



Malacca magic: The Old Majestic.

Old is the operative word. Majestic? Well perhaps in a bygone, disappeared era. What must it have been in the past? What might it become in the future? Unlike its *Sarkie Brothers'* counterparts - Raffles in Singapore, The E&O in George Town (both now modern-day luxury clones) - *The Old Majestic*, a staging post between the two, appears much in its original, if now aged state.



Sky-high battened ceilings support old and yellowed fans. A maroon and mustard tile mosaic, showing signs of wear, covers an expansive floor; a mix of gnarled armchairs and tartan-cushioned easy chairs, along with glass-topped tables scattered at random, around what once must have been, a most *majestic* lounge. At one end, leather-cushioned bamboo bar stools cluster around a highly polished bar, now devoid of customers. I could imagine it vibrant and intense with white talk, in days of Empire.

Today the place sits, a faded relic, doomed it would appear to ultimate but extreme fates: destruction by wrecking ball, or upliftment to the 5-star class of its former brethren. I wasn't sure which was worse.



An elderly gentleman sits in a weathered leather armchair, not far from the bar, exactly the same as the day before, looking elegant in checked waistcoat and maroon bow tie, with white wing-commander moustache to match. Is he a guest, a staff member, or an eternal monument to the British Raj? It's hard to tell. He stares ahead; his drink – G&T with ice – sits on a small round table at his side. He hardly moves.

The young Chinese receptionist, smartly styled in black and white, leans on the bar: bored, with nothing to do. A uniformed attendant goes about his routine of switching on the fans and tuning the TV ... the one visible gesture to modernity!

No one speaks, nothing stirs, except now, the new sound of whirring fans, as they slowly gather speed to slice through the hot and humid air. It must have been a wonderful meeting place in its hay day. But I like it even now - love it perhaps - with its high ceilings and thick walls: a cool, if rather musty retreat, from the oppressive mid-afternoon heat.

"Perhaps the place is heaving in the evening hours," I joke to myself.

Then aloud I order a drink; my voice coming from nowhere and startling the diminutive lady, behind the bar.

“Can you mix a gin-sling, like they do in Raffles?” I ask this thinking the answer will probably come back as a blank stare. But no

“Yes sir. Right away sir. Coming up sir. You like with pineapple and lime?” Half question, half statement.

I lean on the bar and waggle my head in the Indian mode, indicating yes. She half-turns to look at me, smiling back as she fixes the drink.

Minutes later, like my sole companion from days of empire, I also recline in a faded brown chair, legs crossed, directly under a ceiling fan, which revolves with a hypnotic clanking sound. I sip my gorgeously tall, ice-cooled drink.

“This must be heaven.” A feint murmur passes my lips.

“Sorry sir. The drink is as you expected?” The talented mixer of my *Singapore Sling*, still standing behind the bar, obviously has extremely good hearing.

“Yes, fine thank you. Just thinking I need to leave by seven.”

FOOTNOTE: With time, The Old Majestic underwent total renovation, back to something like its former self. In 1992 rooms were \$15; now a cool \$250!



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