The average price of $1,766 psf Executive Condominium in 2025. Is this a story of success and stalemate?

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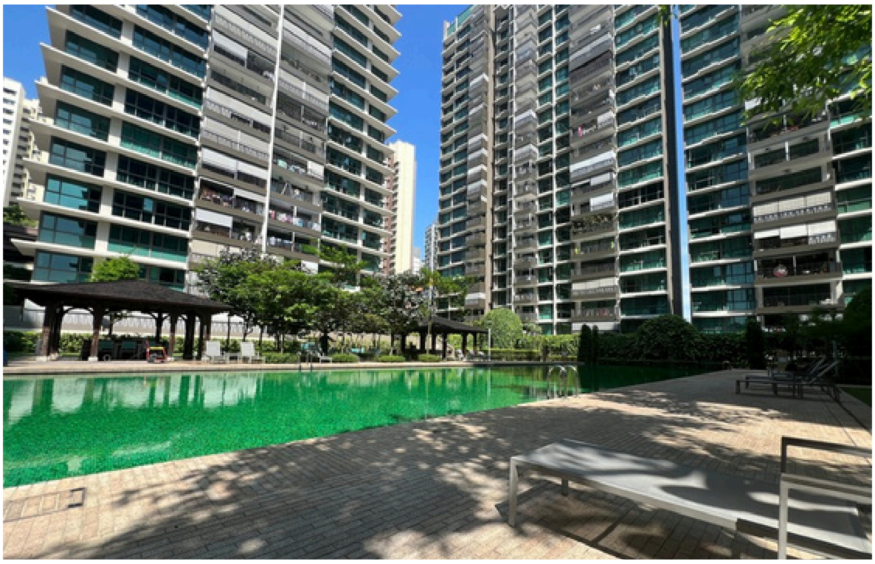
In August 2025, Aurelle of Tampines sold 682 units in a single day with a 90% take-up rate at an average of $1,766 psf. Every 4 and 5 bedroom unit was gone within hours. On paper, it was a triumph. A signal that Singapore's belief in the Executive Condominium (EC), the so-called "bridge" to the middle-class dream which is unshakable.



But as a real estate agent and an EC owner who bought into that dream over a decade ago, I see more than just strong sales in these numbers. I see the echo of my own journey and the complicated reality that awaits every hopeful buyer today.

In 2011, I faced a choice that many young families do. After selling my first HDB, do I choose space and location in a resale Executive Maisonette (EM), or bet on the future with a new EC? The math was clear then. ECs were priced at a 30% discount to private condos, with the potential for 70% or more gains after MOP. I convinced my wife to take the bet. We eventually bought a 4-bedder at The Topiary for $1.1 million, moved in happily in 2016, and watched its value climb steadily.

Today, that bet has paid off on paper. Our unit could fetch a profit of close to $1 million. But here's what the spreadsheets don't show, we are now in what I call "The Golden Handcuffs" of EC success. To cash out, we'd need to spend $1.3 million on an equivalent EM, or $1 million on a 5-room in Bishan, plus approximately $100,000 in rental during the 15-month wait, and another $200,000 for renovation. The upgrade ladder we climbed now feels like a ledge.

And so, the record launch of Aurelle raises a deeper, more personal question:
" Is today's $1.76 million new EC still the bridge to the Singapore Dream or has it become a beautiful, expensive island?"

This article isn't just about prices and policy. It's about what happens after the EC succeeds. It's for every family weighing that same bet I made in 2011, and for every owner wondering, like I am: What's next?

The Million-Dollar EC. From HUDC to Hybrid, How Singapore's "Middle-Class Bridge" Was Built and Redefined

The Executive Condominium (EC) is often presented as a modern housing solution, but its origins are deeply rooted in a deliberate, decades-long policy evolution, one that began not with the first EC launch in 1996, but with the phasing out of another aspirational housing type "the HUDC flat"

The Pre-EC Era with HUDC, Executive Apartments, and the Original "Sandwich Class" Dream

Before the EC, Singapore's middle-class housing landscape was dominated by three key formats:

HUDC Flats (1970s–1980s)

The Housing and Urban Development Company (HUDC) flats were Singapore's first experiment in above HDB, below-private housing. Aimed at middle-income earners who exceeded HDB income ceilings but found private condos out of reach, HUDC estates like Bishan, Tampines, and Bedok offered spacious layouts, basic facilities, and 99-year leases, but without the full condo status. By the mid-1980s, HUDC estates were privatised, transforming into some of today's most sought-after leasehold condo estates (e.g., Laguna Park, Pine Grove, Shunfu Ville). Their success and the windfalls they created planted a powerful idea where the government could create a hybrid housing class that appreciated into private wealth.

