

# Assessing Façade Modification of Heritage Shophouses in Klang Royal Town, Selangor

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## Abstract

Klang was known worldwide since the 15th century for its tin industry and status as the royal capital before Kuala Lumpur. It has become overgrown since the arrival of the British Government after 1874. Nevertheless, many heritage buildings, mainly the shophouses, have been transformed and modernized to follow current trends for commercial purposes. This study aims to reveal the history of Klang Royal Town; highlight regulations and acts regarding façade modification on heritage shophouses; and assess the current state of façade modifications done on selected heritage shophouses in Klang Royal Town. Six heritage shophouses have been chosen as samplings to be analysed on the elements of façade modification, having undergone minor, moderate to major modifications. These façades are compared with photographs taken in 1987 and the modifications evaluated in the context of relevant guidelines and acts. The results show that most of the heritage shophouses in Klang Royal Town face the same issue of uncontrolled façade modification and serving current design trends to compete commercially with other shophouses. This study emphasizes the impact of these façade transformations and the heritage buildings' historical significance from the upkeep and safeguarding of heritage buildings' value.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, numerous controversial opinions have been voiced regarding the appropriateness of modern architectural insertions into historic urban areas. Public impressions on how well buildings fit into their context were measured by Groat (1988), with the opinions of building contrasts experts and their contexts, in terms of three factors: site characteristics, overall building shape (such as building height, form, and shape complexity), and façade details (such as windows, colour, and material). The discussion has polarized the architectural sector, which opposes conservationists and developers. This demonstrates the value that a building's structure reflects, in addition to the common role in building façades. In addition, façades are regarded as the interconnection between inner surroundings and exterior environments, delineating that façades represent the city's face (Askari *et al.*, 2009; Hayashi, 2004).

A city's image is connected mainly with the city's visual quality, which has been called the city's germ. For urban and environmental design, façades play an important role. It is undeniable that the beautification of building façades can help attract potential visitors, especially in a business district. However, the frontage is being modified to suit the current commercial or urban preferences and trends or to obey the current market

thirst. These 'celebrity-buildings' are highly empowered by commercial demand and the role of accelerating interest and city investments via their attention-grabbing and provocative designs (Jencks, 2006). Most new façade designs contradict their contexts, placing traditional street sceneries in the city under urban threat (Ja'afar *et al.*, 2012). The first impression is that all the potential visitors need to be attracted, which plays an essential character in indirectly portraying what sort of experience is being offered inside the premise. The assessment of building environment architectural quality depends, in part, on the physics of buildings (Brown & Gifford, 2001; Gifford *et al.*, 2000), and visitors' evaluations may vary based on personal differences (Naoi *et al.*, 2006).

The evaluation of a building façade may be affected by architectural style, building age, shape size, construction value shape, lighting, colour and material (Askari *et al.*, 2009). Some criteria, such as colour and material, have been determined in earlier investigations of the beauty of the façade of a heritage building (Karaman, 2001). It must also be mentioned that if a heritage building exposes an expression of the idea, beauty and artistic quality prevail (Coeterier, 2002). However, Brown and Gifford (2001) emphasize clarity, complexity, friendliness, originality, robustness, and significance as cognitive factors which can predict a building façade's quality.

An active debate has arisen ensuring the appropriateness of contemporary architectural insertions into historic urban areas (Macdonald, 2017). This often leads to the frontage being modified to suit the current preferences or to portray activities offered inside the building. The historical values behind buildings are often forgotten due to rapid urbanization. It is a tearful scene in a heritage city to see how the building frontage is manipulated with a lack of respect for its historical values. According to Novis Putri *et al.* (2018), out of one hundred sample shophouses in Bandung, Indonesia, twenty-nine per cent (29%) have undergone total modifications. It is clear that the issue of shophouses' façade modification is a global issue.

