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Golden Cinema in Beach Road to relaunch as indie cinema called The Projector

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Golden Cinema at the Golden Mile Tower. A group of design professionals are reviving two shuttered cinema halls on Beach Road, in the hope that it will become a permanent oasis for alternative films in a scene overwhelmingly dominated by commercial releases. -- PHOTO: ST FILE

BY JOHN LUI

A group of design professionals are reviving two shuttered cinema halls on Beach Road, in the hope that it will become a permanent oasis for alternative films in a scene overwhelmingly dominated by commercial releases.

The two rooms in the fifth-floor section of Golden Cinema at Golden Mile Tower, closed since the start of this year, will re-open as the hipper, more chic The Projector next month, when it will be one of five screening venues in the Singapore International Film Festival programme. The Projector's official relaunch takes place in January next year.

Renovations are now underway, along with an Indiegogo crowdfunding appeal to help finance it and the purchase of two digital projectors. When complete, one hall will be a dedicated cinema, and another a multi-purpose space for private screenings, and arts and corporate events.

Creative development consultancy and management company Pocket Projects and cross-disciplinary design practice FARM have partnered as the project's managers.

Luna Films, a film consultancy known for programming the Japanese Film Festival for the

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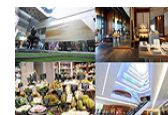
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last five years, has been brought in as a partner to create a film programme. Food and beverage firm Group Therapy Coffee, which operates cafes in Duxton Road and at the Katong V mall, will run a cafe in the lobby.

Ms Karen Tan, 34, founder of Pocket Projects, says she found out about the disused fifth-floor space in January this year through a friend working in an architectural firm in Golden Mile Tower.

"It's a rare opportunity. It's not often that you come across old cinemas and we thought we could do something quite special with it," she tells Life!. Her firm specialises in urban regeneration.

With The Projector, instead of refurbishing a property for a client, the team are doing it for themselves, she says. She, like many others, is frustrated by the lack of choice available in commercial cinemas.

The lease Ms Tan has taken on the fifth-level space is for more than a year, she says, but declined to give the precise length of time.

"This is not a six-month lease - it's a sizable commitment," she says. The renovations will retain as much of the cinema's original charm as possible because the team feel strongly about "reintroducing an old icon to the public".

The old-style flip-up chairs will be repaired and reupholstered and the paint on the armrests will be stripped back to reveal the original wood, for example.

Golden Theatre, with its single-hall, 1,500-seat capacity, was the largest venue in Singapore and Malaysia when Chong Gay Theatres opened it in 1973. It screened mainly Mandarin films in its early years. But like many older cinemas during the 1990s, its fortunes declined as patrons migrated to newer venues in MRT-served shopping malls.

Golden Theatre became a multiplex in the 1990s when its single hall was subdivided into smaller ones, with its circle seats becoming Golden 1 and 2, on the fifth floor.

The Projector will take over these two fifth-floor halls. One has been renamed The Green Room, and will be a 230-seat venue reserved for alternative films. The other, dubbed RedRum (after a key phrase used in the 1980 Stanley Kubrick movie *The Shining*, will have some of chairs removed so it can serve as a multipurpose space.

In the meantime, the single-hall, 1,000-seat Golden Digital Theatre at the building's third floor will continue operating under its current name and management, Ayngaran International, and it remains a popular venue for Indian movie fans.

Ms Tan declined to say how much money the team have invested in the lease and the renovations, but says that more cash is needed to complete the project. The team hope to raise US\$50,000 on crowdfunding site Indiegogo (igg.me/at/theprojectorsg). The site, launched earlier this week, has so far brought in US\$10,000 from more than 60 funders, with about 40 days left to go in the campaign.

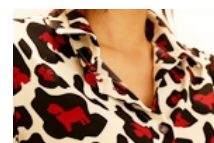
Should the target crowdfunding amount not be raised, they will proceed with their plans anyway.

Both Ms Tan and Ms Blaise Trigg-Smith, co-founder of Pocket Projects, are aware of the business risks in running a cinema that screens niche titles. In recent years, several organisations, including Sinema Old School at Mount Sophia, have tried to run dedicated arthouse halls, but have been forced to change tack.

Ms Trigg-Smith says the challenges include online streaming, piracy and giving up the revenue from screening blockbusters but "we thinking that being independent and focusing on everything but the mainstream could be our biggest strength. We will have a

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diverse programme of films."

Ms Tan says that having three elements - film, a cafe and a multipurpose space - helps spread the risk.

"They are complementary and we're hoping this gives us a better chance of success," she says.

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