

# China

May 2007

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David Salesin

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1

Beijing

9 May 2007, 5:11pm, at the Red Capital Residence, in Beijing.

Twenty hours after leaving home, we checked into this restored courtyard home in the Dongsi preserved heritage district. The four of us would spend the next four nights in a tiny room just large enough for an antique Chinese canopy bed (which in our case slept three), a cot – and little more. We slept with the windows open, listening to the wind in the courtyard's large tree.



9 May 2007, 5:12pm, Beijing.

Here is the hotel's small lobby. In contrast to the traditional nature of the exterior, the interior of the rooms had been done up in Art Deco style.

Fashion essentially stood still in China for 35–40 years during the Maoist period. So this is the same type of furniture that party cadres, who likely occupied this residence during that era, would have enjoyed.





10 May 2007, 11:20am, at Adobe Systems China, in Beijing.

The next morning, I visited Adobe Systems China, a relatively new office started about a year and a half ago by Ning-Ju Nan in Beijing. The office now has about 65 employees and is expanding rapidly. Google opened its new office right next door around that same time and already has 200 employees. The conference room where we met at Adobe looks directly out upon Google.



10 May 2007, 1:39pm, Beijing.

Ning-Ju took me to lunch at a branch of a famous Peking duck restaurant located on the first floor of the Adobe building. I told Ning-Ju that I liked all kinds of seafood, so he ordered braised sea cucumber, among other delicacies. Ning-Ju explained that sea cucumber is mainly about the texture (firm gelatinous) and sauce (mushroomy and mildly sweet) – and he was exactly right.



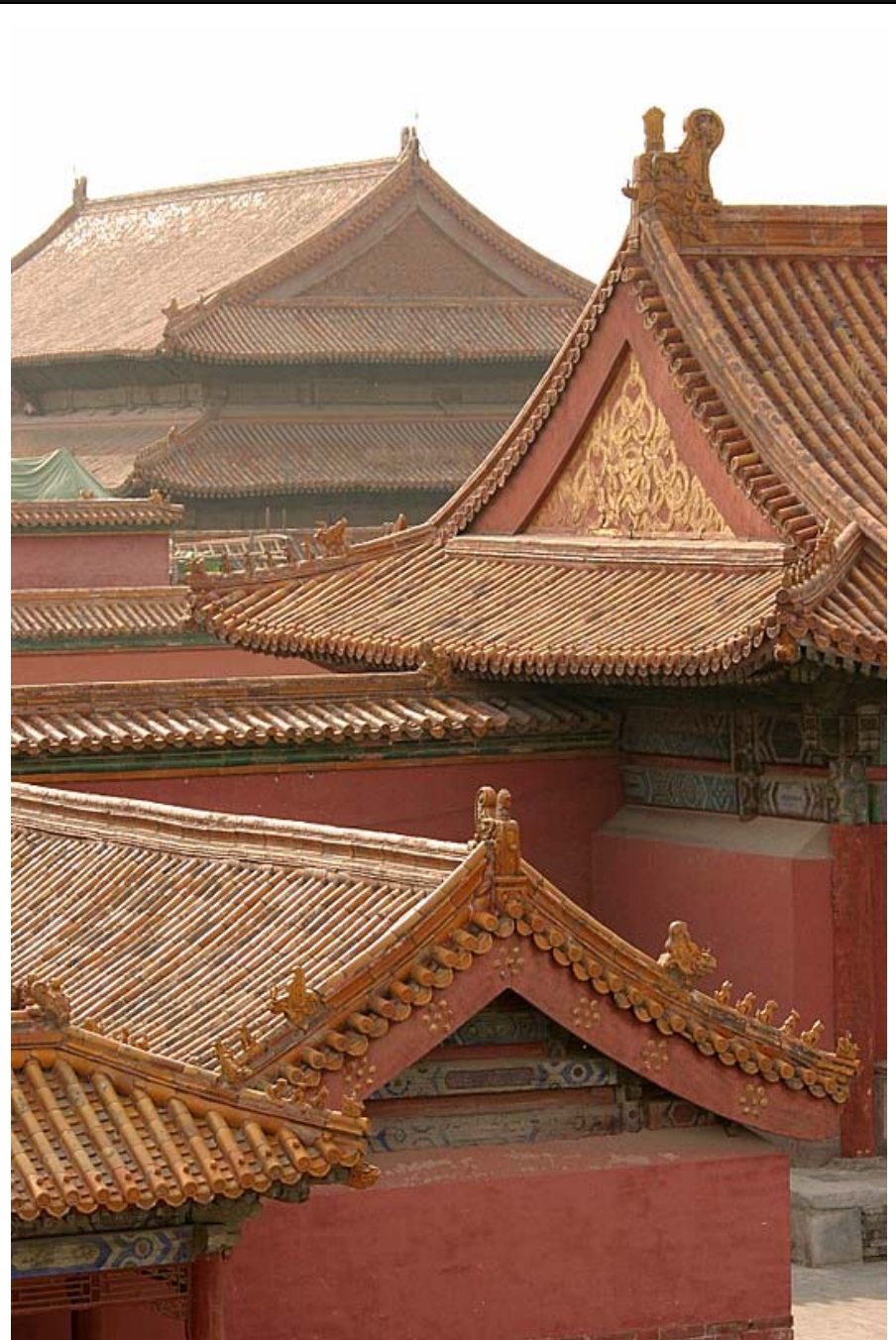


10 May 2007, 4:06pm, in the Forbidden City.

Later that afternoon, I joined my family and the van Dams in the Forbidden City, home to the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1644 and 1644–1911, respectively), and off-limits to the public during all of that time.

The Forbidden City, with its maze of eight hundred buildings, is an oasis of beauty and calm in the heart of Beijing. I can understand why the emperors of those dynasties rarely ventured outside of its walls.

Actually, the emperors led quite a life within these walls. Ming emperors kept up to 10,000 concubines, among whom they selected randomly at night, picking out a tablet with the girl's name from a pile on a silver tray. A single meal for a Qing emperor might involve over 100 dishes and could have fed thousands of his subjects.



10 May 2007, 4:28pm, in the Forbidden City.

A close-up of one of the city's walls.

The Forbidden City fell into disrepair after the fall of the Qing dynasty, and was looted by both the Japanese in the 30s and Nationalists in the 40s. However, it is being renovated quite thoroughly today.

The compound looked even fresher than it did on our last visit, five years ago. Even so, I was glad to be able to find some tangible evidence of the history of the place still remaining.

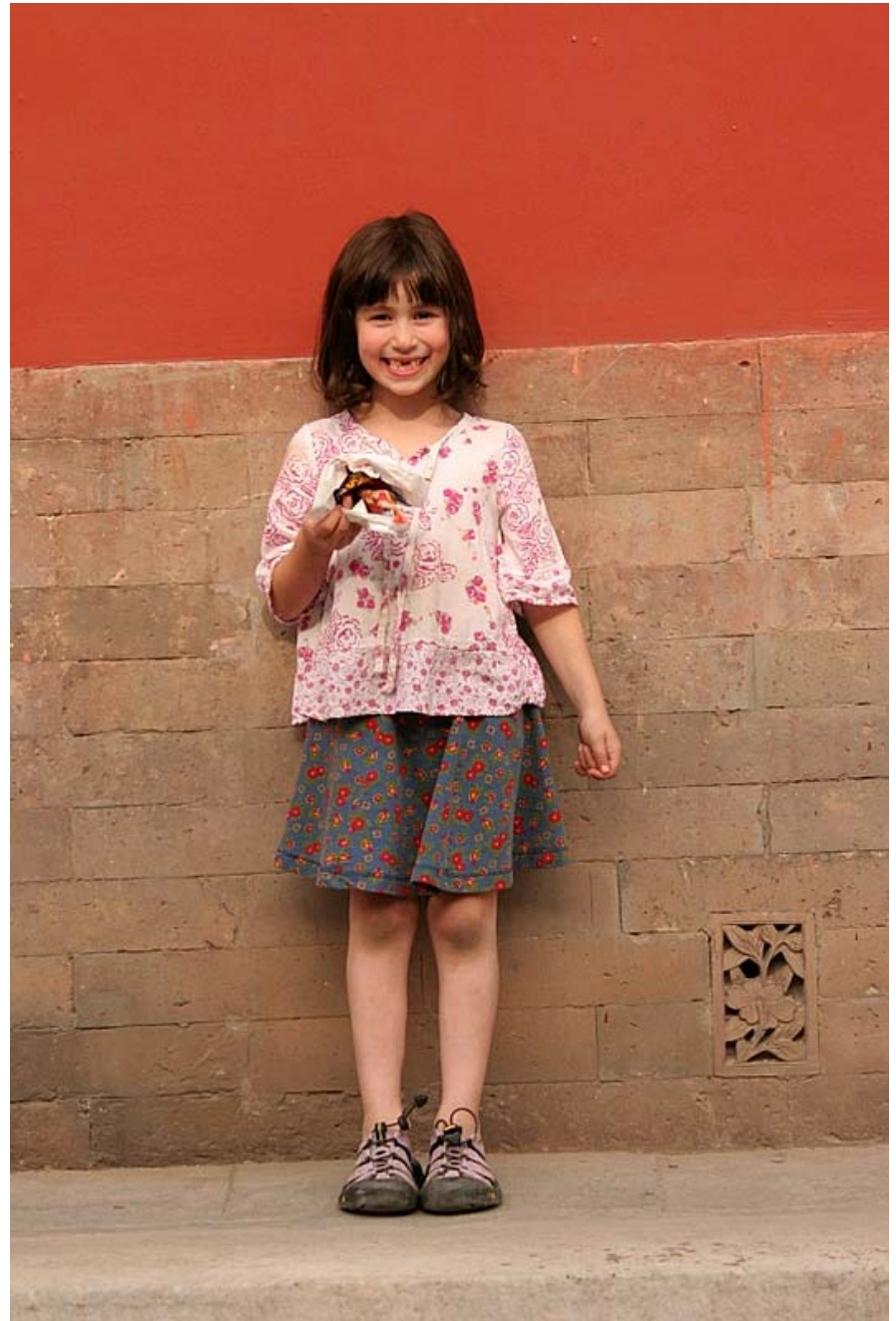




10 May 2007, 4:36pm, in the Forbidden City.

Eleni, enjoying an ice cream in front of a freshly painted section of wall.

Eleni had just lost her second front tooth on the day we left for China. The tooth fairy paid a visit to Beijing and left her 10 yuan.



10 May 2007, 4:39pm, in the Forbidden City.

Debbie and Andy van Dam, on the bench just below the ledge on which Eleni was standing. The sunlight streaming in over my shoulder, coupled with the red reflections off the walls all around us, was just perfect for some impromptu portraiture.



