

# Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum, Mid-Levels

by Tim Youngs

Renovations are now underway at the historic Kom Tong Hall in the Mid-Levels, converting the grand former home into a museum to commemorate Dr Sun Yat-sen.



Early photograph  
of the building



**K**om Tong Hall hit the headlines in 2002 when its owners, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, submitted an application to demolish the old home. The move to tear down the building sparked a public outcry and led to intervention by the Antiquities and Monuments Office and the grandson of original owner Ho Kom-tong. After the demolition was placed on hold, the government started talks to acquire Kom Tong Hall and preserve it as a museum, and in mid-2004 the church agreed to surrender the building for \$53 million.

The public's desire to spare the 2,500 sq m building from destruction stemmed largely from the former home's historical and architectural significance. Built in 1914 at 7 Lower Castle Road in the Mid-Levels, Kom Tong Hall stands as a prime example of the Composite Classical style of the Edwardian period. Few other buildings with the once-popular approach, which combines red brickwork with stucco or stone architectural features, remain intact —

others include the Old Pathological Institute on Caine Road, built in 1906, and Central Police Station, from 1919. The old home is also believed to be Hong Kong's first residence built with a steel frame and in-wall electrical wiring. Corinthian, Ionic, Doric, Tuscan, Baroque, Rococo and Art Nouveau decorative features are all found inside and out, and components ranging from all hardwood windows to doors and shutters appear to be original.

Plans were drawn up to adaptively reuse the building as a museum to commemorate Dr Sun Yat-sen — a conversion deemed appropriate since the home dates back to near the formation of the Republic of China in 1911. Ho Kom-tong also went to the same Central School in the nearby Aberdeen Street as Dr Sun did, and the pair were born in the same year. The Dr Sun Yat-sen Heritage Trail winds through streets below the old house. With the museum proposal set, Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) was assigned to oversee restoration and handle planning and design duties.



Exhibition area



### Preservation plans

ArchSD's preservation approach followed the two-stage Conservation Plan methodology set out by James Semple Kerr. The first phase involves understanding the place, gathering documentary and physical evidence, coordination and analysing the evidence, and assessing and stating significance. The second stage involves conservation policy and its implementation. At this later point, information gathered for development of a conservation policy relates to physical condition, external requirements, needs for retention of

significance, and the client's requirements or feasible uses. The approach saw ArchSD conduct extensive research into the building's history, going direct to people connected with it. Interviewees included Ho Kom-tong's descendants, such as grandson Ho Hung-to who grew up at the hall, as well as retired structural engineer PK Ng, who worked on Kom Tong Hall in 1960, and Wong Wing-kin, who served as a housekeeper for the church. The process allowed the project team to determine the building's historical, architectural



and contextual significance as well as its authenticity and its social and scientific value. With assessment conducted, implementation of the legal prerequisites for the project could then begin along with determination of objectives and drawing up suitable conservation guidelines.

The proposed schedule of accommodation for the Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum includes exhibition areas, education and research facilities, visitor facilities, administration/management/ancillary areas and sanitary provisions. The number of visitors will be limited to 300 people at any given time, since the structural loading of the building was designed for residential use only. Access to rooms will be similarly controlled — only staff access will be allowed into spaces not complying with current loading standards.

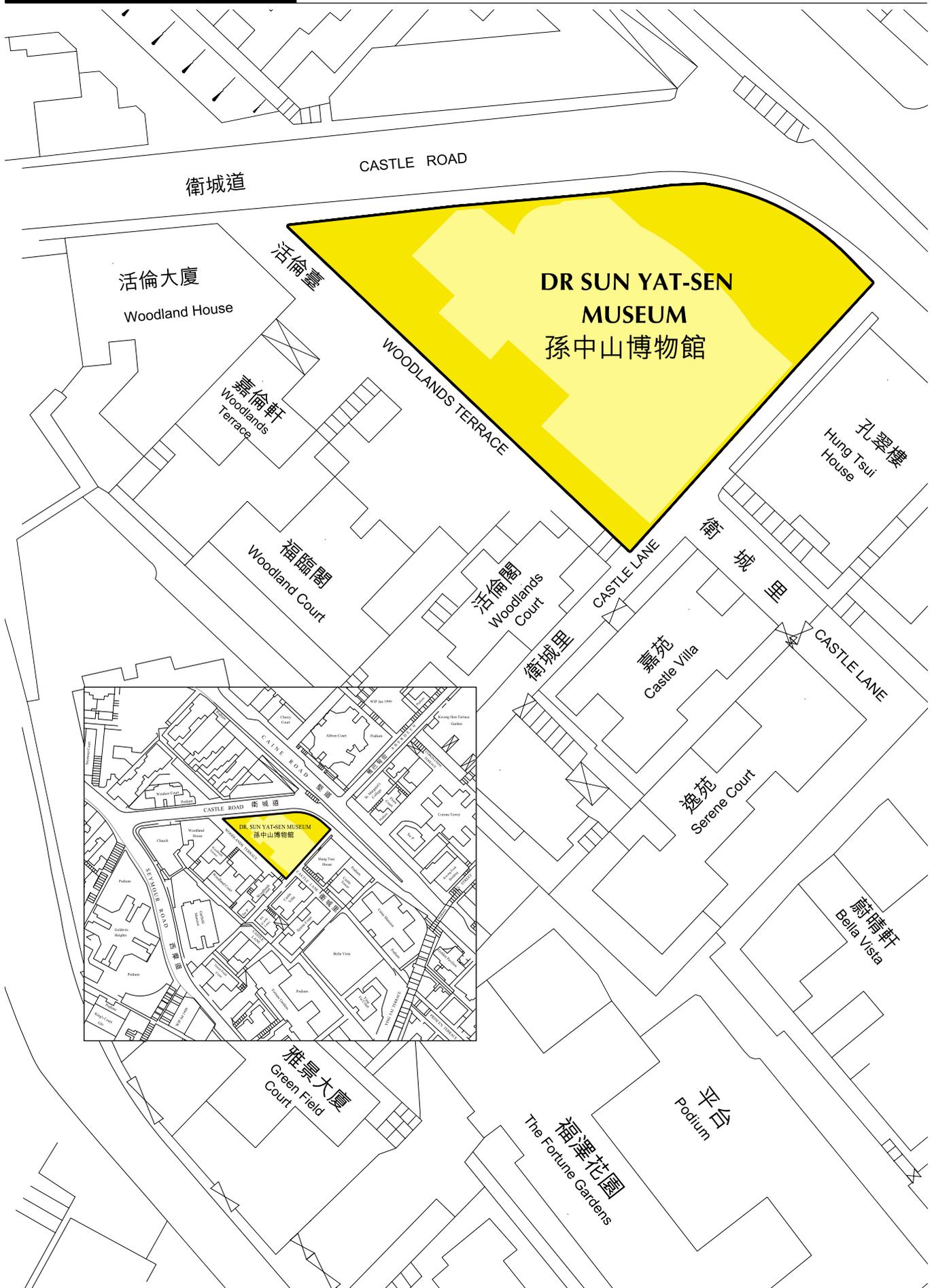
Under the conservation policy drawn up for the project, aspects of the building were graded under degree of importance. The front elevation facing Caine Road was determined to hold high value, for example, along with other features such as the main corridor, the French parlour and the dining room, and plans were set for retaining original materials, repairing as

necessary with compatible materials, or returning finishes to original states or designs. Plans for the project also aim to strike a balance between adaptive reuse as a museum and retaining the collective memory of past building uses; Kom Tong Hall will be an artefact on display itself.

#### **Work in progress**

Conversion of the former home into a museum covers all levels. At the basement, a former garage, excavation is being carried out to accommodate an improvised 27,000 cu m water tank for the sprinkler system and fire hydrants, as well as the required pumping system and the electrical switch room. Fire-service panels and metal louvres are being placed at the existing garage entrance facing Castle Road, and timber doors or timber-faced steel doors in period design will replace the existing stainless steel door facing.

The main visitor entrance will be at the lower ground floor, with a reception area entered from the front of the building, as well as seating, toilets and an office. The baptismal font constructed by the church at the Castle Lane side is being retained together with



surrounding timber decking as part of the first exhibition area to show the history of the building. The exit will be via a gift shop adjacent to Castle Road. Other features on this level include a seminar room; an elevated platform installed in the rear courtyard for disabled access to the ground floor; a machine-room-less passenger lift located at the recess area of the rear on the southwestern side; a new external staircase to serve the first and second floors as an escape route; a plant room; and a store room.

