
Experiencing Singapore

Mount Faber – Telok Blangah Hill Park – Gillman Barracks – Hort Park

From Mount Faber Park – Telok Blangah Hill Park Park – HortPark – Kent Ridge Park (3–5hr)

This route takes you on a trail from the eastern edge of the Southern Ridges to its west. You will go through **Mount Faber**, past the iconic **Henderson Waves** and up **Forest Walk**. The route also brings you through **HortPark** – a charming park that also offers gardening ideas and solutions, and finishes at **Canopy Walk** in **Kent Ridge Park**.

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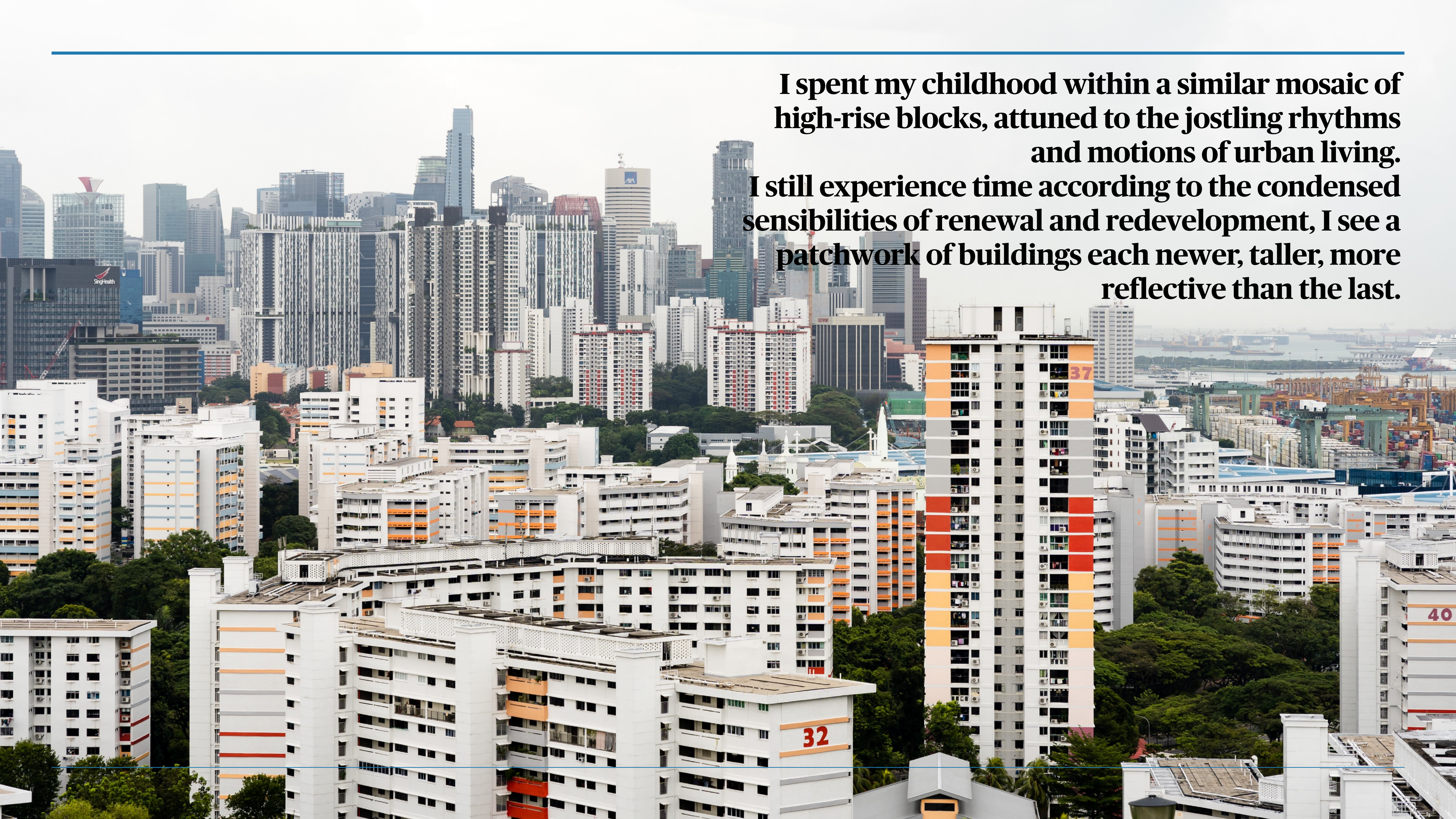
After a quick lunch at **Seah Im Food Centre**, we proceeded up to **Mount Faber Peak** and along **Faber Walk**. We explored the park, including the **Mural Walk** which presents a version of Singapore history, and crossed the **Henderson Waves** into **Telok Blangah Hill Park**.

