

Historic Building Appraisal

Mei Ho House

Block 41, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon

Mei Ho House (美荷樓) is the only surviving H-shaped public housing block in Hong Kong. The Shek Kip Mei (石硤尾) squatter area fire in 1953 alerted the government to the need to tackle the squatter problem and to take up the responsibility of providing public housing. A programme of public housing, resettlement and clearance of squatter areas was eventually put into place. Eight permanent six-storey buildings were completed in 1954, and the H-Block public housing estates soon became a familiar part of Hong Kong's built environment. Shek Kip Mei Estate (石硤尾邨), first built in 1954, is the oldest public housing estate in Hong Kong.

***Historical
Interest***

Featured by its H-shape, Mei Ho House is the first design of Mark I type. When completed in 1954, it was named Block H. In the following eight years, new blocks were built. Mei Ho House was then renamed Block 15. In the 1970s, Shek Kip Mei Estate underwent redevelopment and conversion works. The H-Blocks were converted into self-contained units which greatly improved living conditions in the resettlement blocks, and new blocks were constructed. Mei Ho House was then further re-numbered as Block 41.

Architecturally the H-Blocks bears Modernist influence, with their long linear forms and strong horizontal lines formed by their continuous balconies. The H-Block was the first design of Mark I resettlement estates, and Mei Ho House is the only surviving H-Block in Hong Kong. It is a witness of the resettlement estate history from the birth of resettlement estates to conversion into self-contained units. It is a six-storey high building characterised by two identical wings linked by a cross-piece forming the H-shaped plan. The long arms of the "H" consisted of living units arranged back-to-back opening on to the access balcony which ran around the perimeter of each floor. There was an access staircase at each end of the long arms. Water standpipes, communal bathrooms and flush latrines were provided in the cross-piece of the "H". The H-Blocks underwent conversion in the 1970s into self-contained units.

***Architectural
Merit

Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

The Shek Kip Mei Estate is where Hong Kong's public housing programme began. Mei Ho House is an authentic and now rare H-Block with built heritage value, social value and local interest. The new resettlement blocks helped

***Social Value
& Local
interest***

people recover from their grief and despair following the squatter area fires and a new community spirit was soon built up in the new housing estates.

Mei Ho House stands at the foot of a small hill with other blocks in Shek Kip Mei Estates. Shek Kip Mei, together with Cheung Sha Wan is a concentration of public housing estates which sprung up after Shek Kip Mei Estate. Examples are Lei Cheng Uk Estate (李鄭屋邨), Pak Tin Estate (白田邨) and Tai Hang Tung Estate (大坑東邨).

Mei Ho House is within walking distance of other historic buildings, such as ***Group Value*** the North Kowloon Magistracy (北九龍裁判法院), Building of The Garden Company, Limited (嘉頓有限公司建築), Sham Shu Po Police Station (深水埗警署) (all Grade 2), and Nos. 51 & 53 Yen Chow Street (欽州街) (Grade 1).