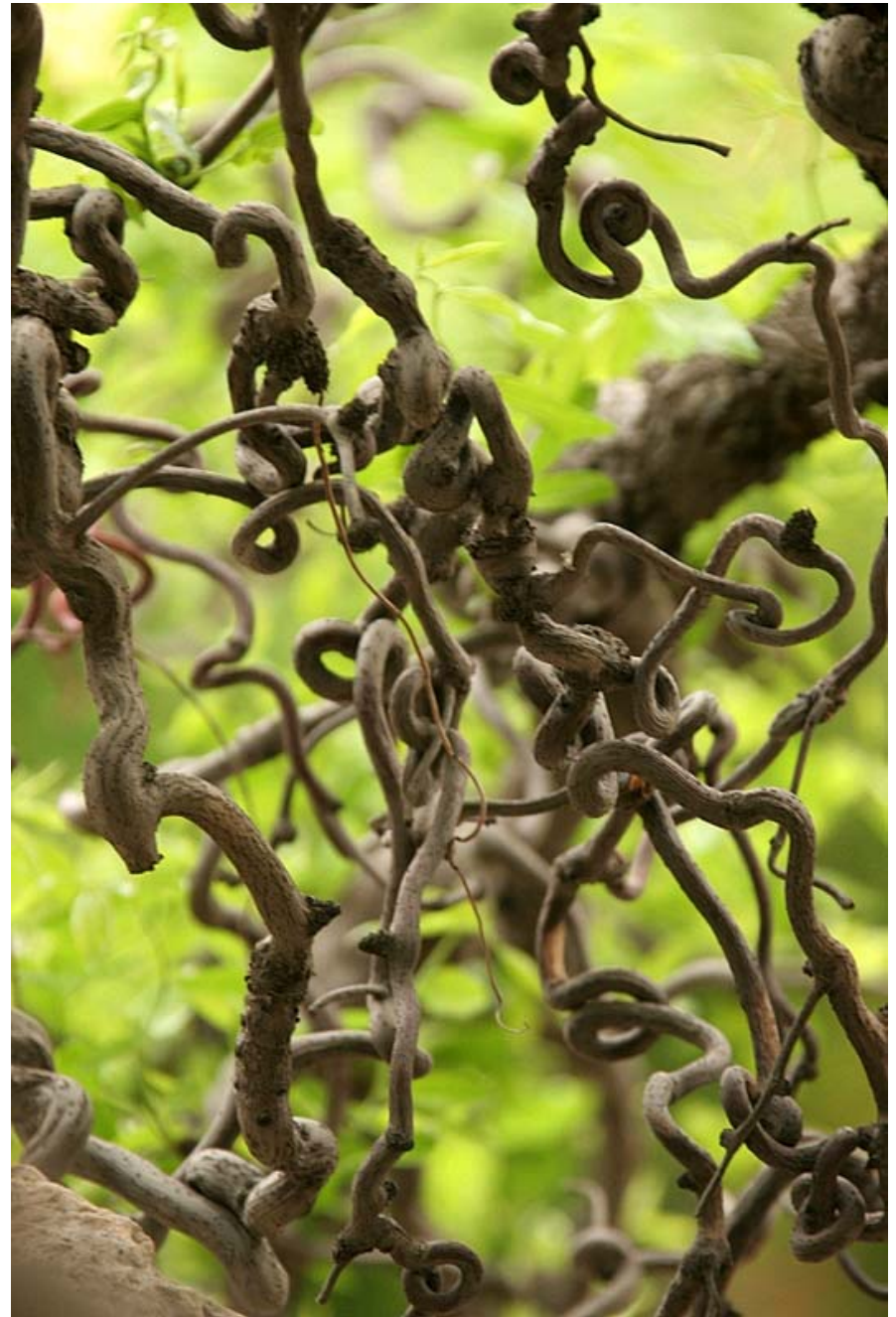


10 May 2007, 4:52pm, in the Forbidden City.

Branches of a dragonclaw date plant, in the Imperial Garden.  
The sign below these trees explains:

The Dragonclaw date plant results from the grafting its scion onto the stock of wild jujube. It is slow growing and its fruits are impossible to eat. However, its curly branches and leafstalks coupled with its quaint-shaped fruits add to the scenic beauty of the garden.

I loved the intricate, twisted branches, and the profusion of greenery provided a soothing contrast to the ubiquitous reds surrounding us up until then.



10 May 2007, 4:53pm, in the Forbidden City.

The underside of the eaves on one of the courtyard buildings in the Imperial Garden, painted to look like bamboo.





10 May 2007, 6:03pm, Beijing.

That evening, we met Harry Shum and his family for dinner at Ding Tai Feng, a famous chain of dumpling restaurants. The kitchen looked like an operating room, with the chefs all hunched over tables in surgical masks, gloves, and gowns as they brought plump dumplings into the world with practiced efficiency.



11 May 2007, 10:08am, at Microsoft Research Asia, in Beijing.

The next morning I visited Harry Shum and his 650-person operation at Microsoft Research Asia (MSRA) in Beijing. Here is Harry in his Managing Director's chair, in the very same office Kai-Fu Lee occupied when he opened the lab in 1999.





11 May 2007, 12:24pm, Beijing.

Ning-Ju, Harry, and I had lunch together at a fine restaurant nearby, in an introduction I had arranged. Ning-Ju took this picture of Harry and me in our Politburo-member-entertaining-the-foreign-dignitary poses. Over lunch, Harry gave Ning-Ju advice on starting a lab in China. We got to sample all kinds of dishes, including *xiao doumiao* (baby pea vines), and fresh bamboo shoots.



12 May 2007, 11:36am, Yonghe Gong lamasery, in Beijing.

The next morning, we visited Yonghe Gong, the most renowned Tibetan lamasery outside Tibet, built near the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The lamasery contains numerous brightly painted prayer halls and ornamental gardens. Here is a detail of the elaborate decorations on a prayer hall exterior.





12 May 2007, 11:39am, Yonghe Gong lamasery, in Beijing.

In the very last prayer hall, called the Wanfu Pavilion, stands an enormous Buddha: a fifty-five foot statue carved from a single sandalwood tree. The base of the statue must have been 15–20 feet in diameter – sequoia-like dimensions – it completely spanned the breadth of the majestic double doorway as you entered the hall. The statue was a gift from the seventh Dalai Lama to the Emperor Qianlong. It took three years to transport the statue from Tibet, where it was carved, to Beijing.



12 May 2007, 12:12pm, outside of Yonghe Gong, in Beijing.

On the way out of the lamasery we stopped so that Eleni could buy some gifts at a souvenir stand. These masks were for sale, among the other trinkets.





12 May 2007, 12:13pm, outside of Yonghe Gong, in Beijing.

It took quite a while for Eleni to choose the butterfly charms that she wanted and bargain down the price. (We have been giving the kids an allowance of five yuan a day to spend as they like. It turns out that Eleni is by far the best bargainer among us. Numerous times we have tried to buy the same item that she bought earlier at the same price that she paid. None of us has succeeded: the merchants let us walk every time. "The power of cuteness," her mother contends.)



12 May 2007, 1:41pm, Beijing.

Afterward, everyone took me back to Liyuan, a fabulous dim sum place they had all enjoyed on the day I had lunch at Adobe and had been raving about ever since. Indeed, the potstickers there were literally the best I have ever tasted. Pan-fried atop some sort of drizzled batter, the crispy threads complemented the juicy filling perfectly. (Look for Liyuan near the Regency Hotel.)





12 May 2007, 3:36pm, off Wangfujing, in Beijing.

Wangfujing is *the* major shopping street in Beijing, with grand department stores and American fast-food outlets like KFC. Just off Wangfujing is a warren of tiny alleys where the food vendors sell more traditional fare. At the best places selling the freshest food, the scorpions-on-a-stick are still moving their tails up and down.



2

Guangxi



13 May 2007, 3:04pm, Guilin.

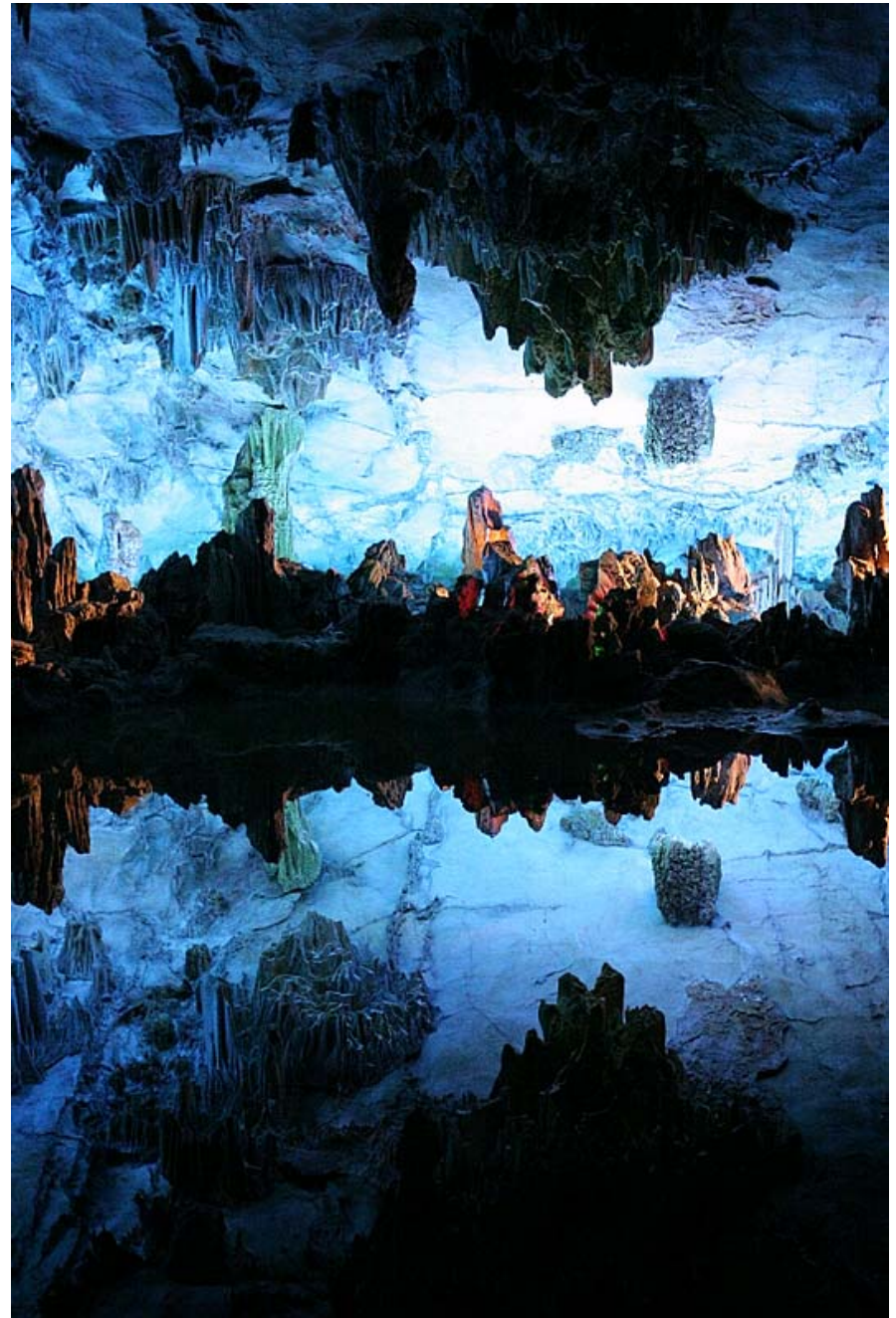
The next morning we flew to Guilin, in the subtropical province of Guanxi. By the time we reached the city and checked into our hotel, it was well past lunchtime, and all the regular restaurants had closed. We got our lunch from a small, open-air noodle restaurant. With plenty of peanuts, pickles, scallions, and roasted chili sauce (I asked them to leave the beef and pork off mine), the 2-yuan (25-cent) dish was surprisingly tasty. The van Dams didn't care for it one bit though.