Having quickly peeked into the fashionably laid-back **Alkaff Mansion** and ambled along the dramatic elevation of the **Forest Walk**, we crossed the **Alexandra Arch** and took a break in the **Gillman Barracks** area. We admired the nearby **HortPark** before ending our explorations due to the rain.

Mount Faber offers stunning panoramic views of Sentosa Island and the Harbourfront area. I remember being fascinated by the endless vistas and beckoning seascapes as a child peering out from within the cable car.

Faber Walk also offers a peek into the exclusive Keppel Bay enclave – here, we glimpse at the Corals at Keppel Bay development.

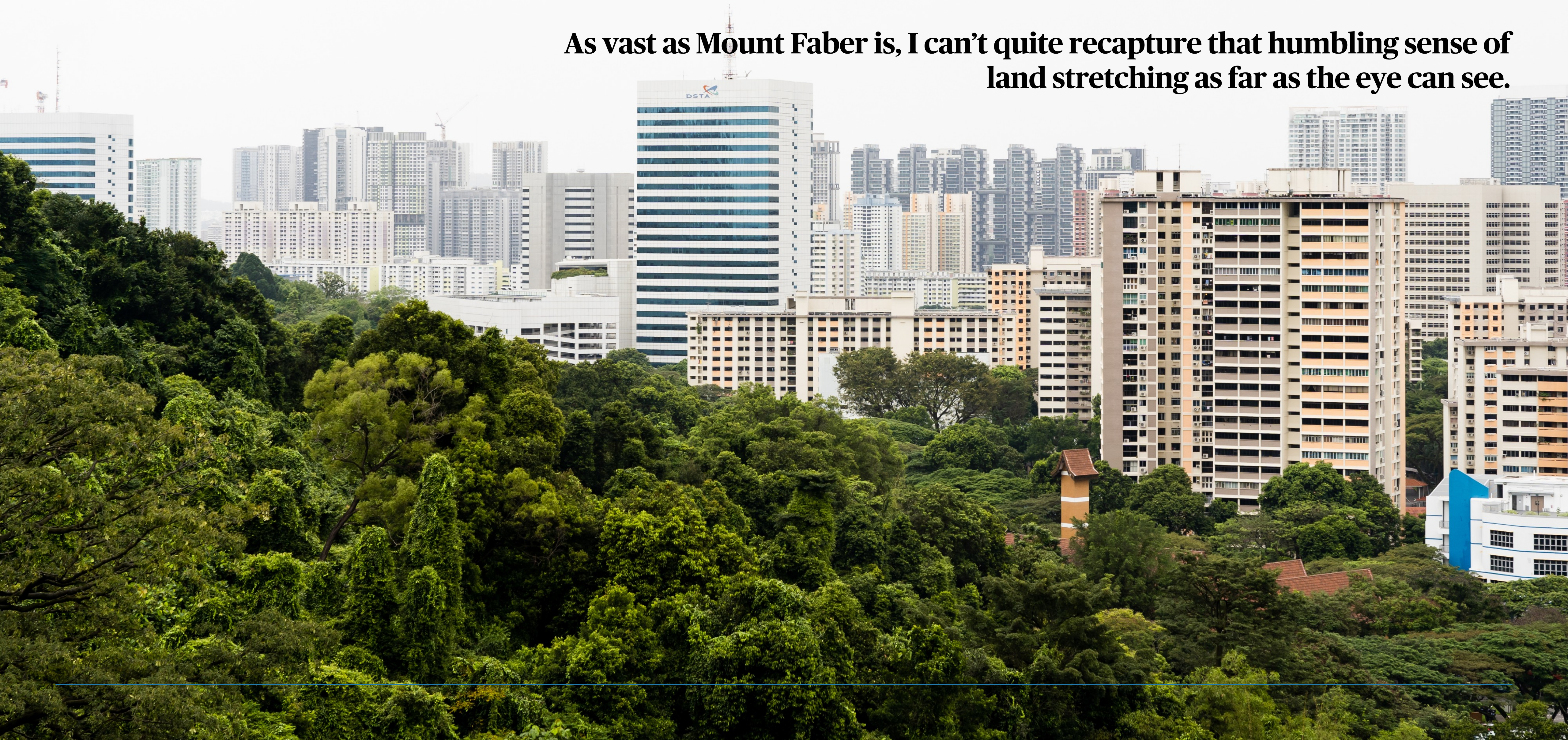




I spent my childhood within a similar mosaic of high-rise blocks, attuned to the jostling rhythms and motions of urban living. I still experience time according to the condensed sensibilities of renewal and redevelopment, I see a patchwork of buildings each newer, taller, more reflective than the last.

I spent some time in a land with a different sense of geography, one where it seemed impossible that people could cover every square inch of land.

As vast as Mount Faber is, I can't quite recapture that humbling sense of land stretching as far as the eye can see.

