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His first typewriter and his first laptop – an IBM ThinkPad – adorn the room, a fitting part of a collection of personal belongings of the late Mr Wee Kim Wee, a journalist-turned-president.

Adding to the personal touch is his trophy for winning the Singapore Junior Badminton Championship in 1938, one of several for the sport, his stash of rabbit figurines, which he collected as he was born in the Year of the Rabbit in 1915, and an autographed basketball from American basketball team Harlem Globetrotters.

Come early 2023, the public will be able to visit the Wee Kim Wee room, housed at the Singapore Management University (SMU) Administration Building in Bras Basah.

The room, roughly three-quarters the size of a badminton court, is a collaboration between Mr Wee's family and SMU, and also features the late Mrs Wee's belongings, such as her cheongsams. Mr Wee, who began his career as a clerk at The Straits Times and later became its deputy editor, died in 2005, aged 89, and Mrs Wee died in 2018, aged 102.

Ms Wee Eng Hwa, 79, the fifth of Mr Wee's seven children, said the personal touches of the belongings are aimed at achieving a meaningful, living heritage.

"We hope everyone will enjoy reminiscing the past with the present in mind, as well as the many human stories embedded in each and every item within this room," she said, speaking as she led a tour attended by ST.

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A highlight of the room is that it is a recreation of Mr Wee's office, where he used to work and host visitors after serving as the fourth president of Singapore from 1985 to 1993.

He had occupied the office space at Cavenagh Court, a condominium complex that has a view of the Istana, from 1993 to 2005.

Dr Wee Hong Neo, 75, the sixth of Mr Wee's children, was also a guide to the tour of the room on Friday. Mr and Mrs Wee had a son – the eldest, who died in 2015 – and six daughters.

She said, as she gestured towards the windows with views of greenery outside the room: "When i first visited this space, I was blown away, because the set-up was exactly like Cavenagh Court. The French windows open up to a view of the trees on the Istana grounds, and his office was down the corridor after the dining table."

Other standout artefacts in the room include a pair of paintings depicting Balinese women, bought by Mr Wee to commemorate a memorable interview he did as a young ST journalist in 1966. The interview with then Lieutenant-General Suharto in Jakarta earned him a front-page scoop – announcing Indonesia's desire to end a three-year confrontation with Singapore and Malaysia.

The room was launched on Friday during an event to mark the 20th anniversary of the Wee Kim Wee Centre at SMU. The centre was set up to foster intercultural exchange and dialogue to advance learning.



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Minister for National Development Desmond Lee, guest of honour at the event, said the collaboration between the family and SMU “demonstrated how an educational institution and a private family can work together to safeguard our national heritage”.

“It is critical for Singaporeans to remember our nation’s history and to honour the pioneers who fought for and achieved the stability and harmony that we now enjoy,” he added.

A heritage fund created by SMU was also formally launched at the event. It would go towards the upkeep of the Wee Kim Wee room, support educational programmes by the Wee Kim Wee Centre, and grant scholarships to SMU students, especially those with financial needs.

“Mr Wee did not have money to go through secondary school. I know for a fact that he would have been very pleased with every dollar that goes to supporting this fund,” said Ms Wee.