13 May 2007, 4:14pm, Guilin.

After lunch, we visited Reed Flute Cave, about 5km outside the town, which contains some of the most extraordinary stalagmites and stalactites I have ever seen. The cave is quite large and includes an underground lake, which makes for some beautiful reflections.

Reed Flute Cave is named for the reeds distinguishing its entrance, which were used for making musical instruments. Indeed, the kids bought some small bamboo flutes for 1 yuan apiece from the children selling them outside; perhaps they were made from these reeds. The cave was used as an air-raid shelter during WWII and turned into a tourist attraction in the 1950s.

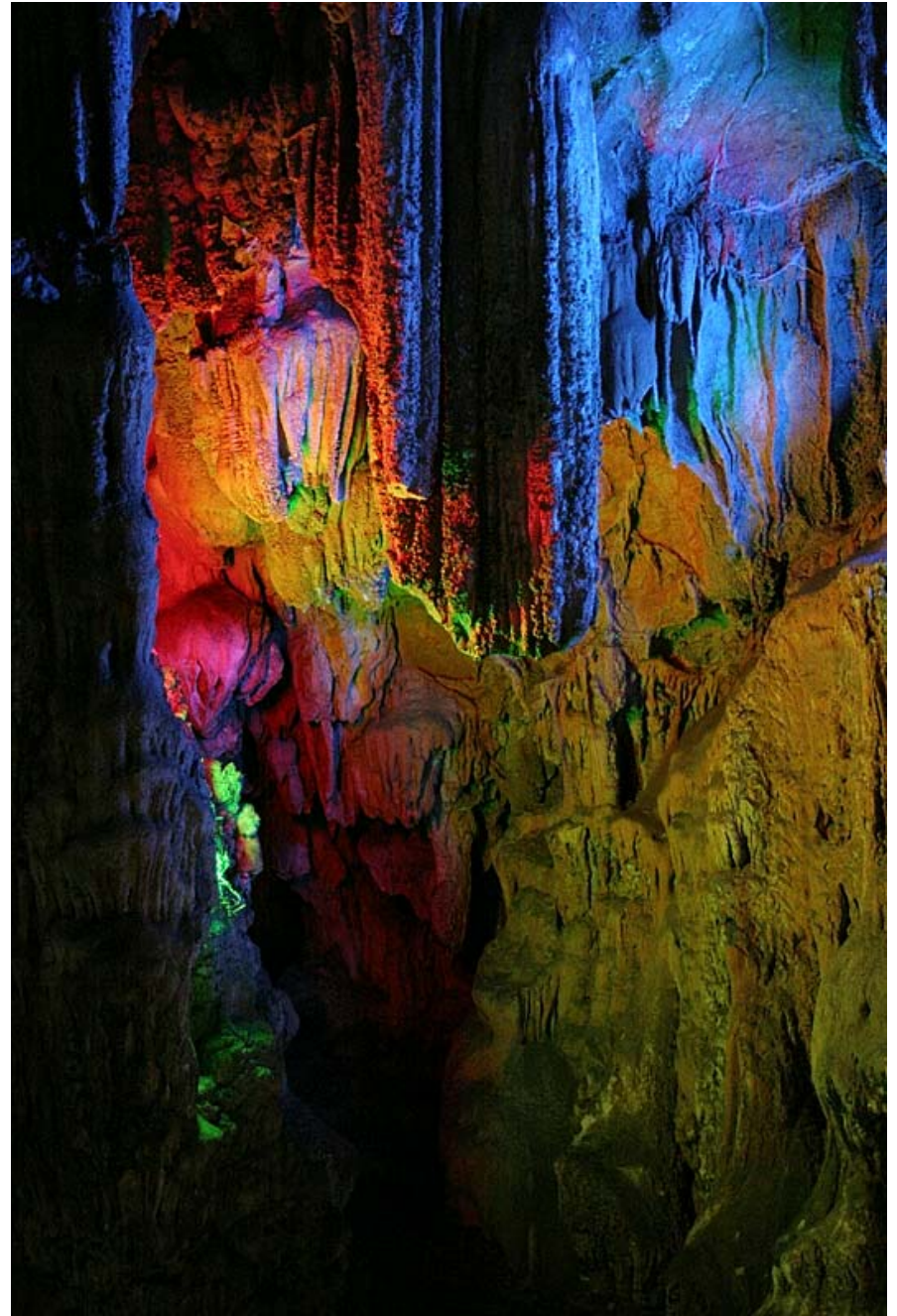




13 May 2007, 4:25pm, Guilin.

The formations in the cave were illuminated with colorful – one might even say gaudy – theatrical lights. The lights were activated by our guide, by touching a magnet on the handle of her flashlight to control panels situated around the cave.

Unfortunately, the lights were deactivated by timers – and they tended to turn off just as I was ready to shoot a picture! This is one shot I managed to capture in time.



13 May 2007, 5:39pm, Guilin.

Afterward, we returned to the city and climbed Xiangbi Shan, or Elephant Hill, which lies at the confluence of the city's two rivers, the Li and the Taohua – and really does look like an elephant dipping its trunk in the river from the right angle.

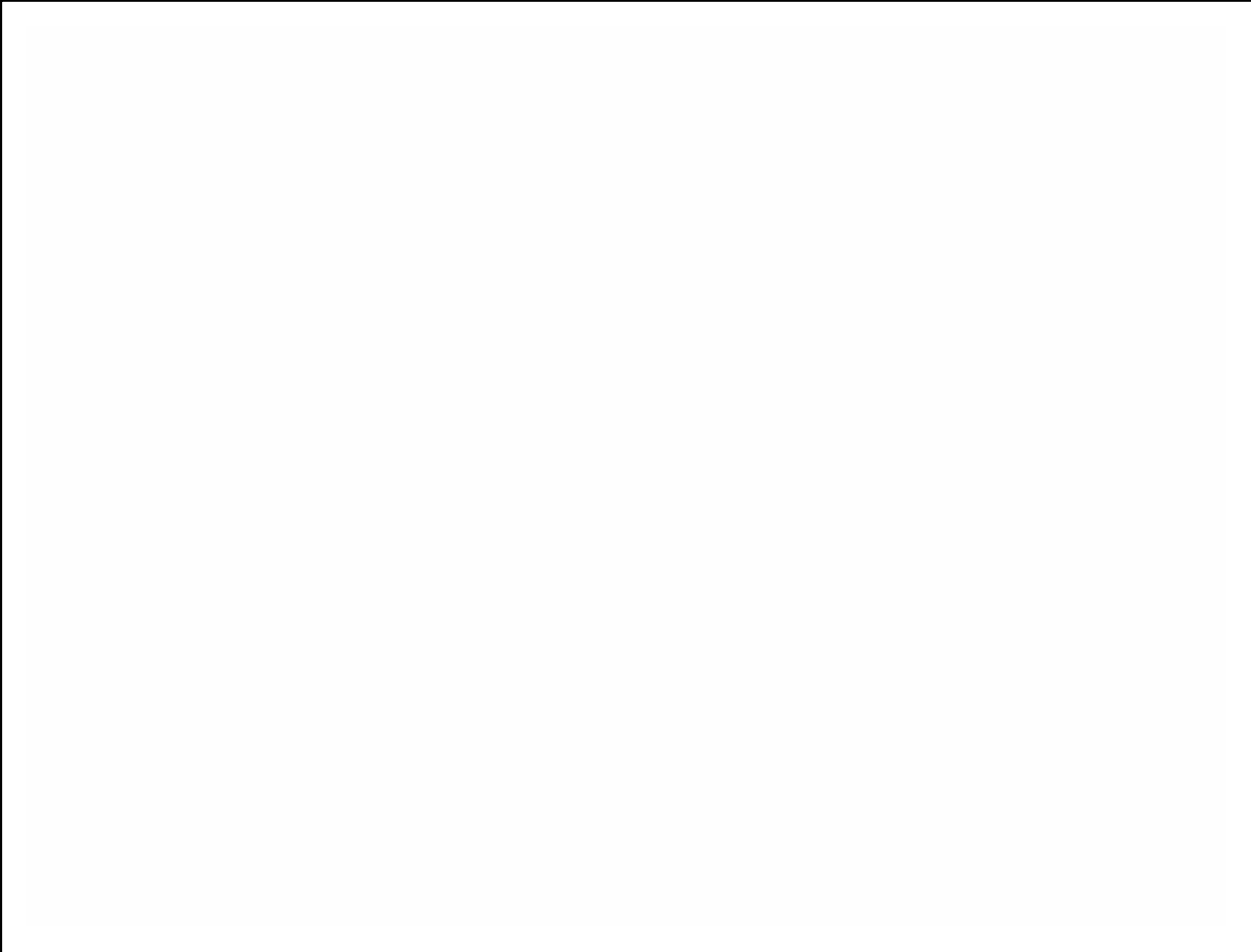
The view out over the city of 1.3 million reveals the modern skyline – wartime bombing destroyed most of the city's older buildings – surrounded by the limestone karst peaks for which the city has been known since ancient times.





13 May 2007, 6:01pm, Guilin.

The small shops at the bottom of Elephant Hill were selling all kinds of battery-operated animated figures, including zebras and rhinoceroses tethered to a stake and walking around it, baby dolls kicking their feet, and these Barbie go-go dancers. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



14 May 2007, 10:42am, on the Li River.

The next morning, we took a 3.5-hour cruise on the Li River, from Guilin to Yangshuo. The river winds through some of the most extraordinary scenery in China, and the boat provides an ideal, laid-back vantage point from which to take it all in. The breeze from motoring through the water also made the 85-degree temperatures and high humidity feel quite pleasant indeed.





14 May 2007, 11:19am, Guilin.

Every one of the peaks along the river has a special name (“Chicken Coop Hill,” “Fishtail Peak,” “Eight Immortals Crossing the River”) and a legend to go with it.

I don’t think I ever learned the names of these particular peaks, but I liked the reflections they cast in the water.

Around this time, I had the opportunity to sample some osmanthus wine, made from the blossoms of the tree for which Guilin is named. (Guilin means “osmanthus forest.”) The wine was fragrant and mild, providing a lovely accompaniment to the fine scenery surrounding us.

According to Helen, our local guide, there is no heavy industry along the Li River. Rather, 80% of the inhabitants of the area rely upon tourism, in one way or another, to earn their livings.



14 May 2007, 11:19am, on the Li River.

A wider view of the same scenery. For this photo, I put the Canon D20's "contrast" setting on maximum in order to try to enhance the sense of depth created by the morning haze.

Cruising the Li River was reminiscent of The Three Gorges on the Yangtze, which we took a boat through five years ago, just before it was dammed. But the Li River scenery is a bonsai version of the Yangtze's – seemingly at a much more human and accessible scale.





14 May 2007, 2:23pm, Yangshuo.

The boat dropped us off in Yangshuo, a village of only around 300,000 inhabitants – which is tiny for China.

For a small fee, this cormorant fisherman showed off his birds along the canal in front of our hotel, where we would spend the next couple of nights.



14 May 2007, 3:23pm, Yangshuo.

The view from the grounds of our hotel. (I believe that the tree on the left is a Norfolk pine, just like the potted plant we have in our bedroom at home, only much larger.)