Executive Apartments (EAs) & Executive Maisonettes (EMs) (1980s–2000s)

As HUDC was phased out, HDB introduced the Executive Apartment (EA) and later the Executive Maisonette (EM)which is spacious, premium public housing meant for larger families and upgraders. These were fully public housing, with no privatisation pathway, but they offered something rare in space, layout, and prestige within the HDB system. They became the de facto upgrade for successful HDB families.

How the Policy Shift Led to the Phase-Out of HUDC and EA/EM

By the early 1990s, the government began to rethink this model. HUDC privatisation had created windfall gains that were difficult to control, while EAs/EMs were expensive to build and contributed to rising HDB construction costs. There was also a growing desire to clearly separate public housing from private-like products to preserve the sanctity of the HDB ethos, "a home for living, not for speculation."

1996 Marked the Birth of the Executive Condominium (EC)

The introduction of the Executive Condominium (EC) in 1996 was not just another housing product launch, it was a masterstroke of policy engineering, a calibrated response to lessons learned from the HUDC era and the limitations of Executive Apartments.

Designing a Hybrid with Guardrails

The EC was architected to avoid the pitfalls of its predecessors while still offering a tangible path to private homeownership. Its core structure was a carefully balanced hybrid:

Feature	Public Housing Element	Private Condominium Element
Eligibility	Income caps, citizenship/PR requirements	None beyond initial eligibility
Initial Subsidy	Sold below market price	None after privatisation
Restriction Period	5-year MOP + 5-year limited resale (to Singaporeans/PRs)	Full open market after 10 years
Ownership	99-year leasehold (HDB-style tenure)	Converts to Strata Title upon privatisation
Facilities	Condo-style amenities (pool, gym, etc.)	Maintained as private facilities

This structure served two strategic purposes:

1. ***Wealth Creation Pathway***

It provided a delayed but guaranteed transition to private asset status, fulfilling the aspirational promise.

2. ***Speculation Dampener***

The 10-year restriction period (5 years of which was a Minimum Occupation Period) prevented the flipping and speculation that had characterised the later HUDC market.

The Target Demographic known as the "True Sandwich Class"

The EC was designed for a very specific yet important group of buyers

<u>**Income Ceiling**</u>

Initially set at $10,000 and later raised to $12,000, $14,000, and now $16,000. This targeted households earning above the BTO threshold but still unable to comfortably afford private condominiums.

<u>**Psychographic Profile**</u>

Typically young professionals, dual-income couples, or small families seeking an upgrade from HDB living. They valued feature like security, facilities, modern design-hall marks of “condo living” but found private condo financially out of reach or would needed to over-leveraging.

The Early Success and Market Reception

The first ECs, such as The Esparis in Pasir Ris (launched 1997), were met with strong demand. They presented a compelling value proposition by offering a near-private living environment at a 20-30% discount. For many buyers, it felt like getting ahead within the rules, a legitimate shortcut to the middle-class dream.

The Strategic Pivot from EAs/EMs

The launch of the EC coincided with the phasing out of new Executive Apartments and Maisonettes by HDB in the late 1990s/early 2000s. This was a deliberate consolidation:

- HDB could focus on its core mission of providing affordable, no-frills public housing.
- The upgrade aspiration was neatly handed off to the EC model, a product managed by private developers but within a strict government framework.

This pivot created a cleaner housing hierarchy:
BTO → Resale HDB → EC → Private Condo
Each step had a clearer value proposition and target audience.

The Implicit Promise and Social Contract

The EC came with an unspoken but widely understood promise. Those who follow the rules on income caps, minimum occupation period, waiting time would be rewarded with asset appreciation and eventual private ownership. This was the social contract for the sandwich class, built on patience and compliance.

This historical context is significant because it explains why today's EC buyers, even prices of $1,766 per square foot still feel a strong sense of entitlement to future gains. They are not merely buying a home, they are buying into a policy promise that existed for three decades, a promise now being tested by unprecedented prices.