Klang Royal Town in Selangor is one of the heritage towns in Malaysia that consists of many heritage buildings, including shophouses, prayer halls, and government buildings. Klang became known worldwide for its tin industry and as the royal capital town before Kuala Lumpur (Rajendra, 2014). Since the British Government took over Klang in 1874, it has been overgrown until today. Many heritage buildings, primarily shophouses, have been transformed and modernized to follow the current trend and commercial purpose. In response to this problem, this study explores the history of Klang Royal Town to reveal its historical significance value that needs to be protected and highlights regulated guidelines and acts regarding façade modification.

Lastly, this study assesses the current state of façade modifications on selected heritage shophouses, compared them with photographs taken in 1987, and evaluates these modifications based on regulations, guidelines and acts.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The History of Klang Royal Town

Klang is considered as a Malay Royal town in Selangor, along with Muar in Johor, Seri Menanti in Negeri Sembilan, Pekan in Pahang, and Anak Bukit in Kedah (Harun *et al.*, 2015). It has its own historical and cultural features that distinguish it as a precious masterpiece through both minor and major architectural projects. These royal cities should be preserved as proof of the greatness of the Malay Royal Institution's monarchy scheme (Muslim *et al.*, 2013). To maintain a royal town, a primary function is to define the meaning of its urban heritage by identifying its primary cityscape components. Moreover, the identity of a royal town is essential in the presence of ancient palaces and royal administrative areas, which effectively constitute the principal elements of the town's identity.

Klang Town was also the capital of Selangor before it was changed to Shah Alam. Klang Town is also one of the main gateways to Malaysia through the sea (Port Klang) and is located 32 km southwest of Kuala Lumpur. The Klang River was already marked and named on the earliest sea charters prepared by navigators who accompanied Chinese admiral Cheng Ho on his visits to Malacca between 1409 and 1433 (Chin, 2016). A bridge was constructed across it from 1908 to 1910, known as the "Belfield Bridge", built by Sir Henry Conway Belfield, a British Resident of Selangor from 1902 to 1911.

Prehistoric instruments known as Mawas' Bones used during the Iron Age were found here, showing that civilization appeared in the Klang some 2,000 years ago (Pejabat Daerah dan Tanah Klang, 2021). Later, around 600 years ago, during the rule of Majapahit, Klang's written accounts began. When Malacca was only a fishing village, long before it became the capital of a Malay empire in 1400, Klang was already a lively business centre known for its quality tin. A warehouse was therefore built in 1856, called Gedung Raja Abdullah, which functioned as a tin storage warehouse. The metal was abundantly found in and along the Klang River. The town began as a residence for the Malay leaders controlling trade in minerals and forest products. For hundreds of years, Klang was literally on the map.

The history of development, governmental forms, social organization, ideological priorities, way of life, and day-to-day needs can be seen in both products and society. Klang's history originated in the eleventh-century state of Srivijaya and Majapahit (Majlis Perbandaran Klang, 2016). When Sultan Suleiman ruled Klang under his authority, Raja Mahadi and Raja Abdullah, the two Sultan Suleiman's sons, triggered a civil war in Klang. The civil war reflected a conflict in capturing Klang's authority and supremacy. As a result, Raja Mahadi built a fortress next to the present Klang Municipal Council's building, which became a significant defence wall, to prevent opponents from going further as the conflict started. The town was fortified in 1860 but later was destroyed owing to time and the tide. What has been left until today was an inscription, the beginning of the kingdom of Raja Mahadi.

Some opinions stated the name Klang was originally from the language of the Mon-Khymer, "Klong", which translates to a "warehouse" according to C.O Blagden, who further clarified that the leading role of Klang Town was one of the most important ports and housed numerous of warehouses. In contrast, Charles A. Fisher claimed that "Klang" refers to a stream of water or passage of water, and the locals readily accepted his statement, since Klang did and still does have several water passages (Pejabat Daerah dan Tanah Klang, 2021). However, a local researcher from Universiti Malaya, Azhar Mat Aros, opinionated that Klang was named after the sound of bells in a mountain in the district. Some other opinions stated Klang was from "Kolang", which means "a place where the traders could not forget" in the Minang language.

