

Summary of the Report on Site Investigation and Restoration Options  
King Yin Lei at 45 Stubbs Road, Hong Kong

\*\*\*\*\*

History and background

King Yin Lei at 45 Stubbs Road, Hong Kong started to be built in 1936 on a slope overlooking the sea at the Mid-Levels of the Victoria Peak. Site formation and a retaining wall resulted in a flat piece of land on which stands a magnificent private residence owned by a Chinese. In the British colony of Hong Kong in the 1930s, it was most remarkable for such a house rich in Chinese architectural features to be found on this prime site at the scenic Mid-Levels which was predominantly by the British. Signifying historically the undeniable rise in the status of the Chinese merchant class in the British colony at that time, the house has had three owners, with the name "King Yin Lei" being given by the second one.

The environment and architectural features of King Yin Lei

2. The complex comprises a main building, an annex block, a garage, a subsidiary building, a pavilion, a swimming pool, etc. Situated at the hillside and facing the sea, the complex is surrounded by rich greenery. Due to geographic constraints, the architect designed the main building to be slightly (7.2 degrees) tilted to the north east to avoid facing due north, and the entrance of the complex orientated at east 32.4 degrees south to signify the fung shui idea of "the purple qi coming from the east" (紫氣東來). The main building has a spacious semi-circular fore courtyard situated on a 23-metre-depth slope augmented by a stone retaining wall over 11 metres in height. Protruding out of the hill, it is an auspicious fung shui setting of "being the champion" (獨佔鰲頭). In the centre of the fore courtyard was a "half-moon pond" (now reclaimed) commonly found in villages in southern China, which would mean to bring wealth to the owner. "Half-moon pond" is a typical landscape feature in the traditional villages of southern China. Located at the left (west) of the main building is a subsidiary building, while an annex block is right at its back to the left. A garage is at the left of the annex block and a pavilion is at the back of the main building a bit to the right. Further to the right side across the driveway is an in-ground swimming pool.

3. The whole setting of the site is that there are two portions, which are separated

by a boundary wall. The front portion consists of the main building, the annex block, the garage, the subsidiary building and the fore courtyard, forming the "inner residence". The rear portion consists of the pavilion, the garden and the swimming pool, forming the large "outer yard". There is a "bird area" to the left of the rear part in the front portion, where an old kennel for the dog of the mansion's first owner as well as some bird cages can be found. On the wall of the old kennel there is a small memorial plaque, and on the cage posts there are historical marks of the designer and the manufacturer.

4. The main building follows the traditional "three-bay two-veranda" (three-sided courtyard house) layout commonly found in southern China, which means there is one central hall and two wings with an open area facing south. A screen wall is built at the south of the open area to form an internal courtyard. Different from traditional courtyard houses, the wings are slightly tilted away from the central house. At the southern part of the first level of the central house, an octagonal area of the main hall protrudes into the internal courtyard so that the main entrance chamber is enlarged. It reminds us of the pavilion in front of the main hall found in some traditional upper-class residences in southern China.

5. The annex block has two storeys with a number of parallel rooms connected by a veranda, which reflects the simplicity of modern residential designs in the early years. The second level of the main building and the annex block are connected by a kitchen and a passageway, which ingeniously separates the living areas of the masters and the servants while the masters can still enjoy the convenient service of the servants. A food hatch used to deliver dishes from the kitchen on the first level to the round hall (dining hall) in the main building can still be found inside. The first level of the two-storey garage is for car-parking and the second level is for residential purpose. Its roof is a classical Chinese luding roof (a four-sloped roof with a flat central portion). The single-storey subsidiary building with classical Chinese pyramidal roof in quadrangular shape and humpbacked roof is about 20 metres long and connected by corridors to the square-shaped pavilions at both ends. The one-storey hexagonal pavilion has two entrances and a classical Chinese double-eaved pyramidal roof in hexagonal shape.

6. The upper structure of the house is made up of brick walls, reinforced concrete floor slabs and roof boarding. From the damaged beams and columns, it can be observed that there is more sand and less cement in the aggregate. Small diameter steel bars are used and the cement grading is low with possible mixture of lime. Limited by

the construction equipment then, vibrators were not used to minimize air holes. But the floor slabs are as thick as 200 mm and a grid pattern supporting system is used for the beams of the main halls on various storeys. For the round chamber to the west of the first floor, a concentric radiating pattern is in place. Such structural designs have served to enhance the load carrying capacity of the floors, in addition to making the coffer ceiling attractive.

