

# SHANGHAI SURPRISE

STORY ROD MACKENZIE PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREW ROWAT

SHANGHAI IS A FULL-THROTTLE CULTURE, WITH NEW INNOVATIONS IN ARTS, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN HAPPENING ALL THE TIME. JOIN US FOR A RAPID-FIRE TOUR OF THIS BUSTLING CITY

**SHANGHAI ISN'T A CITY THAT LETS YOU SETTLE IN** slowly. My feet don't even touch the ground during the welcome act, a phenomenal levitating express train that blasts you 19 miles from the airport to the city centre at a hair-raising 267mph. This illusionist is named the Maglev, because it's swapped wheels for magnets to propel it along. They certainly do the job – after all, the take-off speed of the a jumbo jet is only 180mph. Emerging in under eight minutes, then, into this

mega-city of some 19 million people, I soon realise that fast reactions and agile handling are much more valuable here than any amount of straight-line speed. And I don't just mean to help dodge the street hawkers with their fake Rolex watches, who appear at my elbow with uncanny, Swiss-like precision whenever I step outside. No, it's Shanghai's blend of sheer traffic density and frequent driver unpredictability that makes a car like the Mazda2 come into its own. >



The Bund, where architectural history meets the future

The most spectacular spot to get to grips with the city's geography is down on the Bund, Shanghai's iconic strip of historic riverfront on the western bank of the mighty Huangpu. As darkness falls, the place fills with excited sightseers, but few of the thousands of cameras are focused on the heritage buildings. All the lenses are pointing east across the river towards the *Bladerunner*-esque district of Pudong, an exotic forest of neon-lit skyscrapers blinking and sparkling out curious messages of all kinds. My favourite is the shiny blue 101-storey World Financial Centre, which sports a giant mouth-like aperture cut into the upper floors. It seems to be opening up for a feed like a hungry sea lion, slowly stretching its neck out as far as it will go.

It is also an apt reminder that it is dinner time. I strike out along the Bund past the imposing stone edifices that sit shoulder to shoulder like squat old businessmen, still managing to look dapper thanks to their sharply tailored 1920s and 30s attire. Most buildings here have been immaculately restored and now house luxury fashion boutiques, art showrooms and splendid restaurants and hotels.

At number 18, I whizz up to the sixth floor to find Mr & Mrs Bund, an elegant brasserie under the wing of high-flying French chef Paul Pairet. Dressed in a jaunty designer flat cap, he plays the role of edgy kitchen maverick with aplomb. "Mash-ups: not just for potatoes and DJs any more," is how he refers to his classic French cuisine with a twist (he once added tinned sardines to a haute cuisine menu). He's currently fine-tuning a new venture called Ultraviolet, a restaurant with only ten chairs, where guests will savour a 20-course avant-garde menu at a communal table. Paul and his team, meanwhile, will deliver a bespoke 'sensory

play' featuring a hi-tech system that controls lighting, music, scent, projections and even the flow of air.

Is Shanghai ready for such an experiment? "It's a city that embraces new ideas quickly," Paul explains. Then he tells me a story about the tiny street stall that served him an interesting egg dish; only when he looked closer did he realise that this was no traditional Chinese recipe, but the cook's attempt to replicate the egg muffin sold in McDonald's.

"My point is that while Shanghai is driven by money, it's also driven by curiosity. That's what's taking over from tradition among the younger generation."

Do others in Shanghai share this creative optimism?

Next morning, I weave the Mazda2 quickly and with ease through the rush-hour traffic to catch up with Eike Stratmann who's busy putting the city's fast emerging art scene on the map – quite literally – with *Shanghai*



GALLERY Nicole Teng



DINNING Paul Pairet



**CITY SLICKER**

The Mazda2 is just the car to cut through the city, with agile handling, eager performance and great fuel economy. Nimble and lightweight, compact, but still roomy inside, the Mazda2 was voted the 2008 World Car of the Year and for 2011 it has been refreshed with a more refined interior and sportier look.



ART GUIDE Eike Stratmann

*Detour*. This chic guide highlights every single art space in the city, from appointment-only private collections and tiny studios to big commercial galleries. Born and bred in Berlin, Eike's driven by a passion to introduce the arts scene here to a wider audience and is determined not to miss anyone out.

"Some places aren't allowed to erect a sign outside their building," she says, "so the map's not just a piece of paper – it can become very powerful; if you're not on it, you don't exist. Such is the pace of change and scale of the city, I bring out an updated edition every two months."