We stayed at the Paradise Yangshuo, where, judging from the photos in the hotel lobby, Presidents Nixon, Carter, H.W. Bush, and Clinton also visited and presumably stayed at one time or another.

Actually, this wasn't our hotel originally. We were booked in a dodgy place across the street, with our room paid in full in advance. However, upon checking in, we found the room smelled of smoke, had warnings about protecting your valuables posted all over it, and looked out onto a busy boulevard full of high-RPM engines and blaring horns. The front desk told us no other rooms were available.

We decided to make our first stop in Yangshuo the Paradise across the street, which turned out to be lovely and had rooms available for a reasonable price. The porters from the Paradise wheeled their baggage trolley to the front door of our original hotel, and we helped the porters there bring our bags back down and out to the street. The receptionists were scandalized — I'm not sure anyone had ever walked out on them like this before. But they returned the money for our room, which was frankly beyond our expectations.





14 May 2007, 3:35pm, Yangshuo.

A good part of Yangshuo — the part catering to tourists, at least — is off-limits to cars, making it a very peaceful and pleasant place to wander around. Everywhere on the street are makeshift stands with produce for sale, both ordinary and exotic.

These were the only peaches we saw on the trip. I told Eleni she could go ahead and eat one without peeling it after she washed it with spring water. But perhaps that wasn't such a good idea, as she was the only person to get sick on the trip, throwing up the next morning. Luckily, she recovered after a few hours.



14 May 2007, 4:03pm, Yangshuo.

The streets of Yangshuo were filled with bargain souvenirs from southwest China — silk jackets and purses (of which this is one), silver jewelry from Tibet, T-shirts, and chops (custom-engraved signature seals). Eleni dubbed the area “T-Shirt Town” and was always eager to spend time there.

Lagging a bit behind to take pictures, I also found a gigantic smooshed cockroach on the sidewalk, which I brought the kids back to see. (I’ll spare you the picture though.)





14 May 2007, 4:17pm, Yangshuo.

Chinese puppets for sale in "T-Shirt Town."



14 May 2007, 6:38pm, Yangshuo.

Among the delicacies we tried at dinner that night were “Li River frogs,” prepared as a simple stir-fry with plenty of red and green chili peppers, like much of the local cuisine.

Ever since our trip to India, Isaiah has loved spicy food. He was delighted that he could eat many more chili peppers than even Andy – and never tired of reminding Andy of his superior ability to consume them.





14 May 2007, 8:08pm, Yangshuo.

That evening we went to see what Helen described as a cultural sound & light show. My expectations were not very high. To my surprise, however, the show turned out to be one of the high points of the trip: an imaginative, playful, and stunning display of music and choreography, with the actual landscape of the Li River and karst formations as its backdrop. The show was based on a famous 1960 musical, *Liu Sanjie*, about the Zhuang, an ethnic minority. The performance began with local village girls singing and carrying torches in traditional dress....





14 May 2007, 8:15pm, Yangshuo.

In the next scene, fishermen used huge curtains of red fabric to pull themselves back and forth across the river in hidden rafts, in a kind of watery dance set to music.

According to Helen, all of the talent is local: some 400 villagers participate in all.



14 May 2007, 8:18pm, Yangshuo.

Here, the fishermen propelled themselves across the water on their backs.

The show has been a colossal success. Apparently it sells out to crowds of 2000 spectators every single night (almost all of them Chinese, from what I could see), with two performances a day on holidays. It has been a huge source of income for the local economy.



14 May 2007, 8:30pm, Yangshuo.

The theatrical lighting, combined with traditional costumes and materials – and a little dry ice – made for some incredible photographic opportunities.





14 May 2007, 8:31pm, Yangshuo.

The whole show, it turns out, was directed by Zhang Yimou, the well known director of the films, *Raise the Red Lantern* and *House of Flying Daggers*. He will also be directing the opening act for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing — clearly an event not to be missed, if this show was any indication.



14 May 2007, 8:50pm, Yangshuo.

The final act involved literally hundreds of young women, each one wearing an elaborate costume lit up by super-bright computer-controlled LEDs.

The women walked onto invisible platforms floating on the river in a seemingly endless chorus line, eventually zigzagging across the lake as more and more filed onto the stage.

Once all 200–300 dancers had appeared, the computer took over, blinking the different performers on and off in a completely unexpected and delightfully synchronized display.





14 May 2007, 8:56pm, Yangshuo.

Eventually, the chorus line exited stage left, with their reflections glimmering in the river under the illuminated karst scenery, which you can just make out above them in the image below.



15 May 2007, 11:46am, in the countryside around Yangshuo.

As Eleni was sick the next day, we abandoned our plans to drive five hours to the terraced rice fields of Longsheng and opted instead for an extra day in Yangshuo. Helen and I rented bikes in the morning and toiled around the nearby countryside, while Ondi and the kids relaxed in town. To my surprise, aside from the mountains rising around us, the terrain was completely level.





15 May 2007, 11:52am, in the countryside around Yangshuo.

The scenery was lovely – and seeing the countryside under my own power once again was exhilarating. Indeed, it transported me back some twenty years to a week-long bicycle trip I had taken around the Golden Triangle in the north of Thailand with my friend, Sam Joffe. There's no better way to see the countryside than by bicycle.



15 May 2007, 3:40pm, in the countryside around Yangshuo.

That afternoon, all four of us went punting along a small tributary of the Li on tiny bamboo rafts.





15 May 2007, 3:52pm, in the countryside around Yangshuo.

The rafts traversed a number of small dams. We learned after the first such dam that you need to put your feet up in the air if you don't want them to get soaked as the front of the raft plunges into the water below.



15 May 2007, 4:27pm, in the countryside around Yangshuo.

The bamboo rafts spurred a whole cottage industry of supporting services, located on rafts anchored mid-stream and selling things like food, drink, and water-fight supplies. There were even rafts supporting photographers with computers and digital printers to sell you candids on the spot.





15 May 2007, 4:51pm, in the countryside around Yangshuo.

A small village on the banks of the river.



15 May 2007, 7:55pm, Yangshuo.

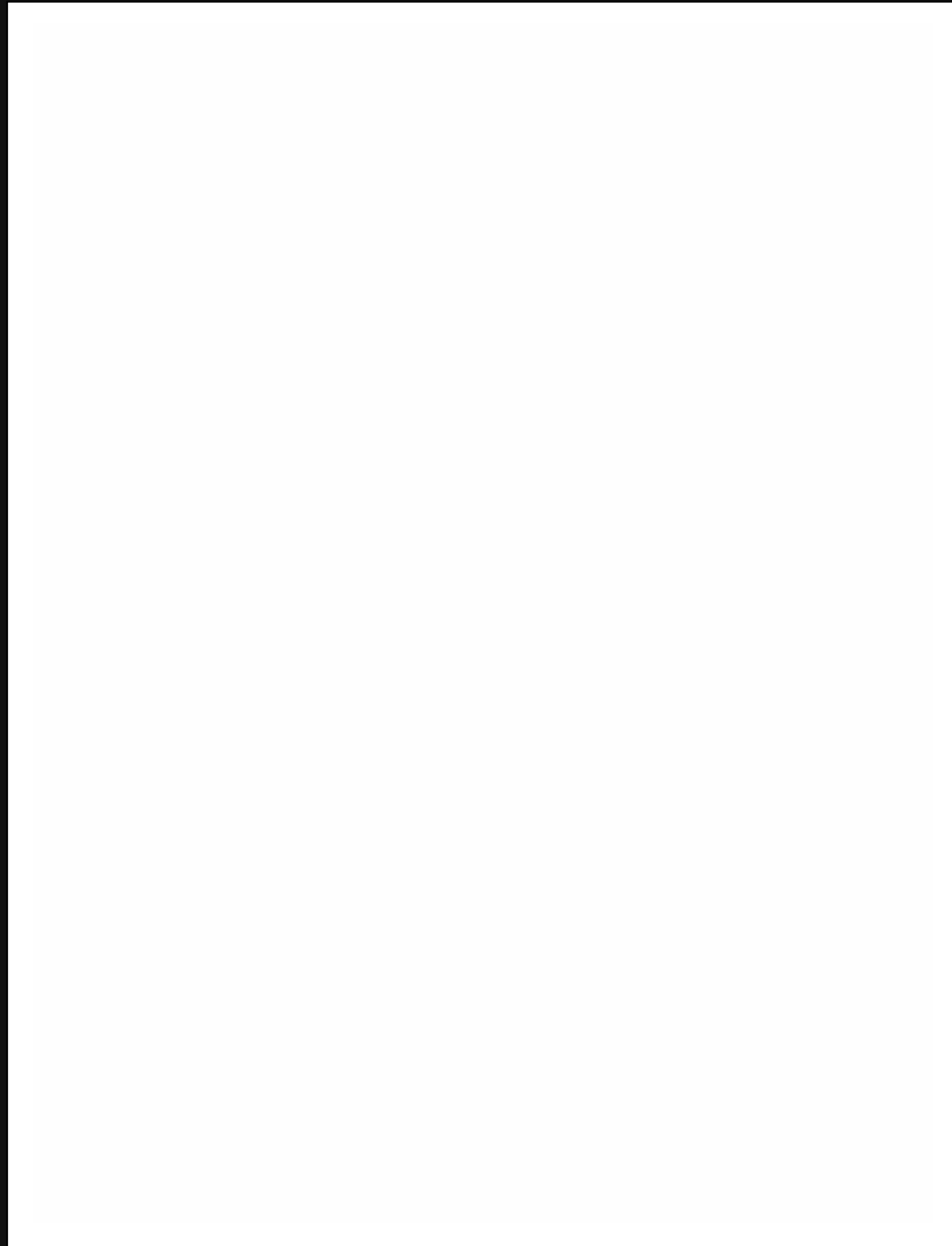
That evening, after a swim at the hotel pool, we dined on Li River shrimp. The shells are thin and crispy, and you just pop them whole into your mouth. Yum!





16 May 2007, 2:37pm, Guilin airport.

The next day, we made our way back to Guilin to take a flight to Hangzhou. Eleni practiced her limbo as we waited in line to check in. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



3

Zhejiang



16 May 2007, 8:16pm, Hangzhou.

We arrived late afternoon in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang, one of China's most prosperous provinces. We were greeted at the airport by Luying Li, an energetic and outgoing third-year undergraduate student whom I met a few months ago when she visited our graphics lab at UW.

After checking in at our hotel, we proceeded to Zhiweiguan, a fabulous (and super cheap) dumpling place recommended by Colin Zheng, my PhD student at UW who grew up in Hangzhou.

Basically, ordering food at Zhiweiguan works like this: You convert your yuan into tickets on the way in, then grab a tray and pay the server behind the counter with tickets as you grab each item. (Makes sense to me: This way, the people handling food don't have to handle the money.) On our tray, you can see (clockwise, from the top) giant *xiao long bao* (soup-filled meat dumplings), conical cornbread, sweet lotus root with sticky rice, and potstickers – almost as good as the ones we ate in Beijing! The dumplings were excellent, and the entire meal – including beer and several more courses that we went back for later – cost under ¥100, or \$12.50.



17 May 2007, 8:08am, Hangzhou.

My day started early, with a 6:00am run along Xi Hu (a.k.a. West Lake), the picturesque lake on whose shores the city was established over a thousand years ago. Even at that early hour, West Lake is a bustling hub of activity, with huge groups of brightly clad, mostly octogenarian tai chi practitioners, martial artists, and aspiring swing dancers practicing their arts on the sidewalks surrounding the lake. When I got back to the room, Isaiah was drawing and enjoying the view.