## 2.2 Heritage Shophouses in Royal Town

The heritage shophouses in Klang Town are in the demarcated core zone of the heritage area, as designated by the Klang Municipal Council. 156 shophouses have been designated as heritage shophouses and included in the category of cluttered buildings in this zone, with other categories of individual buildings (palaces, religious buildings, educational buildings, and old residential buildings) and open areas. These shophouses comprise a variety of architectural styles [18]. The variety of shophouses was affected by the year when it was built. Ranging from the 1880s until the post-1970s, the shophouses' architectural styles are as follows:

- i) Traditional (the 1880s-1920s): Shophouses made of bricks and roof tiles with simple window openings made of timber and minimal ornamentation.
- ii) Neo-Classical (the 1910s-1930s): Two or three-storey shophouses with combined Greek and Roman columns with ornamented windows detailing, pediments, parapets, cornice, and limestone swags on the façade.
- iii) Early Modern (the 1950s-1970s): Shophouses with simple shapes and designs with structures based on technology and modern engineering, including sunshade fins and metal-framed glass.
- iv) Modern (post 1970s): Two or more storey shophouses with reinforced concrete structure, and further modern development from early modern style, with lots of glass at the elevator shaft.

Most of the shophouses in the heritage area of Klang Town are believed to have been built around the 1880s, starting with the Traditional Style. They represent the culture and economic activities that started back in the 1900s. However, many of the shophouses found today have been transformed into later architectural styles due to weather damage over the years and modernized to suit their newer functions. Nevertheless, since this area is located near the palace of Istana Alam Shah, buildings, including shophouses in some streets here, are restricted to be less than five storey height regulations to obey the principle of a Royal Town. In addition, any new development proposal must receive approval from the Sultan of Selangor and the Klang Municipal Council.

## 2.3 Regulations Related to Modification of Heritage Shophouses

According to the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) (Government of Malaysia, 2012), the act of demolition, disturbance, obstruction, modification, marking, pulling down or removing any monument in a heritage site is not permissible without formal written approval from the Commissioner. Moreover, a few rules are to be followed related to buildings' façades:

- i) The historical significance, association, or connection with the history of Malaysia.
- ii) Good design and aesthetic features.
- iii) The association of society or culture.
- iv) The nature, material or incorporeal cultural patrimony or underwater cultural patrimony is rare or unique.

Meanwhile, modifications on any heritage building, including heritage shophouses, are regulated to follow the conservation concepts stated in the Heritage Building's Conservation Guidelines, which the National Heritage Department of Malaysia established in 2012 (Jabatan Warisan Negara, 2017). Originality is taken as an

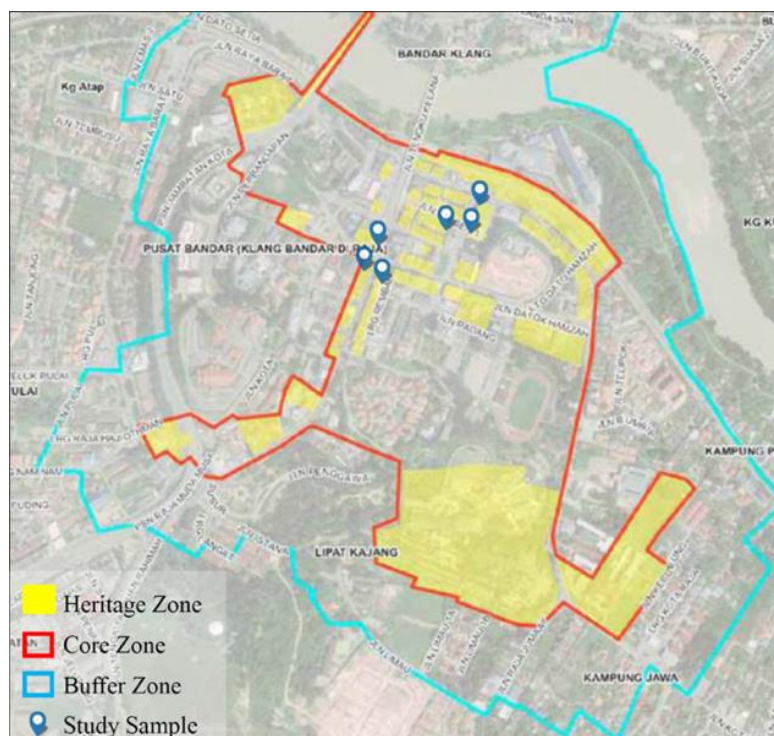
aesthetic aspect, while the process of bringing it back is considered ethical. In heritage building conservation, obeying the heritage significance is the most vital aspect. These aspects are later broken down into four categories, namely:

