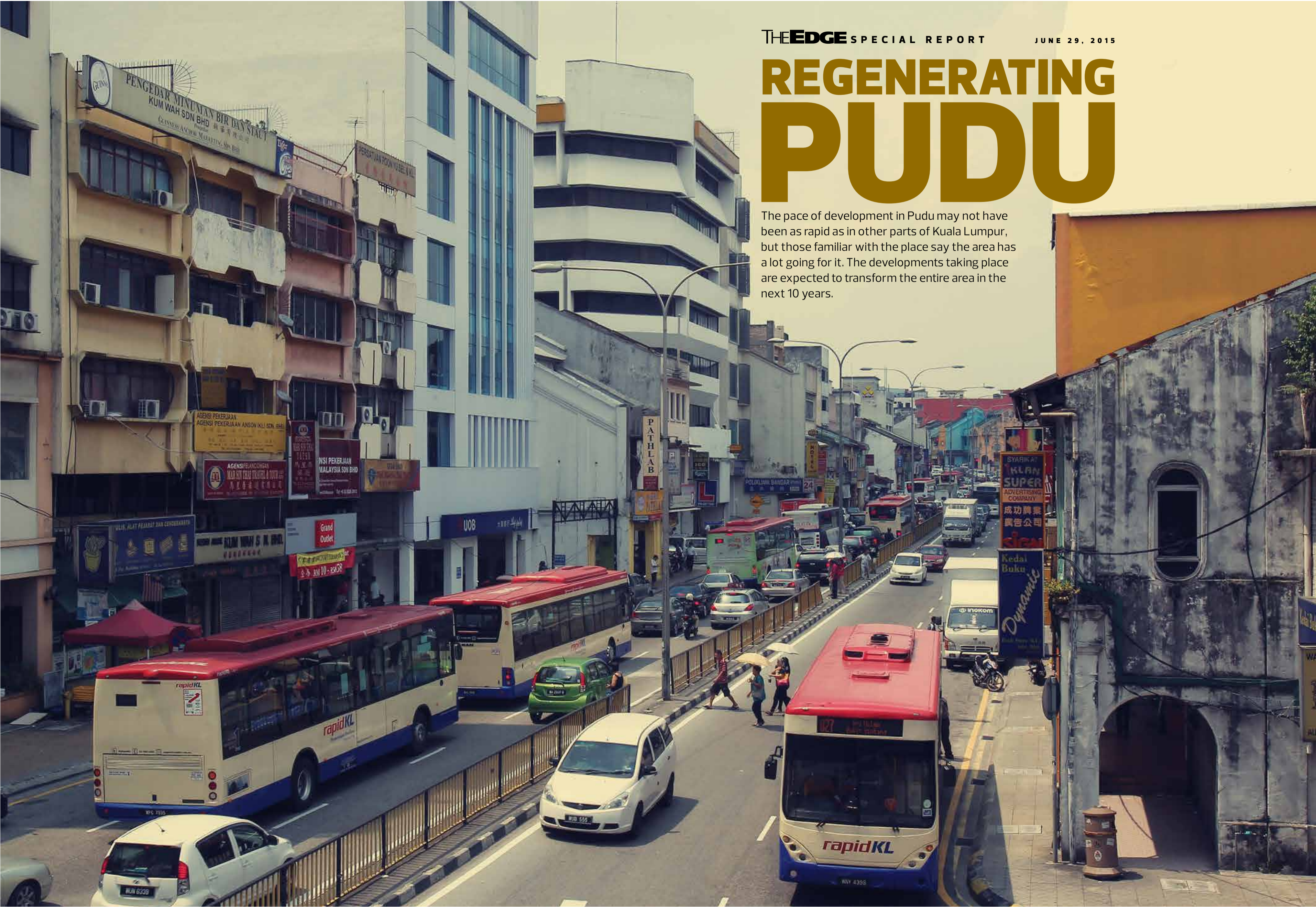


REGENERATING PUDU

The pace of development in Pudu may not have been as rapid as in other parts of Kuala Lumpur, but those familiar with the place say the area has a lot going for it. The developments taking place are expected to transform the entire area in the next 10 years.