17 May 2007, 8:10am, Hangzhou.

A view of one of the lake's ancient causeways, and the city beyond, taken from our hotel window.

The early morning scene along the lake is actually quite a contrast from evenings, when all the elderly folks have seemingly turned in for the night, and the lake's romantic promenades are taken over instead by young couples strolling arm in arm. Eleni counted 554 such couples on our walk back to the hotel after dinner the night before, until she got tired of counting.





17 May 2007, 11:42am, Hangzhou.

We were picked up later in the morning by my hosts, Luying Li and Jinhui Yu, a faculty member who specializes in non-photorealistic rendering, at Zhejiang University (where I am a “Guest Professor”). I had been expecting to spend the full day at the graphics lab there, but they wanted to take my family and me to see some sights in Hangzhou before my visit and talk in the afternoon. Together, we climbed the 13-story Liuhe Ta, a thousand-year-old pagoda on a spectacular site overlooking the Qiantang River.

Afterward, Eleni used her allowance to buy this Chinese parasol – as usual, managing to bargain the price down to one we were never able to reproduce, ourselves, when we tried to buy such an item later on in the trip.



17 May 2007, 12:39pm, Hangzhou.

We had lunch in a century-old local noodle house, where the specialty was noodle soup with grilled eel and shrimp. The proper way to eat this dish is to hold the bowl as close to your face as possible and shovel the noodles in as quickly as you can with chopsticks. Somehow, despite the lack of napkins, I managed to consume the dish without unduly damaging my nice silk shirt.





17 May 2007, 6:27pm, on the new campus of Zhejiang University, in Hangzhou.

In the afternoon, I visited the graphics lab at Zheda, as the university is colloquially known, where I gave a talk and got to see some demos. Afterward, we walked over to the campus refectory – purported to be the world's largest, seating 10,000 students simultaneously. Ondi and the kids joined us. Ondi's favorite dish was this tea-smoked eel, smothered in flash-fried, crispy tea leaves.





17 May 2007, 7:28pm, on the new campus of Zhejiang University, in Hangzhou.

Our dinner was in a private room on the upper floor of the refectory. Our private dining room even had its own private men's and women's rest rooms, located off the attached private living room area, where I took this picture of Luying and the kids.



18 May 2007, 11:22am, Xitang.

About a year ago, Colin showed me pictures from the canal towns around Hangzhou, and ever since I have wanted to go see some of them for myself. We finally had a chance on this trip.

Xitang is a small village on the road between Hangzhou and Shanghai, with well preserved buildings dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. It is not in either of my China guidebooks.

I took this image as we approached the old part of town....





18 May 2007, 11:33am, Xitang.

All right, I've made you wait long enough! The old city of Xitang is a photographer's paradise. Everywhere you turn is another irresistible shot. I took this photo from one of the numerous bridges over the canals along which the city is built.



18 May 2007, 11:52am, Xitang.

One of the many houses along the canal. My eye was drawn to the pink roses, balanced by the blue tablecloth and the steps leading down to the canal.





18 May 2007, 11:59am, Xitang.

A fisherman making his way down the canal.



16 May 2007, 12:19pm, Xitang.

We sat down for lunch at a breezy restaurant right at the junction of the two main canals. Musicians serenaded us while we enjoyed some of the best food on our trip.

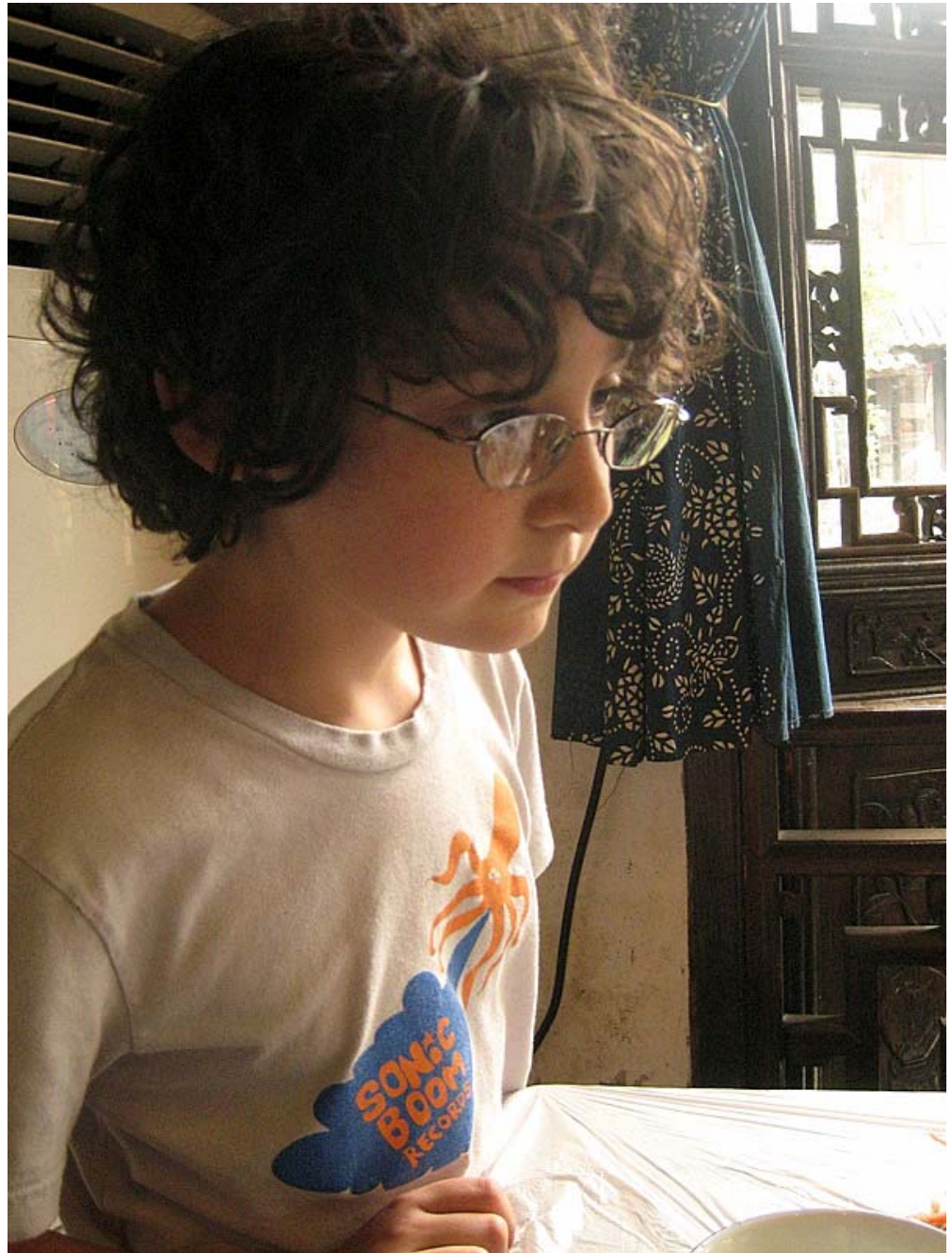
The fish was super fresh and cooked just perfectly, with ginger, scallions, and a few chilies (which Isaiah consumed). These two dishes were followed by some kind of Chinese cabbage with some of the juiciest mushrooms I've ever had, and a beautiful duck soup with dumplings, which Eleni loved.





16 May 2007, 1:04pm, Xitang.

Isaiah, in a contemplative moment, just after lunch was cleared.



18 May 2007, 1:06pm, Xitang.

After lunch, we continued to wander the streets along the canals. I tried out my wide-angle lens for a different perspective.





18 May 2007, 1:06pm, Xitang.

A closer view along the left side of the canal. I loved the hanging red lanterns and pink-and-white banners against the grey stone walls.



18 May 2007, 1:08pm, Xitang.

A view back on the restaurant in which we had lunched.





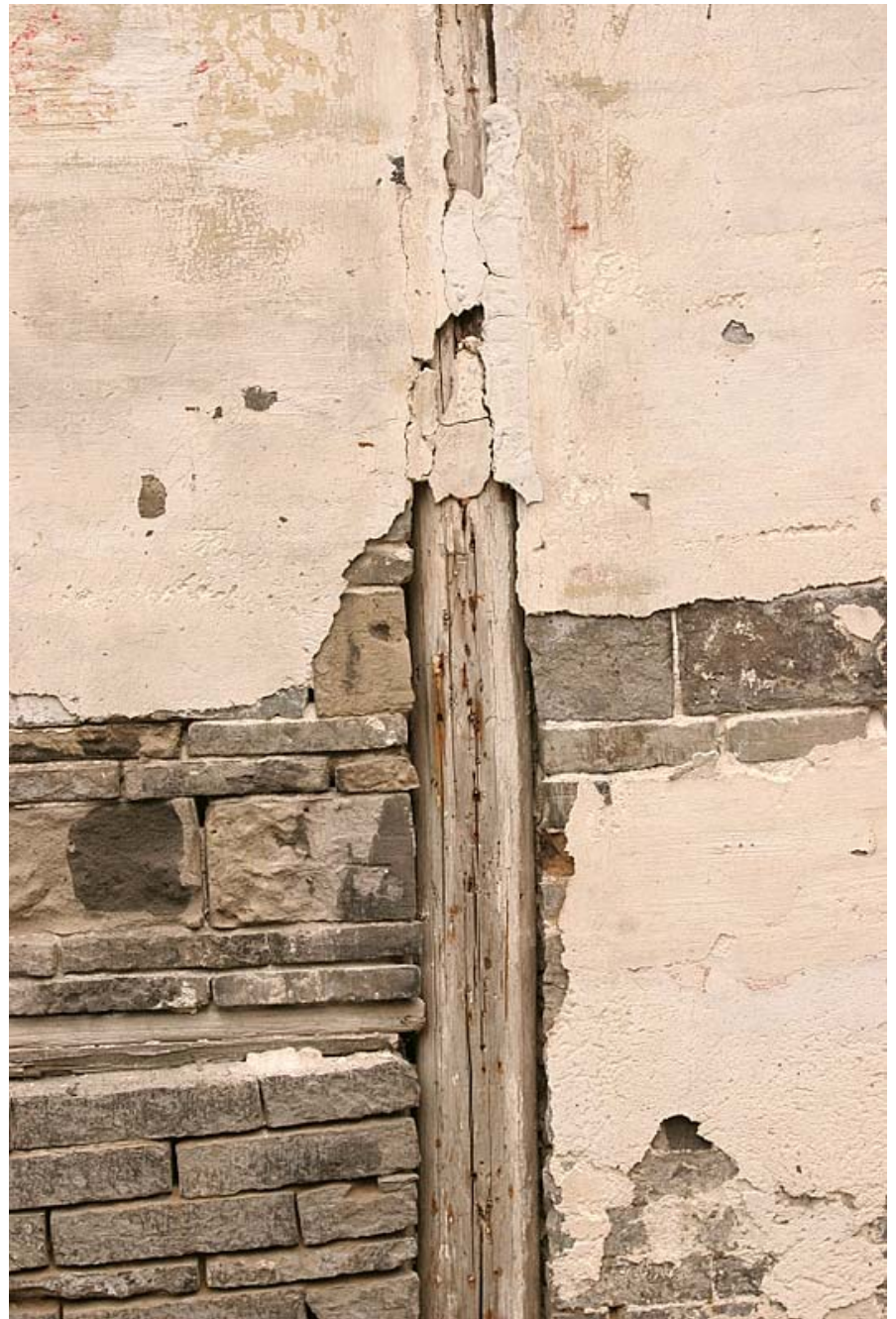
18 May 2007, 1:13pm, Xitang.