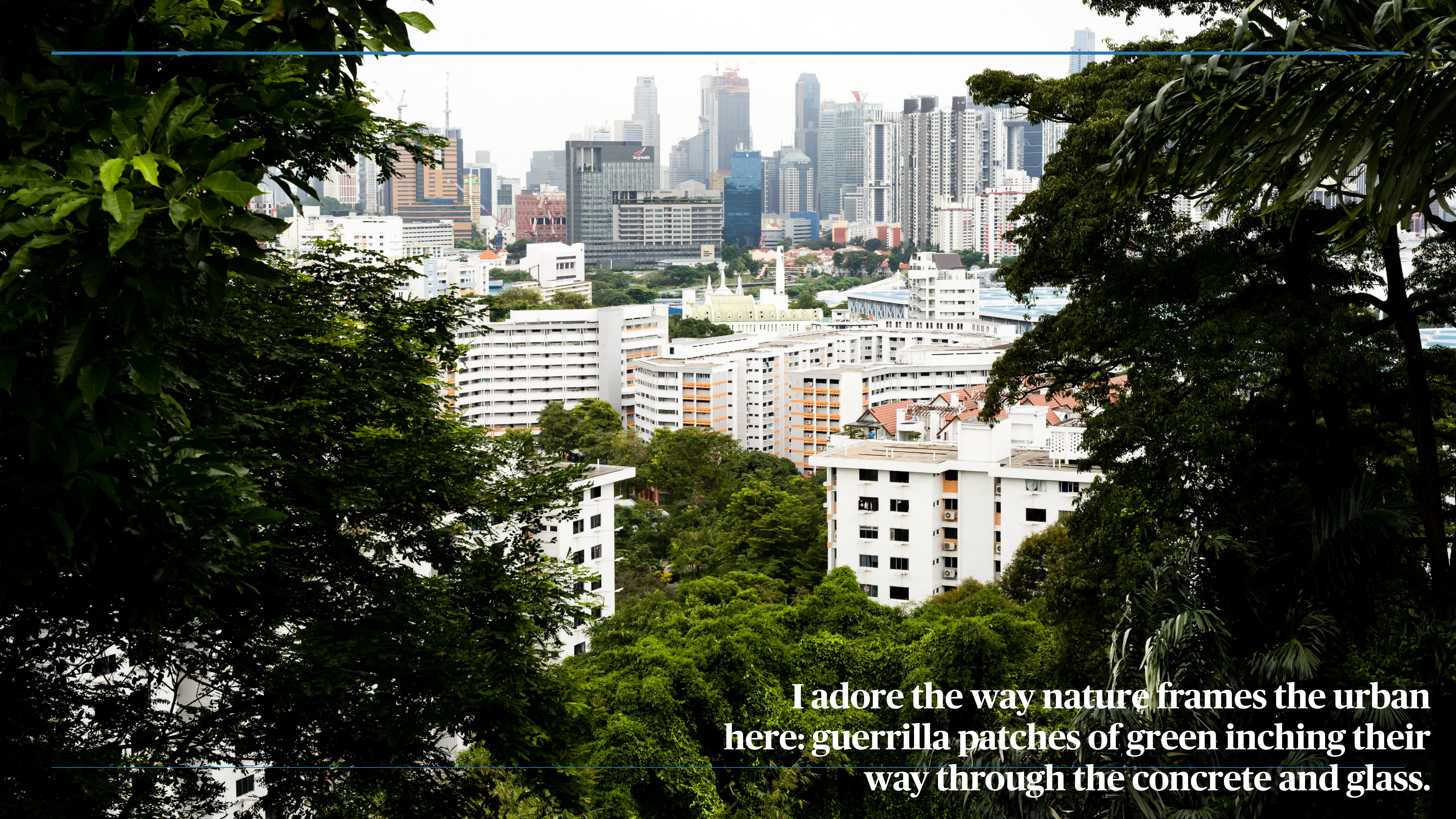


I'm reminded that in Singapore, our greenways are managed lands, where we struggle to tame a land so pliant and yet so resistant – where machinery can move mountains and yet can also, in an instant, be swept away by unusual rainfall. For now, tarp the shade of plastic grass holds nature at bay.



Our relationship with nature in Singapore is constantly mediated through the lens of human effort. Nature's detritus is kept at bay.





**I adore the way nature frames the urban
here: guerrilla patches of green inching their
way through the concrete and glass.**

Furthermore, seeing these exclusive residences nestled within a verdant green gets me thinking about the lengths people *will* go to find space for themselves in the city.





For instance, the Alkaff Mansion is a beautiful space for beautiful people, where one buys an afternoon away from the hustle and bustle of the city.





For others, they might find tranquility in secret corners of the island – including this gem known as the terrace garden.



Another means is to reclaim space from within existing places. A former British military camp, Gillman Barracks is now home to a contemporary arts cluster. Although the galleries that populate the space need not necessarily be affordable, I admire the way art and culture finds a way to add meaning to existing spaces and structures, much in the same way we fill space and place with memories peculiar to us and our means of navigating the city.

Lastly, we build protective layers
around the things precious to us. In
one glass house, we find the image of
nature recast to preserve that
burnished moment of beauty --



