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Conceived as a mobile platform to house the Singapore International Photography Festival 2014, DECK by 2902 Gallery is a new crowdfunded arts space in Prinsep Street. An innovative use of refurbished shipping containers by design consultant LAUD Architects allows it to be easily relocated to a new site after its lease ends. Prabhu Silvam reports.

DECK by 2902 Gallery

URBAN ACUPUNCTURE

Text by Prabhu Silvam

Photography by Daniel Swee

PROJECT CREDITS

Architect: LAUD Architects Pte Ltd

Client: Art Photography Centre Ltd

Contractor: Tong Hai Yang Construction Pte Ltd and TA Asian Holdings Pte Ltd

Civil & Structural Engineer: Aston Consulting Engineers,

Tan Charng Cherng & Associates, and KKT Consultants Pte Ltd

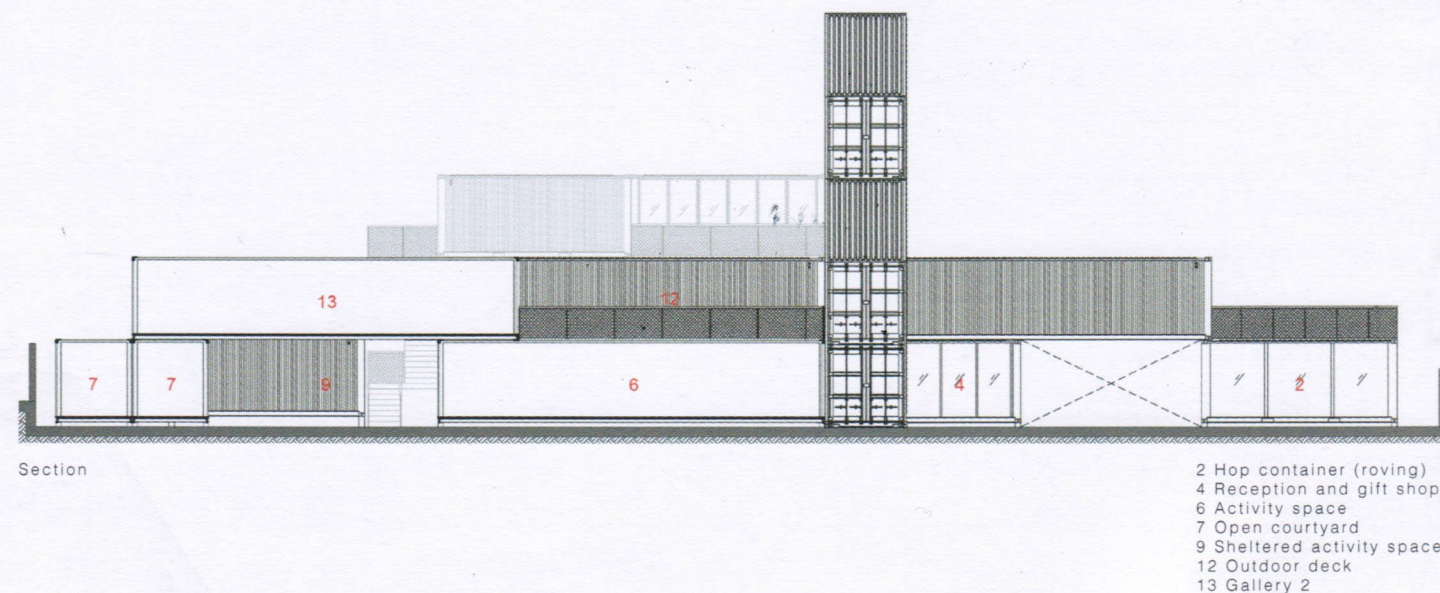
Logistics: CWT Limited and Bok Seng Logistics Pte Ltd

Land Area: 794.4 m²

GFA: 368.7 m²

Completion Date: October 2014





DECK is a visual conundrum: 19 refurbished shipping containers stacked atop one another in a haphazard medley of bold, unapologetic aesthetics. Like a prose out of a Lewis Carroll novel, it defies known logic while making absolute sense at the same time.

Singapore-based contemporary art photography gallery 2902 Gallery is the driving force behind this new arts space. Active in the local scene since 2008, the gallery prides itself on showcasing the best in art photography in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Upon setting up DECK in October 2014, 2902 Gallery launched the fourth instalment of the Singapore International Photography Festival. Commencing over nine weekends from 3 October to 30 November 2014, the festival saw a culmination of 105 artists showcasing their works across 15 venues nationwide, with DECK serving as the epicentre for the festival.