Eike is keen to introduce me to one of her recent discoveries, nestled in a quiet alley in the bustling district of Jing'an. Managed by Taiwanese artist Nicole Teng, the Plum Gallery is located in what appears to be a cosy two-room apartment – except that the paintings and much of the furniture change month by month depending on the exhibition. I perch on a quirky recycled chair with colourful old food tins for legs and



ART Maleonn



FASHION Han Feng

“It’s like New York was in the 80s and 90s with lots of energy and many young people coming together”

above me are shelves lined with wonky pottery vases, each showing a hand-painted figure representing members of Nicole’s family. It’s all very primitive and restrained, not the sort of hard-sell themes I was expecting in such a frenetic city.

“My work is not about simply making a beautiful shape, it is organic,” the artist explains. But will anyone take notice? “If you do something raw and real in Shanghai, you’ll be heard.” As if on cue, there is a knock on the door and in troop a Chinese TV crew.

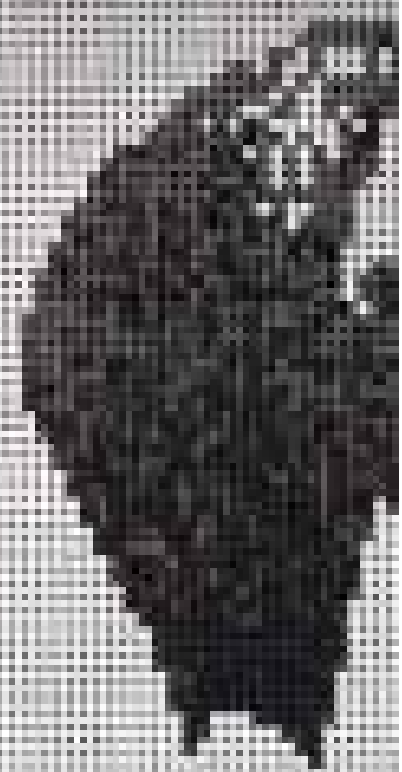
Getting noticed is certainly not a problem for Shanghai native Maleonn. This award-winning artist is currently at the top of his game with his ‘fabulist’ digital photographic tableaux displayed in leading galleries from New York to Tokyo. When we meet, he is busy packing up his studio for the Shanghai Biennale, moving it from a disused car factory to the city’s main art museum. It has been a sensational rise to stardom – the former advertising art director only became a full-time artist in 2004.

“Everyone thought I was crazy dropping my career,” Maleonn tells me, stroking his cat, Shakespeare. “In the past, you needed good connections with curators and galleries to get noticed; I knew nobody, but then the Internet came along and I simply uploaded my works there.” In his view, Shanghai’s historic Western influences help to explain the city’s creativity: “It means people here are open to more things.”

Another major talent enjoying global recognition is fashion designer Han Feng. When not crafting her trademark theatrical couture for international socialites, she’s devising costumes for London’s Royal Opera House and Hollywood movies (most recently for the 2010 remake of *The Karate Kid*), or designing home interiors and lighting installations. She divides her time between a loft in New York and a gorgeous light-filled apartment set in Shanghai’s art deco Jin Jiang Hotel (where President Nixon stayed during his historic 1972 visit to China), and these regular intercontinental

commutes give her a unique perspective on the local cultural scene: “Shanghai’s fashion market has really matured in the last few years – people here no longer desire the same luxury labels that everyone else is wearing, they’re starting to look for different things.” Opportunities for creative-minded people are growing rapidly, she says: “It’s like New York was in the 80s and 90s with lots of energy and many young people coming together. If you have an idea here, you can do it.” Someone who is also bringing fresh ideas to Shanghai’s urban landscape is Canadian-born architect





“In Shanghai, if you can imagine something, you have the means of trying it out”

ARCHITECTURE Sacha Silva

Sacha Silva, one of the founders of AOO Architecture. As the city has developed at breakneck speed, sustainability issues have rarely figured very high on many plans. So AOO's research into environmental sustainability and its application to architecture, interiors and furniture is fairly unique. Following their pioneering, waste-free eco principles they've already developed over 30 modern conversions of Shanghai's historic houses into highly personalised residences,

plus there's the URBN hotel (China's first carbon-neutral hotel) and a collection of recyclable furniture based on laminated cardboard and plywood. I meet Sacha outside his firm's latest project, a Vidal Sassoon hair studio set in a former metal foundry, where I ask him whether they've picked a tough city to promote their 'green' values.