A row of houses along a canal.



18 May 2007, 1:23pm, Xitang.

Detail of an old wall.





18 May 2007, 1:44pm, Xitang.

We happened upon an old Chinese garden, with traditional *Tai Hu* rocks, willows, and pagodas. Eleni posed by this artificial cave, which you pass through in order to wind your way up to the pagoda above.



# 4

Shanghai & Jiangsu



18 May 2007, 4:45pm, Shanghai.

We pulled into the Ruijin Guesthouse, in the former French Concession of Shanghai, around 4:00pm. The weather was clear and cool, with temperatures in the 70's, a refreshing breeze, and sunlight like San Francisco's. For a moment, I thought, "Here is a place in China I could actually live!"

Two different weddings were about to take place on the grounds of the place we were staying. As we headed out in search of Ondi's favorite cream puffs, I captured this candid portrait of one of the wedding couples.



18 May 2007, 5:20pm, Shanghai.

A half hour later we reached “Beard Papa,” a Japanese cream-puff chain located in an underground Metro station. Lo and behold, they were still open! We all agreed with Ondi that the cream puffs were well worth the walk.





19 May 2007, 11:10am, Shanghai.

The next morning, I convinced Ondi, Debbie, and Eleni to let Isaiah and me tag along on their “girl’s” shopping expedition. (What else were we going to do? And I figured there could be some good photographic opportunities, at the very least!)

We went to an area that a Seattle friend, Leslie Martes, had told Ondi about, where a whole bunch of small boutiques and galleries had recently opened up among the tiny streets and alleyways of an old working-class neighborhood. Indeed, it was an attractive area, with something interesting for everyone – particularly the girls.



19 May 2007, 11:25am, Shanghai.

Among other shops, we found a small music store, selling traditional Chinese instruments like this lute and music CDs. The store also provided classrooms for instruction upstairs.





19 May 2007, 11:40am, Shanghai.

Nearby, a small gallery was selling what seemed like museum pieces – hundreds, and, in some cases thousand-year-old figures from the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Even Isaiah, who until now was questioning the wisdom of tagging along on this expedition, was captivated. I asked the prices (which weren't displayed), but the woman running the gallery didn't speak much English, and Ondi was back in another store with Debbie, trying on clothes. I figured it was probably one of those places where if you had to ask....



19 May 2007, 12:08pm, Shanghai.

Peering into the kitchen of one of the many appealing restaurants we walked by.





19 May 2007, 12:21pm, Shanghai.

Here's a wider-angle view of the neighborhood of shops, to give you a sense of the area.



19 May 2007, 12:27pm, Shanghai.

The kids and I eventually found Ondi and Debbie again. Debbie was in a small dressmakers shop buying Ondi an elegant *qipao* (a tight-fitting silk dress with slits all the way up the legs) as a thank-you gift for being such a great guide. It fits her beautifully.





19 May 2007, 1:30pm, Shanghai.

After shopping, we met up with Andy at the Crystal Jade restaurant for terrific dim sum.

Eleni has become quite a connoisseur of *xia jiao* (a.k.a. *har gow* in Cantonese, a.k.a. shrimp dumplings). The *xia jiao* at Crystal Jade were tied for first place with those of Liyuan in Beijing. But Eleni ate only eight of them at Liyuan; here, she ate eleven!

Eleni also enjoyed drinking freshly pressed watermelon juice, which was available just about everywhere.



19 May 2007, 4:44pm, Shanghai.

In the afternoon I went with Andy and Debbie to the Shanghai Museum, while Ondi took the kids to a play date with the children of a colleague from the States who is spending a year doing research in Shanghai.

In a policy that I found quite enlightened, photography within the museum is fine – except in the temporary exhibit of American art where it is prohibited, probably by the museums that loaned the work.

The museum is wonderfully laid out, with galleries for jade, currency, calligraphy, ceramics, furniture, and sculpture – all quite fascinating.





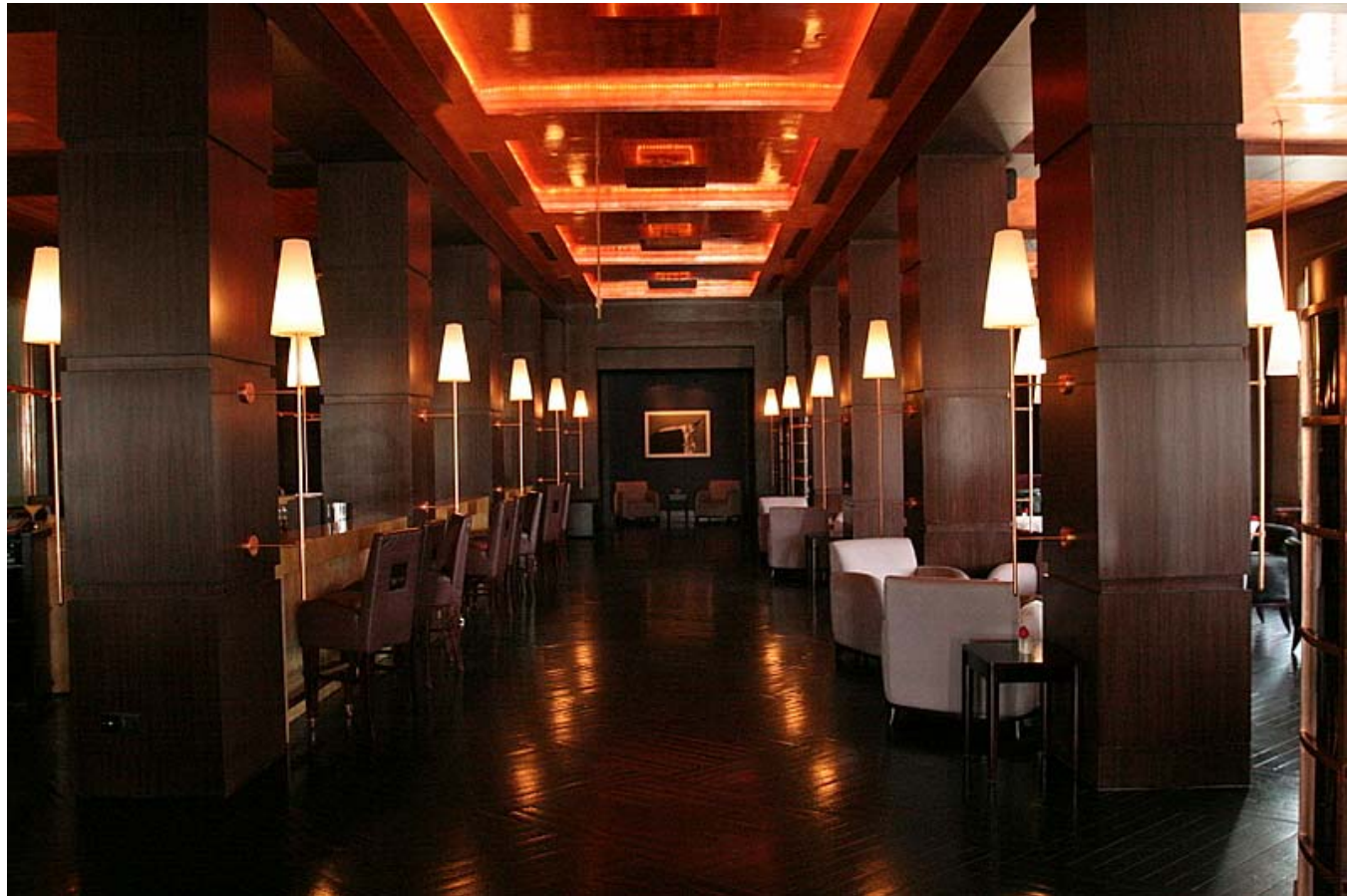
19 May 2007, 7:25pm, Shanghai.

That evening, I joined my family for dinner, along with Ondi's friend, Robin, and her family. The restaurant is one of the oldest continuously run restaurants in the city, having been a state-run business during the Communist era, before private restaurants were allowed. The food was decent at least, and incredibly cheap. Unfortunately, soon after this picture was taken a man sat down at a table nearby and started chain-smoking and shouting into his cell phone incessantly.



20 May 2007, 12:59pm, Shanghai.

Any shortcomings of the meal the night before were more than made up for the next day, with a lunch at Jean Georges, which offers some of the best French fusion cuisine in the world at extremely reasonable prices. The restaurant's interior was designed by Michael Graves.





20 May 2007, 1:03pm, Shanghai.

Just after taking that picture, I heard someone say, "David?" It was Leslie Martes, our eye doctor's wife from Seattle, who had tipped Ondi off to the shopping area in Shanghai. She was visiting the city along with her daughter, Nina. I called Ondi right over. Small world!



20 May 2007, 1:06pm, Shanghai.

Back at the table, our cocktails had arrived: Andy's ginger margarita, Debbie's and Ondi's elderflower champagne cocktails, and my tropical-fruit Cosmo. We toast our good fortune to be enjoying this meal together!





20 May 2007, 1:09pm, Shanghai.

Crunchy Tiger Prawns, Avocado Basil Purée, Pineapple Juice – which Andy ordered.



20 May 2007, 1:10pm, Shanghai.

Foie Gras Brûlé, Dried Sour Cherries, Candied Pistachio – of which we ordered two, to share.

This was right up there with the best fois gras I ever had, at La Maison de Marc Veyrat in Annecy. The formal description neglects to mention the ginger gelatin around the base, which is divine with the rest of the preparation.





20 May 2007, 1:53pm, Shanghai.

Slow-Baked Salmon, Steamed Wild Mushrooms, Sake-Ginger Dressing – which I ordered. And loved – some of the best salmon I ever had!



20 May 2007, 1:54pm, Shanghai.

Sea Bass, Parsnip, Fragrant Coconut Juice – which Ondi and Debbie ordered. Those are little cubes of diced coconut and jalapeño sprinkled along the top of the fish.





20 May 2007, 2:21pm, Shanghai.

The kitchen at Jean Georges.



20 May 2007, 3:51pm, on the Bund in Shanghai.

After lunch, Andy, Isaiah, and I took a walk on the Bund while the girls went shopping. Somehow, Andy and I were persuaded to buy two pairs of strap-on roller skates for ¥150 (bargained down from an asking price of ¥300 originally). [\[Click to play video.\]](#)

As soon as we bought them, however, other sellers descended upon us in a veritable feeding frenzy of commerce. (A similar situation arose a few nights earlier when we bought too many mangosteens at once, and every mangosteen vendor within a several block radius swarmed us within seconds!)

“100 yuan for three!”

“30 yuan for one!!”

“20 yuan!!!”

“10 yuan!!!!” the sellers tried to outbid each other.

We nearly bought ten more pairs, when suddenly the 30-yuan vendor chewed out the 10-yuan vendor, and everyone began to disperse.

Here is Andy trying out his new purchase. They were much harder to use than they looked!