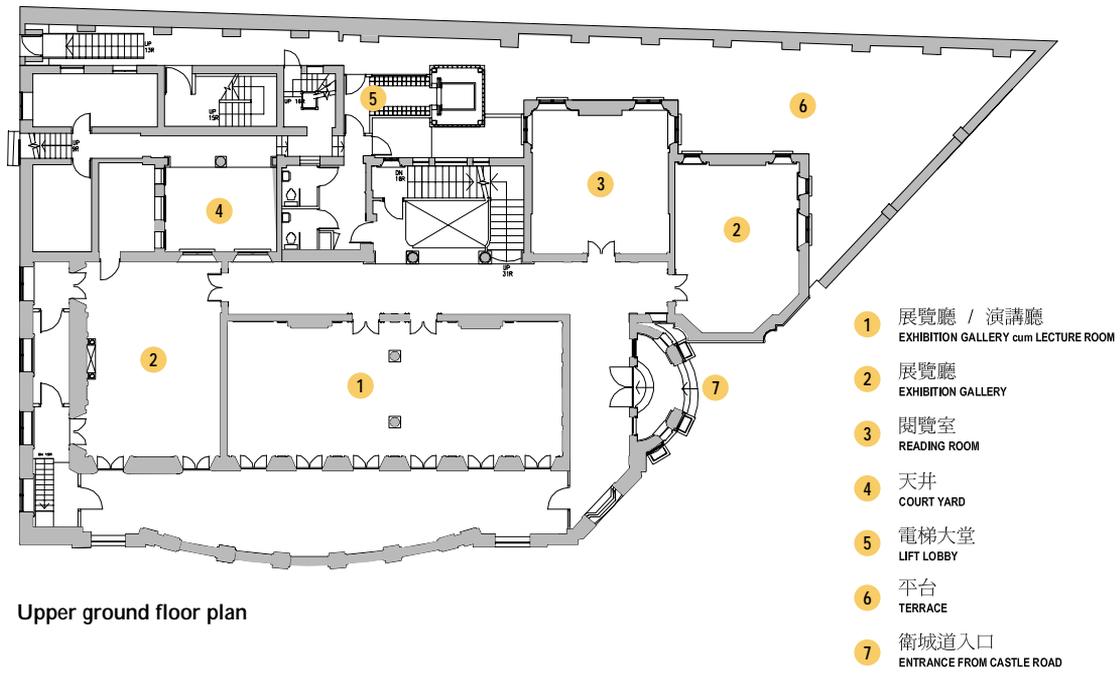
The upper ground floor will have all the existing modern windows in the balcony, the slide-and-fold partitioning, the timber floor and the ceiling together with the old supply and return air-ducts to the French parlour removed. The front and northwest elevation is being reinstated to the original condition, with bamboo blinds similar to the originals installed to provide shading to the balcony, and all original floor and wall tiles will be exposed and repaired. Other work on this level includes replacing doors and gates, preserving all French windows and timber louvre shutters, restoring all wainscoting panels along the corridor, reinstating the dining room to its original appearance, modifications for improved ventilation, reinstating columns in accordance with old photographs, adding period lighting and ceiling fans, and presenting photos showing the home's original use by the Ho family. An opening will be formed direct to Castle Road at the corner to Woodland Terrace and an original exit to Castle Lane will be reinstated. The rear terrace will be landscaped to soften the visual impact of the retaining wall, and the existing rear internal service staircase will be maintained with all original timber railings repaired.

The mezzanine floor above is being renovated with disabled access and will hold offices, stores and toilets. The first floor will become an exhibition gallery, with all architectural features along the main corridor maintained and reinstated. Suspended curved panelled ceiling resembling the corridor's original vaulted profile will conceal necessary electrical conduits, cabling, signaling equipment, lighting and smoke-detection pipeworks. Original ceilings and upper walls will be exposed and all original ceiling patterns will be reinstated, as too will be all original floor and wall finishes. The two rooms at the