The design was undertaken by local firm LAUD Architects, known for its futuristic takes and contemporary scales, seen in previous works like the Bible Society, Bethel Assembly Of God Church, and Oxley Condominium. DECK is the latest homage to its astute, modernist approach to structures. As head architect behind the project, Ho Tze Yin conceptualised the principal design and overall idea.

"When you take something functional like containers and make it architectural, it transcends into something different altogether. That was our aim," explains Ho. "Containers are highly functional storage spaces by nature, but that's the last thing we wanted, because this is an architectural space. So the form of the place had to be different," adds Ho, when asked about the seemingly haphazard layout of the containers.

But there is poetry to this madness and an unspoken order to this brewing chaos. The cold, metallic grey exterior gleams clandestinely under the mid-day sun but transforms into a stealthy contortion of metal at night—almost indistinguishable to the wandering eye after dusk. Then, like clockwork, it rises again at dawn, standing proud and grey amid the mundane blanket of city-centre modernity.

The overall composition of DECK has a more architectural leaning than functional one. The idea behind DECK was to utilise something as standard and functional as storage containers to create a variety of spatial experiences through mere arrangement and form construction.

As the current plot of land has been leased for only two years from 2014 till 2016, planning for DECK meant keeping in mind the spatial and functional prerequisites. The multidimensional appeal of the structural composition means that it can be broken down to the bare minimum and reassembled at another location, if required. "They can be disassembled like Lego. Although the way we reassemble them cannot be entirely different, there is a possibility that we can reattach them in a slightly different configuration," explains Ho.

Utilising the method of tap welding, each container is carefully conjoined to one another. This allows each joint to be easily detached and secured back again seamlessly at another location, and in another shape, to accommodate the new land area.

Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? Each of the 19 refurbished containers was fabricated and constructed at a shipyard within the span of three to four weeks. Donated to the project by Pacific International



1 The 19 shipping containers that make up DECK were donated to the project by Pacific International Lines Singapore.

2 The staggered refurbished shipping containers combine into a multipurpose arts venue capable of hosting exhibitions, art programmes, and talks.

3 Each container is carefully conjoined to one another using the method of tap welding. This allows each joint to be easily detached and secured back again at another location, if needed.

The idea behind DECK was to utilise something as standard and functional as storage containers to create a variety of spatial experiences through mere arrangement and form construction.

Lines, the containers, weighing eight tons each, have been ingeniously transformed into a sandbox-inspired art house. Metal façades that would usually weather the grime of ship docks as principal storage space for essential goods and supplies now house something of an entirely different calibre—but still as integral.

In addition to housing the finest in photography both locally and in the international scene, DECK serves as a multidisciplinary capsule, boasting a Gallery, Resource Library, Activity Studio, and Artist's Studio within its premises. As an ode to non-conformity, both visually and metaphorically, DECK stands proudly amidst the traditional clan houses and arts enclaves in time-suspended Prinsep Street, and not without reason.

DECK's utility-inspired building doubles as a location connector between Prinsep Street and Albert Street. Thanks to its formicarium-styled structure, visitors are able to travel from one end of the street and reach the other by the end of their gallery visit. This not only makes it highly accessible to the visiting public at large, but also regulates the flow of traffic from both streets and increases the appeal of the area as a whole—further solidifying the location as a proven arts enclave.

The initiative to use recycled containers drives the cause of green buildings and encourages the use of pre-existing

materials to create something new altogether. The idea of building something temporary over unused land—activating it and facilitating meaningful activity to draw people to it—revitalises the space. Overall, DECK is not just a project about containers; it's also about redefining the urban condition, by tapping into its surroundings in a meaningful and economically feasible way.

With no environmentally invasive construction involved, DECK is ideal, with minimal eco footprint but maximum societal impact. "I call it 'urban acupuncture'—building something that leaves a small environmental footprint but a large impact on the community at large," remarks Ho.

Housing the photo exhibition in containers has injected new life into the 19 containers. Raw and grunge-inspired, DECK demarcates a safe house for artistic and creative growth in the fast-paced arts industry. It is for the working-class hero, bringing the spirit of photography back to the common man. This is line with 2902 Gallery's vision of taking the power of photography and placing it back where it belongs: with the people. ■

For more information, visit www.deck.sg.

4,5 White walls and fluorescent lights are installed to create a bright, minimalist feel—a direct contrast to its cold, steely exterior.

