

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# A respectful integration with nature at GuocoLand's Springleaf Residence

**H**ow does a developer transform the site of a former school into a home integrated with nature? Singapore-listed real estate group GuocoLand's Springleaf Residence could be the blueprint for developers to build residential projects that are situated near existing forests.

GuocoLand's 941-unit Springleaf Residence will offer views of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve and sheltered access to the Springleaf MRT Station on the Thomson-East Coast Line (TEL), located less than two minutes away.

"It's a line that serves residents to go to the Central Business District for work, to Orchard for shopping, to the Botanic Gardens and eventually, to the airport, in the future," says Cheng Hsing Yao, Group CEO of GuocoLand.

Residents of Springleaf Residence are connected to the rest of the island via the TEL, and can still look forward to retreating to a "very natural environment" at the end of the day, Cheng adds.

As a property developer and property investor, GuocoLand is "always thinking about new ways of living and how lifestyles will evolve over time", says Cheng. "Besides the trademarks of GuocoLand, where we design spaces from inside out with flexibility and entertaining at home being key guiding principles; we have also imbued Springleaf Residence with a stronger emphasis on wellness."

The 32,023.7 sq m, 99-year leasehold site, located in a predominantly landed housing neighbourhood, was awarded in April 2024 to GuocoLand and its joint venture partner Hong Leong Holdings.

According to Cheng, the area has not seen any high-rise condominium developments within a 500m radius. "We feel that Springleaf Residence's site is similar to that of our projects at Lentor Hills estate, and we can come in as the first project and set the positioning of Springleaf estate as a premium residential estate."

GuocoLand secured a \$847.1 million green facility for the development in August 2024, with United Overseas Bank (UOB), Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) and DBS Bank as the arrangers.

## On solid ground

GuocoLand's objective of seamless and respectful integration with the natural environment forms the foundation of Springleaf Residence's design. Located along Upper Thomson Road, the development aims to minimise changes in ground levels near the boundary; Springleaf Residence is bordered by the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Nee Soon Swamp Forest and the namesake Springleaf Forest.

From this came a novel workaround — GuocoLand and their consultants carefully calibrated site levels to follow the natural contours of the existing forest, taking reference from key landmarks within the development. These include the conserved school block and majestic rain tree, greeting residents and visitors when they enter Springleaf Residence.

The elevation of the site increases as residents proceed deeper into the estate. Further in, five 25-storey towers will house 909 residential units, and GuocoLand has taken into consideration adequate spacing between blocks, sensitivity to the conserved building and views from each unit.



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Each tower will also feature two sky terraces on different levels that allow residents to entertain, work or simply relax at the various cocoons available, and where they can also enjoy views of Upper and Lower Seletar Reservoir and the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. In total, there will be 10 sky terraces, which will feature different flora to attract birds and pollinators to bring nature into the development.

Given the proximity to the surrounding forest, GuocoLand has also considered ways to minimise light pollution. Studies show that lighting with warmer colour temperatures is gentler on the eyes. As such, GuocoLand will install warm-toned lighting throughout the development.

Cheng adds: "We found that when we design for ecology and with biodiversity sensitivity in mind, we are actually also enhancing the wellness of our residents."

## Blast from the past

With Springleaf Residence, GuocoLand retains elements of not just the natural environment, but that of the built environment as well. The four-storey main structure of Upper Thomson Secondary School, which was completed in 1965, will be transformed into 32 residential units, while a perpendicular "wing block" will be repurposed and become known as Springleaf Club. This will house some of the estate's community facilities, such as a gym, study room, and an "arts and crafts room".

"This craft room will be a shared space for residents," says Cheng. "We were thinking back to our own school days and thought that this could be like the rooms for technical or home economics in schools. You can use the space for hobbies like pottery or use it as another dining room to host friends for gatherings as well."

The ECA House is another unique feature of Springleaf Residence. Harkening back to the part of schools where "extra-curricular activities" clubs were housed,



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"You can have several different parties and events going on at the same time, or you can be hosting large family gatherings. We hope that this can become a very active residential engagement zone, so we bring back a kind of school-like vibrancy into the condominium," he adds.

## Living in nature

Encircling Springleaf Residence will be a "native forest corridor" with species of plants that are native to Springleaf Forest, complemented by other indigenous varieties. Dominant tree canopies will be introduced to enhance the corridor, facilitating movement and habitat connectivity for animals.

The inner landscape gardens of Springleaf Residence embrace a "meadow" concept, designed to attract various butterflies, with a variety of grasses and shrubs with flowers that provide essential nectar sources.

"Being next to Springleaf Forest, we wanted to bring species that are found in the forest into the site," says Cheng.

Springleaf Residence will put up plaques and information panels describing the native species found in the area. "We wanted to have this interesting dialogue between people and nature. Our wish is that the residents living here, especially children, will get to learn more about the different species that are found within the condominium."

To avoid bird strikes, Springleaf Residence's five towers have a window-to-wall ratio of under 50%. Recessed window glass helps to increase shade and reduce reflectivity. The native forest corridor also serves to guide the birds' flight paths as they tend to fly over tree canopies.

Besides its focus on biodiversity, Springleaf Residence is also a sustainable development, and will receive the Building and Construction Authority's (BCA) Green Mark Platinum (Super Low Energy) award with Maintainability badge. It will be GuocoLand's second development to attain the award after the 605-unit Lentor Mansion.

Looking forward, GuocoLand will continue to introduce nature and wellness-focused concepts and facilities in their developments, including an upcoming 399-unit project at Faber Walk and another at River Valley Green with around 455 units.

"There are similarities between the Springleaf estate and the Lentor Hills estate. Both are in quiet private landed housing enclaves and are directly served by the Thomson-East Coast MRT line. What is different for Springleaf estate is that it is near to, and has great views of, the forest and nature areas," says Cheng. **E**