

Editor's Note:

This weekly series focuses on individuals who have lived in China for a while and have a tale that's worth telling. Field, age, gender, nationality and race, all are unimportant in comparison with what adventures the subject has been up to, the experiences they can recount. Get in touch with a tip about a China story that deserves to be told. (features@shanghaidaily.com)

**Hugues Martin**

Nationality: Burgundy, France

Age: 35

Profession: Financial planner

Q&A**Favorite place in Shanghai?**

My home. It is at the end of an old street and is very quiet, which is unusual for Shanghai. In the morning I can even hear the birds singing.

Worst experience?

In my first apartment I was awakened at 3 in the morning by a bus outside honking its horn. This was just the day after I had signed the apartment lease.

Description of yourself:

Passionate, open, flexible

Favorite weekend?

Flying to Gulangyu Island off Xiamen (Fujian Province). There is an island where there are no cars.

What can be done to improve Shanghai?

There are still many ways but it has improved a lot since I have been here. I wish the watch seller I meet every day on my way to work would realize that I do not want to buy a watch every day.

Advice to new expats?

Be careful, it's not what it looks like. There is what I call the "Shanghai Show," ie, modern Shanghai that is portrayed in all the magazines but that is just a surface. As soon as you scratch deeper it is very different.



Hugues Martin is an amateur historian with a strong interest in old buildings, architecture and documents.

The French collector: Don't destroy the old

French amateur historian Hugues Martin was first tantalized by the 1935 "Blue Lotus" adventures of Tin Tin, the Belgian cartoon journalist who battled opium dealers in Shanghai. Now he collects artifacts of the 1920s and 30s, writes Jenny Hammond

Shanghai for most people epitomizes what is new and forward-looking. However, amateur historian Hugues Martin is intrigued by the city's history and artifacts, especially banking and shipping documents, books, maps, magazines, flyers and objects from the 1920s and 30s.

Martin, a 35-year-old French expat, specializes in financial services for expats. He is also president of the French speaking association, Cercle Francophone de Shanghai.

He splits his time between work, the association and the older, Puxi side of the city where he has lived for three and a half years.

Martin first came to Shanghai in 1998. It was a random choice, he had no idea what it would be like, but he remembered a Tin Tin (a Belgian cartoon featuring an adventurous journalist and his dog) book titled "Le Lotus Bleu" (1935) set partly in Shanghai.

"Obviously this is nothing like Shanghai now but it forged a view of Shanghai for a lot of French people," says Martin. Shanghai became a city he wanted to revisit, though he was living in eastern Europe.

"Shanghai today has the same atmosphere as eastern Europe five years ago. There is a sense of opening up, that everything is possible and you can see a change happening every day, which you can somewhat be part of.

"Though the Shanghai change is much bigger in scale, there are still lots of similarities. Many people want to create new things, don't know how but still try. They give energy to do something that didn't exist before, which creates a very positive buzz."

Although an avid spectator of the changing city, Martin spends a lot of time collecting artifacts that log the city's history.

"I am a real fan of old Shanghai and see it disappearing every day. Some buildings are in very bad shape and should go but others are worth saving. However, usually they are replaced by new and shiny buildings and that is not China."

Martin is not against new buildings, and he enjoys much of



the new construction in Pudong. However, "I think they are still destroying too much of the old city."

As an amateur historian with a strong interest in old buildings, architecture and documents,

Martin documents the 1920s and 1930s.

"I collect everything that tells about the life of people here at that time. I try to log the change in the city. If you know what to look for and have good contacts you can

find some truly amazing remnants of the old life."

Very few people collect these sort of things, he says, but some people are like walking encyclopedias of the city. "For me it is just a hobby because of time constraints and having only been here a few years."

He shows his collection mostly to his friends and says, "Now is the urgency to collect, if not, these things will just go in the bin. Later will be the time to show them."

In his collection, Martin's favorite item is an advertising flyer for the Park Hotel on People's Square from the 1930s.

"What is special is that it looks like the ads you see today for the big hotels but it is over 70 years old. When you have these things and can touch and feel them you can imagine the lives of the people here in the 1930s."

Although he peers into the past, Martin says he believes Shanghai is regaining its status as a world city, "as it was in the 1930s when it was the biggest city in Asia from a Western perspective. This comparison is interesting as it seems to be coming full circle."

While Shanghai looks to the future, Martin looks affectionately at his flyer for the Park Hotel and says, "I just hope they won't destroy everything old."



Hugues Martin's favorite item in his collection is an advertising flyer for the Park Hotel on People's Square from the 1930s.

