



Shanghai's ever-transforming Pudong district.

SHANGHAI SURPRISE

The city heats up with in-the-know boutiques, fashionable nightlife, and seductively revitalized hotels

There's a focus, an energy, a snowballing interest here," says gallery owner Elisabeth de Brabant of her adopted Shanghai, once a grimy and faded Communist industrial center, now a neon-lit urban forest as unsentimental and stimulating a city as any in the world. Credit China's ongoing economic resilience and last year's World Expo, which resulted in billions spent on infrastructure. "They painted entire neighborhoods—sidewalks were made, whole blocks redone. It was this huge makeover," marvels Brabant. "Now it's like Tribeca, Notting Hill, and a little bit of the Marais."

Five-star hotels have proliferated along the gussied-up Bund, Shanghai's famed waterfront esplanade, while the financial district, Pudong, bristles with space-age skyscrapers. The French Concession is full of low-slung colonial-era homes—many of them now cocktail lounges, chic restaurants, and tucked-away boutiques.

The latter are undoubtedly Shanghai's greatest lure. The city was built up as a British trading base in the 1840s; today it stays true to its merchant roots, with craftsmen and expat designers selling everything from handprinted fabrics to silk lampshades to yak-yarn scarves. On a recent visit *AD* browsed the best of it all: where to stay, eat, and drink, and especially what to buy in the new Shanghai.

SPIN Ceramist Gary Wang just moved his Spin tableware line to this two-level showroom with poured-concrete floors and dramatic spotlights—a fitting milieu for one of Shanghai's best stores.

Each well-priced ceramic piece is hand-made in Jingdezhen, the spiritual home of porcelain in China, but its styling is distinctly modern. There are huge gleaming-white platters, whimsical vases, and full place settings with abstract slashes of color. *360 Kangding Lu*; *011-86-21-6279-2545*

STILLER'S After earning raves (and a Michelin star) for his restaurant in the Rhineland, chef Stefan Stiller emigrated to China and worked in various kitchens around Shanghai before opening this spot in the Cool Docks development just a few years ago. His sprawling complex offers a casual deli, a cooking school, a formal dining room, and a roof-deck bar with outstanding views of the waterfront. The rotating menu typically includes such German classics as sauerbraten or pot roast alongside Asian fusion dishes (the cod with wasabi foam is a highlight). *stillers-restaurant.cn* →



Stiller's rooftop bar.

CHINESE HANDPRINTED BLUE NANKEEN EXHIBITION HALL Duck under the lengths of fabric festooning the doorway of this hidden gem and enter a blue-and-white treasure trove. Nankeen cloth, first produced millennia ago on the Silk Road, is still handmade here in a batiklike process using indigo, with soybean pulp substituting for wax. The result is fabric sold by the meter, as well as shirts, tablecloths, throws, and even stuffed animals in a vast array of traditional, floral, and geometric patterns and styles. On sunny days, the oasis of a garden in front is full of damp, freshly dyed textiles fluttering on a washing line. *No. 24, Lane 637, Changle Lu; 011-86-21-5403-7947*

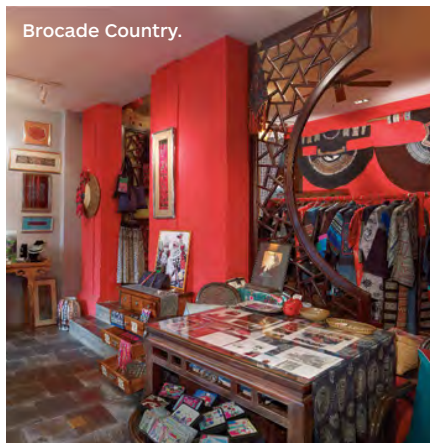


Blue Nankeen Exhibition Hall.



The lobby at the Waldorf.

WALDORF ASTORIA SHANGHAI This new five-star at the southern end of the Bund is actually two hotels in one. The first, in a waterfront building that was once a colonial-era gentlemen's club, is a boutique lodging equipped with a birdcage elevator. The second, connected by a long marble corridor, is a sleek new 252-room tower with impressive views from the upper floors. Both make for a sumptuous stay, though it's a shame the revived Long Bar provides only a wood replica of its legendary (and now lost) 110-foot slab of mahogany. Look down in the lobby, however, for a dose of authenticity: The slightly cracked marble floor has been the same for decades. *Rates from \$450/night (tower), \$915/night (club); waldorfastoriashanghai.com*



Brocade Country.

BROCADE COUNTRY A pair of Shanghai sisters owns this cheery store, with its dazzling stash of fabrics made by the Miao people of southern China. These are not tokenistic chinoiserie but richly colorful textiles with Jonathan Adler-meets-Tory Burch retro pizzazz. Also on hand are stunning area rugs, as well as traditional fur-lined boots, a small selection of Yunnan jewelry, and Stevie Nicks-style tiered skirts. Don't miss the heavy, embroidered throws in gold or jewel-bright pinks and oranges;

COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF STILLERS; CHARLIE XIA/THEJUNCTIONSTUDIOS.COM (2); ANDREW ROWAT



A landmark of Shanghai's Bund.



Lighting shop Illu.



The Peace Hotel's lobby.

as pillows they would conjure the glamour of atomic-era Palm Springs. 616 Julu Lu; 011-86-21-6279-2677

FAIRMONT PEACE HOTEL There's no better place to stay in the city than this icon of the Bund. Opened by playboy hotelier Sir Victor Sassoon in 1929 as the Cathay Hotel, it was renamed the Peace Hotel by the Communists and saw much of its louche allure trickle away. A three-year renovation by design firm Hirsch Bedner Associates has led to a striking rebirth. Rooms have been modernized and enlarged, while Sassoon's former penthouse apartment has become a wood-paneled four-room suite with breathtaking views across the water. The reception area's giant dome, featuring Lalique glass and gilt-and-ebony dogs (a tribute to

Sassoon's prized whippets), has been meticulously touched up as well. *Rates from \$265/night; fairmont.com/peacehotel*

EL CÓCTEL At sidewalk level, the sole tip-off that el Cóctel lurks on the second floor of this French Concession house is the cocktail shaker encased in a vitrine by the door. Upstairs there's a sunken bar in the center of a hushed, understated room, minimally decorated with screens and deep-seated club chairs. Tokyo-trained barkeeps mix precision drinks freehand, without using jiggers. The lounge is so dark that servers bring a mini flashlight to anyone reviewing the menu (the standout is the Black Manhattan, made of whiskey and Italian Averna liqueur, with a maraschino cherry for a sweet kick). *el-coctel.com*

ILLU This intimate shop glows invitingly with Anja Fehrensens's lighting designs: tulip-shaped silk table lamps, mod paper lanterns, and stylish fur shades. On your visit be sure to peek into the windowless back room, where artisans work clattering sewing machines, stitching fabrics to frames. *illudeco.com*

ELISABETH DE BRABANT ART CENTER Brabant is an internationally known art dealer and curator, and her gallery in this four-story French Concession townhouse showcases noted Chinese artists such as Li Lei, Hung Liu, and Shen Chen. The venue is warmly atmospheric, with rough brick walls and polished-wood floors—a far cry from the typical soulless white box. *elisabethdebrabant.com* —MARK ELLWOOD