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E&O Hotel says old-world charm intact while spruce-up is ongoing

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The three-century old decommissioned cannons from Fort Cornwallis guard the grounds of the E&O Hotel, George Town, Penang

Although the Heritage Wing of the Iconic Eastern & Oriental (E&O) Hotel is currently undergoing an extensive refurbishment, some parts of its rich history will still be cherished and protected.

As one of the few historical hotels around the globe, the management has placed great emphasis to preserve elements of the hotel's 134-year old history, the iconic Java tree, the manual lift, the dome and three British era cannons.

Planted even before the E&O hotel was built, the Java tree is the only constant among the changes the hotel has undergone throughout the years, from the initial establishment of the Oriental Hotel in 1885 to its merger with the Eastern Hotel; an earlier venture by the Sarkies Brothers, into the E&O it is today.



An archive photo of the Java Tree taken in the 1920s with Herman Hesse (gentleman in the waistcoat) in the foreground. Photo source from the Penang State Museum

Java tree saw many marriages

The Java tree has also stood witness to many marriages as couples held their garden weddings in the attendance of their closest friends and family under its shade, creating many happy memories in its presence.

Besides the Java tree, the E&O is also home to one of the first Otis lifts installed in Malaysia during the 1920s.

The manually controlled Waygood Otis lift with a sliding grill was featured in the Hollywood film *Crazy Rich Asians*, and has been well maintained although no longer in use.

Three decommissioned cannons from Fort Cornwallis will also continue to remain in place along the seafront facing the Andaman Sea as they symbolise not only the history of the E&O and Penang but also the history of its guests.

Guests throughout the years have returned to the hotel and recall the times where they played around the steel cannons or climbed upon them as children and took pictures with them when they came to visit with their friends and family.

The grandeur of that lift has no match



The Otis lift designed to resemble a birdcage has served generations of dignitaries, VIPs and celebrities

In addition, there is the iconic echo dome in the Heritage Wing lobby which is an original structure from the time of the Sarkies management and will remain as part of the hotel in the future.

The echo dome got its name from the way it projects even the softest of sounds made beneath it, from people whispering to one another to the clicking of heels against the polished marble floor.

It has borne witness to many conversations throughout its history and has had many prominent figures like Somerset Maugham and Charlie Chaplin to the more recent late Lee Kuan Yew and Datuk Michelle Yeoh pass below it during their stay at the hotel.

Hotel general manager Alison Fraser said it is of utmost importance for the hotel to conserve these elements of history as it is part of the hotel's identity and a treasured legacy for the future generations.

"The E&O Hotel will not be the same without these icons as we can no longer call ourselves a historical hotel without these key pieces of history," said Fraser in a press release issued recently.