



Saturday Special Report
retail wonderland; The mall report card: Orchard Road

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12 malls along Orchard Road and the Marina Bay area are new or recently refurbished. We line them up to see how they fare.

1 ION ORCHARD

Positioning: A mall that caters to everyone from the mass-market shopper who favours high street labels such as Mango and Topshop to the well-heeled who are willing to splurge thousands on each purchase. Tenants include about 70 flagship retail stores like British perfumer Penhaligon's and Italian watchmaker Officine Panerai, and luxury brands Prada, Louis Vuitton and Dior.

Completed: 2009

Net lettable area: 640,000 sq ft

Number of tenants: about 330

Judges' comments

LW: Ion has a customer-first mindset; it understands its target market and strives to meet their expectations. For example, its uniformed concierge staff are equipped to give directions to the local sights because tourists make up a sizeable portion of its shoppers.

It also brands itself well, everything from the signature fragrance in the mall to the greeters in the toilets is carefully thought through.

But its layout, especially at the basements, can be quite confusing so there should be more signage to direct shoppers.

LL: The way the tenants are organised is very clear-cut, with the high-end ones on the ground level and up, and everything else below. The toilets are very clean too.

But the basement floors are often congested and the spaces tight, which makes me feel claustrophobic.

PY: It has a good mix of high-end and mid-priced offerings; almost everything I need is there. There are also good tea places with nice ambience, such as TWG and The Marmalade Pantry.

Score: 4.5/5

2 KNIGHTSBRIDGE

Positioning: 'A prominent collection of flagship stores' that is a bit of a split personality. It is for hipsters who are loyal to high street brands Topshop and Abercrombie & Fitch, spiffy executives decked out in Brooks Brothers and the super-rich who will splash hundreds of thousands on a diamond-encrusted watch at luxury concept store Malmaison by The Hour Glass.

Completed: 2010

Net lettable area: 83,000 sq ft

Number of tenants: 8

Judges' comments

LW: The podium's layout offers its tenants highly visible stores from the main shopping strip. So although the retail space is limited, it managed to bring in the leading new-to-market Abercrombie & Fitch.

Although there is nothing much else to attract shoppers to Knightsbridge, it is in a good position as shoppers from Paragon spill over to there.

LL: I don't think A&F brings in the crowd to the podium, maybe except to gawk at the male models. Knightsbridge is not a destination stop, because all the other brands are available in other malls.

PY: I won't go to Knightsbridge unless I want to get something from Abercrombie & Fitch. But I do like how the Malmaison is beautifully decorated.

Score: 3/5

3 MANDARIN GALLERY

Positioning: With brands like Y-3, Marc by Marc Jacobs and D&G, and luxury multi-label boutiques such as TriBeCa, this mall is for women of leisure and aspirational executives.

Refurbished: 2009

Net lettable area: About 126,000 sq ft

Number of tenants: About 95

Judges' comments

LW: I like the escalators that take shoppers into the mall from the street. There is also a good range of premium retail boutiques, eateries and lifestyle stores in the mall.

But I find the lighting too dim and the ceilings too low for my liking.

LL: There might be a collection of known international labels on the first floor but the mall is pretty quiet on most days. The low ceilings on the second and third floors make me feel claustrophobic. The carpark is also horribly cramped and dim.

PY: I don't recognise many of the brands in the upper floors of the mall and I often find myself getting lost inside the complicated layout. I can't locate the stores and restaurants easily.

Score: 3.5/5

4 ORCHARD CENTRAL

Positioning: To provide 'new rules, new experiences' to everyone from budget- and fashion-conscious individuals in their 20s to older professionals who can afford to live it up. Tenants include the edgy multi-label boutique Black Market no.2, and London-based Singaporean designer Ashley Isham's duplex boutique.

Completed: 2009

Net lettable area: 250,000 sq ft

Tenants: About 170

Judges' comments

LW: I like the escalators that take shoppers directly to the upper floors from the outside of the building. I also like the art pieces in the mall and the sky garden, which is the only green space in Orchard Road. This shopping centre is good for those who have the time and like to browse and discover new brands and offerings.

However, I don't fancy the narrow walkways in between. One also has to spend time learning how to navigate the mall. Unfortunately, not many Singaporeans have the discipline to do that.

LL: Many of the shops there don't appeal to shoppers because there's no thought put into the retail concepts. It's as though the owners had some money and decided to buy some goods - which are available everywhere else - and plonk them there. They have to think about the shopping experience for consumers.

To make matters worse, the layout is like a maze. The roundabout drive up to the carpark leaves a lot to be desired. The saving grace is the Vietnamese and Japanese F&B outlets which serve good food.