7. Adding er-shui-er-zhu-er-mao-yi-cai (二水二鑄二鉚一彩) to the traditional san-diao-er-su-yi-shui-yi-cai (三雕二塑一水一彩), the modern architectural decorative craftsmanship of southern China include stone carving, brick carving, wood carving, plastered sculpture, pottery sculpture, glazing, fair-faced and polished green brick with silky joint, terrazzo, shanghai plaster, cast copper, cast iron, copper rivet, iron rivet, painting and stained glass. Except brick carving, fair-faced and polished green brick with silky joint, cast copper and cast iron, all the other types of traditional craftsmanship can be found in the complex.

8. The main chamber and the two wings of the main building have hip and gable roofs, considered to be roof features of big houses in traditional Chinese architecture. As the roof surface is large and slanting, torrential rain can crush the ground with water splashing to the walls and verandas causing undesirable impact. In the early period of republican China, intercepting drains were set on the roof above the walls to carry water to the surface and hidden drains at wall corners, greatly reducing the volume of rain water on the ground. Concealed down pipes are used in this complex, which means that pipes are not seen on the walls, but when blockage occurred it would have been difficult to clear. The house also has a good concealed outdoor drainage system which is still functioning.

9. Since the Mid-Levels used to be the residential area of rich people in Hong Kong, the security design was one of the strictest of its kind. There was a secret compartment on the second floor of the east wing of the main building. Enclosed by four walls, the compartment has an entrance on the eastern wall where a secure safe door is installed. There is an ante-room at the entrance where tiny holes are opened at the eastern and western wall eaves for ventilation. Known also as "the safe room", this secret compartment is heavily secured.

#### Description of damage sustained

10. The whole roof surface and the main ridge, gable ridge and corner ridge were

originally covered with green-glazed pan tiles and roll tiles, ridge-end ornaments, pearl, porcelain figurines of immortals and mythical animals in simple form, following ancient Chinese palatial style. All such features have been removed and broken into pieces. The style of internal and external enclosing walls is in line with that of the complex, with the walls made of red fair-faced brickwork and the top covered by green-glazed features. Currently the top of the enclosing walls at the southeastern entrance (altered at a later stage) and the cages area have been basically kept intact, but nearly all glazed materials covering the inner gate and the enclosing walls have been destroyed.

11. Columns, corner beams, cantilever purlins and Chinese bracket sets under the eaves were originally made of pale yellowish-brown terrazzo. Currently apart from the columns and cantilever purlins being kept intact, most column heads and part of the Chinese bracket sets under the eaves have been smashed. Plaster mouldings were originally pasted onto the beams and pre-cast terrazzo onto the architraves. Nearly all of them have now been broken and some architraves have been damaged to the extent that the steel bars of the concrete are exposed.

12. The walls are externally made of red fair-faced polished brickwork. The outer veranda is furnished with plaster mouldings at the wall eaves and granite dados. The inner side of the walls is plastered white, with wooden picture rails at the top and wooden skirting at the bottom. There are plaster mouldings at the wall eaves of the main hall. The red-bricked walls have remained intact apart from the partial damage sustained at the north elevation. Granite dados have remained in good condition. White plaster of inner walls is basically undamaged, but lots of picture rails have been removed. The skirting remains largely intact. All plaster mouldings at the wall eaves have been removed. Made of red fair-faced brickwork, the enclosing walls have not been damaged.

13. The original floor paving of the main hall on the first floor of the main building was white marble, with a black-and-white Swastika pattern on the periphery. The paving has now been completely destroyed. Only a small portion of marble has been left in the passageway. The floor of the western round chamber and the eastern room was originally paved with large pieces of white mosaics laid in an arc-shaped radiation pattern. The paving has now been completely destroyed. The original floor paving of the chambers and rooms of the two wings was wood parquet tiles, which has remained intact except for a small damaged portion. The floor of the bathroom in the eastern chamber, paved with green ceramic tiles, remains in good condition.

The floor of the one in the west, originally paved with small white square mosaics, however, has been completely destroyed. The original floor paving of the outer veranda, being coloured small square mosaics, has largely been damaged.

14. For the second level of the main building, the original parquet flooring of all the chambers and rooms formed by small pieces of wood has remained largely intact, with the exception of only a small part of it having been damaged. The flooring of the veranda and balcony, finished with coloured small square mosaics, has been removed entirely except an area of about 2 square metres at the balcony. While the flooring of the bathroom in the east has been replaced with modern marble, the original flooring of the one in the west, finished with pink tiles, has remained in good condition.