“In Shanghai, if you can imagine something, you have the means of trying it out. The scale of the place means that there's room for everyone – including us – and



MAZDA IN CHINA

Mazda officially entered China in 2001 and has four production facilities: one in Jilin Province, one

in Chongqing and two in Nanjing, manufacturing the Mazda2, Mazda3 and the Mazda6 – all for the domestic Chinese market only. The Mazda5, CX-7 and MX-5 are imported from Japan. In

2009, 174,000 cars were produced in China and Mazda sold 180,000 cars making it the company's fourth largest market (after USA, Japan and Europe). And it's still growing – fast!



## “This is a land of opportunity... there aren't any preconceptions”

it's not saturated; the model is still maturing.” From his infectious smile, he is clearly excited by the possibilities. “It's a very safe and cosmopolitan city, but I'm most impressed by its intensity. The pace here is seductive.”

Before I leave, I'm hoping to get an insight into Shanghai's next generation. When brands such as Nike or Adidas need to get to grips with the local youth market, they turn to multi-discipline creative agency Jellymon. From streetwear to watches, graphic design to shop window displays, their mixture of Western aesthetic and knowledge of the Chinese market keeps demand red hot. Pushing past trendy fixed-gear bikes and BMXs, I squeeze into their studio-meets-playroom to meet its British co-founder, Sam Jacobs. It's a Saturday afternoon but his young team are all hard at work at their desks. “The youth market is ever expanding; young people are becoming more independent and increasing their understanding of the world via the Internet,” he says, “and it's significant that so many things, from technology to fashion, are manufactured in China – influences are picked up directly via the back door of factories.”

Inventiveness and creativity is nothing new in China, of course – it's just being allowed to resurface again. As Sam, puts it: “There remains a strong sense that this is a land of opportunity, and because there aren't any preconceptions you have the freedom to experiment – anything is possible here.”

Later, heading back to the airport aboard the Maglev, I barely register the train hitting maximum velocity – Shanghai has already brought me bang up to speed. ■

Mazda2 goes on display outside a gallery in Red Town

## SHANGHAI GUIDE

### GETTING THERE

Hop aboard the **Maglev** (50RMB/£5) from Shanghai Pudong International Airport to Longyang Road Station, then grab a cab into

the centre. Show the driver your hotel address printed in Chinese or you won't be going anywhere fast. [www.shanghaiairport.com](http://www.shanghaiairport.com)

### WHERE TO STAY



Go green at **URBN** (above), China's first carbon-neutral hotel designed by AOO Architects. Slate-walled

rooms (some with private gardens) come with soft hemp rugs, Wi-Fi and iPod docks. [www.urbnhotels.com](http://www.urbnhotels.com)

Move up in the world at the towering **Park Hyatt Shanghai**, the highest hotel on the planet, occupying floors 79 to 93 of the Shanghai World Financial Centre in Pudong. [www.parkhyattshanghai.com](http://www.parkhyattshanghai.com)

### WHERE TO EAT

**Origin**, set in a historic house at Taikang Road, makes the perfect brunch spot thanks to its all-natural seasonal menu and refreshing smoothies. Then go souvenir hunting in the surrounding labyrinth of lanes that house dozens of trendy boutiques selling fashion, jewellery and handicrafts. [www.originsh.com](http://www.originsh.com)

**Mr & Mrs Bund** presents chef Paul Pairet's innovative twists on French classic dishes (like the Tuna Mousse served in a tin, below) accompanied by fabulous views over Huangpu River to the bright lights of Pudong. [www.mmbund.com](http://www.mmbund.com)



**Lost Heaven** is worth finding for its exotic Yunnan cuisine blended with spicy influences from Thailand and Burma. [www.lostheaven.com.cn](http://www.lostheaven.com.cn)

### WHAT TO SEE

Pop a copy of *Shanghai Detour* [www.shanghai-detour.org](http://www.shanghai-detour.org) in your pocket and explore the city's dynamic contemporary art scene.



dull, the 5,380 square foot scale model of downtown Shanghai is mind-blowing. It'll also help make sense of the breathtaking views from the 100th-floor observation deck in the World Financial Centre. [www.swfc-observatory.com](http://www.swfc-observatory.com)

Discover the city of the future at the **Urban Planning Exhibition Center** in People's Square [www.supec.org](http://www.supec.org). While it sounds slightly

Slow the pace with a pre-breakfast stroll in **Jing'an Park** to watch the locals getting stuck into t'ai chi, Chinese chequers and mahjong.