- i) The originality of building material.
- ii) The originality of design and architecture.
- iii) The originality of construction and carpentry work.
- iv) The originality of the building layout.

Moreover, in Klang, the Urban Design Guidelines for Heritage Site (*Garis Panduan Rekabentuk Bandar Tapak Warisan Majlis Perbandaran Klang*) established specific guidelines in 2013 from the Klang Municipal Council as guidance for operators, building owners, and professional consultants during their preparation in submitting development proposal for any buildings within the heritage area of Klang Town, mainly the shophouses (Majlis Perbandaran Klang, 2013). It is to ease any conservation work done by the adjacent area and the heritage site concept. The Klang Municipal Council formed a Heritage Unit to ensure that these guidelines are followed in heritage sites other. They also carry out monitoring work, updating data and heritage sites database, processing planning permission, and submitting reviews of land and building plans on heritage buildings under the guidelines. In addition, the guidelines provide indicators to monitor the physical changes of a heritage site, and any damage found in a heritage site is to be fixed immediately.

### 3. Research Methodology

The scope of the study is to identify the physical changes and modifications done on the selected six heritage shophouses among listed heritage buildings by the Klang Municipal Council (MPK) in Jalan Tengku Kelana and Jalan Stesen, Klang (Fig. 1 and Table. 1). The first part of the study reviews the historical facts and backgrounds of Klang Royal Town and its individual chosen buildings. Consequently, the data was gathered by reviewing previous research on Klang Royal Town and the official portal of MPK and interviewing the landowners on the aspects of elements that have been modified and their factors contributing to the modifications. The interview questions were designed only to evaluate the physical façade features of the chosen buildings based on the Urban Design Guidelines for Heritage Sites (Majlis Perbandaran Klang, 2013). The criteria for shortlisting the chosen shophouses were evaluated by observation and further divided into three categories, namely major, moderate, and minor façade modifications, based on categorization made by (Novis Putri *et al.*, 2018) (Table. 2). The shophouses were selected based on accessibility of information and its suitability to be categorized within the three categories. Eventually, two shophouses were selected to fit into each category. The modifications done on the façade are later evaluated by comparing them with photographs taken by (Lee, 2017) from his personal collection.



**Fig. 1** Location of six chosen heritage shophouses

Source: Author, based on Majlis Perbandaran Klang (2016).

**Table 1** Background of chosen six heritage shophouses

Location	No.	Commercial Activities		Architectural Style	Year of Built	Height
		Current	Previous			
Jalan Stesen	SH1	Restaurant	Restaurant , hotel	Neo-Classical	1930	Three storeys
	SH2	Computer shop	Watch shop, insurance provider	Neo-Classical	1920s	Two storeys
	SH3	Bank	Sports shop	Neo-Classical	1930s	Three storeys
Jalan Tengku Kelana	SH4	Tailor shop	Tailor shop	Neo-Classical	1910s	Two storeys
	SH5	Traditional health shop	Computer shop	Neo-Classical	1910s	Two storeys
	SH6	Saree shop	Saree shop	Neo-Classical	1920s	Two storeys

