

# RE CLAIM LAND

THE FIGHT FOR SPACE  
IN SINGAPORE



## Barber in the Alley

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Amidst the gleaming office towers and fancy restaurants of Tanjong Pagar, barber Lee Yoon Tong looks out of place operating a make shift salon with just a mirror, a cupboard and a chair in a back alley of Singapore's financial district.

The 70-year-old used to own a shophouse salon nearby but as the area modernised into a city centre of well-heeled corporate-types, it also inflated his rent that led to his eviction in 2002.

But Lee refused to call it a day. Instead, he reclaimed this back alley and re-opened his salon to continue serving regular customers, many whom he grew up with here. Five days a week, under the watchful gaze of the overlooking skyscrapers, Lee ekes out a modest livelihood with the only skill he has ever known.

And Lee's tale is not just one of nostalgia. By running a business on the streets and surviving, it questions the state's notion that street hawkers like Lee, seen as unsightly and messy, are incompatible with a modern Singapore well known for its order and cleanliness. More so in this economic recession, their resilience shows us how a little imagination and creativity is all it takes to survive.

This story is one of a collection found at **Reclaim Land: The fight for space in Singapore** <<http://reclaimland.sg>>