



Discover 'Shanghai Architecture'

Review by Pauline van Roosmalen

Shanghai Architecture Guide by Anne Warr
 Published by Watermark Press, Sydney
 Publication year 2007
 ISBN 9780949284761

Finally the book many of us have been waiting for is available: Shanghai Architecture, the first guidebook to Shanghai's remarkable mixture of historical, present and future architecture. Written by architect, academic and long-time resident Anne Warr and published Watermark Architectural Guides, this long-awaited guidebook is a must-have for all those who travel to Shanghai and are interested in its architecture and town planning.

With 272 entries covering a period from 242 AD (Longhua Pagoda and Temple) to 2010 (Lingang New Town), the book offers its readers a wide though concise panorama of the many building types, architectural styles, architects and commissioners that make Shanghai's landscape. Written with obvious passion for the town, its inhabitants and its architecture and architects, Anne Warr presents her readers with all the basic information necessary to discover Shanghai.

In the enlightening introduction the reader is let in on Shanghai's development from modest trading post in the sixteenth century to one of the world's leading trading centres in the twenty-first century, its foreign concessions, the stimulating contribution of private entrepreneurs and often American trained architects in the electrifying building-boom of the interbellum, Shanghai's housing blocks (or lilongs), the stirring period after the establishment of the People's Republic of China and the in many ways spectacular developments after 1992. The subsequent chapters take the reader on tours through

various areas of interest: the Bund, the Old City, the French Concession, People's Square, Nanjing Road, Pudong, the north and west of Shanghai and even Shanghai's environs. Preceded by preambles that again provide the reader with interesting information on the area to be discovered, the subsequent separate descriptions of the buildings are packed with all the basic information a guidebook needs to provide: name of the building, year of design, name of the architect and location, and brief descriptions of the coming about of the building, its architectural style, etc.

But there is more. The book has an abundance of illustrations; - considerably more in fact than the objects described. Furthermore, additional texts on specific themes are added. Not only in short texts (recognisable by italics) but also in entire pages dedicated to a specific subject, such as pages 46-47 and 266-267 on the areas Waitunyan and Wujiaochang, pages 250-251 on the lilongs and pages 238-239 on the four bridges over the Huangpu river. A particularly good read are the pages on 'Cinema and Modernity' (pages 110-111), 'the Song Family' (pages 131-132), and the overview of Shanghai architects (pages 310-317). This additional information goes beyond the mere technical and stylistic aspects of Shanghai's architecture that provide the reader with the necessary information to understand the merits of a specific building or architect - and make Shanghai Architecture more than just an average guidebook.

Unfortunately this plus-point comes with a downside as the book, despite the succinct descriptions of the selected objects, is just a bit too big and too heavy to be a convenient guide-book. It's a good book to read while sitting down, not walking around. Another drawback is the absence of a map of Shanghai indicating the situation of the various areas described in the book. Including a map like this on the back-flap would have been easy and would have offered readers an insightful tool to understand the lay-out of Shanghai – and thus orientate themselves.

All in all however, the book is an important addition to the many publications that are, will be and have been published about Shanghai's architecture. The obviously thorough research that preceded the writing of *Shanghai Architecture* did pay off: it offers visitors a good introduction and useful manual to the architecture of one of the world's currently most exciting cities on earth, and makes those not in Shanghai want to (re)visit the place.

And for those who want to know what Warr did not include in the guide-book: there's always the option to join her on one of her walking tours through Shanghai.