PY: There are no well-known strong brands to pull me to this shopping centre. The layout of the mall confuses me as well because I can't see everything at a glance; and I don't like the spiral carpark which gives me a headache when I drive through it.

Score: 3/5

5 PARAGON

Positioning: A retail haven for wealthy shoppers who often flock to luxury labels such as Gucci, Miu Miu and Givenchy after an appointment at the private clinics nearby. Masstige (mass luxury) brands like Raoul, Banana Republic and Alldressedup are also available for the aspirational executive.

Refurbished: Facade facelift was completed in 2009, while an interior renovation project was completed last year.

Net lettable area: 742,000 sq ft

Number of tenants: About 150

Judges' comments

LW: The beautiful Gucci duplex makes me feel like I'm on the Ginza shopping strip in Tokyo.

With its mid- to high-end brands, Paragon has a clear positioning which attracts wealthy medical tourists who are visiting the clinics in the vicinity.

Its squarish layout also makes it a breeze to shop there.

My only gripe is the congestion at the entrance to the carpark and passenger pickup point.

LL: The mall is good for shoppers who are into high-end or masstige labels and F&B outlets.

PY: It has a good coverage of brands; from the luxury labels to the department store Metro and mid-priced clothing and lifestyle products.

I'm a mother so it's great that there is also a Toys 'R' Us and clothing options for kids.

Score: 4/5

6 SCOTTS SQUARE

Positioning: A luxury mall with new-to-market brands such as Leonard and Michael Kors, and all-time favourites like Hermes and multi-label boutique On Pedder.

Completed: 2011

Net lettable area: 75,000 sq ft

Number of tenants: About 26

Judges' comments

LW: The mall is really new and it has yet to settle, so I think it's too early for me to judge. But with its glass-and-steel facade, I think it gives its tenants good visibility on the main strip.

LL: The square is in a good location and it's a mall which draws high expectations. But the tenant mix shows that the management can't decide if it's high-end (Hermes and Leonard Paris) or mid-priced (Bread and Butter, and Tila March)

PY: I find the mall too small and besides the new-to-market Michael Kors boutique, there's no pull factor for me to enter it.

Score: 3/5

7 WISMA ATRIA (undergoing renovation)

Positioning: 'A trend-setting lifestyle mall' with high street fashion labels such as Forever New, Seafolly, Lacoste and Charles and Keith and mid-priced jewellery and watch boutiques like Lee Hwa Diamond Gallery and Tag Heuer.

Development: Renovations due for completion in third quarter this year.

Net lettable area: About 127,500 sq ft

Number of tenants: About 128

Judges' comments

LW: The mall is extremely accessible with the Orchard MRT station, and underpass connecting it to both Ion and Takashimaya Shopping Centre. Its racetrack layout also makes it easy to shop.

However, the mall does not have a clear positioning and the tenants are predictable. Hopefully, this will change when the renovations are completed.

LL: There is a sufficient array of international high street and masstige labels here, although Isetan seems to be struggling to find its voice in the retail mix. The department store carries run-of-the-mill pieces that are similar to what's carried in the smaller stores in Wisma.

PY: It is easy to get around the shopping centre's squarish design and the carpark is pretty spacious. I go to Wisma for my daily needs, like when I need to service my watch at Sincere, have tea with my friends and buy my electronics at Sony. I have no complaints about this mall.

Score: 3/5

8 313@SOMERSET

Positioning: Targeted at shoppers between the ages of 19 and 35, it is packed with high street heavyweights including Zara and Forever 21, and smaller tenants such as Dip Drops and GG 5.

Completed: 2009

Net lettable area: 294,000 sq ft

Number of tenants: About 170

Judges' comments

LW: The concierge service staff's neat uniforms, bunned hair, heels and stockings make me feel like I'm at a five-star hotel. They also move outside their counter to offer help to shoppers.

There is traffic on the first floor and basement levels because of the MRT station, but their challenge is to get shoppers to move upstairs where the tenants are not exciting.

LL: It has a good variety of high street and smaller tenants. The MRT station below adds liveliness but the mall lacks a clear differentiating factor.

PY: The big high street stores here such as Zara and Uniqlo are not unique to 313. But I do like the alfresco dining area where Brotzeit German Bier Bar & Restaurant and Oriole Cafe & Bar are.

Score: 3.5/5

PANEL OF JUDGES

- Dr **Lynda Wee** (LW), an adjunct associate professor in retail at Nanyang Technological University's business school and chief executive of retail and training consultancy Bootstrap.

- Mr Lionnel Lim (LL), an avid shopper and veteran stylist with more than three decades of experience. At work, he spends lots of time sourcing for outfits in malls.

- Ms Fun Pui Ying (PY), a hard-core shopper who goes on at least four shopping trips around the world every year. She is the director of transaction banking at an international bank here.

Orchard area

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