**Table 2** Categories of modification (Novis Putri *et al.*,2018)

Categories of Modification	Components of Modification
Major Modification	Railing/fence
	Walls and its components
	Floor additions
Moderate Modification	Mechanical equipment on façade
	Advertisement board
	Secondary skin
	Door's location
	Window's location
Minor Modification	Roof
	Exterior repainted
	Signage component
	Building skin material

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The evaluation of façade modification on selected heritage shophouses was carried out based on categories of modification by Novis Putri *et al.* (2018), the Heritage Building's Conservation Guidelines Jabatan Warisan Negara (2017), and the Urban Design Guidelines for Heritage Site (Majlis Perbandaran Klang, 2013). Table 3 shows the transformation of the façade from 1987 to 2022 and the modifications done by the owners/tenants on the shophouses during their occupation. Among the factors of modification are to fulfil their customers' needs, grab more attention, and inform passers-by on ongoing promotions. This finding is consistent with Jencks (2006) and Ja'afar *et al.* (2012) revelations on provocative design on urban shophouses.


The most common modification in the minor modification category made on all six heritage shophouses was repainting the exterior due to the wear and tear of the paint due to the weather. The aspect of colour choices, however, was due to trending colours during the repainting period; these were usually striking colours, believed to be able to draw more attention. This out-of-place and unsuitable insertions can be referred back to a study on the inappropriateness of contemporary architectural insertions by Macdonald (2017). Another modified element was the signage, purposely to change the shop's name. However, SH5 and SH6's new signages are oversized, covering almost all ornamentation on the perimeter of the façade, and not located in the designated area. Finally, out of six heritage shophouses, SH3 and SH6 have changed the buildings' original skin material

from limestone to brick and plastered wall finishes due to deterioration from weather damage and the high-cost maintenance of the limestone, as shown in Table 3.

In the moderate modification category, four shophouses (SH2, SH4, SH5 and SH6) have placed more than one piece of mechanical equipment, including an air-conditioner's outdoor unit, wires and cables, and mechanical ventilation equipment. Some of this equipment has covered the window openings and ornamentation of the façade, and messy cables obstruct the façade's aesthetic. Most of these shophouses have also installed huge advertisement boards on the façade that have become a 'second skin' covering most of the window's openings, consistent with the major issues of urban shophouses as highlighted by Toong and Utaberta (2015). Meanwhile, four shophouses (SH2, SH3, SH4 and SH6) have changed their entrance doors' location due to the division of the ground floor into two separate shops and to place the glass display. However, only two (SH3 and SH6) have had their windows' location and roof style changed from the original to suit the new façade and building form and to create glass displays on the upper floors. Only SH3 has made major modifications to the shophouse, where one floor has been added on the top, changing it into a four-storey building. This is to provide more space for the bank's management office.

**Table 3** *Types of modification on heritage shophouses in Klang Royal Town* (Author, 2023), based on photographs taken by Lee (2017)

Samples	Façade in 1987	Current Façade	Types of Modification	Level of Modifications
SH1			Repainted	Minor
SH2			Repainted Signage changed Mechanical equipment added Advertisement board added Door's location changed	Moderate
SH3			Repainted Signage changed Building skin material changed Advertisement board added Door's location changed Windows' location changed Roof changed Walls added One floor added	Major

SH4			Repainted Mechanical equipment added Door's location changed	Minor
SH5			Repainted Signage changed (oversize) Mechanical equipment added Advertisement board added Secondary skin added	Moderate
SH6			Repainted Signage added (oversize) Building skin material changed Mechanical equipment added Advertisement board added Secondary skin added Door's location changed Window's location changed Roof changed	Major

To further assess these façade modifications with the existing regulations, a checklist was made based on the regulated guidelines and acts by the Klang Municipal Council and the National Heritage Department (Table 4). Only SH1 seems to be retaining almost all original elements on the façade, except the original wall tiles and traditional lighting in the walkway. Moreover, its signage is slightly oversized, covering the façade ornamentation and exceeding 70% of the signboard area. Meanwhile, SH6 shows minor fulfilment on the checklist due to many facades' modifications on almost all elements and the instalment of huge signage and advertisement boards covering almost all of the façade.

