

Sensational Shanghai

By Dr Martin Chio, Editorial Board Member

It oddly seems to visit China during special occasions. The last time I was there, I stood in Tiananmen Square on my Run-Out Date from full-time National Service; this time it was to celebrate my two-score. ☺ A good friend from university, who was working in Shanghai, had offered the use of his apartment and the driver, so it was a chance not to be missed. We arrived on a cool Saturday afternoon in October and were met at the airport by the very affable driver Mr Yu. Unfortunately, my Anglo-Chinese School-limited Mandarin made for a few instances of awkward silence during the 45-minute ride as I racked my brains for the right words to hold up my end of the conversation.

As we entered the apartment on Anfu Road in the French Concession of Shanghai, the view from the balcony took my breath away (photo 1). We settled into our room and then sat down with our hosts to discuss our plans for the trip and (more importantly) our dining venues, since food was to be a major focus of the trip. ☺

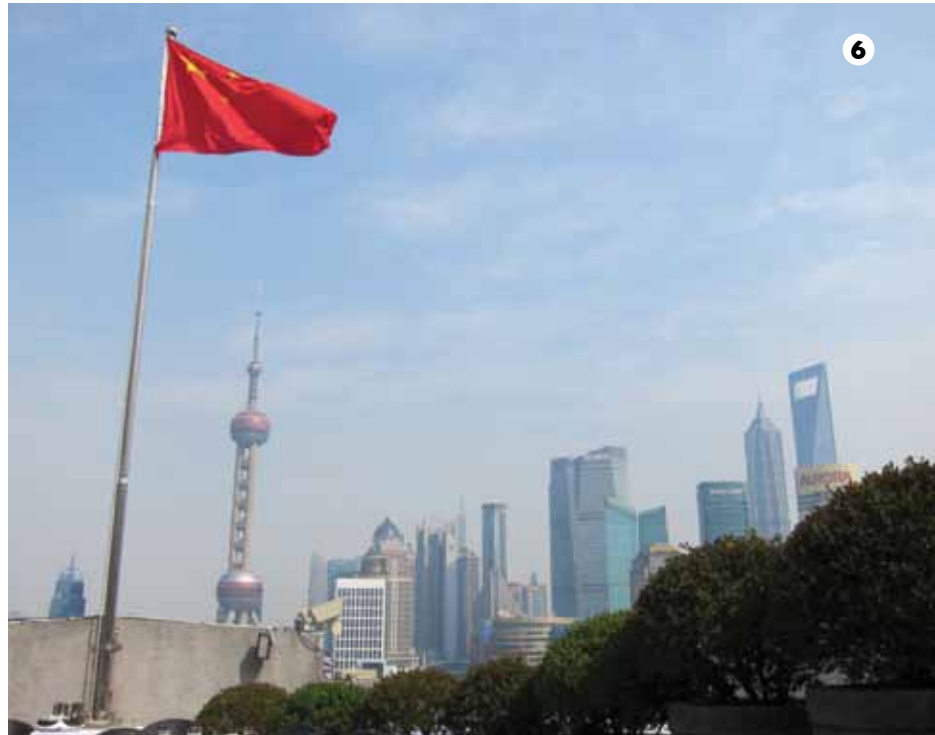
For our first meal, we made our way to el Willy (photo 2) (<http://www.el-willy.com>), which serves very tasty modern Iberian tapas (photos 3 and 4). As it was a cool evening, we sat outdoors and enjoyed the convivial atmosphere. It really didn't feel as though it was smack in the middle of a bustling metropolis – a most unusual and welcome start to the trip.

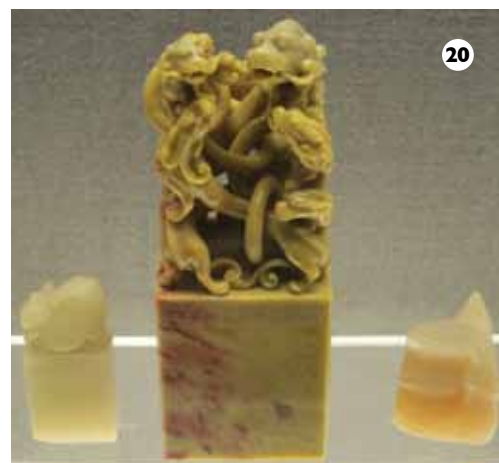
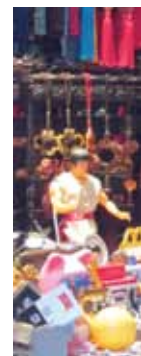
The next morning, we woke early and popped across the street to Baker & Spice (photo 5) (an artisanal bakery run by the Wagas Group) for a light breakfast of fresh bread and pastries. We then sorted out the last minute logistics for our impending trips to Hangzhou and Suzhou, before heading out to lunch with my junior college year-mate (and fellow doctor) J, who was also working in Shanghai. He brought us to M on the Bund (<http://www.m-restaurantgroup.com/mbund/home.html>) which sits atop the 1920s Nissin Shipping building, with a commanding view of the Bund (photo 6). I opted for the Sunday fry-up and was not disappointed with the generous portion of meats topped with a fried egg (photo 7) (it is so not easy to have a low cholesterol diet while travelling ☹).