REGENERATING PUDU

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The allure of Pudu

Once considered a sleepy backwater, sections of Pudu have been redeveloped over the years, thanks in part to the boom in neighbouring addresses such as Bukit Bintang and Imbi.

ALL STORIES BY SREEREMA BANOO

In the last few years, Pudu has undergone a transformation of sorts — new developments within the area and in the surrounding neighbourhoods, improved accessibility and better public transport. This has helped raise the profile of the once sleepy hollow.

Property developers such as Gamuda Land Bhd, UDA Holdings Bhd, Eco World Development Group Bhd and Swiss-Garden International Sdn Bhd are just some of the companies with projects in the area, developments which property consultants and observers say will breathe new life into this old address.

One of the first streets in Kuala Lumpur, the main thoroughfare Jalan Pudu begins where Jalan Tun Perak and Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock converge and snakes its way some 3km to Jalan Cheras. Established in the late 1800s, Pudu (spelt Pudo during the British colonial era) was originally a town in its own right.

Henry Butcher Marketing Sdn Bhd chief operating officer Tang Chee Meng says the town had a humble beginning as a tin mining community. In the 1800s, Chinese immigrants came to KL seeking their fortune in the booming tin mining industry. As the area was covered in dense jungle, Pudu was known to the locals as *pun san pah* (literally translated as a half- or semi-jungle).

“As there was a large Chinese community in the area, it was also known for secret societies, which came along with the immigrants,” Tang says.

Savills (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd deputy managing director Paul Khong says Pudu was a notorious area at the time, so the name carried a negative connotation. There were also very few residents in the early days, he adds.

“It became popular in the 1900s as Petaling Street was getting crowded and the British Government had to move the local population towards the south to Pudu and the north to Batu Road,” Khong explains, adding that the area was also home to many local traders.

Pudu had a “wild, wild west” sort of image in its early days, says Tang. “One of the first buildings constructed in the area was the Pudu Jail, which was built in the 1890s on the site of an old Chinese burial ground. Pudu Jail became well known after an inmate painted what was then the longest wall mural in the world. It also counts among its inmates the notorious Botak Chin.”

Other iconic buildings that helped define Pudu were the Puduraya bus terminal, the Pudu wet market, Tung Shin Hospital and the Chinese Maternity Hospital. The area was also known to have a river running through it.

In an article, the Malaysian Institute of Geomancy Sciences describes a river in Pudu that was known as *tai sui hum* in Cantonese. According to the article (which is part of its Klang Valley Feng Shui series), residents had to cross the river to go to Imbi. Today, the river has disappeared — designated as part of an underground drainage system, though sections of it can be glimpsed from the Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (Smart Tunnel).



Old shophouses on Jalan Pudu Lama

The early commercial and residential properties in the area were 2- and 3-storey shophouses as well as flats, says Khong. “Pudu was a low to middle class neighbourhood, largely populated by traders who worked and lived around the area. It was an off-fringe location of the old Central Business District (CBD) of KL and the main business focus was around Jalan Pudu itself and towards Puduraya and Petaling Street.”

Siva Shanker, CEO of Agency at PPC International Sdn Bhd, who lived in neighbouring Jalan Cochrane in the 1970s, has vivid recollections of the area. “It was a sleepy hollow at the time and its claim to fame was its proximity to the city and CBD.”

WAVES OF CHANGE

Property consultants believe that Pudu’s transformation probably began with the completion of Berjaya Times Square, which opened in 2003. As a result, Pudu became more accessible and visible from neighbouring areas, such as Bukit Bintang.

