



DESIGNING A NATION'S GARDEN  
IN THE HEART OF SINGAPORE'S DOWNTOWN

# GARDENS BY THE BAY

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LEFT Masterplan showing the Bay South and Bay East Gardens.

Gardens by the Bay is Singapore's latest green legacy as it seeks to transform into a City in a Garden. Building upon more than 40 years of concerted greening efforts initiated by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew who saw this as critical to Singapore's attractiveness and liveability, the City-State has in recent years unveiled a bold plan to create a Metropolis rising out of a pervasive mantle of tropical greenery.

This will see an intensification of the green landscape matrix of streetscape greenery, parks and gardens and nature reserves linked together by a network of more than 200 kilometres of park connectors across the entire island. This will be further enhanced by skyrise greenery, an effort that will see the urban infrastructure being draped by a lush green layer.

Marina Bay—Singapore's New Downtown—presents an excellent opportunity to realise this vision of a City in a Garden. Occupying 101 hectares of land reclaimed some 30 years ago, the Gardens by the Bay comprises three distinct but connected waterfront gardens—Bay South (54 hectares), Bay East (32 hectares) and Bay Central (15 hectares). The Gardens will emanate out from the Bay South Gardens at the very heart of the Singapore Downtown and encircle the Marina Reservoir like a green necklace, thereby creating an intimate and seamless interface between land and water. This move is a shift in urban planning paradigm as the choicest real estate, some 8.1 kilometres of waterfront, is allocated to the Gardens instead of commercial development. A *Newsweek* article in January 2006 lauded this as a shift in the right direction as cityscapes in Asia today seek to distinguish themselves by turning green.

Understandably, the economic returns would have to be satisfied in such a move. The returns are not just monetary—reaped from the increased value of surrounding real estate and tourism receipts—but strategic as the Gardens will launch Singapore into the realm of distinctive global cities with environmental sustainability and quality living as its distinctive hallmarks. This attracts not only international branding, but also investors and human talent.

More than anything else, the Gardens by the Bay will be a national garden to all Singaporeans. As Dr Kiat Tan, Project Director of the Gardens by the Bay, puts it at the launch of the Gardens by the Bay: “This is our stake in the

world's premier tropical City in a Garden. The most attractive and desirable part of Singapore has been set aside and will be accessible to all Singaporeans. Gardens by the Bay is dedicated to Singaporeans as their own space where they can participate in meaningful and memorable activities.”

The challenge lies in developing a masterplan design that will not only encapsulate the essence of what will enrich the lifestyle and recreational activities of Singaporeans and tourists alike through horticulture edutainment, but will enhance the Gardens' value propositions for Singapore, that of international branding and distinction in sustainable development.

An international design competition was called in January 2006 to seek out the best design ideas. This attracted more than 70 entries submitted by 170 firms from 24 countries worldwide, from which two firms—Grant Associates<sup>1</sup> and Gustafson Porter<sup>2</sup>—were eventually awarded the masterplan design for the Bay South and Bay East Gardens respectively. The Bay South Gardens are currently being constructed in Phase 1 of the Gardens development, and target to open at the end of November 2011. Full construction of the Bay East Gardens is slated for Phase 2 of the Gardens development.

This article provides an overview of the Bay South Gardens masterplan design, highlighting critical elements that have been incorporated to help bring about the essence of a Nation's Garden in Singapore's Downtown.