20 May 2007, 3:56pm, on the Bund in Shanghai.

A view of the Bund, including the “lotus building” in the background. The Bund was the commercial heart of old Shanghai. It lies along the shore of the Huangpu River, where everything from tiny sailing junks to ocean-going freighters would unload their wares. Today, it features a grand promenade, with colonial-era buildings housing banks and hotels on one side, and views across the river of the futuristic skyscrapers of Pudong on the other.



20 May 2007, 5:10pm, Shanghai.

In the afternoon, we went to Yu Yuan, a classical garden built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Here is Ondi, our intrepid tour guide, in the garden with some of her shopping bags from the afternoon's outing.





20 May 2007, 5:15pm, Shanghai.

A view of one of the many magnificent halls in the gardens of Yu Yuan.



21 May 2007, 11:22am, Tongli.

The next day, we took a trip to Tongli, another small canal town located in Jiangsu province, near Suzhou, about an hour and a half away from Shanghai.

I asked Eleni to pose in front of some barbecued cow's hooves, a local specialty on sale just about everywhere in the small village.





21 May 2007, 11:38am, Tongli.

A view along a canal, onto one of the village's 49 stone bridges.



21 May 2007, 11:39am, Tongli.

The best way to visit Tongli is to get lost in its labyrinthine passageways, which we all did without much effort. It was lucky that we were able to find each other again without too much difficulty.





21 May 2007, 11:45am, Tongli.

Fishermen (and women) in the area traditionally use domesticated cormorants to help them fish. The birds have tight rings around their necks so that they cannot swallow the fish. (They are given about one in seven fish to eat though, according to the guidebook.) For ¥10, this fisherwoman gave us a demo – and even instructs us when to take the photo, as you'll hear Ondi translate.



21 May 2007, 12:28pm, Tongli.

One of Tongli's many gardens is the Pearl Pagoda, originally the home of a Ming dynasty official. The kids enjoyed feeding the koi, which inhabited one of the garden lakes.





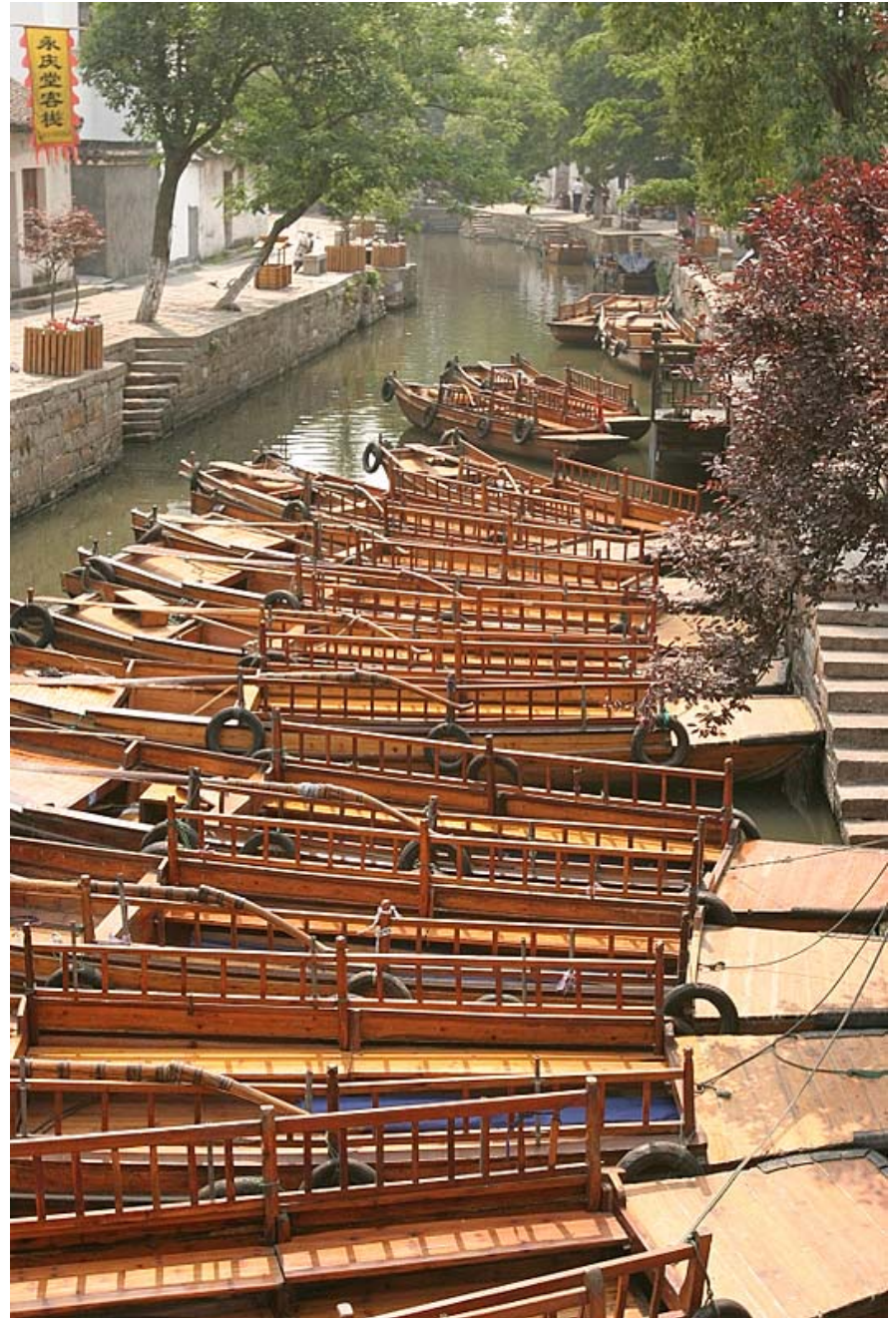
21 May 2007, 2:01pm, Tongli.

I nearly tripped over this puppy, the size of a hamster. Andy was quite smitten with it; he nearly asked if he could take it home.



21 May 2007, 2:12pm, Tongli.

A view out over one of the village's many canals.





21 May 2007, 2:14pm, Tongli.

A bicycle rickshaw on the tiny lane leading to the sex museum. (See next slide.)



21 May 2007, 2:19pm, Tongli.

One of the most unusual features of Tongli is its sex museum, the only museum of its kind in China outside of Shanghai. No photos were permitted in the indoor galleries – which feature all sorts of things, from small dioramas that mothers would use to teach their daughters about sex on their wedding day, to wooden dildos used by courtyard eunuchs on palace concubines, to the castration knives themselves – but outdoor photos were fine.





21 May 2007, 3:06pm, Tongli.

The sex museum's gift shop sold these ergonomic chairs, built for two, in addition to many other things. Eleni is studying the chair's brochure, which basically gives instructions on the many ways in which it can be configured and used.



21 May 2007, 3:35pm, Tongli.

Later in the afternoon, we visited a small shop selling elaborate, intricate paper cuts — all created freehand with scissors by a master. We and the van Dams each bought several.

Here is the master's work desk.





21 May 2007, 4:02pm, Tongli.

A row of houses, illuminated by the late afternoon sun as we were leaving the village.



21 May 2007, 5:38pm, Zhouzhuang.

On the way back to Shanghai, we stopped off briefly at one of the region's largest and most famous canal towns, Zhouzhuang. Everyone was tired, so I was given just a half an hour to look around. I'm glad we stopped; even the brief visit was well worth it.





21 May 2007, 5:45pm, Zhouzhuang.

A view onto the same canal, from the level of the houses.



21 May 2007, 5:48pm, Zhouzhuang.

Ondi and Isaiah, along one of the smaller canals.





21 May 2007, 5:59pm, Zhouzhuang.

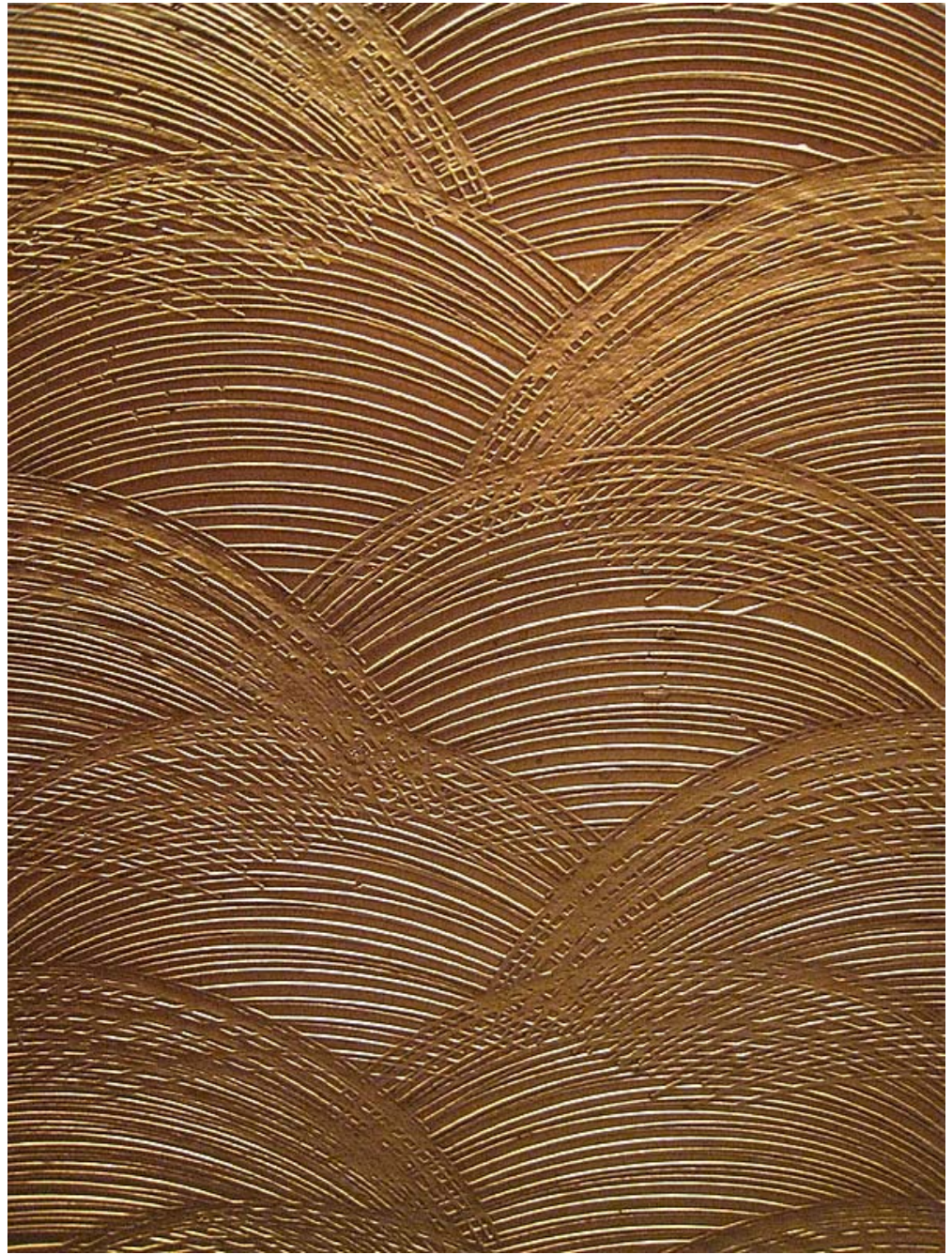
More cow hooves. These actually looked quite appetizing (unlike most I had seen)!