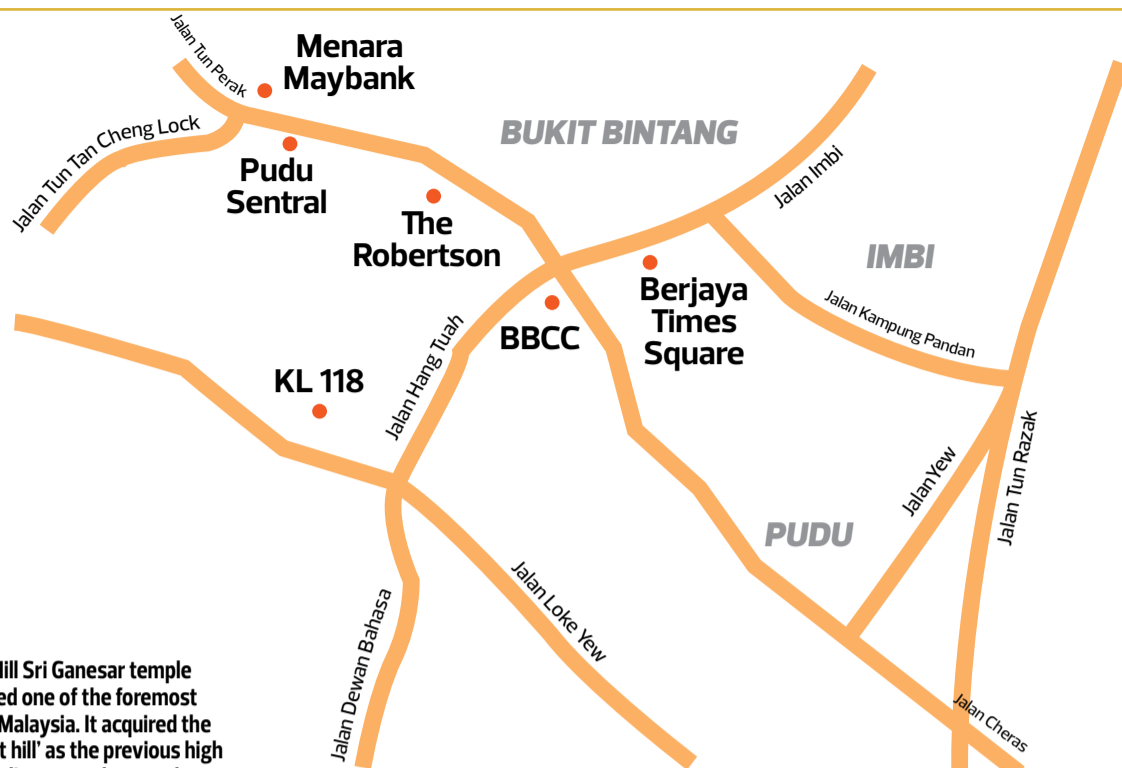
The renovation of the Puduraya bus terminal, which was renamed Pudu Sentral in 2011 in keeping with its new look, was another shot in the arm for the address. In September 2012, Pudu Sentral became the Urban Transformation Centre for KL, the second one after Melaka. The centre houses government agencies, private businesses, a Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia branch, Kedai Kain 1Malaysia branch and the first Kedai Buku 1Malaysia.

A noticeable change in this part of Jalan Pudu is the reduction in traffic congestion, thanks to the opening of the Bandar Tasik Selatan Integrated Transport Terminal, which caters for southbound buses, in 2011.

Swiss-Garden International corporate communications manager Linda Evelyn Wong remembers how congested Jalan Pudu used to be when Puduraya served as the hub for inter-city express buses. “You could see from the hotel the buses queuing all the way to Puduraya,” she says.

Wong has been with the hospitality group — whose





The Court Hill Sri Ganesar temple is considered one of the foremost temples in Malaysia. It acquired the name 'court hill' as the previous high court was adjacent to the temple.



maiden property, Swiss-Garden Hotel in Jalan Pudu, opened in 1993 — since 2004. Over the years, she has seen the significant changes in the area.

