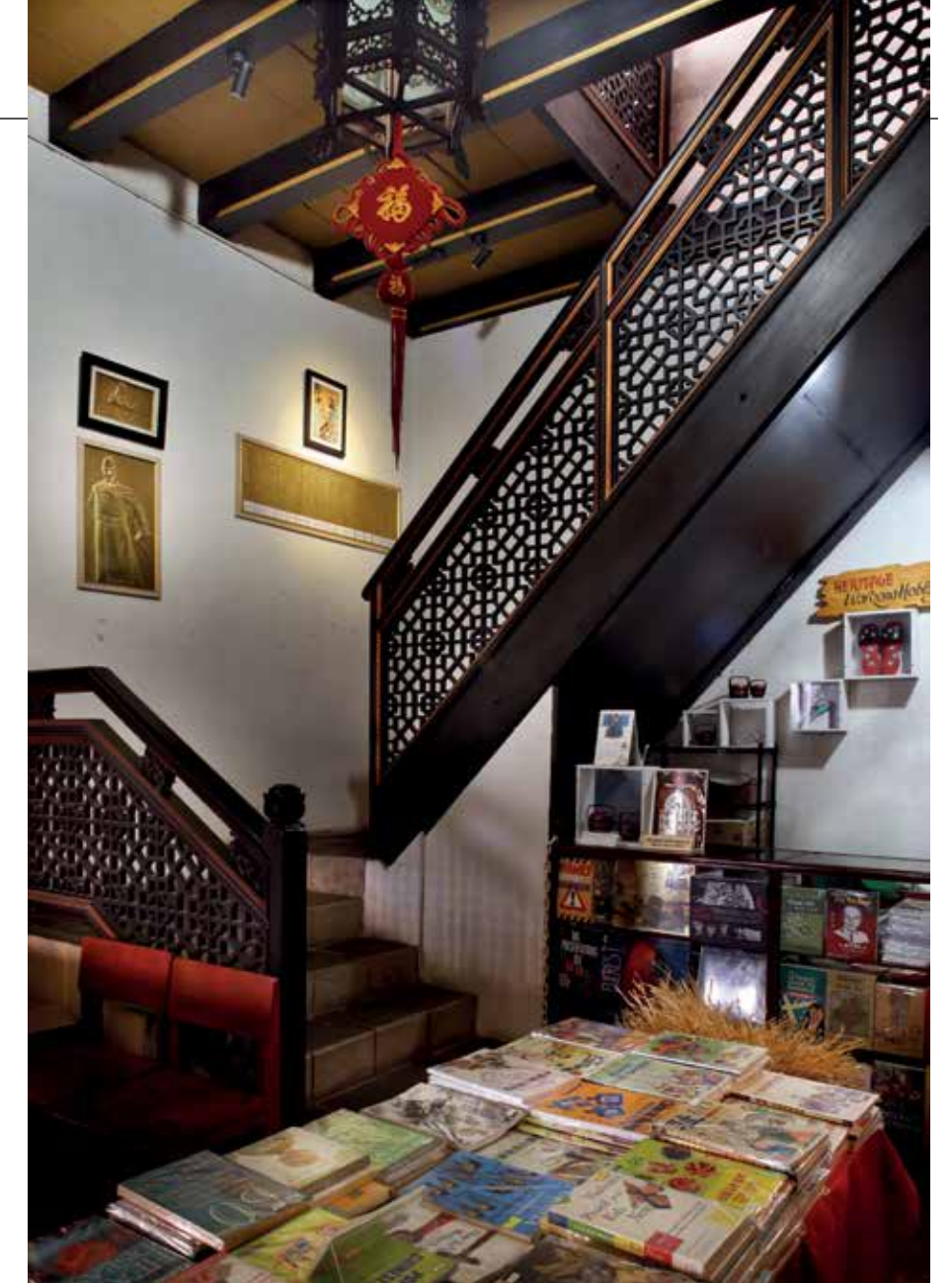


**QING DYNASTY PEARL**  
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT  
—  
The inner court of the ground floor with 19th Century Moon Gate  
—  
View of the First floor Museum full of 17-19th century artifacts

## A Restored Pearl from the Qing Dynasty

It was Abraham from biblical times whom got promised descendants as much as the sand in the desert, but it has been the Chinese who seem to have managed to have descendants in most countries: From New York to Singapore, 'China Town' districts form part of the culture of many cities, and as the Chinese merchants from the Qing Dynasty aimed to trade and integrate, unlike the Dutch and Japanese who wanted to control and colonialize, Indonesia has a very proud Chinese heritage, and Chinese Indonesian descendants, who are celebrated at the Benteng Heritage 'The Pearl of Tangerang' Museum as the brainchild and heart song of Udaya Halim.

