The Archbishop’s Palace of Cebu

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Today, the new archbishop of Cebu, the Most Reverend Jose S. Palma, will arrive in Cebu to formally begin his reign as its prelate. Tomorrow, following solemn ancient church rituals, he will be installed as the fourth metropolitan archbishop of Cebu.

Pretty much like the president of our country who has the Malacañan, the archbishop also has an official residence which also contains his office. This residence, popularly known to some as the Palacio, is located in a very sprawling compound right behind the Sacred Heart Parish Church along D. Jakosalem Street. It contains many rooms, various halls, and a large chapel. The office and the actual room of the archbishop however is located in an adjacent structure that is still connected to the main building.

Not many may know about this residence and what it really is but if it ever comes into the consciousness of some locals then maybe perhaps because in the last decade or two it has become a popular venue for private weddings.
The archbishop’s residence was built in 1953 through the instance of Julio Cardinal Rosales, the second archbishop of Cebu. Just a few years before this, the archbishop did not have a proper official residence as the city was still reeling from the ravages of World War II. Even the Cebu Cathedral was still being restored after having been gutted by a bomb with only the facade, the thick walls, and the belfry remaining. Sto. Rosario Parish Church was the pro-cathedral during this time.

The original location of the official residence of the archbishop used to be located just right across the cathedral. It was a fairly large abode, or oversized as some articles say, of cut-coral stones in the lower level and hard wood in the second. It had clay tiles for the roofing although these were later changed with galvanized-iron sheets in the early 20th-century.
The defunct episcopal residence across the cathedral.

There’s no exact date as to when this former residence was built although some have surmised that this might be the work of Bishop Santos Gomes Marañon, a church-builder who designed the plan for the church of Oslob and Naga, the rectory of Sibonga Church, and the belfry of the cathedral. It is also believed that Bishop Marañon built the old rectory of the cathedral which is now a museum. The old rectory and the defunct residence have very striking similarities.

During the USAFFE air raids, the old residence was gutted down, hit by a bomb, along with the cathedral and countless other edifices in the city. Fortunately the rectory was spared of the carnage and still stands today as the Cathedral Museum of Cebu. The location of the old residence at present is now occupied by the Patria de Cebu, a building that contains various offices of the diocesan curia.

The present-day residence of the archbishop at D. Jakosalem also has its own story to tell. Pope John Paul II stayed here overnight when he visited various places in the Philippines in 1981. President Ramon Magsaysay made a stop-over prior to departing for his doomed flight back to Manila.

Just a few days ago, the residence was spruced up in preparation for its new occupant. It will once again welcome years of history ahead.