Her colleague, chief operating officer Ricky Ang, adds that there has been a rise in the number of budget and boutique hotels and eateries catering for the tourist market in the last 18 months alone. They include the Transit Hotel, Hotel 99 and Sandpiper Hotel. "It is not surprising to see people crossing Jalan Pudu with their luggage," he says.

However, some developments failed to take off and have become an eyesore, such as Plaza Rakyat. "It was supposed to replace Puduraya as the new transport hub, which would have given the area another boost with its integrated commercial development. Unfortunately, it was abandoned," says Tang. It is understood that City Hall is taking over the stalled project, and many observers are hoping the project will be revived soon.

DRIVERS FOR GROWTH

Although the pace of development in Pudu has not been as rapid as in other parts of the city, like the KLCC and Bukit Bintang areas, those familiar with the place say Pudu has a lot going for it, especially where accessibility is concerned.

Tang points out that public transport, for example, has never been a major problem in the area given the availability of public buses and taxis plying the road and the existence of the Pudu Sentral bus and taxi terminal.

Khong concurs, saying, "The LRT passes through Pudu at the Puduraya, Hang Tuah and Plaza Rakyat Stations and the monorail at the Hang Tuah Station. This has helped the Pudu area grow and connect with all the other locations."

St Anthony, which was built in 1911, is located on Jalan Robertson



The Smart Tunnel's exit at Jalan Changkat Thambi Dollah has also helped to open up and modernise the area, he adds. "This whole place is being transformed substantially from being a backwater of Bukit Bintang."

What's more, upcoming MRT stations in Bukit Bintang are poised to enhance Pudu's accessibility to other parts of the Klang Valley. Given these enhancements, it is unsurprising that developers are eyeing opportunities in Pudu where, according to Khong, land is changing hands at more than RM1,000 per sq ft (psf).

"Land within the city limits in good KL city centre locations are around RM3,500 psf. The increases in land values are moving in tandem across city locations. Pudu's proximity to the city and major developments has seen land values there head northwards. More redevelopment projects are expected to rejuvenate this entire area in the next 10 years," Khong says.

One of these major projects is The Robertson by Gamuda Land Bhd, a township developer which chose the Pudu address for its maiden high-rise mixed-use development.

"We saw a great opportunity to lead the transformation of the area. This was reaffirmed when the government decided to provide various new infrastructure and transport developments for Pudu and the surrounding areas," says Gamuda Land managing director Chow Chee Wah.

"With the existing transport services from Pudu Sentral, complemented with the inter-city LRT and monorail systems, and the MRT services just a couple of years away, Pudu is poised to experience another boom in the near future.

"We also note that the developments surrounding KLCC have almost reached maximum capacity. Thus, The Robertson and other surrounding developments will naturally become the next preferred property hot spots."

The RM712 million freehold development fronting Jalan Pudu and Jalan Robertson will comprise retail and commercial components as well as serviced residences.

Tang believes that huge redevelopments, such as the Bukit Bintang City Centre project, will breathe new life into the area and take the address to another level. Undertaken by a consortium comprising UDA Holdings Bhd, Eco World Development Group Bhd and the Employees Provident Fund, the RM8 billion redevelopment of the 19.4-acre former Pudu Jail site is seen as "a big deal" by observers.

Khong also believes the redevelopment of old government quarters in Bukit Bintang, forming the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX), will be a catalyst for Pudu and its surrounding areas. "Lend Lease [from Australia] recently bought a 17-acre site [within TRX] to build a mall with residences and hotels above. When the physical works start, the impact will be seen reverberating through to Pudu and the surrounding areas."

Swiss-Garden International is similarly optimistic about the address. It is developing the 20-storey D'Majestic Place Hotel and Residences, with 188 rooms and residences, in Jalan Pudu. Scheduled for a soft opening in July, Ang is positive on the property's prospects. "There is currently nothing in the area with this kind of hospitality product," he says of the boutique hotel.

