

Glitzy Orchard

Belt's makeover enhanced by retailers' fancy facades: Experts

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Flaunt it if you have it. That is what retailers with prime shop space along the Orchard Road belt are doing.

A war has broken out as eye-catching, brightly lit facades – showcasing luxury brands like Gucci, Prada and Chanel – compete for attention there.

Retail experts say the belt's glitzy makeover has emerged in the past two years, along with the profusion of malls.

Said Dr Lynda Wee, from business consultancy Bootstrap: "Orchard Road is not just for locals. It has to pull in tourists from the region. With Marina Bay coming up, if Orchard Road does not create interesting facades, how will it compete?"

Orchard Road Business Association chairman Sng Ngai may said that while the glitzy facades were the purview of individual mall owners, they have enhanced the area's \$40 million makeover.

She said: "They have created a totally different Orchard Road in the past two years and have really enhanced the look of the place."

The malls said there is usually a tussle to get prime shop space with a facade.

Said a spokesman for Ion Orchard, which has six duplex units housing luxury brands on its facade: "Given the limited number of duplex units with street fronts, the demand is naturally strong. These

double-storey units offer a stronger brand presence and, importantly, allow the brands to build their own signature external facades."

A spokesman for Mandarin Gallery, whose glass facade houses five duplexes and six street-facing stores, said it gets inquiries about the availability of such units.

Even the older malls have undergone facelifts. Paragon did its renovation in 2008, responding to the Urban Redevelopment Authority's call to building owners to create more interesting building facades to enhance the vibrancy of Orchard Road.

As a result, it now has five tenants with street-facing frontage – each with three to five storeys of facade presence.

Mr Mauro Malta, general manager of Tod's Asia-Pacific which has a 3,300 sq ft boutique in Paragon with facade space, said: "Facades are important retail space, creating a big visual impact."

The malls and retailers declined to reveal the rental costs for facade space. But Mr Peter See-Toh, Knight Frank's managing director (retail services), said prime retail spaces with Orchard Road frontage have rental prices starting from \$40 per sq ft (psf) per month, depending on the sizes of the shops.

For less prime spaces, he said, the rental may range from \$20 to \$35 psf per month.

Ms Sulian Tan-Wijaya, senior director (retail and lifestyle) at Savills Singapore, said the relationship between landlord and tenant is also



Gucci's shopfront at Paragon in Orchard Road. Following its renovation, the mall now has five tenants with street-facing frontage – each with three to five storeys of facade presence.



Mandarin Gallery's glass facade has five duplexes and six street-facing stores. Orchard Road malls say there is usually a tussle among retailers to get prime shop space with a facade.

an important determinant of price.

She said: "A good example of a win-win landlord-tenant relationship is Paragon and Gucci's. The

new Gucci flagship is visually stunning and the location is unbeatable."

Said Ms Eileen Bygrave, retail di-

rector of Salvatore Ferragamo, which

will have a 6,000 sq ft duplex boutique with a three-storey facade in Paragon by July: "A good facade creates great visual impact and people will come in. Still, they'll buy the product only if the quality is good."

But the research director of Chesterton Suntec International, Mr Colin Tan, said that such facades will probably have a bigger impact on tourists than on locals.

One shopper, Ms Mimi Johari, 28, a sales executive, agreed: "Such big stores are interesting only for

EXPERTS' FAVOURITES

Three retail and property experts name their top five mall facades along Orchard Road.

■ **Peter See-Toh, managing director, retail services, Knight Frank:**

1. Ion Orchard
2. Paragon
3. Mandarin Gallery
4. Orchard Central
5. Ngee Ann City

"The first four have new and refreshing shop fronts that have distinctively attractive and eye-catching window facades and displays.

"For Takashimaya at Ngee Ann City, the facade designs are classic, with an evergreen appeal."

■ **Ngee Ann Polytechnic real estate lecturer Nicholas Mak:**

1. Ngee Ann City

2. Paragon
3. 313@Somerset
4. Orchard Central
5. Mandarin Gallery

"Ngee Ann City's facade is grand and large but not too 'in your face'. 313@Somerset also has an interesting facade even though the tenants are not so high-end.

"Paragon's facade is expensive looking but this may turn away lower-budget shoppers."

■ **Dr Lynda Wee, from business consultancy Bootstrap:**

1. Ion Orchard
2. Paragon
3. Orchard Central
4. 313@Somerset
5. Ngee Ann City

"Paragon and Orchard Central are very creative in their use of space. Orchard Central, in particular, looks very different, all the more given its small space.

"Ngee Ann City is classic and iconic."

the first time, and shoppers will be interested to check them out, but not necessarily to buy something. And they become monotonous after repeated viewing."

Dr Wee, however, feels that Orchard Road has to be compared to shopping districts worldwide.

And the quest never stops. She said: "Right now, we are as good as, say, districts in Tokyo or New York both in terms of the facades and the vibrancy of our street life. But in the next three to five years, we will have to reinvent ourselves again."

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What do you make of the new face of Orchard Road? Send your views to suntimes@sph.com.sg