Inside the 2011 Window, A Golden Era of Alignment and a Personal Turning Point

My journey into EC ownerships didn’t begin with spreadsheets or investment models, it began at a personal crossroads in 2011, a year that now stands out as a near perfect alignment of market claim, policy generosity, and psychological readiness for a generosity of upgraders

The Macro Backdrop, A Rare Moment of Post-Crisis Clarity

The year 2011 was a short period of stability between two turbulent times.

Behind it, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis had reset prices and cleared speculative froth. Interest rates were at historic lows, with SIBOR hovering around 0.5 to 0.8 percent, and banks were lending again with renewed but cautious confidence.
Ahead of it, the first round of property cooling measures is the SSD and TDSR that was introduced, while the most severe, ABSD, would only arrive in December 2011. The market was sobering, but not slumped.

This created a sweet spot for buyers. Affordability was high, competition was rational, and the future felt more predictable than it had in years.

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The Policy Landscape Subsidies Without Strings

For EC buyers, 2011 was an unusually favourable year. The resale levy exemption for second-timers was still in place, a loophole that saved families like mine tens of thousands in upfront costs. This policy, which was removed just one year later in 2012, acted as a quiet subsidy that boosted affordability at a time when prices were starting to climb.

In addition, CPF housing grants for ECs were generous, and loan-to-value ratios remained at 80 percent for first mortgages. This allowed buyers to maximize leverage at historically low interest rates. (As a second-timer, I did not qualify

The Psychological Shift From HDB Mindset to Almost Private

For upgraders like my wife and me, having sold our first BTO in Punggol, the EC represented more than extra square footage. It symbolized a tangible step up the social and lifestyle ladder. The choice was not simply between an Executive Maisonette (EM) and an EC. It was between the familiar comfort of HDB living and the aspirational appeal of something that felt almost private, while also providing an environment we believe would support our children's comfort and development.

The numbers told a compelling story. An EM in a mature estate such as Dakota crescent offered space and location for about $950,000 to $1 million. An EC like the Topiary offered newness, facilities and future privatisation at $1.1 million for 1,367 square feet, with the potential for more than 70 percent appreciation after MOP compared to the EM's estimated around 10 to 20 percent.

At the time, we were not just buying a home. We were buying flexibility. Our plan was to cash out after the minimum occupation period, then downgrade to an HDB flat, perhaps an Executive Maisonette if is affordable or a five-room unit, to clean our mortgage and consider early retirement. If we reached our financial peak, we might have chosen to upgrade again using the profits, but the primary goal was financial freedom and security for the family.

The Rollercoaster from Disappointment to Destiny

Our journey was not without setbacks. We had initially set our sights on the new EC launch at Citylife @ Tampines, drawn to its location in a mature and well-established eastern estate. It was an area with familiar amenities, established schools, and a sense of community we valued. For us, location was more than a point on the map. It was about rooting our family in a neighbourhood that felt complete.

The reality of EC demand hit hard when Citylife was oversubscribed by three times. Despite being prepared, we did not secure a favourable queue number. That door closed, and it was a moment of real disappointment.

Yet that closed door led us to The Topiary in Sengkang, a location we had not seriously considered before. Standing in the showroom and running the numbers in real time, a new clarity emerged. The fear of missing out turned into a deeper realisation. If we did not buy into this model now, we might never afford this ladder again.

We made the commitment. The price was around $1.1 million for a high floor four-bedroom unit with 1,367 square feet. The mortgage was about $750,000 at an interest rate of roughly 1.2 percent. The monthly instalment came to about $2,800, a figure that felt manageable and even optimistic.

The Turning Point and its Hidden Trade-Offs

The years between 2010 and 2013 marked a unique chapter in the EC market, and our story reflects that of many families who bought during this period. Buyers enjoyed advantages that are hard to imagine today. Financing was available before TDSR took effect. Interest rates were at historic lows. EC prices still carried a meaningful discount compared to private condominiums. Levy rules were favourable. In many ways, this was the last generation of EC buyers for whom the product felt like a straightforward value buy.