21 May 2007, 7:40pm, Shanghai.

Back in Shanghai, we headed straight to the Jinmao Tower, which houses the Grand Hyatt, the world's "highest hotel above ground level," whatever that means. (The hotel also boasts the world's highest pool, the world's highest gym, and the world's highest laundry chute – 420 vertical meters.)

The elevator doors feature this elegant brushed metal.





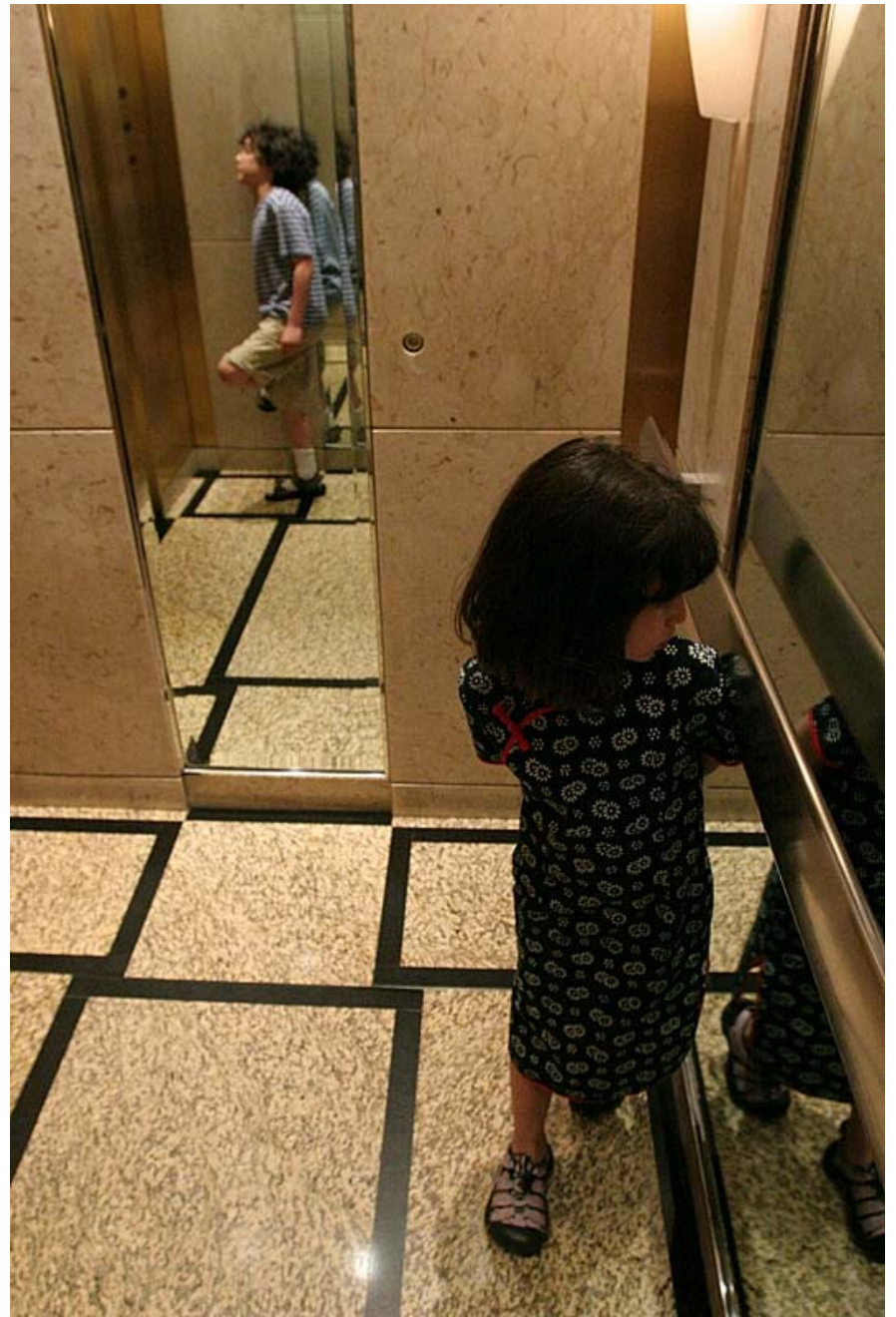
21 May 2007, 8:15pm, Shanghai.

We enjoyed our final dinner together at the hotel's impressively situated Chinese restaurant, on the 55<sup>th</sup> floor, with views out over all of the lights of Pudong and the city. Unfortunately, the food wasn't as good as we remembered it being five years ago, so we wouldn't recommend the place for anything but the views – and the Peking duck, which was still quite good in fact.



21 May 2007, 8:18pm, Shanghai.

Riding the elevators with Isaiah and Eleni, while waiting for the food to arrive. We went all the way to the 85<sup>th</sup> floor, then back down to the street, then back up to the 55<sup>th</sup>. By that time, the Peking duck had arrived!





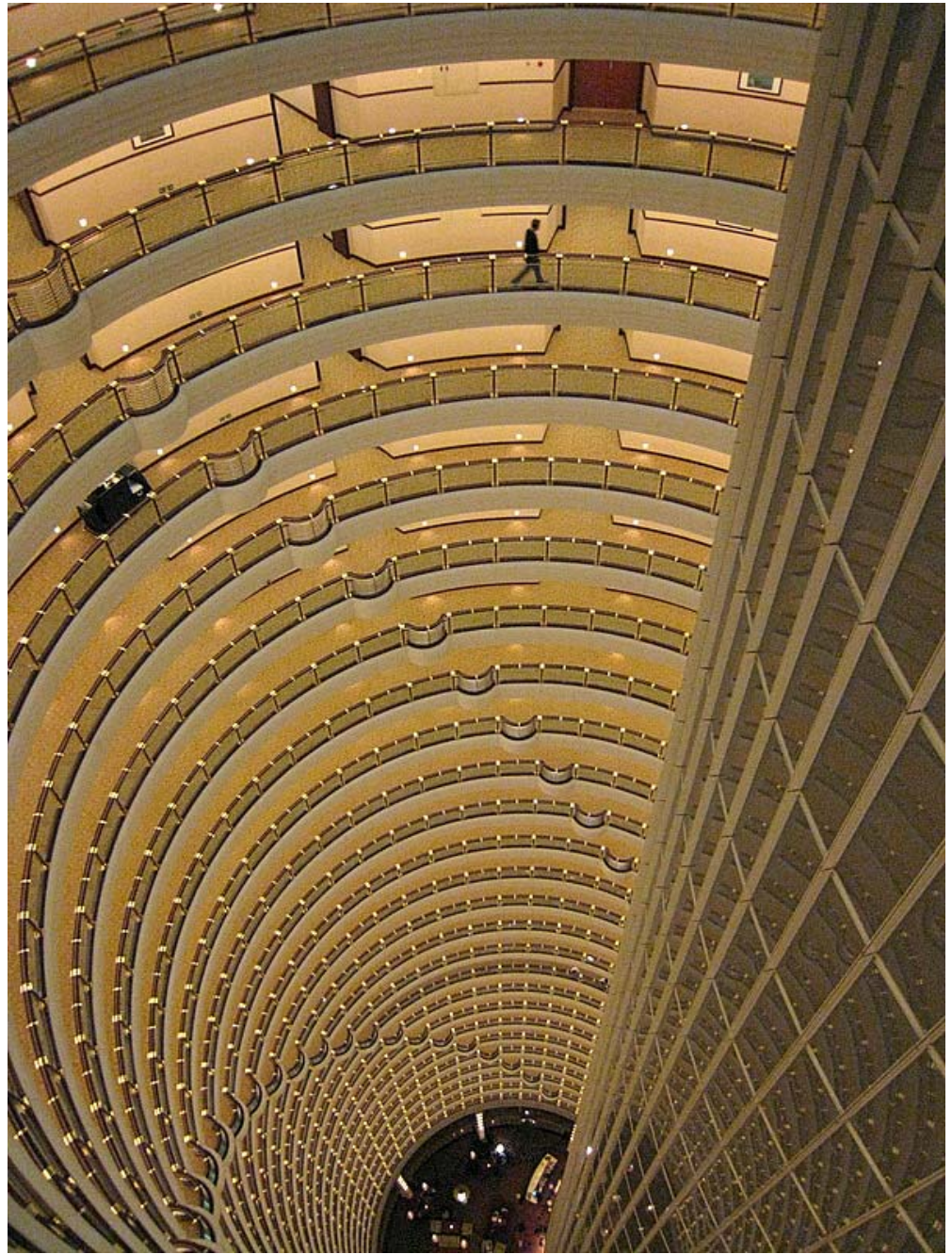
21 May 2007, 8:20pm, Shanghai.

Eleni, posing in front of the Jinmao Tower, while waiting for our meal. If you look closely, you can see the orange glow of the lobby and restaurant, on the 54<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> floors, respectively.



21 May 2007, 9:12pm, Shanghai.

A view from the 85<sup>th</sup> floor, looking down through the atrium to the lobby on the 54<sup>th</sup> floor below.





21 May 2007, 9:15pm, Shanghai.

The lights of Pudong, with the Huangpu River, the Bund, and the orange-colored reflected light of the Grand Hyatt lobby superimposed.



22 May 2007, 1:13pm, Shanghai.

Andy, in a by now quite familiar pose – finishing off the last of the dim sum – just before heading out for the airport with Debbie for their long journey home.

The previous night ended with some unanticipated excitement. We had reached our guesthouse and were saying goodnight to the cab driver. Andy peered into the cab's trunk to make sure nothing had been left – just as the cab driver was shutting the trunk's door. The corner of the door sliced straight into Andy's forehead, and blood shot everywhere. We were extremely concerned.

The taxi driver rushed Andy to the hospital – just two blocks away – along with Ondi to translate. Fortunately, the bleeding had already stopped on its own by the time they arrived, and the doctor cleaned and dressed the wound, saying no stitches were necessary.

Total bill for the emergency room visit: ¥35 (or a little over \$4), which the taxi driver, who felt really bad about the accident, insisted on paying. (Andy has since seen his doctor at home who agreed with the treatment and told Andy he will be fine.)





22 May 2007, 1:42pm, Shanghai.

Walking back through the French Concession, we passed these crickets in cages.



22 May 2007, 2:56pm, Shanghai.

After lunch, I went for a short walking tour on my own through the old part of Shanghai.

These wines were being sold by the liter.





22 May 2007, 3:14pm, Shanghai.

More crickets-in-cages for sale, with the cricket vendor sleeping behind them.



22 May 2007, 5:07pm, Shanghai.

Later in the afternoon, the kids and I went for a stroll around the French Concession, while Ondi visited with friends.

Here is some of the beautiful wrought iron that you see all over this district, in front of the garden of an old villa.





23 May 2007, 12:46pm PDT, nearing Seattle.

Our flight home was entirely uneventful (unlike our trip home from India!).

Isaiah stayed awake for the entire ten-hour flight from Shanghai to San Francisco but could barely keep his eyes open long enough to board our flight to Seattle.

By contrast, Eleni slept well on the flight to San Francisco, so she was wide awake for our final flight. She even went to the last hour of school when we got home, where she wore her new Chinese dress and was welcomed by a chorus of friends.

(I, myself, didn't get any sleep on either flight because I was editing this slide show the whole way home!)

