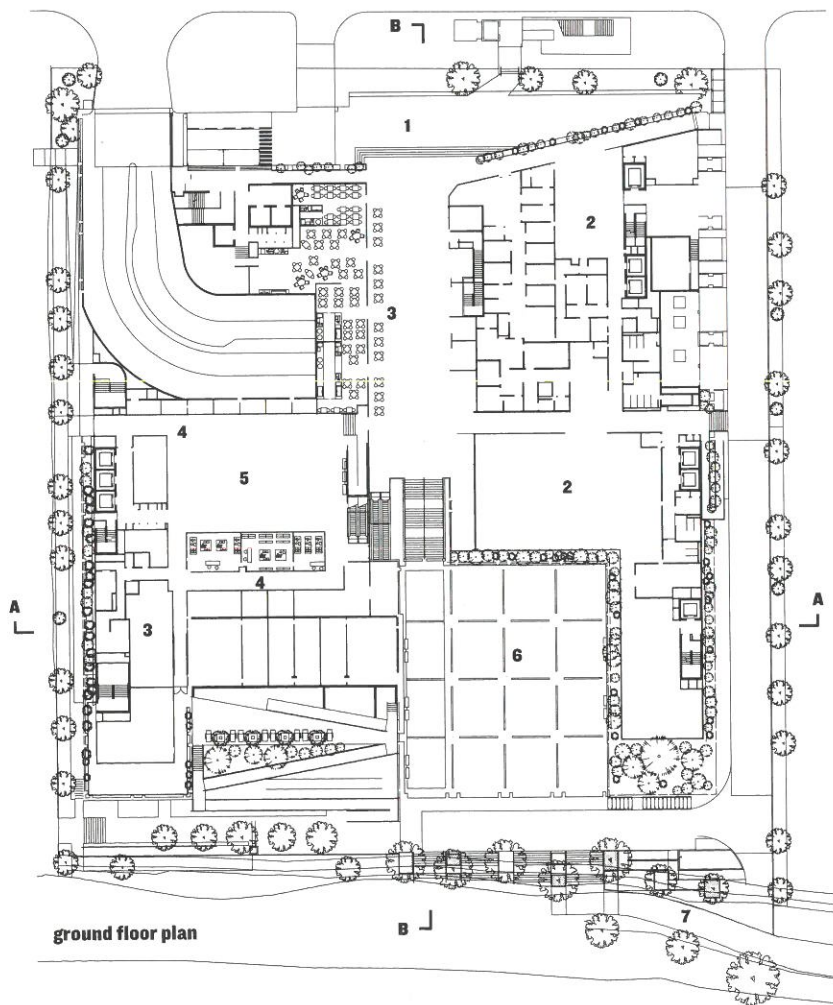
section BB



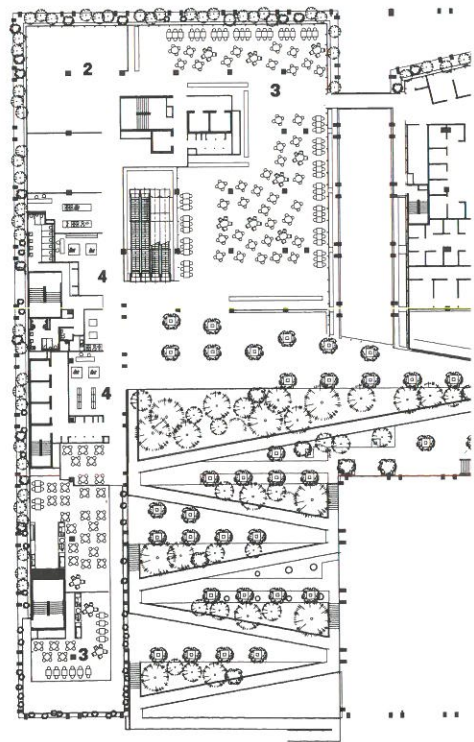
section AA

- 1 entran
- 2 polycli
- 3 restau
- 4 shops
- 5 event
- 6 comm
- 7 path a

0 10m



ground floor plan



third floor



HUFTON + CROW

typology as originally pioneered by the HDB in the 1960s: the publicly developed neighbourhood centre focused primarily on best serving its community. Serie Architects and Multiply Architects won the 2015 public competition with a robust proposal that pays tribute to the heritage HDB spirit, and reinvents the neighbourhood centre.

While the common programmes housed by Oasis Terraces are a predictable mix found in every new town – polyclinics, shops, restaurants, a plaza for the community and other communal facilities – nothing is common or predictable about this project. Legibility is a key driver in the planning, massing, and architectural articulation of the 27,000m² building. In plan, the square outline of the building is bisected by a 10m-wide public connection from the Light Rail Transit (LRT) station behind Oasis Terraces, gently descending and opening up to a 16m-tall sheltered plaza, before gradually blurring the edge of the

development with the park that runs alongside the Punggol Waterway. Rising next to the plaza is a mesmerising alternation of zigzagging ramps and lushly planted terraces, the main gesture inspiring the name of this project and its defining feature. This verdant amphitheatre provides a seamless formal, ecological and visual continuity with the riverside while simultaneously softening the massing of the building into two distinctive wings, connected below and across the terraces by horseshoe-shaped floors.

In many respects, while the planning is a skilful spatial sleight of hand, punctuating many formal moments of surprise and delight, Oasis Terraces is essentially still a high-performing typological interior planning exercise. ‘On a meta-critical level, Oasis Terraces demonstrates the possibility of revalidating and transposing the grammar of persistent architecture,’ explains Christopher Lee, Serie Architects’ principal.

‘Abstracting and repurposing architecture that has been sanctioned by use and time serves to create an architecture that is new and yet strangely familiar to all.’

This clever, deliberate and legible use of architectural elements, validated by time and place in HDB’s long history – a nod to Lee’s affinity with Aldo Rossi’s urban artefact theory – is in full display at Oasis Terraces. Inspired by HDB’s early tectonic syntax, the facade is a rhythmic colonnade of open frames, carefully layered inwards with peripheral planter boxes providing depth, shade, rain protection and softening the overall composition with overflowing greenery. Programmatically, the covered plaza is a scaled-up extrapolation of another local typological icon, the HDB void deck: a common open area found at the ground level of each block of flats, where Singaporean communities gather for everyday activities as well as larger events such as weddings or funerals. Whether tectonic or experiential,



CRISTOFORI

EMERSON

SHAW

TAMPACO

OASIS

The typical community centre programme of health clinics, shops, restaurants and a void deck are housed within a frame wrapped with planted verandas (previous spread). The building sits on the axis of the Waterway (this spread) and adjacent to the LRT station