Yet behind these benefits were trade-offs that were less obvious at the time. We gained a modern home with facilities and a clear pathway to wealth creation. But we also locked ourselves into a decade of illiquidity during which life could and did change. We accepted a location farther from the city core, betting on Singapore's decentralisation story. And we tied our family's mobility and financial flexibility to a single asset that depended on policy.

2025 The New Calculus When the Discount No Longer Tells the Whole Story

The most significant change in the Executive Condominium market is not the size of the discount but what that discount now represents. While the percentage gap between ECs and private condominiums has remained relatively stable, the absolute cost and financial burden of buying an EC have grown so dramatically that the traditional idea of value has been fundamentally redefined.

The Discount Remains Stable in Percentage but Has Become Transformative in Scale

Many people assume the discount for an Executive Condominium compared to a similar private condo has declined over time. In truth, the percentage difference has remained remarkably consistent for decades. What has changed is the financial impact of that discount.

In 2011, The Topiary launched at about $700 to $800 per square foot, while nearby H20 Residence sold for around $900 to $1,000 per square foot. This worked out to a discount of roughly 22 percent. For a 1,367 square foot unit, the savings amounted to about $273,400.

Fast forward to April 2025. Aurelle entered the market at an average price of $1,766 per square foot, while new OCR private condominiums during the same period averaged around $2,252 per square foot. The discount is now approximately 21.6 percent. For a comparable 1,200 square foot unit, the savings amount to about $583,000.

Here lies the critical shift. The percentage discount has stayed similar, even slightly better, but the absolute price has risen so dramatically that affordability feels very different. Paying $1.76 million for a subsidized product, even with a 20 percent discount, represents a significant financial commitment. It fundamentally changes how buyers perceive value and calculate their options.

The Premium Is No Longer in Price But in Strategic Optionality

At today's price point, the monetary discount of an Executive Condominium becomes a secondary feature. The true premium buyers are paying for is found in the long-term strategic optionality embedded within the asset's legal and financial structure. This optionality transforms the EC from a static home into a dynamic instrument for future wealth planning.

The Strategic ABSD Avoidance Pathway

The most significant financial advantage of an Executive Condominium is not an immediate benefit but a deferred strategic option. It addresses a critical dilemma for upwardly mobile households. As families grow and careers progress, aspirations often shift from a first condo style home to a different private property perhaps a freehold asset or a more central location or a larger unit to accommodate extended family.

The formidable barrier to this move is frequently the Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty. For a Singaporean, purchasing a second residential property incurs a twenty percent tax on the purchase price. On a three million dollar condo, this amounts to a six hundred thousand dollar penalty, a sum that can derail even a well planned upgrade.

The EC provides a structured, albeit demanding, solution to this problem. A household can live in their EC for the mandatory five year Minimum Occupation Period. Upon its completion, they can sell the unit, realize the capital appreciation gained, and find themselves owning no property. With the equity liberated and combined with savings, they can then purchase their target private property as a first and only property, liable only for standard stamp duty. This pathway effectively allows them to leapfrog the ABSD barrier.

This is not a default path for every EC owner. It involves considerable transaction costs, moving expenses, and market risk. Its profound value is for the segment of buyers whose financial trajectory accelerates within that five to ten years window. For them, the EC functions as a powerful, tax sheltered investment vehicle that converts into the foundation for their ultimate property goal.

The Phased Value Unlock Over a Decade

The journey of an Executive Condominium to becoming a fully private property happens in stages, and each stage offers different opportunities to unlock value.

The first big milestone comes after five years, when the EC can be sold on the open market to Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. This is often when early buyers see strong gains, as shown by projects like The Topiary.

The next five years are not just a waiting period. During this time, the EC usually continues to appreciate because overall market prices keep rising. New launches for both ECs and private condos in the area set higher benchmarks. Even though an older EC sells at a discount for its age and remaining lease, its price is pushed up by the increasing cost of new developments nearby. This creates a second wave of growth well before the EC can be sold to foreigners.

The final stage comes after ten years, when the EC becomes fully private. At this point, it can be sold to any buyer, including foreigners, and is treated the same as a private condo. This opens access to the largest pool of buyers and often secures its position in the private property market.

Illiquidity as a Disciplined Investment Framework

The five-year Minimum Occupation Period, followed by another five years of market growth, creates a natural ten-year investment horizon. This timeline is not a weakness but a key feature. In a property market that often reacts to short-term trends, this enforced holding period acts as a safeguard. It prevents owners from selling too early during temporary downturns and ensures the property is kept long enough for its main value drivers such as scarcity, location, and eventual privatisation to fully play out.

