

Escapes

## Road Trip: The Bund Is Back

Finn-Olaf Jones, 11.07.11, 6:00 PM ET

**Photographs: James Owens**

The Bund, a 3/4-mile length of Shanghai waterfront, was the epicenter of power, style, and decadence in the '20s and '30s, when the city was known as the Paris of the Orient. It was where Europeans and Americans flocked to find an accessible swatch of the vast and unfamiliar continent beyond the headlands—and where the international language of beauty and glamour was often expressed, even among Western women, in a tight silk cheongsam.

Then came the revolution, and the Bund became a glum stretch of state-owned insurance companies, ministerial buildings, and banks. For some 50 years, dusk meant lights-out in the grand and gaily decorated buildings.

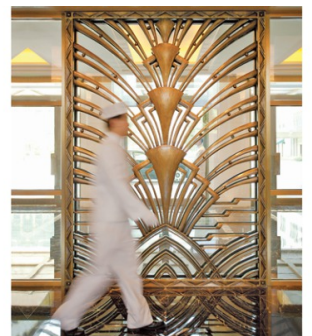
Now, of course, the Bund is back. The 21st-century Chinese government knows something good when it seizes it. Last year's Shanghai World Expo triggered repaving, building, leasing, and restoration on the Bund to the tune of some \$3 billion. The results are staggering: The once-traffic-choked road along the waterfront has been narrowed in favor of a popular walkway, while cars are diverted underground. The project took merely three years. No Big Dig-style delays here—the joys of a single-party state!

"One hundred and fifty years ago, this was a muddy riverbank," says Spencer Dodington, a transplanted Texan who gives specialized tours of the

Bund. "Now it's the most glamorous address in Asia." The Bund—its name derives from the Urdu word for "embankment," used by Indian workers brought here by the colonial British—melds Gothic, Renaissance, neoclassical, and Art Deco architecture into a buffet of urban exuberance in a city that has suddenly regained its appetite for such things. And now these state-owned buildings are being sold and rented to those who want in on the fun.

They've even let a new member into the club: The Peninsula Shanghai hotel, which bookends the northern curve of the Bund, was the first new building here in six decades. "This is a homecoming for us," explains one of the company's general managers, Paul Tchen, standing in the magnificent grand foyer, where locals come for tea dances overseen by Beaux Arts friezes along the walls. "The company started in Shanghai, and now we're back in the city's best address." Although the Peninsula was completed in March 2010, a glamazon from the '20s would feel right at home amid the stylized Art Deco furniture and silk and chrome finishes, while the high-tech doodads built into the walls (free long-distance VoIP for the masses!) serve also to signify Shanghai's emergence as a true 21st-century city. (Since my visit, the 257-room, 24-story Waldorf Astoria also opened, at No. 2 the Bund.)

"If you want to be a modern citizen of the world, you have to go to Shanghai," says New York-based designer Peter Marino, who finished the flagship Chanel boutique within the Peninsula in 2009. The store—if it can even be called that—more closely resembles an exquisite private home, with bookshelves lined with \$2,000 purses. Other modern citizens of the world crowd into Three on the Bund, a 1916 Beaux Arts building that has been gutted and redesigned into a glamorously minimalist space by Michael Graves. Young things dressed in small things gather at Jean Georges or at the Whampoa Club. Others head to the top-floor deck, where small private dining rooms offer views over the river to the neon lights of Pudong, punctuated by the two-globes-on-a-stick TV Tower, the symbol of modern Shanghai.



If you want a taste of *la vieille France* in the new Babylon, head through the 18th-century Italianate columns in the classically designed lobby of the former Standard Charter Bank of India, Australia and China, and take the elevator to the sixth floor to Mr & Mrs Bund, where French comfort food is served with modern flair by Paul Pairet.

Further up, the once-glamorous, long-shuttered home of the iconic Peace Hotel (Noël Coward used to write here), with its distinctive tarnished-copper-green pyramid roof, was reopened in July by the Fairmont Group, which also resurrected the hotel's famed Jazz Bar. The house band is composed of some octogenarian musicians who played here in the days before Mao & Co. stopped the music. (Confusingly, there's also the new Swatch Peace Hotel right across the street.)

Another echo of the past can be seen at the Bank of China Building, a hybrid of Western and Chinese design that embodies "Shanghai Deco," where recent renovations uncovered a striking frieze of Confucius, whose 2,500-year-old teachings on the importance of self, altruism, and filial duty were verboten during the Cultural Revolution. Viewing Shanghai today, Confucius might say, "What's old is new."

#### **AT A GLANCE**

**Fairmont Peace Hotel**

866-940-4914, [fairmont.com/peacehotel](http://fairmont.com/peacehotel)

**Jean Georges Shanghai**

86-21-6321-7733, [jean-georges.com](http://jean-georges.com)

**Mr & Mrs Bund** 86-21-6323-9898, [mmbund.com](http://mmbund.com)

**The Peninsula Shanghai** 866-382-8388, [peninsula.com/shanghai](http://peninsula.com/shanghai)

**Spencer Dodington** Luxury Concierge China, 86-13-68167-9980, [luxuryconciiergechina.com](http://luxuryconciiergechina.com)

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**Waldorf Astoria Shanghai** 800-WALDORF, [waldorfastoriashanghai.com](http://waldorfastoriashanghai.com)

**Whampoa Club**

86-21-6321-3737, [threeonthebund.com](http://threeonthebund.com)