-- In another, we protect
our fragile efforts to
replicate nature's tender
nurturing.

Walking this trail captured some of Singapore's inherent tensions, where the natural and the built constantly overlap and commingle in the compression of urban space. Wherever one looks, there are competing definitions of beauty on offer, where the beauty of human ingenuity rests, at times, upon its problematic triumph over the natural.

I loved the peace and quiet of the area, even as I thought about how we should make the Greater Southern Waterfront an area accessible for all to enjoy. The trail sharpened my appreciation of how space is commodified in Singapore (or really, any large urban city), where we pay to enjoy exclusive enclaves – in the same way cars offer the privacy that one sorely misses when jostling in the MRT. We use our material resources to shield us from the incessant vibrations of a life lived elbow-to-elbow with other people.

It's a realisation that has implications for both Singaporean culture and our experience of nature. Collectively, we need to ensure that our culture remains communal and open, seeking to share rather than to claim for ourselves. Similarly, our natural spaces should also remain open to the public, rather than the exclusive reserve of the well-to-do. At the same time, we will need to find ways to allow each person the space to navigate the messiness of everyday life, preserving those life-affirming pockets of solitude for quiet and reflection.

Special thanks to Gabriel, whose camera lens is the real enabler of democracy – by whose work I realise the possibility of shared experience and seeing through others' eyes.

Find his work @kwaypngshots.