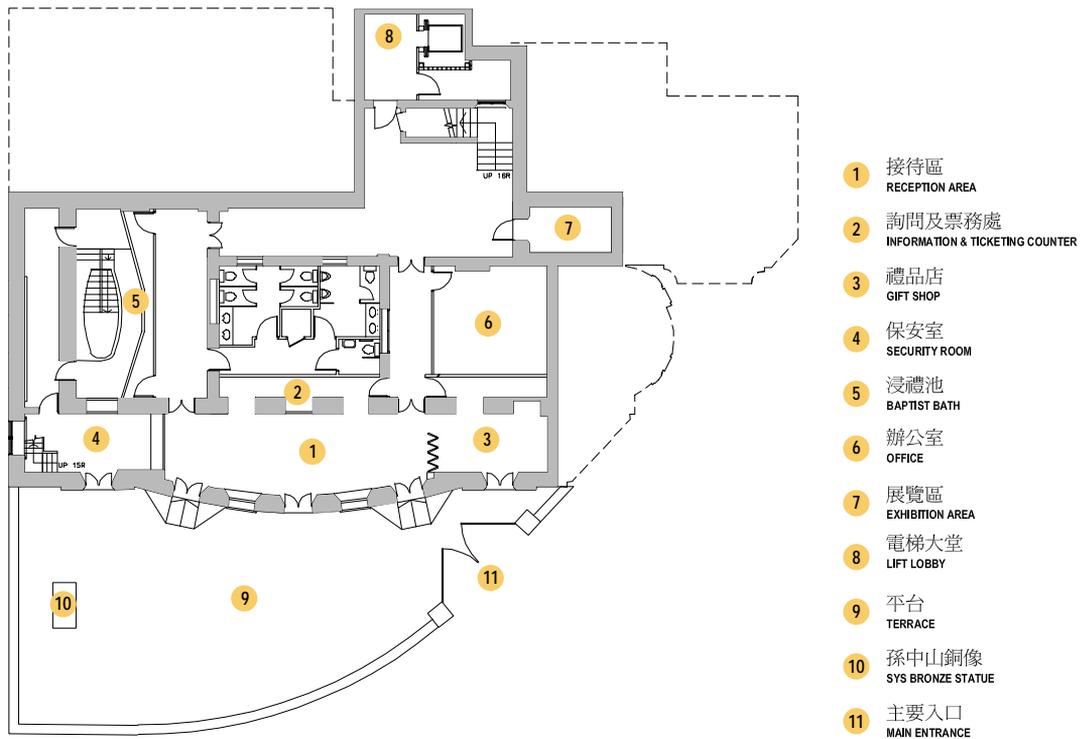


western side will be used as exhibition areas and as multi-purpose function rooms. Toilets and a service corridor in the middle will be returned to original positions with windows facing the light well, and original bathrooms next to Castle Lane will become a plant area for E&M equipment and ducting.

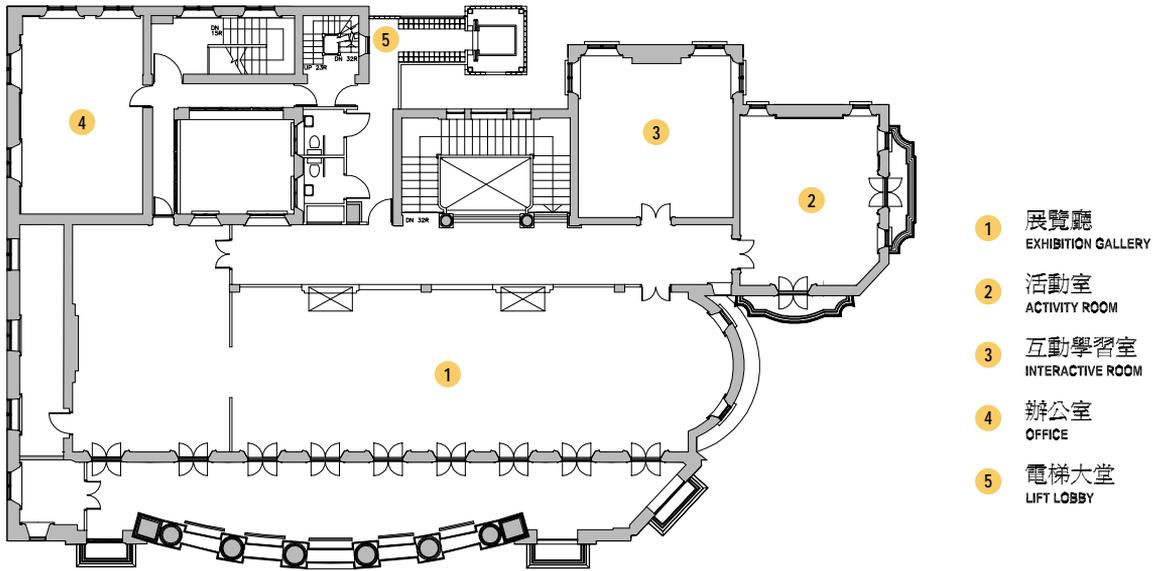
Work on the second floor includes adding structural cable fencing at the stairwell to comply with statutory requirements and to protect the existing railing; enhancing ventilation; repairing and reinstating all Venetian windows to their original design; and reinstating openings to the side room on the



