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## A better city? It better be Shanghai

by Claire Wrathall

**Home to the world's highest hotel, its fastest train and some of the most cutting-edge architecture, this summer Shanghai hosts Expo with the moniker, "Better City, Better Life". It's the biggest exhibition ever held – the site alone is the size of 1,000 football pitches – and they are anticipating an extra 70 million visitors. Just be prepared for something rich and strange.**

Back in 1935 Fortune magazine described the roaring commercial centre that was Shanghai as "the megalopolis of Asia... inheritor of 20th-century Manhattan". By then it had already given rise to the tallest towers outside the US: a claim that endures. The new 101-storey Shanghai World Financial Center tops out at 492m and contains the Park Hyatt, currently the highest hotel in the world.

It's just one of a slew of new hotels – the Peninsula, the PuLi, the Langham, and the Waterhouse – that have opened in time for this year's Expo, the six-month exhibition of 192 international pavilions that has prompted a US\$45 billion makeover of Shanghai, more than was spent on the 2008 Olympics. It promises quite a spectacle: the Saudi pavilion contains the world's biggest cinema screen, and the British one is a vast hairy cube, covered in 217,300 swaying fibre-optic filaments. But then Shanghai is a city where weirdness has been elevated to an art form.

Take Barbie Shanghai, the six-storey Barbie-themed store selling 1,600 Barbie-related products from dolls to branded diamond pendants and clothes in adult sizes. Stranger still, there's a Barbie spa and a Barbie Cafe, operated by David Laris whose eponymous restaurant at Three on the Bund was once arguably the best in the city. That was before Paul Pairet opened Mr & Mrs Bund at number 18 on the famous esplanade.

Also within Three on the Bund is an Armani store, an Evian Spa, a Jean-Georges Vongerichtin restaurant and the Shanghai Gallery of Art. And it was here I met Charlotte, a super-soignee Shanghaiese investment banker, who was sizing up a work by Qiu Jie to see if she had space for it.

We chatted about galleries worth checking out. ShanhART, she said, and the warehouses on Moganshan Lu, better known as M50. Oh, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in the heart of People's Park, where elderly men still clatter mahjong pieces on weekend afternoons; parents watch admiringly as their only children fly kites; and a cautionary sign warns that "Activities of a feudalistic or superstitious nature are banned." This in a city where Cloud Nine, the bar on the 87th floor of the 421m Jinmao Tower has a resident fortune-teller.

That was an OK bar, said Charlotte. For tourists. Not so her new favourite, the just-opened, oh-so discreet Monkey Lounge in the French Concession. Or M1nt, where there first thing you see is a 17m shark tank. Oh, and Constellation in Xu Hui, a tiny old-school cocktail bar of great charm. And she still loved the decor of the Glamour Bar (5 The Bund), and its night-time views across the Huangpu river to the business district, Pudong, and its extraordinary skyline reminiscent of 1950s sci-fi B-movies.

Charlotte and I chatted on. I admired her dress. It was by Shiatzy Chen, she said, "the Chanel of China"...Where else did she shop? The South Bund Soft Spinning Material Market for silks; Tao Bao City for bargains

← BACK TO OFFERS

### Key Dates

The World EXPO in Shanghai started 1st May and runs through till the 31st October and is "the only show in town" for six months. But check out also the new Rockbund Art Museum recently renovated by David Chipperfield which will host an inaugural exhibition up till the 25th July.

### About the Writer

Claire Wrathall started her journalistic career on Vogue in London in the days when Anna Wintour edited the British edition (and the devil wore Chanel). Now freelance, she writes mostly for the Financial Times and goes to China as often as possible.



Shanghai Oriental Pearl Tower