15. The original flooring on the second floor of the central chamber and the rear veranda at the main building, finished with small white hexagonal mosaics, has been completely removed. The flooring of the rooms on the two sides and the front balcony, finished with Canton tiles, has been well preserved. Natural cracks are found to have occurred on the terrazzo platform in front of the door. The original flooring of the entrance hall and the kitchen on the first floor, finished with small white hexagonal mosaics, has been completely removed. The same happened to the flooring of the entrance hall and the kitchen on the second floor, finished with square units composed of red and white octagonal cement bricks and small white hexagonal mosaics respectively.

16. The flooring of the passageway and the first and second levels of the annex block, all finished with square units composed of red and white octagonal cement bricks with the exception of the toilets, has been completely broken into pieces. The flooring of the subsidiary building and the pavilion, with small coloured mosaics laid in grid pattern, remains intact on the whole, as does the plain cement surface of the first level of the garage. The rooms and the verandas on the second level, paved with square units composed of red and white octagonal cement bricks, have been preserved in good condition.

17. Basically in the palatial architectural style of the Qing dynasty, the construction of the granite railings of the veranda on the first level of the main building is complete with balustrade posts and capitals, handrails and panels with cloud-shaped bracket having vase decoration fitted in-between, terraces and drum-shaped dropping belt stones on the two sides. The 20 capitals of the verandas in the north, east and west have all been broken. The verandas in the north and west

both have a handrail being torn down. A drum-shaped dropping belt stone in the north veranda has also been destroyed, while a dropping belt stone is missing and a balustrade post has been removed.

18. Apart from the entrance door and the rear doors on the two sides of the screen wall of the internal courtyard, each outer door of the main building that opens outwards to the veranda comes with double doors. The inner door is a stained glass door in an iron frame while the outer door is a split sliding gate fitted inside the wall. The inner doors have all been removed, but the iron gates fitted inside the walls have suffered no damage with the exception of one. The entrance door has adopted a triple-door design. It consists of a outward-opening lattice door made of iron with rivets arranged in the character "壽" (longevity), an iron sliding door fitted inside the wall in the middle and a set of wooden doors that opens inwards. All the three layers of the door have now been removed. Only some residual parts of the outer door can be found. There are three types of windows, namely triple windows, double windows and single windows, most having been damaged.

#### Value Assessment

19. The value assessment of historical buildings is dynamic, based on information comprising the present condition of the buildings and written records.

#### Historical Value

20. King Yin Lei can be classified as a modern building. In terms of historical value, both the first and the second owners of the residence were renowned figures in Hong Kong. Its first owner Mrs. Shum Li Po-lun's (岑李寶麟) was the daughter of Mr. Li Po-chun (李寶椿), the famous merchant in Hong Kong who made great contributions to many social welfare causes including medical services and education. Mrs. Shum's husband was an herbalist who practised in Australia. There remains in the house a cast iron tool for grinding Chinese medicine, possibly left behind by Mr. Shum. Its second owners were Mr. Yow Qhei-man (邱子文) and his son Mr. Yow Mok-shing (邱木城). The father commenced the business of manufacturing traditional Chinese dried fruit sweets and was known to local people as the "King of Dried Plums". His son is a famous businessman who is devoted to public charities, having made significant contributions to education. He has been appointed as Chairman of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, a Justice of the Peace and a Director of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow Chamber of Commerce.

21. Hong Kong was a British colony. In more than a century of its modern architectural history, British colonial style architecture played a dominant role. The result was an eclectic mix encompassing weatherproof verandas into British architecture to suit the climate of South-east Asia. Around the 1930s, the building industry in Hong Kong developed slowly because of world economic and political problems, while its architecture began to be influenced by the international styles. It was around the same time that the republican government on the mainland of China advocated what was called "the intrinsic Chinese architectural style". A large number of educational, religious and government buildings having a blend of both Chinese palatial style architecture and advanced western building and structural technology emerged. However, private residences lavishly built in the style of Chinese palatial architecture were a rarity. It was remarkable indeed when such a mansion appeared in a prominent location at the Mid-Levels where British style buildings predominated. The house was therefore a distinctive construction standing out from the rest, bearing witness to the architectural history of Hong Kong and that of China, and providing life evidence for the study of architectural and social histories.

22. In addition, King Yin Lei at the Mid-Levels in Hong Kong is the only surviving example of Chinese palatial architecture built in early 20th century and which manifested the concept of "predominantly Chinese with Chinese and Western elements nicely combined" (中西結合, 以中爲主). Few buildings of a similar kind in other parts of Hong Kong could compare with King Yin Lei in terms of its excellence in architectural design, exquisiteness in craftsmanship and diversity in building materials.

