

# Historic house restorer gives new life to old furniture in aging warehouse



The Nanxiang factory building hosts a diverse array of vintage furniture and collectibles from 1930s Shanghai. — Photos by Wan Yue

Wan Yue and Yang Di

In an inconspicuous old factory building in Nanxiang, Jiading District, there is a collection of furniture from old Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s. Ke Haiqi, who is engaged in the restoration of historic houses, has amassed these Shanghai-style furniture pieces. Collecting furniture is not only his job but also his hobby.

In 2022, Ke moved his studio from downtown Nanchang Road to suburban Nanxiang and rented an old factory building on Xianghuang Road.

"The landlord felt that the factory building was too old and proposed renovating it before renting it to me. I said I liked it just the way it was. I didn't want it if it was renovated," Ke said.

After leasing the old factory building, Ke cleaned the walls and implemented minimal alterations, focusing primarily on rewiring to preserve the authentic "aged" ambiance.

As an example of Shanghai culture, Shanghai-style furniture combines classical and modern styles, and is highly sought after for its unique charm. In the old three-storey factory building, Ke carefully arranges and displays a large number of vintage furniture pieces, and walking among them feels like entering a time tunnel.

"Every time I see an antique item, what attracts me the most are two aspects: firstly, its history imbued by time; secondly, its design concept and the craftsmanship of the old masters."

Most old furniture is quite worn out, and Ke hopes that the furniture in his



A side table crafted by Ke Haiqi using vintage ceramic tiles and flooring

studio can combine ornamental value with practicality. Therefore, the restoration process is indispensable.

He will refurbish the old furniture by reupholstering them with new fabric, meticulously cleaning off dust and damage, and conducting repairs with the goal of preserving their original appearance to the fullest extent and restoring them to their former splendor.

He also revitalizes old items that were once useless, such as using old tiles and flooring to create side tables with the added function of magazine storage.

Through Ke's ingenuity and craftsmanship, the old furniture is imbued with a distinctive "Ke-style" aesthetic, seamlessly blending into modern households, and becoming another form of contemporary, modern design style.

## Carpenter crafts Taihe Hall model in rosewood

Liu Xinyu and Yang Di

WANG Haiming from Dalu Village, Waigang Town, has completed a rosewood architectural model based on the prototype of the Taihe Hall, after nearly three years of work.

The Taihe Hall, also known as the Hall of Supreme Harmony, is a significant structure within the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. It is the largest hall in the complex and was historically used for important imperial ceremonies and events during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

It features an exquisite and sturdy mortise and tenon structure, meticulously selected rosewood materials,



An intricate model of the Taihe Hall, crafted by Jiading carpenter Wang Haiming — Liu Xinyu

and carefully carved decorative patterns. It also showcases classical charm in its carved railings and flying eaves.

Wang, aged 47, was born into a family of carpenters

and has been dedicated to learning and inheriting the traditional skills of making and repairing antique furniture. He has a long-standing dream to build a quaint ancient-style house which

inspired him to use the wood he had to create this exquisite work of craftsmanship.

"Each little lion on the railing has a unique shape, and the drains shaped like mythical creatures and dragon heads are also faithfully reproduced," Wang said.

So far, Wang has replicated cultural relics such as the Qing Dynasty rosewood carved bat-patterned auspicious armchair and the Ming Dynasty rosewood painting table.

Moreover, Wang does not stop at replication. His innovative concept is fully reflected in his "Crane Chair." The chair took 11 months to design and improve, using three types of tenons just

for the connection between the backrest and the seat, and the streamlined design of the backrest and armrests conceals ingenious details, improving the comfort of the seat while also enhancing its beauty. It achieves a seamless and smooth effect without paint.

"I also plan to replicate the 12 zodiac chairs from the Summer Palace. Currently, I am still in the stage of researching literature and documents," Wang said.

Whether he is designing new or replicating a cultural treasure, he hopes to make his works visible to the public, attracting more attention to the charm and modern innovation of Chinese furniture.