
Chapter Eight

From Asian House to Noble House

By the mid-1980's, the Chancery offices in Asian House were becoming cramped and unkempt. The Wanchai location was never the most salubrious, and it competed for the attentions of visiting businessmen with earthier attractions like the "Pussycat Bar" or "The Hey Feela Seafood Restaurant". Worse, the two floors of the Commission were sandwiched between the most popular (or so it seemed) Chinese restaurants in Hong Kong, and the air vents of their kitchens blew directly into the offices of the Commission. Years later, old files still carry the scent of braised fish cooked in garlic sauce. Those who worked at Asian House bitterly recall their travails with the crowded elevators. The building management seemed deaf to all pleas for crowd control, though it was comforting to see a Cabinet Minister and his entourage squeezed into an elevator, beside the fishmonger on his daily rounds.

The Administration Officer at the time

was Brian Passey. It was his job to liaise with the regional inspector who was sent out from the Office of the Fire Commissioner of Canada, who finally examined the accommodations. Not surprisingly, it was determined that the facilities no longer met Canadian safety standards. This caused the Commission to begin an active search for new premises.

Exchange Square, one of the best prospects, was built in 1984 on the last remaining waterfront site in the Central business area. It was to be the home of the new unified Stock Exchange. As Hong Kong Land publicity gushed, it was the height of excellence, destined to be the focus of blue-chip business activity throughout Hong Kong – a taipan's "noble house". And since its developers, Hongkong Land, were part of the Jardine's empire, this was not so far from the truth.

The Commission decided to lease space in the new building. Hong Kong, that old



The Maple Leaf flying over the Commission's Exchange Square offices across the road from the old Canadian Pacific offices.