

# The culture, creativity and essence of wheat that make up Mamen Village

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On an autumn weekend afternoon, the freshly baked European-style bread at a bakery in Mamen Village fills the air with an intoxicating wheat aroma. Across the river, visitors linger over the ceramic art exhibits on the walls at MM Cafe.

Not far away, at the Mamen Ceramic Art Village Creation Center, a group of children sit around a long table, gently painting colorful patterns on plain white pottery ware.

Mamen Village in Waigang Town, Jiading District, a rural area rooted in ceramic art and woven with artistic vibes, is quietly thriving in Jiading District.

Lacking natural landscapes, Mamen is driven by culture and art, forging a unique path to rural revitalization.

Through artist residencies, popularization of handmade experiences, and aesthetic upgrades of rural spaces, it attracts young people and parent-child families from urban areas. Art is injecting new vitality into this land.

## Kiln-baked bakery

Bois&ble, a kiln-baked bakery tucked away in the village, opened in October but has already drawn many diners who make a special trip.

A resident surnamed Mi is one of them. Recommended by a friend, she visited the bakery specifically. "It's truly different! The firm texture and unique aroma from kiln baking can't be replicated by ordinary electric ovens at all," she said in delight.

Wang Tingting, the bakery owner, connected with Mamen out of a simple wish, which was to find a place to build a kiln.

"Kiln baking isn't just for nostalgia; it perfectly matches the soul of European-style bread," Wang explained. "European bread needs the tempering of high temperatures and firewood to release that simple yet pure European flavor."

The baker's poetic name stems from Wang's first impression of Mamen.

"Bois" refers to the ginkgo forest that captured her heart at first sight, while "ble" embodies her desire to return to nature and pursue a healthy lifestyle. Though there were no similar businesses in the village, its artistic atmosphere and rare tranquility led Wang to believe, "This is the place firmly."

With full support from the Mamen village committee, from handling certificates to launching the business,

Wang's kiln-baking dream smoothly became a reality.

She integrates her professional background into her baking philosophy, insisting on using natural yeast and low-temperature slow fermentation.

To her delight, shortly after opening, the bakery received positive market feedback. Customers came not only from Waigang but also from other parts of Jiading.

Wang plans to launch a Western food series centered on sour-dough bread, creating a more comprehensive healthy dining experience. "What we want to present is not just a bakery, but a space for health, fermentation, and a slow lifestyle."

From private baking to a physical store, the venture was a natural growth process for her and a journey to explore a better lifestyle.

## Cafe by the rice paddies

Across the river from the kiln bakery, a wooden building stands amid golden rice fields — MM Cafe.

The cafe, situated by the field ridges, skillfully combines the fragrance of coffee with the beauty of ceramic art, becoming another unique cultural attraction in Mamen.

"Coffee and ceramic art here are not just a simple combination but a deep symbiotic relationship," said Wang Shuo, the cafe manager.

Inside, over a dozen ceramic artists' works are displayed quietly under warm lights; each piece is both an exhibit and a daily utensil. Outside, the courtyard is turned into a mini solo exhibition area, focusing on one artist's creative journey every month, allowing visitors to experience ceramic creation while savoring coffee.

The exhibitors include both established artists who have lived in the village for over a decade and young local creators who have just graduated



At the MM Cafe beside the field ridges, guests enjoy their coffee. — Photos by Li Pin

The freshly baked bread from Bois&ble, a kiln-baked bakery in Mamen Village



from art schools.

"We deliberately create a relaxed, pressure-free exhibition atmosphere. When art exhibitions are no longer unapproachable, creators are more willing to bring their works here to 'have fun.' This free state actually makes the artistic atmosphere flow naturally," said Wang.

The confidence behind this unique model comes from Mamen's profound ceramic art foundation. The village's shared ceramic art center is equipped with a full set of wood-fired, gas-fired, and electric kilns — a rarity in Shanghai's rural areas, which provides solid professional support for creation.

"We aim to elevate rural aesthetic experiences by fusing the warmth of clay with the aroma of coffee," Wang expressed. For Wang, this space is not just a business but a commitment and investment in Mamen's artistic future.

## Ceramic art center

Inside the Mamen Ceramic Art Village Shared Creation Center, visitor Shen Yuchen tried ceramic art.

"We originally just came to visit the village, but when we saw there was a ceramic art experience, we couldn't help but try it," said Shen. "The sense of accomplishment from making a

piece with your hands is special; it naturally calms people down."

Last November, Mamen completed the review of its municipal-level village design and was included in a Jiangnan planning project, marking that the development of the artistic village has been put on a fast track.

Over the past year, the village has transformed and reinforced collective warehouses into a ceramic art shared center, completed the artistic renovation of 11 idle rural houses, and attracted over 20 studios to settle in. The overall rental income of the villagers has increased by 30 percent, creating a situation where both artistic value and economic benefits coexist.

The continuous injection of resources from universities has provided strong momentum for the village's development.

Mamen has cooperated with Fudan University, Shanghai Arts and Crafts College, and Hongik University in South Korea and is in discussions with Tongji University and Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts about setting up industry-academia-research practice bases.



Visitors can try ceramic art at Mamen Ceramic Art Village's communal creation center.