**Table 4** Checklist of façade modification at heritage shophouses in Klang Royal Town

Guidelines for Façade Modification	SH1	SH2	SH3	SH4	SH5	SH6
Profile, steep and height is to be maintained	√	√		√	√	√
Façade ornamentation to be retained	√	√		√		
Ornamentation on column should be retained	√					

Wall tiles to be retained						
Original location of doors	√					
Original location of windows	√	√		√	√	
Walkway should be retained	√	√	√	√	√	√
No obstruction on walkway		√	√	√	√	√
No awning on walkway unless compatible	√	√	√	√	√	
No advertisement board unless shop's name	√	√	√	√		
No banner, bunting and stickers	√		√	√		
Signage should not cover opening on façade	√	√	√	√		
Signage should not cover ornamentation on façade				√		
Signage should not exceed 70% of signboard area				√		
Air-conditioner's outdoor unit should be hidden	√		√		√	√
Traditional lighting in walkway should be retained						
Signage should be timber or metal plate	√			√		

Source: Author (2023), based on the Urban Design Guidelines for Heritage Site (Majlis Perbandaran Klang, 2013) and the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) (Government of Malaysia, 2012)

Finally, based on the interview sessions with the respondents, a few contributing factors to these modifications were identified. All of the respondents agreed that minor modifications such as paint and signage boards were intended to meet commercial needs and boost the businesses' visibility. As for SH2 and SH4, both respondents agreed that there no was better place to place their mechanical equipment rather than on the façade to make it easier for installation and maintenance work on the equipment. On the other hand, SH3 and SH4 opted for a full revamp of the façade, completely changing the original material of the façade, as it was highlighted by the respondents that the original limestone façade was deteriorating over time. However, all respondents admitted to never having been summoned or fined by the local municipal council regarding these modifications. They also noted that to their knowledge, no local authorities or law enforcement conducted any inspection during or after the modifications.

### 5. Conclusion

Klang Royal Town boasts a captivating history that spans centuries. It has previously served as the capital of Selangor and was a bustling seaport, contributing significantly to trade and commerce. With its origins dating back to the eleventh century, Klang Town has witnessed the rise and fall of ancient kingdoms such as Srivijaya and Majapahit, leaving behind remnants of their cultural influence and historical significance. Its history spans from the years of Srivijaya and Majapahit, to a lively trading centre popular for its high-quality resource of tin, to finally becoming what it is now, Klang Royal Town. Heritage buildings in Klang Royal Town are regulated under a local guideline, namely the *Garis Panduan Rekabentuk Bandar Tapak Warisan, Majlis Perbandaran Klang*. This includes 165 heritage shophouses located in the core zone of the town's designated heritage area; many have been exposed to modernization and urbanization.

As a result, many owners and tenants have modified the shophouses' façade, namely, repainting with striking colours, installing large signages, changing the original building skin material, installing mechanical equipment, installing unsuitable advertisement boards, changing the original doors and windows' location, and adding the building height. Moreover, many of these modifications are not following the regulated guidelines and acts provided by the federal government and local authorities. Therefore, the related stakeholders need to ensure these guidelines and acts are enforced and followed, and modifications to heritage shophouses can be managed and controlled. In addition, awareness and interest among owners and tenants towards the aesthetic and historic significance of heritage buildings should also be encouraged.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

### Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Nur Nazihah Kamarul Zafik, Rohaslinda Ramele Ramli, Ahmad Nazrin Ariz Anuar; **data collection:** Nur Nazihah Kamarul Zafik; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Nur Nazihah Kamarul Zafik, Abdullah Anas Abu Bakar, Nadia Widyawati MADzhi; **draft manuscript preparation:** Nur Nazihah Kamarul Zafik. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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