Today's Executive Condominium offers more than just a lower price. It combines several advantages. It serves as a tax-efficient bridge for those planning a future private purchase. It is a patient investment in an asset that gains value in stages. And it is a structured approach that encourages financial discipline, supporting long-term wealth creation in real estate. These benefits redefine the EC as more than an affordable home. It is a smart investment with a clear path to the upper tier of Singapore's property market.

The Modern EC Buyer: From Homeowner to Portfolio Strategist

This evolution in value has cultivated a new archetype of EC purchaser:

The 2011 EC Buyer (The Upgrader)		The 2025 EC Buyer (The Strategist)	
Primary Motive	Space, facilities, lifestyle	**Primary Motive**	Tax efficiency, intergenerational wealth transfer.
View of Asset	A home with a financial bonus.	**View of Asset**	A strategic, policy-linked holding within a broader portfolio.
Decision Driver	Heart, family needs, and a good deal.	**Decision Driver**	Financial modelling, advisor counsel, long-term projections.
Exit Plan	Sell after MOP to upgrade or cash out.	**Exit Plan**	Hold through privatisation, then reassess as part of legacy planning

Today's EC buyer is often making a move similar to what a family office would do. They are not just buying a home. They are investing money in a property that is structured by the government, offers tax benefits, and is limited in supply. This setup is designed to help protect and grow wealth over the long term, even across generations.

The Trade-Offs of a Million-Dollar Optionality Play

Choosing the EC route today means accepting some big trade-offs. The flexibility and future upside come with real costs and limits that buyers need to think through carefully.

The Scale of Commitment

Buying an EC for about $1.76 million usually means taking a mortgage of around $1.32 million at 75 percent loan-to-value. At current interest rates, the yearly interest alone can be more than $30,000. This debt is not a small detail. It is the price of the flexibility the EC offers, but it also adds significant financial risk.

The Narrow Margin for Error

With so much money tied up in one property that cannot be sold quickly, there is little room for mistakes. A market drop of 10 percent would wipe out more than $175,000 in equity and could trap owners who need to sell. This shows that an EC is meant for long-term holding, not short-term trading.

The Lifestyle Anchor

This level of financial commitment often shapes life decisions for many years. Career changes, overseas moves, or even family plans may need to be reconsidered because of the weight of a million-dollar mortgage and the required holding period. This is the hidden cost of keeping future flexibility, a reduction in freedom today.

The Core Trade-Off

In the end, the EC offers a clear exchange. You give up liquidity and flexibility now in return for tax benefits and future appreciation. Not every household can make this choice. It requires steady income, a strong tolerance for risk, and confidence that the future rewards will outweigh the present limits.

TO CONCLUDE

My experience with The Topiary mirrors the story of the EC itself. It began with a simple plan to buy at a discount, wait through the Minimum Occupation Period, and use the gains for the next step. By that measure, the plan worked perfectly.

Yet today I hold an asset that has grown in value, but I feel more restricted than free. The profit is real, but so are the costs of unlocking it. A replacement home now costs far more, renting and renovating during the mandatory fifteen-month wait adds six-figure expenses, and taking on new debt later in life is daunting.

This is the part of the EC story that few talk about. We achieved the dream of appreciation, but now face the challenge of illiquid wealth. The ladder we climbed so successfully now feels like a platform with no clear next step.

This personal reality reflects the market's own turning point. The EC has created so much paper wealth that it has outgrown its original role as a simple stepping stone. At $1.76M, it is no longer just a rung on the ladder. It is a major financial platform that demands a strategy as deliberate as the initial purchase.

I share this story to move the conversation beyond numbers and launch-day excitement. It is to ask the question every EC buyer must now confront. Am I buying a home for the next decade or am I underwriting a long-term financial plan? And if that plan succeeds, what is my next move for life, not just for the property?

The new reality of the million-dollar EC is not about whether you can afford the down payment. It is about whether you have a vision for what happens after success. The most important decision may not be the purchase itself but the plan you make for the profit.

"Buying is easy. Planning for success is hard. What will you do when your EC dream turns into a financial dilemma?"