**STORY BY** Dewald Haynes **PHOTOS BY** Udayasakhya Halim



As a small boy growing up in a modest house overlooking the Pasar Lama market in Tangerang, Udaya would sometimes gaze over the narrow lane toward this large, old Chinese-style house on the other side and wonder what secrets it contained. Much later in life, Udaya had a dream one night that he found himself inside this house. That was the moment he knew it was his destiny to buy this old house, renovate it, and turn it into a museum dedicated to the preservation of the Chinese heritage of Indonesia. The property that houses the museum was purchased in September 2009 by Udaya Halim who lovingly and carefully restored it to its original glory, and preserved many of the original features and materials.

The museum is very much a living museum and community hall, as it is now used by the local Tionghoa in Tangerang and wider Chinese community in Indonesia to host cultural events. The Museum Benteng Heritage

association was founded on the auspicious date of November 11th, 2011 (11.11.11) and has grown in reputation to become an important icon of Indonesian Tionghoa culture and has won several prestigious awards: The MURI (Museum Records Indonesia) award; the Cipta Pesona Award from the Ministry of Tourism for the best cultural a tourism destination in 2012; and the Gold Winner of the Prix D'Excellence Award for Heritage Restoration from FIABCI Indonesia in 2012. It was also named the Silver Winner of FIABCI International in 2013. This last award, akin to the Oscar of real estate, is given to real estate projects that embody excellence at all levels of their creation.

Tangerang is believed to be the site of one of the first settlements of ethnic-Chinese in the archipelago. Although there are recordings that Chinese merchants had contacts with Indonesia dating back as far as the 6th century, permanent settlements were



**QING DYNASTY PEARL**  
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

— The Landing of first floor museum with an altar dedicated to Guan Gong, the most respected as God of War and Brotherhood” by the Peranakan Chinese

— Exit Stairs down to the souvenir shop of the museum

— The Front Foyer with its original Antique doors and the display of “Naga Nusantara”, a MURI (Museum Rekor Indonesia / Indonesian Records Museum) Award winner for the first gold tinted Batik Dragon

not established until much later. It was Chen Chi Lung that originally led a small band of followers from the northern Javanese coast, close to what would later become Batavia (now Jakarta), up the Cisadane River in 1407. These initial settlers are also thought to have been acolytes of the famous Muslim admiral from China, Cheng Ho, who led seven great Chinese fleets to Indonesia and beyond in the early 15th century during the Ming Dynasty. These settlers become known as the “Cina Benteng”, meaning “the Chinese of the fort”, a name that derives from Tangerang and the bend in the Cisadane River becoming the site of a Dutch fort in the 17th century. The fort was built in order to protect the Dutch settlement of Batavia from attack by the unruly Banteneese further west. Originally the

fort was a fertile rural area with rice fields and rubber plantations and a 17th century Chinese temple that remains in use until this very day.

The restoration project saw the building constructed on two main floors with a beautiful first-floor terrace overlooking the street below, the building contains many historic artifacts and pictures of Tionghoa life in Indonesia from over the centuries, together with explanations of the importance of the voyages of Admiral Cheng Ho in spreading Chinese heritage across Asia. Feng shui principles were applied in the general re-layout of the building, with courtyard doors that look out to the garden left open to assist with air-ventilation. A large indoor water features also help to keep the building cool



**QING DYNASTY PEARL**  
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT  
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The light well of the ground floor with addition of mountain relief on the wall to give the nuance of nature  
—  
The ground floor over looking the left wing of the building with a 19th century wooden ornament attached to the beam of the corridor  
—  
A 19th century wooden Wedding Basket on an 18th century copper table ornated with animals engraving on top  
—  
View of the balcony with an altar dedicated to KUIXING, God of Education, the statue is believed to have been in the building for centuries



without any artificial airconditioning that could harm some of the valuable artifacts.

A collection of old opium scales from different periods found across the region, examples of traditional Tionghoa costumes that were borrowed from the 18th and 19th century Qing Dynasty and a collection of tiny ladies' shoes used for the bound feet of women in the days when the Chinese thought that small feet enhanced a woman's beauty, are just a view treasures to be admired. There are also examples of old Chinese techniques and styles of batik that "paints" a story about cultural integration over a period of time.

At the top floor the most impressive original element of the house can be found: A delicate relief surrounding the first-floor opening up toward the skylight above. The relief depicts the story of General Kwan Kong, a famous Chinese general widely revered as a paragon of loyalty and righteousness, thought to date from the 17th century.

Udaya Halim's unwavering energy and dedication to the cause of preserving the Tionghoa identity and traditions in Indonesia brings to life a story filled with richness that started here in Tangerang in the early 15th century. As a little boy turns into a man, a small grain of sand can also turn into a precious pearl of wisdom, courage and preservation. The Pearl of Tangerang is a prime example of the cultural richness and heritage of a nation brought together through "unity in diversity" in the incredible Indonesia of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 