



The glass and steel sports complex houses a 12-lane bowling alley, a gym, eight badminton courts and four pools. PHOTO: CHINESE SWIMMING CLUB

End of Katong landmark

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"which look like Chinese ink brush-strokes", says Mr Lee, who has been president for nine years.

In the lobby, lattices on the ceiling and bamboo curtains give the area an Oriental touch. The building also houses Tung Lok Classics, a Chinese restaurant, and a spa that is under construction. The restaurant and spa will be open to the public.

Club members, if not some architects, love the new look.

Housewife Christina Leong, 38, a member since she was nine, says she does not miss the old sports complex at all.

"It was an eyesore and it doesn't fit with the present time."

She still goes to the club once a month to its gym and cafe.

Another member is Madam Lily Lim, 61, a general manager of a hardware company. She used to go to the club as a child every Sunday with her family. Her father then was a life member and Madam Lim became a member five years ago.

She says: "As a child, the old building was big and exciting," she says. "But I prefer this new one too as it is grand, posh and sophisticated."

Ms May Gwee, 38, a freelance public relations consultant, says that "the new buildings move with the times". She adds that the Olympic-sized pool and the kids' pool are better than before.

Mr Lee hopes that with the new look, the club will be able to attract younger members.

It currently has about 8,500 members. The club membership fee is \$10,000 with a monthly \$40 subscription fee. The club



The spacious lobby in the arrival pavilion, with the 'Water Bubbles' chandelier. ST PHOTO: BRYAN VAN DER BEEK

does not sell memberships. Prospective members can join only when current ones want to give up their membership.

The Chinese Swimming Club began in 1909 and there was an old clubhouse before the blue-tiled roof sports complex was completed in 1979.

It still has another Ming-dynasty-inspired building - the recreation complex, located across the road from the arrival pavilion. The future of this building is still uncertain.

The club will put up a proposal at its annual general meeting in April next year.

What is more certain is that the interiors of the two-storey building will be fitted with more activity rooms.

Over the years, it has churned out swimming champions such as Pat Chan, Ang Peng Siong and Mark Chan.

Today, its swimming stars include Lionel Khoo, Koh Hui Yu and Cheryl Lim. Chan, the golden girl of swimming from

1965 to 1973, who used to train at the pool, is more familiar with the old clubhouse than with the former sports complex.

She says that "it is a shame to get rid of history but the club has to move on".

Dr Kevin Tan, president of the Singapore Heritage Society, says that although the Ming-dynasty-inspired sports complex was a "landmark for its time, I don't feel too badly about the loss of it".

He explains that although the building was distinctive, it had little historical significance.

"It would be good if a new building could be built around the old sports complex - losing a landmark in Katong is always sad," he says.

Club president Mr Lee says that all that matters is that "members like it. We cannot please everyone".
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Tell us what you think of the new Chinese Swimming Club. Write to stlife@sph.com.sg



Aerial view of the Chinese swimming club. PHOTO: CHINESE SWIMMING CLUB

100-year history

1905: Nine young swimming enthusiasts form a group called the Tanjong Katong Swimming Party. There is no pool and they swim in the open sea.

1909: The group grows to more than 30 and they decide to adopt the name Chinese Swimming Club.

1912: The Chinese Swimming Club is formally registered under the then Societies Ordinance.

1921: The club begins hunting for permanent premises. A wealthy philanthropist, Mr Lee Choon Guan, offers the use of his bungalow, where the clubhouse now stands, for a nominal fee.

1925: The bungalow and its land are sold to the club as freehold property for \$20,000, after Mr Lee's death in 1924.

1927: The Chinese Swimming Club contributes to an all-Malaya team who travel to Shanghai for the Chinese Olympics, the equivalent of the Asian Games then.

1939: Construction of a 25m swimming pool begins. Until then, swimming and water polo were still done in the open sea.

1941: The pool and a new three-storey clubhouse open.

1942: The clubhouse is used by Japanese military police during the Japanese Occupation as it is the tallest building on the coast.

1946: The Chinese Swimming Club

reopens membership and offers life memberships for the equivalent of \$100. This helps to solve short-term funding problems.

1951: The Chinese Swimming Club is rebuilt with a full-sized Olympic swimming pool for \$126,000.

1965: Singapore's original Golden Girl, Pat Chan, sweeps eight gold medals at the South East Asian Peninsula Games in Kuala Lumpur. She trained under her father, Dr Chan Ah Kow, at the club.

1979: The \$6-million sports complex, with its blue roof tiles, is opened by the then Law, Science and Technology Minister, Mr E. W. Barker. The architectural design and fittings reflect Chinese culture. There is also a nine-dragon wall, imported from China and erected tile by tile.

1992: A new recreation complex, located across the road from the sports complex, is opened by then President Wee Kim Wee. It also has the same blue-tile roofs and pagodas of the sports complex.

2002: The blue-roof sports complex is torn down for Phase 1 of the club's redevelopment project, to build a new sports complex and arrival pavilion.

2005: The new sports complex, with its glass facade and bubble-like structure, is opened. The project costs \$27.4 million.

2009: The \$16-million arrival pavilion is completed in April. It will be officially opened on Nov 4 by Mr Wong Kan Seng, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs.