

it's lonely at the **top**

Sentosa Cove

Pooja Thakur Mahrotri

Sentosa Cove, a residential enclave nestled on an island off the coast of Singapore, is quiet at the best of times. On a weekday, its frangipani-lined streets are mostly devoid of life, save the odd domestic helper taking her four-legged charge out for a walk.

The stillness, however, belies the real estate shuffling taking place behind the scenes. Property listings here have been rising. But unless you're buying, there's no cause for celebration: sellers are stomaching losses as steep as 40 percent. Average prices are down almost 30 percent from their 2011 highs, a far more severe slump than in prime central London areas reeling from Brexit.

As luxury real estate markets boomed across Asia-Pacific over the past decade -- from Hong Kong's famed Peak to the seaside mansions of Sydney -- Sentosa Cove stands out as a rare cautionary tale about the perils of international property speculation. The hot money from a commodities frenzy that peaked about seven years ago has fizzled, and millionaires' preferences have shifted toward other areas on Singapore's mainland.

And now, after years of predominantly loss-making transactions, the enclave on Sentosa island faces yet another blow, this time from the government's decision in July to further raise stamp duties. "Loss-making deals continue to plague the market," said Christine Li, Cushman & Wakefield's head of research for Singapore. "The recent cooling measures, coupled with the looming uncertainties arising from interest-rate hikes and trade tensions, will weigh on investor appetite in the near term."

Private-home sales tumbled 64 percent in August to the least in six months as government cooling measures took effect, data released earlier this week from the Urban Redevelopment Authority showed. What was previously Sentosa Cove's main strength has lately become a liability. The area is the only place in Singapore where foreigners can buy a landed house, increasing its allure to overseas buyers, who accounted for a third of luxury purchases in Singapore last year. But with stamp duties doubling to 20 percent since 2011 for foreign buyers compared with just 3 percent for Singaporeans, the waterfront oasis is suffering.

19 September 2018

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Hayao Miyazaki

Godfather of Animation

Environmentalism.

Pacifist.

Revivalist.

Realist.

Feminist.

Artist.

Auteurist.

It would be no exaggeration to describe Hayao Miyazaki as the godfather of animation in Japan - some might even say the world. Since his directorial debut in 1979, his gentle and whimsical children's movies have been hugely popular and become key cultural icons. *Spirited Away* is still Japan's highest grossing movie of all time while other works like *My Neighbour Totoro* are considered canon.

He and his company Studio Ghibli, which he founded in 1985, have often been called Japan's answer to Walt Disney - but in many ways Miyazaki has proven to be a complete original. *Spirited Away* has been Japan's highest grossing movie since its release in 2001. The hallmarks of a Miyazaki film are its lush detailed landscapes and its thoughtfulness in tackling serious themes such as war, man versus nature, and identity. "Firstly they are very beautiful and emotionally very honest," says animation scholar Helen McCarthy. "Audiences everywhere can relate to that." "Secondly, they are many-layered so that children can enjoy them, but people at later stages of life can also find meaning in them. And thirdly, they are highly individual works of art."

Instead of animation's typical cardboard villains and knights in shining armour, his works feature complex lead characters - in *Spirited Away*, the heroine Chihiro starts out as a sullen cowardly child, while its monster No-Face evolves from a timid needy spirit. This complexity was not common in the industry when Miyazaki first started out in the 1960s, drawing scenes for other people's films. But he got noticed in 1965 when he became dissatisfied with a film he was working on which ended with the rescue of a robot princess. Miyazaki suggested an alternate ending where she turned into a human, a suggestion picked up by the producers. "Miyazaki added the humanity to what would otherwise be a typical space fantasy.

As a child, Miyazaki had to flee his town of Utsunomiya amid the firebomb raids of World War Two. Growing up in post-war Japan, he witnessed firsthand its rapid modernisation and rapid urban sprawl. These experiences would make a lasting impression on Miyazaki who has pushed anti-war and pro-environmental messages in his films, which were rare when he first started out. He is also known for his strong female lead characters, which Prof Napier says are partly inspired by his late mother with whom he had a close relationship. While young heroines known as shoujo are common in Japanese animation, unlike others, his girls are neither infantilised nor sexualised.

"What my friends and I have been trying to do since the 1970s is to try and quiet things down a little bit; don't just bombard with noise and distraction. And to follow the path of children's emotions and feelings as we make a film," he said in an interview in 2002. "If you stay true to joy and astonishment and empathy, you don't have to have violence and you don't have to have action. They'll follow you. This is our principle."

Since last year he has been working on a short film called *Boro the Caterpillar*, based on a story in development for two decades. Last month he said it would be turned into a full-length film, which may only be released in 2021 - he will be 80 years old by then. In the few interviews he has the reclusive director has spoken of his need to continue making films.

His ethos has inspired a new generation of animators, most notably John Lasseter, the founder of US animation studio Pixar, and Makoto Shinkai, who helmed this year's blockbuster hit *Your Name*. Miyazaki has tried to retire - reportedly at least six times - but it appears he is not finished telling his stories.

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