To work off some of the calories from that meal, we decided to explore the surrounding area, which gave us a chance to observe some local couples at their wedding photoshoots (photo 8). J then invited us to a tea party to meet some new friends who had just started working in Shanghai. We were whisked off in his chauffeured car (Yes J has a driver too!) to his friends' apartment for some awesome home-baked goodies. The most outstanding was an apple cinnamon bundt cake. Barely able to walk after that, we decided to turn in early as we were leaving for Hangzhou the next morning.

On returning from our overnight trip to the scenic West Lake in Hangzhou (*SMA News*, February 2012, or visit <http://goo.gl/EN33J>), our hosts decided to introduce us to a unique local speciality: braised duck's head. Since I am not as brave or adventurous as my friends imagine me to be, I got away with just taking a photograph of it (photo 9). We then proceeded to el COCTEL (<http://www.el-coctel.com>), a Japanese-style Spanish cocktail bar which is apparently one of the places where the hipsters hang out. As I forgot to label my photograph, I am unable to tell you which unique drink I sampled...









12

The morning after our day trip to Suzhou (*SMA News*, March 2012, or visit <http://goo.gl/8z363>) was spent on a walking tour of Wulumuqi Road and the French Concession district. It was peppered with lovely art deco buildings (photo 10), modern art pieces and various adults still in their pyjamas on the streets. If there is one mini museum I would recommend to visit, it would be the Soong Ching-ling mansion on Huaihai Zhong Road. She was the wife of Dr Sun Yat-sen and is revered as a loyalist to the communist cause in her own right. The residence has been preserved just as it was when she lived there, with most of it open to the public. There is even a large black sedan in the garage which was presented to her by Stalin. A small annex houses various memorabilia from her life, such as her Wesleyan College diploma, family photos, letters, books and LP records.



15

We were hungry after the walk and history, and had lunch at (<http://www.xinjishi.com>) located in the refurbished *shikumen*-style buildings in the Xintiandi district. We sampled classic Shanghaiese staples of *zhajiang* (“fried meat sauce”) noodles (photo 11) and red braised pork (photo 12). We decided to walk off lunch by exploring Tianzifang, an eclectic labyrinth of small shops housed in alleyways, off Taikang Road. Here you can find all manner of antiques, knick-knacks, clothes, art pieces and unique souvenirs (photos 13 to 15). While some of them were mass market tourist trinkets, there were many shops carrying original and innovative designs from local artists. We also came upon a farmer’s market across the road which boasted an impressive range of very tempting foodstuff (photo 16).



18

After a quick pit stop for a shower and change, we set out for Di Shui Dong, a restaurant specialising in Hunan cuisine. The crowd and the very tight spaces were testimony to the quality of its food. I highly recommend the cumin ribs (photo 17) and *mala* (“spicy”) pork (photo 18).

As with all trips, inclement weather does occur and thus on a wet morning, we made our way to the Museum of Contemporary Art, along with hundreds who had the similar idea... We initially queued at the entrance along People’s Avenue, which might have taken us less than an hour to clear, but I decided to chance it and went over to Nanjing West Road and got in within ten minutes as there was a much shorter queue there. ☺ The museum was definitely worth a visit. It was well organised and informative (English descriptions available), with numerous specialty galleries focusing on a particular theme: bronzes, jade, porcelain, painting, and calligraphy, among others (photos 19 to 21).



21

Having enjoyed it immensely and with the weather still dreary, we decided to pop over to the nearby ivy-walled Shanghai Art Museum. Unfortunately it paled in comparison, in my opinion, to what we experienced in the morning, but it did have a superb venue for an afternoon cocktail in the rooftop bar Kathleen’s 5 (photo 22).

As it was our last evening in Shanghai, we planned to have pre-dinner cocktails at Sir Elly’s Bar, but unfortunately it was booked for a private event, so our next option was to try the new House of Roosevelt. The rooftop bar has a superb view of the Pudong skyline (photo 23). Our hosts decided to treat us to dinner at South Beauty (<http://www.southbeauty.com>). The best of the meal were the spicy lamb rack (photo 24) and crispy fish (photo 25). Worn out from the museums and meal, we returned home early to pack for the flight home the next day.

En route to the airport, we stopped for lunch at Fu 1088, a converted three-storey mansion with private dining rooms. Despite the RMB300 minimum charge per person, the quality of the meal was of the highest Shanghaiese standards and well worth it. We just had to sample red braised pork before we left and ended with my new favourite dessert, lotus root stuffed with glutinous rice (photo 26).



26

I thought this was an excellent holiday with great company, tasty food, art, culture and sightseeing, and fairly decent weather. I will be returning in the not too distant future. **SMA**



Martin finds travel and food photography a pleasurable distraction.