

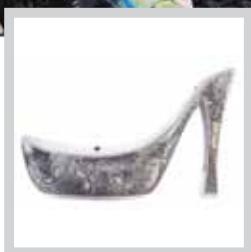
# Interiors

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The Taj Palace, Mumbai, restored after 26/11

# Past perfect

**IAN CARR on refurbishing a beloved Shanghai landmark**



**Carr:** Combining historic appeal with contemporary luxury

**S**hanghai's recent building boom has restructured its relationship with architecture. China's commercial capital has furiously expanded skywards and the towers thronging both sides of the Huangpu River offer a visual metaphor for its economic ambition.

Along the way, Shanghai's heritage architecture has been overshadowed as development focused on new-build properties. But attention is now turning to restoring landmarks as part of an overall regeneration effort in the lead up to the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai.

The Bund, a strip of riverside mansions built during Shanghai's rapid economic development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, has buildings that incorporate several design styles, including Greek, Japanese and French. Now, two of The Bund's signature properties, the Shanghai Club and the Peace Hotel, have become Shanghai's highest-profile restoration projects. Both the Waldorf-Astoria on the Bund, which will open in the former Shanghai Club, and the Fairmont Peace Hotel are tasked with taking their place among the world's finest hotels. But unlike Paris, London or New York where hotels in landmark properties are an intrinsic part of the city's hospitality map, Shanghai has little experience of managing restoration projects.

In the 1930s, the Peace Hotel was one of the world's most luxurious hotels, along with a handful of distinguished Shanghai hotels that hosted global and local high society. But over time, these hotels stagnated or closed altogether. When the Peace Hotel closed in 2007 for a three-year renovation programme one of the city's most prized architectural assets became a time-warped and uninspiring hotel.

The Fairmont Peace Hotel and the Waldorf-Astoria on the Bund represent different design challenges. The former is a conversion of a former

hotel, while the latter is a restoration of a building not previously used as a hotel and which has been closed to the public for many years.

Adding to the challenge is the fact that expectations of travelers to China have heightened over the last five years. The opening of international-standard hotels in major Chinese cities has elevated demands for comfort, hospitality and service.

The objective, however, is to create interior spaces that update each building's unique personality. While there is a consensus worldwide that luxury travelers like to stay in hotels located in older buildings, blending local traditions and history, these two properties will operate in a very competitive marketplace, with ten luxury hotel openings over the next two years.

As part of our design process, we engaged as many references as possible. Our designers watched black-and-white movie reels shot inside the buildings. We ran a campaign for people to share their memories of these magnificent buildings. We also assessed how dining expectations are evolving in Shanghai, and looked at the best restaurants worldwide to determine the right elements for attracting not only hotel guests but also a cross-section of Shanghai society.

Local design elements will be incorporated sparingly, including artworks hanging in public spaces and design motifs in the bedrooms. It is important not to create a generic interior that references only the building's heritage or location. However, both projects share the same objective: to become world-class hotels that balance historic appeal with contemporary luxury, and contribute to the regeneration of The Bund.

*Ian Carr is principal of HBA Design, Singapore. HBA has a team of 14 designers in Shanghai and Singapore working on the Peace Hotel refurbishment project, headed by HBA principals Ian Carr and Connie Puar.*