RIPE FOR REGENERATION?

These upcoming projects aside, the fact remains that much of the area, particularly the older parts of Pudu (closer to Jalan Cheras) has remained untouched. "This is an area where urban regeneration is just waiting to happen," says Siva.

Ang agrees, saying that he would like to see Pudu regenerate in the same way that George Town in Penang has. "I would like to see the old Chinese eateries being retained and juxtaposed with nice coffee places. Pudu has character and that is what people want to see."

Such an approach may also make sense given that large-scale redevelopments will be a challenge. Khong points out that in Pudu, many of the properties have been issued individual titles, and to amalgamate the parcels into one big title is usually an uphill task.

"Even in the strata title segments, we do not have laws that govern redevelopment rules. And we need a 100% agreement

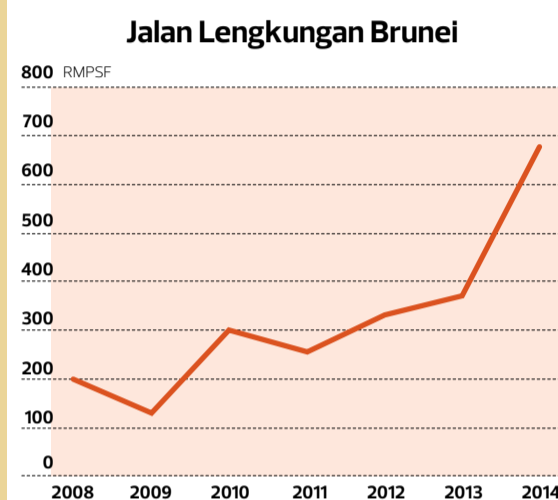
Secondary market values on the rise

Research by Savills (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd shows that the latest transactions for shophouses in the Jalan Brunei area put values at RM2.6 million to RM3 million.

"The asking prices in the vicinity are about 20% higher," deputy managing director Paul Khong says, adding that in better locations, fronting Jalan Pudu, prices will be from RM4.5 million, depending on the location and size.

He says values in Pudu have seen a steep two to threefold increase over the last six years, particularly in 2012 and 2013. The sales pattern reflects the growth in the area and also the upcoming projects in its vicinity, he adds.

Price of shop units (4,800 sq ft built-up)



SOURCE: * ACTUAL TRANSACTIONS BASED ON JPPH SALES FIGURES/SAVILLS MALAYSIA

Transacted property values in Pudu area

TYPE OF PROPERTY	TRANSACTIONED VALUES (RM PSF)		
	2012	2013	2014
Vacant land	604 - 1,102	334 - 1,333	595 - 1,506
Condominiums/serviced apartments (average)			
Casa Mutiara	750	846	923
Casa Residency	NA	1,069	965
Berjaya Times Square (Jalan Imbi)	989	1,102	1,120
Swiss Garden	1,020	1,122	1,207

SOURCE: JPPH/HBM

from all the strata owners (whereas in Singapore, an 80% majority will suffice)," he says.

"There are also not too many sizeable parcels of development land around that are ready for development. This is one of the major problems hindering the redevelopment of Pudu as a whole."

And what of the area's image? Has it shed its image of yesterday or does it still carry less than positive connotations, leading to some projects dropping the Pudu name altogether?

Khong says many areas that were not very popular in the city are being rebranded with new addresses to help shed their old image. "One example is Segambut Dalam, which is now known as North Kiara," he points out, adding that this is necessary for the developers to build newer and higher-end products in the neighbourhood.

Tang believes that the Pudu name carries with it an old-world image that may not appeal to the younger generation, and it would make sense to break away from this name and the images and perceptions associated with it.

Whatever name new developments adopt, observers say the future of Pudu looks bright. **E**

Pockets of pre-war houses in Pudu are slowly being transformed into guesthouses and chic cafés