Upper ground floor plan

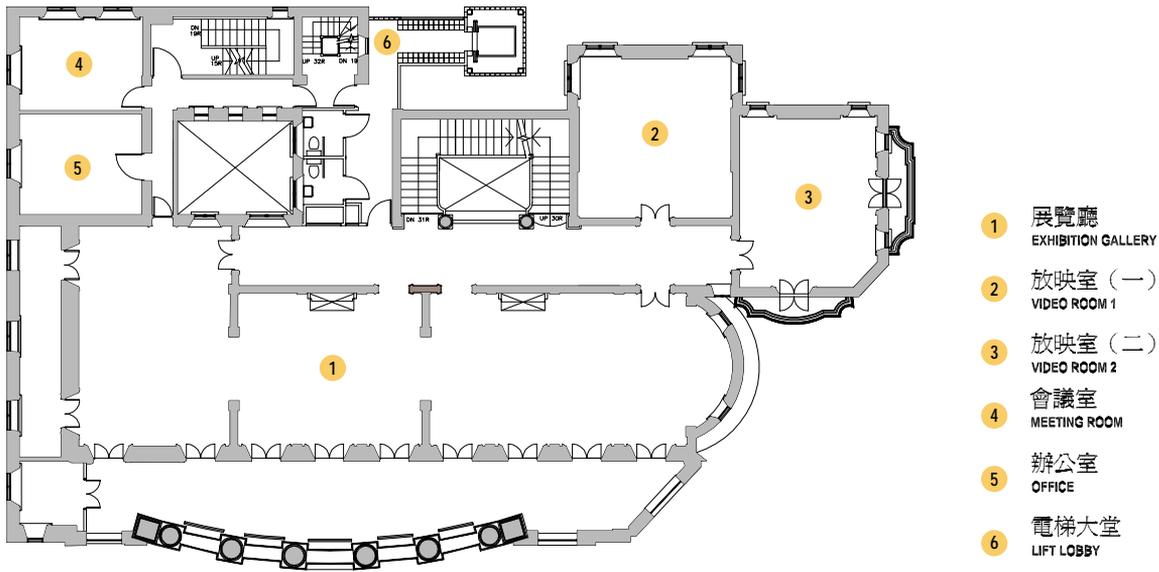


Lower ground floor plan



- 1 展覽廳  
EXHIBITION GALLERY
- 2 活動室  
ACTIVITY ROOM
- 3 互動學習室  
INTERACTIVE ROOM
- 4 辦公室  
OFFICE
- 5 電梯大堂  
LIFT LOBBY

Second floor plan



- 1 展覽廳  
EXHIBITION GALLERY
- 2 放映室 (一)  
VIDEO ROOM 1
- 3 放映室 (二)  
VIDEO ROOM 2
- 4 會議室  
MEETING ROOM
- 5 辦公室  
OFFICE
- 6 電梯大堂  
LIFT LOBBY

First floor plan

Castle Lane side to their original height and fitting them with doors of the original design. The spine wall and the two cross walls are being returned to the original appearance, along with all wall fittings including doors, wainscoting and door frames. Public access to the front balconette and to the two balconies in the northwest room will be restricted.

The roof is set to house building services equipment, evenly spread out to prevent overloading on existing structures. A glazed canopy will be placed above the light well and a service staircase at the rear will be the sole access point.

The Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum is scheduled to open in 2007.