### Artistic Value

23. The artistic value of King Yin Lei is manifested in the overall architectural style and craftsmanship of the house. Roofed by traditional Chinese green-glazed tiles and surrounded by an external wall made of red fair-faced brickwork, it embodies the idea of "predominantly Chinese with Chinese and Western elements nicely combined". The simplified version of ridge-end ornaments, immortals and running animals represents a style adopted in the then pseudo-classic architectural design of avoiding the elaborate decorations of Qing dynasty imperial buildings. The design concept of "style rather than layout" adopted by the architect represented the continuation of earlier attempts by Chinese pioneers to seek a blend of national

layout western architectural technology. In addition, the architect adopted the principle of differentiating the primary and the secondary, as reflected in the appearance, material and decoration of individual buildings and even each storey of the buildings. The architecture and its setting have fully shown that the architect was a master in understanding Qing dynasty structural layout, as he designed the house adopting the idea of having old, modern, Chinese and Western elements nicely blended but with predominantly modern and Chinese artistic concepts in mind.

24. King Yin Lei is also characterized by its first class craftsmanship. From the accuracy in the setting-out survey to the meticulous finishing in the decorations, they could only win the admiration of modern craftsmen. The 50 standardized windows at the central hall on both storeys are impressive, being all of the same width and having almost the same distance apart. The terrazzo, in particular, is smooth and even in colour, arranged in straight lines and seamlessly connected.

#### Scientific Value

25. The scientific value of King Yin Lei is manifested in the scientific and technological principles involved in the site selection, orientations, adaptation to geographical and climatic conditions and the blend of modern architectural structure with ancient architectural layout. Although the building has been constructed for 70 years, no deformation or subsidence of foundation, structural cracks or tilting has been observed. This illustrates fully the scientific value involved in the architectural design and construction technology. By studying the architectural features of King Yin Lei, including its staircases, railings, doors and windows, we will be looking at a real-life example that shows the norms of Hong Kong architecture 70 years ago.

#### Social and Humanistic Value

26. The social and humanistic value of a historical building is reflected in the historical memory of the people and the display of original information. Due to the outstanding and specific architecture of the building, a Hong Kong TV drama entitled "Delightful Dream of the Capital" was shot on location there. A Hollywood film "Love is a Many Splendoured Thing" also chose the building for their scenes. In addition, the location, orientations and landscape arrangements of King Yin Lei provide good teaching material for the study of Feng Shui. The site also has tourism potential, as it offers a nice view of the Victoria harbour from the Mid-Levels.



### Value after Restoration

27. The damage done to King Yin Kei has largely been confined to architectural features and decoration. The architectural layout, structure and main construction materials remain undamaged. Historical information about the architectural craftsmanship for the restoration works can be obtained by analyzing the removed broken features and their associated traditional craftsmanship. The architectural layout, architectural structure, construction materials and the building craftsmanship of the heritage building have remained. Lost historical materials have mainly been some decorative materials and artistic features. If such materials can be made to order, or if we can find some historical pictures of the features or find the fitting features of similar buildings of the same period as models, the lost features can then be produced. With the available information about the original state and current technology, 80% of the original artistic appearance of the house can be restored. Its heritage value can also be basically revived.

### Feasibility of Restoration

28. Apart from making reference to available photos, patterns of ridge-end ornaments, mythical animals, tile ends and drip tiles of glazed roof tiles, decorative patterns of damaged beam heads and bracket sets at the front of the eaves as well as joint brackets and architraves under the eaves can be found from remnants and traces at the scene. Methods of construction and styles of most doors and windows, different flooring materials and styles, and the original appearance of damaged railings can also be known. What have not been found from the present scene are models for the wooden entrance door of the main building, the rear doors of the internal courtyard and the double-layered wooden sliding door.

29. Many of the traditional materials are rarely produced now, as they are no longer used in modern times. In some cases the craftsmanship has been lost with the passage of time. Materials that would be rather difficult to produce are red brickwork, coloured mosaics, stained glass and cement tiles. Rarely used nowadays, the craftsmanship involving terrazzo will be difficult to master. The repair of the dents to the walls made of red fair-faced brickwork will also be a difficult task for the craftsmen.

30. Works that are recommended to be done at the present stage include: (1) Clear

up the site and pay attention to collecting useful historical information and repairable features with photos taken for record purpose; (2) Full waterproof treatment for the roofs and remove any remaining mortar there (after photo-taking and recording the positions of the tiles) ; clean the roofs, inspect and repair cracks, apply waterproof materials and cover; (3) Appeal to the public for acquiring old photos and historical drawings of the house to enhance authenticity of restoration works; photos or drawings of the wooden door of the main building, staircase handrail end, double-layered sliding door and detailed features of the folding doors would be particularly needed.

Ends

January 2008